

**THE VILLAGE, THE STATE, AND AMERINDIAN SHAMANIC THOUGHT:
BECOMING MAKUSHI IN THE HINTERLAND OF GUYANA**

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Charlottesville, Virginia

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M.A. Socio-Cultural Anthropology,
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2008
B.A. Social Sciences,
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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Anthropology
University of Virginia

April, 2016

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Abstract

This dissertation presents a comparison between the cultural representations of Coastlanders and Amerindians in Guyana. This is done by contrasting Makushi practices and understandings of sociality, politics, violence, and the power to kill with non-Amerindian practices and understandings. The dissertation presents a series of episodes to illustrate the differences and similarities between these two systems. In these episodes, themes such as group identity, leadership, politics, kinship, development, shamanism, and death and violence are presented and discussed. Moreover, the dissertation explores the underlying Makushi aesthetics of being, together with the intricacies of their shamanic thought, in order to compare and contrast the differences between Makushi and Coastlander cultural representations of violence and the power to kill.

Acknowledgments

After seven years working on my Ph.D., I can finally acknowledge all of the people who helped me along the way. The most important mentions go to my Makushi brothers and sisters, my in-laws, and all the *youbayamî* I made along the way in the many months I lived in the Rupununi region of Guyana and in Roraima, Brazil. In Lethem, I would like to thank Dayan, Tamsin, Zayna, and Kalen. A special thanks to Guy, Andrew, Walter, Roland, Allamed, Padmini, Maribeth, and Dexter for their patience and for welcoming me into their family, their households, and their village. My dearest Makushi parents Leo and Rufina accepted me as a son, and taught me how to be a real person, a real human being. Living among the Makushi, laughing, gaffing, and also crying with them changed me in such deep and profound ways that all the changes are still not clear to me. I feel in my heart that the experience changed me to be better and to do better towards others.

Other important people that I leave many thanks to for helping me while in Georgetown, Guyana, are the staff from the Walter Roth National Museum of Anthropology. These are Jennifer Wishart, Shebana Daniels, and Louisa Daggers. From Boa Vista, I want to acknowledge the encouragement and support of Alexandro Machado Namem. At the University of Virginia, I am grateful for

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I am extremely grateful to my amazing graduate committee formed by George Mentore, Roy Wagner, and Richard Handler. They offered me all the support I needed, but also provided me the intellectual freedom to trace my own path. A special thank you goes out to my committee chair, George Mentore. Witnessing not only George's passion for good anthropology, but also his respect and compassion for Indigenous Peoples has been moving. His engagement with critical theory has been an inspiration to me, and hope I can be at least a fraction of the scholar that he hopes for me to become.

I also would like to thank my classmates and colleagues in the Department of Anthropology who, in one way or another, also helped shape my research and dissertation. They are: Lydia Rodríguez, Rose Wellman, Nathalie Nahas, Nathan Hedges, Patricia Sánchez Bao, Giancarlo Rolando, Alessandro Questa, Jacqueline Cieslak, Allison Broach, Jessica Boynton, Kyle Edwards, Beth Hart, Grace Reynolds, Dionisios Kavadias, David Flood, Erika Brant, Dannah Dennis, Carolyn Howarter, Susan Palazzo, Harri

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My most important acknowledgment goes to my wife, Julie. She supported me emotionally throughout the ups and down of graduate student life, she was my shelter and safe haven in this weird world that is the U.S., and she even quit her job to accompany me during part of my field research in Guyana. It is because of her unconditional love and generosity that I was able to make it to the sunny afternoon on which I wrote this acknowledgment. And it is to her whom I dedicate this dissertation. We make a great research team and partners in life. I feel that now life has just begun once again, and we are headed into another journey of an entirely different sort.

Note on Pronunciation

The phones present in the Makushi language are:

Consonants: p t k ʒ (') s m n ʃ (r) w Ø (y)

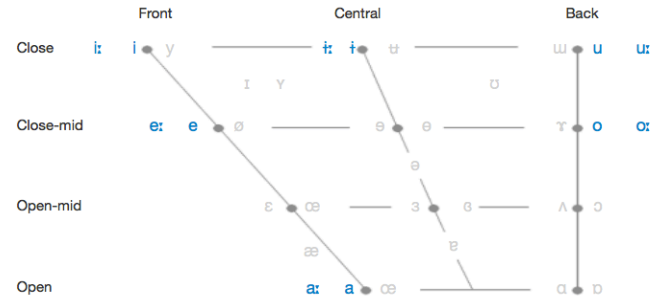
Vowels: a e i o u î (î)

Consonants (Pulmonic)

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t̪ d̪	t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ	n̪	n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ		ɽ	r					ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ɸ	ɾ	ɽ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant			ɭ	l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

Vowels



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.

Other Segments

w LATIN SMALL LETTER W

Source: South American Phonological Inventory Database (2014);
Miriam About (1976;1991).

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INTRODUCTION

During my first month in the village, I would hear a bell sound almost every morning and I would ask myself "what is that?" This was during the period when my hosts had left the village and I was left to look after their house, so there was no one around at the early hour when I would hear the bell. I inquired with several people, but they did not know what I was talking about. "Am I hearing things?" I also asked myself. However, I used to have a frequent visitor in the mornings. He was my older sister's daughter's son, or my older sister's son depending on the context. His name was Harry, and instead of taking the short path to school, he would come by and study me. I always gave him some coffee and salt biscuits, and as soon as he finished he announced "I am going," and left to go to school. On one of his visits, I heard the bell and so my immediate response was to ask Harry: "Do you hear that?" He looked at me, knitted his eyebrows together, paused for a moment and replied with a calm and prolonged "Yes."

"And what is it?" I quickly asked.

"It is a bell," he told me in a calm and slow tone of voice, as if he was spelling out each word.

That took me by surprise, and before I could follow up with any more questions he announced "I am going!" and left the yard and walked up the hill to school.

"Of course it is a bell. This is what I have been telling people all along," I thought to myself. But the matter of the fact is that Harry answered my questions. Can you hear the sound? Yes, I can. What is the sound? It is a bell sound. But these answers did not satisfy my curiosity about that morning sound.

In the following days, I occasionally heard the bell again, but not always when Harry was there. But one day these two facts coincided again and I asked him:

"Do you hear this sound? The sound of the bell? Who plays the bell?"

"People," he responded. Then he quickly left saying, "I am going" and started to walk to school.

On another occasion when the Harry's presence and the bell sound coincided, I asked the boy again:

"Are people playing the bell at the church?"

"No."

"Are they playing it at the secondary school then?"

"No, but more this side."

"At the health center then?"

"No, more that side," and then he set off once again to walk to school.

In his answers he gave two reference points to work with: the sound was coming from a place in between the school and the health center. I was getting closer, but I also was frustrated with this small inquiry that to me had not yet yielded a satisfactory outcome. But my frustrations were not with Harry. He answered all the questions I presented to him: Can you hear the sound? What is this sound? Who plays it? Is it coming from the school? From the health center? The problems were with my questions. I was not asking the right questions to get the kind of answer I wanted.

A few weeks (or months?) later, I was down the hill talking to my neighbor and having breakfast with his family. My neighbor was Harry's grandfather. He was also my brother-in-law or my father depending on the situation. We were all there when I heard the bell sound again. I looked around and no one seemed to have noticed the sound. I turned around and I asked Harry's grandmother (my older sister, or mother):

"Do you hear this sound?"

"Yes, I hear it," she answered me.

"Why is that?" I asked her again.

"This is the bell the people play at the nursery school, so the children can know classes are about to start."

That sated my curiosity, but it took months. There were other instances in which I only got the kind of answer I wanted months after I asked the original questions. There were other times that I could only make sense of what they told me months after they had told me. The problem was not with anyone's particular ability to understand my questions or with their willingness to answer them. The problem was with my ability to think of the relevant questions to ask and then to pose them appropriately. As I learned more and more about what was important to them, I learned to ask better questions, and sometimes not to ask questions at all. Some questions should not be asked, even if the topics are frequent in conversation.

Research Problem

Since the Makushi population is present in Guyana, Brazil, and Venezuela, the initial research question was to investigate how the Makushi population reconciles their ideas of identity and belonging vis-à-vis nationality and citizenship. Based on the findings of my preliminary ethnographic research, the question was adjusted to: How and why do the Makushi people conceptualize and interact with the government and the nation within the realm of shamanic thought? This being the case, what would be the substances of the nation and of the State? This is an interesting question, because according to Makushi shamanic

thought there is no intermediation between self and other, but rather a direct contact and interaction. The Makushi shaman at times operates as a mediator, but anyone in Makushi society can also access the spiritual world, or even become a shaman. Yet they choose not to. And in fact, every person has some knowledge of "shamanic" elements, and they use this knowledge in their daily lives. A good analogy in the Euro-American case is cooking. We can all assume that almost every person of a certain age will be able to fry an egg. A lot of people can do much more, while other people's knowledge of the culinary arts remains restricted. Even though cooking is essential to us, it is not mundane. In our society there are specialists who undergo arduous training and apprenticeship, acquiring deep knowledge and developing secret, artful techniques, while others are content to have a modest knowledge of cooking, or even no aptitude at all. Even in the case of cooking specialists (*chefs*), their skills and renown vary greatly.

Within Makushi shamanic thought, the State is described as an *oma'*, a predatory other-than-human being that can consume people's bodies and spirits. Nonetheless, this *oma'* can give great things to people, if they engage with it appropriately. The predatory and animalistic description of the State by the Makushi should not be strange to Euro-American political phi-

losophy, since the latter share the same principals. The difference is that using the Makushi shamanic logic, hierarchy is destroyed, and bureaucracy unnecessary. However, during the course of my research, I realized that the same "shamanic logic" is present in everything the community and the community members do. Sociologically, they are constantly operating against individualization at the same time that individual freedom is emphasized. And because Makushi individuals are free to do anything and everything, it is extremely difficult to define a sociological boundary for the group. It is as if no sooner than the group is formed, the individuals in the group begin to break off. But at the same time, when an individual stands in isolation from the group, the latter works to pull him back into the undifferentiated mass.

That being the case, the dissertation presents a discussion that focuses on the cultural representation of two systems: The Makushi (Amerindian) and the Guyanese (Caribbean). In this discussion, the dissertation presents the bodily comportment representations of these systems in action, and the moments in which they overlap and diverge from each other. Therefore, the thread that connects the different chapters in the dissertation is a comparison in power and politics between the Coast and the Hinterland in Guyana, between Coastlanders and Amerindians. The new project that was developed as a result of living and being

amongst the Makushi in the Rupununi, together with the process of writing, ties in to the proposed initial research since the underlying contrast between Amerindians and Coastlanders is determining who has the legitimate power to kill.

Field Research

This dissertation is based on a total of 22 months of field research in Guyana and Brazil, from June 2010 to November 2013. However, most of the work was carried out among the Makushi in Guyana. Part of the research was funded by the National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Award. Because of possible political repercussions of this work, all names were changed, including the name of the research site. This will prevent other scholars from using this work in historical comparisons, however it is a small price to pay to add another layer of protection to the identity of informants. In fact, there is no Tunaîmî village or river anywhere in Guyana. Rather, Tunaîmî is the "big water" in the sky - the Milky Way. Perhaps it is a river from which the sky people (*kapongon*) look down, and through the water surface they see us.

Organization of Chapters

In the presentation of the chapters, instead of using several smaller ethnographic allegories or fragments of data as

corroborators of specific arguments, I decided to provide a larger descriptive section. In this way, I present episodes that help us understand complex social dynamics and relations that connect people with their family, village, the region, the government and the nations of Guyana and Brazil. In such a way, I am also presenting the reader with a Makushi sensitivity that does not value condensed, linear thinking in the same way that we do, but values ideas of wholeness, appropriateness, and balance.

In following with the theme of wholeness, chapter one presents a village meeting in Tunaîmî and explores important issues presented by the Makushi. The chapter discusses some particular points such as the school, and other village projects. However, the backdrop or common thread is how the Makushi think of and act on notions of leadership and group boundaries.

Chapter two presents a discussion inspired by the intersections of the Guyanese government, modernity, law, and the Makushi people. Being a transfrontier or transnational people, the chapter also discusses how the Makushi position themselves vis-à-vis international political and economic issues. Perhaps the most recent issue is Guyana's place in a proposed lucrative international carbon market, and I discuss its implications.

Whereas chapters one and two deal with the village and the State, respectively, chapters three through six contribute to

the discussion on Makushi shamanic thought. Chapter three is made up of a series of stories and histories that shed light on the last 100 years of Tunaîmî. Some of the stories are more representative of Tunaîmî's ethno-history, which describes the pressures that the Makushi endured from slaving raids and Christian missions. Some stories are more representative of their struggle in conciliating traditional beliefs in the Spiritual World with Christian beliefs. And other stories and histories are illustrative of social phenomena that infiltrate all social aspects of life.

Chapter four explores in more detail some of the characters presented in the previous chapter and discusses the economic and political context of the Rupununi region in the last 200 years. This chapter also explores the correlations between the Alleluia religion, an Amerindian millenarian religion, with Makushi shamanism, and how knowledge from both is attained. In chapter four, two general categories of shamans are presented: the dark and the light shaman. The differences and similarities between them will be further discussed in chapter six. Chapter five presents and discusses a case where villagers are drastically affected by events that have taken place in the Spiritual World. Dreams are one of the ways in which shamanic knowledge and interaction with spirits is carried out by non-specialists in alterity (shamans). So, this chapter discusses how dreams

infuse meaning into people's lives and how bodies and spirits relate to each other.

The final chapter will present and discuss the tools of the trade of the shaman, and how these are created and maintained. That chapter will also relate the importance of the concept of the body as a constructed artifact not only to the Makushi people, but to Amerindians in Amazonia more generally. Even though shamanism deals with "spirits," the body is the structural counterpart of the spirit, and it is where knowledge is retained.

CHAPTER ONE

VILLAGE POLITICS

Introduction

This chapter begins with an account of a General Village Meeting in Tunaîmî. People from all the communities and villages within Tunaîmî titled land were present at this meeting. This particular account is representative of how meetings are experienced in Tunaîmî. The goal of this chapter is to give the reader a sense of what the dynamics in the village feel like at the human level. Instead of setting up small pieces of ethnographic data to justify different arguments, below I present a meeting in its entirety. In this way, a part of the Makushi epistemological and sociological strategies are in evidence. In the following section of the chapter, I will point out such strategies and analyze their importance in the context of the village, the region, and the nation. I provide even more background to some passages that at first may seem out of place, in order to understand the ways in which the Makushi people produce meaning and significance in their lives. Because the vignette at the beginning of the chapter is too long and interwoven with

meaning to be obviated (Wagner, 1981), my approach can be defined as a thick description (Geertz, 1973). However, as an obviation, the chapter ends its analysis and addition of meaning in the same place where it began: the village.

General Village Meeting in Tunaîmî

It was a beautiful Saturday morning, with bright blue skies and a few scattered clouds. You could see people leaving their houses at a distance as they walked or took motorbike rides to the school compound. The compound was located on the second-highest hill in the village. From there, you could see all the houses to the North, and a stretch of savanna that continued until it disappeared into the forest that only appeared as a dark green line contiguous to the horizon. To the East, more houses were visible, scattered atop rolling hills. It was easy to identify household compounds because the mango, orange, and tangerine trees surrounding them formed dark green clusters that provided a colorful contrast to the brown, yellow, and golden pattern of the savanna landscape. Further at a distance, you could see the Pakaraima Mountains, and the grass-covered hills on the other side of the Ireng River, which was already on the Brazilian side of the border. Looking to the West, the terrain gently lowered in elevation only to later rise up again. In between, there was a nice pond where people bathed and collected

water during the rainy season. Further to the West lied the Kanuku Mountains. The constant movement of clouds and the way in which the sunlight bounced and reflected off of them, darkening and brightening the forested hills and valleys, provided the viewer with an ever-changing scenic landscape.

The only cardinal direction not visible from the school compound was South, because there was a thin stretch of *caimbé*¹ trees South of the buildings, at the top of the hill. But you could see the few footpaths that went into and through the *caimbé* bush and the blue of the sky shining from the other side.

The area surrounding the middle school was bustling with adults talking, moving around, laughing and gaffing with each other. A line of bicycles leaned against one of the school walls with hardly any space for more. Latecomers parked their bicycles under the mature mango tree, amongst its gnarled roots in the middle of the school compound and against the walls of other buildings. A few motorcycles were also parked in the area, but most people who arrived atop them were dropped off by a driver who immediately left riding the vehicle.

There were gatherings of three to five people, especially inside and outside the doors of the building. The building itself was rectangular in shape, approximately 10x25 meters, made

¹ *Coussapoa asperifolia*.

of cement brick, a low zinc sheet roof, and without any internal walls. Villagers used wooden panels to create internal sections within the building to divide the school children into specific grades. Today, the makeshift dividers were removed and all chairs and tables faced one of the narrow walls of the building. In front of them stood a large table and some chairs placed in a line next to the table. Today was a General Village Meeting where people from Tunaîmî, Kukui, and Ka'poi would gather to discuss village affairs.

Plate 1

Panoramic view of Tunaîmî from the water tower



The meeting was scheduled to start at 9 o'clock, but at the marked hour the school only had a few people seated inside. More people lingered outside, conversing with family and friends, as they waited for more villagers to arrive. By 9:30am there were a great many more people both inside and outside the school. The Village Councilors who previously had been gathered around the outskirts started to go inside and find seats. Some

sat in the line of chairs in front, while others took seats amongst the villagers in the main area. When the Councilors entered the building, the many clusters of people outside started to break off and their contingents took seats inside. The school was almost full.

Tunaîmî's Toshao² called the meeting to order and gave the floor to Mister Jeremiah, who led a prayer for all of the community, thanking God for what they had received, and wishing good health for the young children and the youth in the village. Everyone closed their eyes and recited the Our Father prayer. The Toshao thanked Mister Jeremiah and announced that now they would sing the National Pledge. Everyone stood up, placed their right hands on the left side of their chests and, looking sharp and straight to the Guyanese flag at the back of the room, recited the National Pledge in a monotone unison:

"I pledge myself to honor always the Flag of Guyana,
and to be loyal to my country,
to be obedient to the laws of Guyana,
to love my fellow citizens,
and to dedicate my energies
towards the happiness and prosperity of Guyana."

² Toshao is how the Makushi today address a village leader.

After the pledge, everyone sat down once again, and the Toshao ran the meeting in a combination of English and Makushi. When he changed languages, he relayed the information given in the previous language, but always added another point to the discussion, moving it forward. It was not simply a translation of the English content into Makushi and vice-versa, but rather a deliberate repetition and addition of information designed to address the audience and emphasize specific points. After presenting the meeting agenda, which was also written down in English on a chalkboard placed next to the table, the young village leader said:

"We need participation. We need to hear from you, from the young people. We need your advice, guidance. That way, we can know what the community needs to do. But not everyone is here today... we have the agenda on the chalkboard back there. Don't be afraid to speak up. It is not what you say, but how you say it. We are one people, remember the motto of our country."

The Toshao then introduced the Secretary, who was going to read the minutes from the last general meeting. After he spoke, there was a round of applause.

"Good morning again," said Beatrice. "These are the minutes from the last General Meeting held on the 22nd of December of 2012, that took place at the primary school in Tunaîmî. The items covered in the meeting were:

Kukui received a Presidential Grant and decided that they will use the money on an Eco-tourism Project;

Uncle Campos said he has experience with that, since he was involved in a previous Eco-tourism Project. He advised Kukui villagers to anticipate all possible problems and difficulties with the project before they start to spend the money;

Toshao arrived and apologized for being late. He was addressing a domestic issue;

Toshao was questioned about the Eco-tourism Grant Tunaîmî received and he replied that the carpenters, masons, and laborers were being employed, paid, and that the funds were being managed by the Village Treasurer;

Mister Will pointed out the applications for lumber were being placed after the materials had already been extracted. He said that the rules of the community applied to every single individual, as well as to the Eco-lodge;

The Tractor Committee reported they had \$434,000 dollars in the bank and \$84,000 as cash-in-hand. There were also \$430,000 dollars in credit, and it was suggested that people pay their debts with the Tractor;

On the matter of the Presidential Grant for the Cattle Project, Toshao suggested the money could be used to buy another vehicle for village transportation. But people said the road in

and out of the village should be fixed first, and another meeting was suggested to address those issues;

On the Youth Project, Mister Will reported the sheep population increased to 37. The Youth Project bought some equipment, but reported that the donkeys were wandering and killing the other animals;

With regard to the Hot Meal Project in schools, Miss Daniela Ray had stated that due to the mismanagement of funds, the schoolchildren had been left without meals for two weeks. It was also said that due to more mismanagement, the school had bought two animals with the agreement of only a few parents who attended the PTFA (Parents, Teachers, and Friends' Association) meeting. A balance of \$202,000 dollars is still at hand;

The school also received a grant of \$1,000,000 dollars for the building of furniture by villagers, but there were still tables and shelves to be completed;

Other announcements were made, like the establishment of the Kanuku Mountains as a Protected Area. Villages around the Kanuku Mountains Protected Area would now form a Commission, and Tunaîmî had two persons on that commission;

The Treasurer reported a balance of \$75,000 dollars in the bank;

The Solar Project fees came to sum total of \$121,000 dollars, but the person responsible for the collecting the fees

complained that many households were not paying their fees, and that there were five persons who had never paid anything since their solar panels were installed;

Two correspondences were read aloud. One was by Vivian, seeking permission to live in the village. The other was by Mister Carter, informing of his visit and stay with Mister Paul;

Auntie Mable gave stories of advice and past experiences;

On the section 'Any Other Business,' Toshao complained about children making small fires within the school compound. He seriously admonished parents to be more responsible and to know where their children were, because accidents can happen;

Tunaîmî residents who accessed water from the main water tank complained of not getting water due to certain persons interfering with the water distribution. The Water Representative, Mister Tobias, would be informed and asked to check the service. Finally, Toshao entered in agreement with the water users to only collect water after 4pm, giving enough time for the overhead tanks to be filled;

The meeting was adjourned at 1pm," she finally concluded.

After the reading of the minutes, there was a long pause filled with silence.

"Now we have corrections and adoption of the minutes. Those who were here at the last meeting can speak. Is there anything that needs to be corrected, or is there something that was said

that is not in the minutes, or that should be there in a different way? Speak now," said the Toshao.

"I wasn't in the meeting but there is something troubling me," said Mister Jeremiah. "In the beginning of the minutes, it says that the Toshao was not present when the meeting started because of domestic reasons. Did he and his wife have a fight and he couldn't come?" there was general laughter as Mister Jeremiah presented his question. "Can you give more clarification on that?" he continued.

"I remember that on that morning, when I was preparing to come to the meeting, a lady reached my house" said the Toshao. "She was bleeding, and behind her came her husband.. coming to beat her up. I was protecting her, telling the man to go away but he did not have any respect. And then I told him to go to his home. That was on the morning of the meeting. That couple had problems and I had to deal with it," concluded the Toshao.

There was a moment of silence, and no more questions were raised. Mister Kevin Paul stood up and said the minutes were correct. A few seconds later, his brother Richard Paul also stood up and seconded the minutes.

Toshao took the central role again and introduced two visitors who were seated at the table next to him. One was the tourism specialist from the NRDDDB (North Rupununi District Development Board), and the other was the Tourism Manager from

Surama Village. Later on in the meeting, they would speak a little about their experiences in the Eco-tourism industry in Guyana, and present certificates to two Tunaîmî youth who had participated in a tourism internship in Surama. After making this short introduction, Toshao announced that before continuing with the village meeting, they needed to go through 'Matters Arising from the Minutes.' He then spoke for a short period in Makushi, explaining that people could request clarification about what was presented in the minutes of the previous village meeting. He stopped speaking in Makushi and said: "You are free to do so as of now." There was a moment of silence that was interrupted by Mister Frank Matt.

"Toshao, as the PTFA President, I can say that there is \$400,000 dollars for the school that are missing since August (2012). But this money has re-appeared in December. Without my knowledge, and without the whole body of the PTFA, two persons decided to spend this money. There were only six persons at the meeting where they decided to buy cattle. It is hard to discuss the Cattle Project when the money has already been used! There were only a few parents, and they decided to buy cows. Now that the cows have already been bought, we should continue this project, but that means that we have to ask the parents to allow their school children to look after the cows. And what will happen when they have an accident in the savanna? I will be

constantly worried about my son if he is in the savanna looking after cows." Mister Frank's speech was energetic, accompanied by long and fast arm gestures that pointed to the absolute location of where the cows were to be found, his own house, and the road behind him.

"Thank you very much Mister Matt. Does anybody have something else to say?" said Toshao.

After a long pause, Vivian said that in the last PTFA meeting someone said the funds were missing. Vivian, Robert, and Daniela started to engage, all at the same time, and exchanged short, energetic, and rapid sentences in Makushi with one another. When they stopped, Robert said he was still working on building one more shelf for the school, but because he had to work on his farm, the work he was supposed to do on the furniture project had been delayed.

Daniela was seated in the front left section of the rows of chairs. She stood up and turned to her right, to face most of the villagers who were seated in the rows behind her. She then said:

"I had promised to myself that I was not going to say anything. But things have to be clear to everybody... I thought everything was already settled in the previous meeting. It sounds so bad when people say the money is missing. Robert often says 'money is missing.' But that is for the Furniture Project.

I would say that yes, money is missing, because they have used it all. But they did not complete the project! That is the only way I will say it is missing. They collected the money without finishing the project. When I was managing it, Robert still had \$9,000 dollars left to collect. When I left, I told Brother Sam not to give anyone anything unless they finished my project. But behind my back Mister Fox went and collected the balance. So, how come the money is missing from the project? I told Brother Sam not to give Robert any until the project is finished also. This is what happened with the Furniture Project. I am still waiting for school tables and shelves to be completed. Yesterday, one shelf was supposed to be delivered, and three more to be handed over in the Future Project. Well... I am still waiting. As soon as Mister Will Junior delivers the rest, money will be made available. That is it. On the Cattle Project, we are sending kids to look for cows. Yes, the Matt boys saw them by Jamaica, and brought them back to the school on horseback. They knew they were our cows because they were thinner compared to the other set of cows. They came and then went home. That was late in the evening. On another afternoon, I sent two boys to look for the cows again. It was the Silva boys. One of them came back to tell me that the cows were right at Bethlehem. I told them to go and bring them in. They did, but afterwards they stopped at the Brethren Church to eat mangoes from the tree

right there. They stayed until very late. Night fell and I caught them at the mango tree, where they were laughing and gaffing. Mister Matt's son was one of them. I shouted at the boys and I said: "Franco, Dad will be worried about you all!" The problem was not that they went far looking for the cows. They collected them right at Bethlehem, brought them in, but they were eating mangoes all afternoon. So that is it." There was general laughter when she finished speaking.

"Ok, so we have two cows that are property of the school, right?" asked the Toshao. He continued: "And the balance of the money is there to purchase more animals?" Daniela responded yes, and Toshao said that the Village Council had not yet made a decision about the Village Cattle Project. As the Toshao was saying that they were still on the 'Matters Arising from the Minutes,' he was interrupted by Mister Bill Jeremiah.

"I just want to make a comment on what the Headmistress just said. It is good news to know that the school is going into cattle raising. I do agree with Mister Tavares said in another occasion, that the school has to quickly start thinking about branding their cows. That means that they have to go to the Police and register them, and so on and so forth. The Cattle Project is a good thing. Secondly, as a friend of the school, I will advise and suggest that the school buy its own horse. I love to hear that the school boys are becoming horsemen, so they

can herd the cows with horses. Thirdly, I want to ask the Headmistress about the PTFA. What is your enrollment in the school at this point?" inquired Mister Jeremiah, directing the question at Daniela Ray.

The Headmistress answered that they had 175 students in Tunaîmî alone. Mister Jeremiah was confused about the number, because only six parents were present in the previous PTFA meeting. He continued:

"But we heard that only six parents came to the PTFA meeting. So, what happened to the other parents? Why are they not coming? Sporting again like last night? Why? Toshao, do you think that these parents are going to leave Tunaîmî to attend a PTFA meeting in St. Ignatius? They don't even come to their own PTFA meeting right here! And are they going to go as far as Bina Hill, to attend its PTFA meeting? Why are the parents not coming to attend their own meeting? I don't know... perhaps we might need to get some horses and mobilize these parents, and say: 'Hey, tomorrow is a PTFA meeting and every one of you should be present to improve your school.'"

"Very good points!" said the Toshao. "Later we will speak more about this. We can hear Mister Will breathing very hard now... There will be rules governing our community, and one of the rules that is being put forward is that every member, every

villager has to attend meetings. The Community Planning Committee has been working hard on the rules. Whether it is a village meeting or PTFA meeting, everyone has to attend. We will speak about that later. Fines will be attached as punishment. But this is just the beginning of the putting together of the rules for Tunaîmî. Right now, we are still on 'Matters Arising from the Minutes.'" The village leader took a small pause, but soon started to speak again. "I really want to hear the responses from parents as to why they don't come to PTFA meetings. Let's just hear why they don't come. The floor is open for the parents..."

"Are they sick?" - interrupted Mister Jeremiah.

Without paying attention to the interruption, the Toshao continued: "As I said this morning, we want this meeting, we want your participation, we want more discussion from the people out there, not just me and Mister Jeremiah speaking to each other. Alright?"

"Can we leave this discussion for another meeting? Because I think this meeting has to deal with Tunaîmî, Ka'poi, Kukui, and we are only targeting Tunaîmî right now," suggested the school Headmistress.

The Toshao rephrased the question to the public, suggesting that this could be discussed in a Tunaîmî PTFA meeting. There

was a feeble but positive response from the audience to the proposal, but Mister Jeremiah stood up and rejected the idea.

"It is not ok... Toshao, I want to know if Ka'poi School has the same problem of parents not coming to the meetings. I want to know if Kukui School has the same problem. And if they have the same problems, something is wrong with our people!" he interjected.

The Toshao said that today they had the Head Teachers from the three villages present, and when they gave their reports, this question could be answered then. Mister Jeremiah thanked the Toshao, who added:

"Is there any other thing you would like to discuss, that you heard on the minutes?" There was a pause. The Toshao then started to speak again:

"If nobody has anything to say... In the last meeting, I mentioned that we were supposed to buy cattle. Ask the people who were present in the meeting. We were supposed to buy cattle with one million dollars, which is the Presidential Grant. But Mister Andrew Kevin who was the owner of the cows and the former Toshao, Mister Charles David, made a *negócio*,³ right? Mister Charles said: 'We will buy cows from you!' So we tried to carry out that bargain that they had. Only to find out that one cow

³ Portuguese word for "business" or "deal."

cost \$80,000 dollars from Mister Kevin. So if you had to buy 10 cows, how much would that amount to?" asked the Toshao. The villagers responded in unison, "Eight hundred thousand." The Toshao continued:

"Eight hundred thousand, right? He is also selling a horse with saddle for two hundred thousand. 'A good horse,' he said. That leaves us without any money to make a corral, to pay the *vaqueiro*,⁴ and any other expense. Do you remember that I said in the other meeting that this was not feasible? I said: 'Let us look at transportation for the community!' We can move away from the Cattle Project and buy a minibus. My people, look at our situation today. One of our teachers died here in the village. Why was the hospital vehicle unavailable at that time? The doctor said that she should have tried to walk to the hospital, but within one hour she was dead. We cannot put her on the tractor that we have. We had another death recently -- a little girl died. She died fast, she was sick not even a whole day. She was taken out to Lethem hospital on a motorcycle. The other lady from Kukui who died in the hospital was also taken by motorcycle. We even managed to put something on the newspaper. A pregnant lady and other patients have been taken out to the hospital on that old blue motorcycle from Ka'poi's Health

⁴ Portuguese word for "cowboy."

Worker. So I said: 'Let us buy a minibus!' It is written in the minutes. This is a way that we can have transportation available for the community. Now, we have to get your opinion. Some of us might be healthy today, but you never know when you will need transportation. This is something we can discuss now. We have about one million dollars from the Presidential Grant. Some people say: 'Let us still buy the cows!' Did you hear what just two cows are causing in the community? Who is willing to look after cows if we buy them? I might be thinking wrong *yomba'yamî*⁵, but it is you who have to say yes or no, so we can proceed. The tractor is not doing well recently. Nobody wants to travel in tractor no more. Yesterday I saw Oscar⁶ working for Auntie Maya in her shop. Not even he wants to work with the tractor anymore!" General laughter erupted from the villagers out of Toshao's last comment. He continued:

"There is no money for the tractor, but it has helped the community a lot. There are projects that the tractor contributes to, free of cost. When I say free of cost it means that the project does not have to pay a cent. For example, the Dam Project, Well Water Projects, and others. But how can we continue when the tractor is losing money and there is no money coming in? This is open for discussion right now. Let us talk about

⁵ *Youmba*: afinal person, well-known person, friend; *-yamî*: pluralizer suffix.

⁶ Oscar is the porter who works in Tunaîmî village's Tractor Project.

transportation for the community as 'Matters Arising from the Minutes.'"

"Toshao," interjected Mister Frank Matt. "Last year, I think Lethem received an ambulance. I read it in the newspaper. They received an equipped ambulance to transport patients, even to Brazil. But when we make an emergency call, there is no ambulance available. No ambulance, because there are two ambulances sitting right now in the hospital parking area. They never move. Why can't they fix them and make them run?" As he made the point about the ambulances not moving, many people started to laugh and agree with his observation.

"Very good point Mister Matt, but let me tell you," responded the Toshao. "In reality, we have to face the truth. If you get sick and call for an ambulance, it is not going to come to the village. It will never arrive." As he was finishing his point, parallel murmurs of agreement could be heard from the villagers. "Think about yourself and your children. Anybody have anything to say concerning that?"

"Toshao," said the Health Worker from Tunaîmî. "Talking about health, I really agree with your plan of acquiring a minibus. As you said, to be used for emergency cases. I would like to see a minibus coming here. Operating out of Tunaîmî, any hour of day and night. I am for it."

"Some of us were thinking that this was going to be an ambulance to transport sick people," said Mister Richard Paul. "But now it sounds like that this will be like Jared's⁷ transportation and that it will make money. This will also be good for our Eco-tourism project, because instead of hiring people to bring tourists from Lethem, we could transport them ourselves. But when we have a sick person, we can carry that person to the hospital. That is all I have to say."

"I really love the idea of the bus," said Mister Jeremiah. He continued: "But Toshao, we cannot buy a bus with a million dollars. And another issue is the problem with drivers. This morning we wanted our driver to go and bring villagers from Kukui to attend this meeting. But our driver was drunk and he couldn't make it!" General laughter broke out amongst the villagers inside the school again. "Luckily, we had a substitute driver. However, I also like the idea of a Cattle Project, Toshao. And you don't have to go to Sand Creek to buy cows. You can buy the cows right here in our village! What is important is that you get a good breeding bull, and I understand that Miss Mary Evans has many breeding bulls she wants to get rid of. So, we have to decide between a breeding bull and a minibus. How easy is it to change from the Cattle Project to the minibus?"

⁷ Jared Mitchel was originally from Tunaîmî but now lived in Lethem. He ran a transportation service connecting Lethem to many Amerindian villages in the South Rupununi region.

Last year, or the year before that, we received a Presidential Grant to build a big *benab*.⁸ A lot of fuel and other materials were bought and we still don't have our *benab*. So I don't know what is going to happen if we change from the Cattle Project to a minibus."

There was an animated debate over the minibus topic. One person at a time stood up and spoke his or her mind, agreeing or not with the village's buying a minibus, advising on how the service should be run, who might be the best person to drive it, how often it should run, and who should coordinate the project. They also presented concerns about whether it would be a paid service, how much would be charged per passenger, and if medical patients would need to pay or not. They also questioned if children would be charged in the same way, and whether they would even be allowed on the minibus. Various previous Toshao also voiced their opinions on the minibus issue, and on the topic of previous projects that had not been completed.

After the animated exchange of opinions, the Toshao tried to have a vote count on how many were in favor of or against the minibus, but there was no clear winner or loser. The Toshao then started to speak to the villagers.

⁸ A *benab* is a circular construction with a thatched roof, but no exterior or interior walls. This kind of construction is very common amongst Amer-indians in Guyana.

"We can put half of the money and beg the Minister, or ask the President for the rest. We would say: 'Look, we already have all this money, but we need the rest to buy a minibus.' We already have some money and we can do something with it. After this meeting we can start a fundraiser to get more funds. Because the bus will be for Tunaîmî, Kukui, and Ka'poi, we can ask every villager to give something. But this is just a suggestion. For now, we can move on."

Mister Jeremiah and the Head Mistress from Kukui started to talk at the same time. After a few attempts of mutual interruption, Jeremiah persevered and introduced his interjection:

"We need a big bus because it will be packed, packed, packed, and there will be only one minibus. We then will have to get a minibus for Kukui, one for Tunaîmî, and one for Ka'poi."

Once he stopped, there were a lot of parallel conversations going on. The Headmistress' voice, that Mister Jeremiah had muffled earlier with insistence in order to deliver his comment, managed to cut through the cacophony in the background. Without any hesitation, the Headmistress stood up from her seat all the way in the back of the crowd and said out loud so everyone in the room could hear her:

"In Kukui, we had already submitted a proposal to an outside funder for transportation. We are waiting on the feedback

on the transportation for Kukui." As soon as she finished, there was a round of applause.

After the applause ended, Daniel Will stood up and spoke:

"Toshao, I want to comment on the tractor and the minibus again. *Yomba'yamî*, a good bus, costs on average around three million dollars. This is for a good bus. *Prata mîrîrî sîrîrî one million, inna* (the money is one million, ok).⁹ We still need to come up with the rest, and in one of the council meetings, someone said purchasing a minibus is a good plan. This is a good intention. But what about the reality of it... do we have the money? Do we have the money? Councilor Jeremiah and Toshao... I don't want to owe anybody. I don't want to owe anybody. And that is a good thing. The minibus is also a good thing *yomba'yamî*... But the Village Council will need to find a way to get the balance... Maybe we will have to negotiate with the government, and with some outside funding before we are prepared to move this forward. We need to consider all these things. The tractor is really struggling recently to raise funds. And there is a conflict of interest with Jared, right? Jared is still a part of the community. Maybe we can work out some deals with him and say: 'Jared, we will support you, but when somebody is sick in

⁹ He contrasted the price of the bus (three million) with the money they already had (one million). *Prata* (money) *mîrîrî* (3rd person singular pronoun) *sîrîrî* (to-be 3rd person singular) *inna* (yes, agreement interjection).

Tunaîmî, can you come and pick them up?' But we haven't made any agreements with him. It is a good intention to have a minibus. Maybe we can discuss this at next meeting too."

After Daniel Will spoke, there were no more interventions over the Minibus Project, and Toshao continued with the meeting agenda. He deferred to Beatrice, the Village Secretary, who read the correspondences received since the previous meeting out loud. She also pointed out that some of the petitioners might be at the meeting. There were five letters, which were read exactly like this:

"Dear village council. I hereby apply to your office for farmland on the way to Maipaima, which is four acres. I hope my application will be approved.

Jeff O'Neill."

"I hereby apply to your office for farmland which is four acres, which is located at Inpih. I hope my application will be approved.

Thank you.

Maria O'Neill."

"Dear Toshao. I hereby apply for a site to construct a house for me. The place I have chosen is located to the West of the Mission Compound, a few meters from the Ka'poi road. Should my application be successful,

I intend to start building as early as possible. I already have some of the house materials.

Gary Francisco."

"Dear village council. I am a villager and I am running a small business for the past eight months. I hereby apply to the village council to continue my business. If my application is approved I will try my best to obey by the rules and regulations of the village.

Auntie Tina Guilherme."

"Dear Sir, I, Clotilde Guilhermo, hereby make an application to operate a dry goods shop selling groceries, clothing, cosmetics and beverages, sweet drinks and tin juices. My TIN number is: (she put the number here), and my ID number is: (she put the number here). I agree to obey all rules and regulations of the village in regards to business enterprises.

Awaiting your approval,

Clotilde Guilhermo."

After all the letters were read, the Toshao said that there were more applications for farmland to which the Council had not yet responded. However, he pointed out that Mister Jeff O'Neill and his wife Miss Maria O'Neill were asking for four

acres of farm each. He added they were asking for virgin forest, in a plot with many big trees.

There were a few more interventions on the Cattle Projects from Tunaîmî and Kukui, as well as on the Dam Project in Ka'poi. The interventions concerned the costs of the projects, and where exactly the money was being spent. Since these were village projects, some people complained about why they had to pay for the tractor, if the tractor was a village resource. Not only did it belong to Tunaîmî, but it also belonged to the two satellite villages -- Ka'poi and Kukui. All the remarks were heard, but none of them drew a response. Toshao then introduced Uncle Kevin, who would give the report on the tractor.

Uncle Kevin was seated in the first row of chairs where most of the villagers were. He stood up, walked towards the table where some of the Village Councilors were, and turned around to face the general audience. He had a little notebook in his hand, which he opened just before speaking.

"The tractor broke down and we had to drive it to Lethem to fix it. I had to pay the driver his daily allowance while he was there. He stayed in Lethem for three days, and had to return to Tunaîmî with taxi. The taxi cost \$10,000. I then sent Thomas to Boa Vista and spent \$6,700. I then had to pay Martin to pick him up in Lethem and paid \$3,000. That is \$9,700, and this was the second time they had to travel to fix the tractor. Now there

is the third time. Thomas had to go to Boa Vista again, but this time he went with Mister Mitchel (\$1,000); taxi to Boa Vista (\$5,000); taxi in Boa Vista, because you cannot walk around Boa Vista (\$5,000); snacks (\$7,000); taxi to Tunaîmî (\$3,000); and I paid him a little pocket piece (\$7,000). We paid for the clutch plates (\$80,000); and I had to pay Mister Singh \$67,000 to install them. Overall, it was \$231,700 to have the tractor running again." As he spoke, he constantly looked though his notebook, browsing and flipping pages back and forth. He paused for a short moment before continuing. He then said:

"There are also the people who hire the tractor to plow their farms or to haul wood. I have to pay the stipend for the driver, the porter, to buy fuel... but they don't pay me. The balance is carried over to next month..."

"Call the names of the ones who have not paid!" shouted Jeremiah, interrupting Kevin's train of thought.

The former quickly responded by saying: "There are too many names! And I have your name there, too. You haven't paid!" The villagers broke out in laughter at his response. Jeremiah continued by saying energetically:

"But I want to hear all the names!" There was no more laughter from the villagers, and no one seemed to be so interested in knowing the names of the delinquent villagers. There

was also no further engagement from Kevin on that topic. He continued:

"The total income, including the unpaid hires, is \$1,606,900. The expenditures are \$94,000. The daily allowance for the driver and porter is \$5,000, and I also pay \$2,000 for them to look after the tractor and to wash it. I pay them \$5,000 when they go to the bush for material (\$3,000 for driver and \$2,000 for porter). And all that came to \$206,000 total - just in stipend expenses. Now the tractor's expenditures are: first, \$54,000 in diesel and then we bought more for \$28,000; one can of oil cost \$15,000, and another \$23,000 for more diesel. The total is \$120,000. The balance then is \$860,000. We also have some funds in the bank, not very much. It is in a brother's bank account, but I have a copy of all the transactions. Every time we withdraw money, I record it in my book. So I know how much is left, and that is \$315,853." Kevin closed his book, took a pause, looked up, and then continued.

"Sometimes I just regret it. I say to myself 'I am going to stop tomorrow!' but then I never do. I am getting sicker now. I am getting too old on my own to do this job. And it is making me get even older." People laughed at his comment. "I am getting old... and people say the tractor is not their problem. I don't want to do this anymore. But no one wants to do it. So that is why I am here."

An animated debate went back and forth between the audience members, and the people who sat around the table in the front. There was no order, and people spoke simultaneously. The Toshao then started speaking and called the attention of others to himself, which in turn ceased the parallel conversations. He stated that this was the report on the tractor, and that if they wanted to find out more, anyone could ask Uncle Kevin. Kevin then added:

"If you don't agree with my papers, I will step down, ok? I want to step down because I am also not in good health. The other day, I went to the hospital and got an X-ray and they found a crack in my spine. So, I am not too well. Other people could also manage the tractor and they would do it well, even better than I do. So, if you don't agree with my record..." he paused for a three seconds, and then ended with a "Thank you."

Frank then asked Uncle Kevin if the driver and porter received their daily allowances when the tractor did a job that it did not get paid for. Kevin said they do receive their allowance, unless they are doing a job in Tunaîmî. He informed Frank that if they are working the tractor for a Ka'poi or Kukui village project, they get paid. "It is not their village," were Kevin's exact words. Jeremiah took the stance of congratulating Kevin for being such an honest person and for presenting such a

good financial report on the tractor. However, he reminded everyone that the tractor belonged to the Tunaîmî Village Council, and that was why the priorities set by the Village Council took precedence over priorities set by any single person. Also, if anything happened to the tractor on the road or in the village, the police would not come after Kevin, the driver, or the porter, but rather they would seek out the Village Council. He also questioned the Toshao about the frequency with which he, or other Village Councilors, met with the Tractor Committee to discuss and assess their issues. In conclusion, he addressed the issue of the money being in someone's private account. He suggested the money be transferred into the Village Council's bank account, since the temptation for the person whose account was being used was too great. Mister Jeremiah said that if the money was in his own account, he would be tempted to take some for his personal use now and again. The Headmistress also agreed with the point made about the bank account and added that this topic had already been addressed in many other meetings, yet nothing had been done thus far. Toshao said that unfortunately, he had never met with the Tractor Committee, but the Village Council should do so. He also commented on the tractor credit among the villagers, by saying that those who had not paid the tractor knew who they were, so their names did not need to be called up. He added that it was not only for people, but that

there were also projects that owed the tractor as well. He gave the example of the chicken project, and said that previous Village Councils also owed the Tractor Committee, as well as the owned money to the Village Council Treasury itself. As a last comment, the Toshao said: "There is a lot of money not accounted for."

Thomas, who was seated all the way in the back, stood up and told everyone about how the people in Yupukari ran their tractor. According to him, they decided to buy a new tractor, so they could be better equipped to help with other projects in their village. They already had seven million dollars at hand. Everyone contributed with what they could, and their tractor driver and porter were not getting paid. Their contribution to the village was working for no pay.

"This this is how they do things there and this is their system. In Tunaîmî, the porter and driver get paid because they are providing a service to the community," said the Toshao in a dry, harsh tone of voice.

Mister Campos Sales then complained that both the porter and the driver were always drunk, and that because of that they did not do their jobs well. He said that when they go to Lethem, they drink and come back drunk, and sometimes they even forget and leave some people behind, or forget to pick up someone's parcel of food or merchandise. He concluded that if they are

getting paid to provide a service, the way they are doing it is not right. Toshao responded that they are human beings, and that Uncle Kevin tries to talk to them, but they don't listen. He added:

"I will talk to them again, and point out that if they drink, they are not only putting their lives at risk, but everyone else's." Everyone gave a round of applause and started to have parallel conversations. The room was filled with effervescent talking.

Toshao called for everyone's attention and started to move on to the next item on the agenda: the Hot Meal Project. Because not all the parties were in attendance at the meeting, he suggested that whoever wanted to know more about the Hot Meal Project should attend the PTFA meeting in their village and ask for a report. He then moved on to the Village Library issue:

"The village library has been closed since Auntie Marilia's stipend has been cut off. There are very good books in that library and to this day nobody has volunteered to be a librarian. What do we need to do? Our children need to go there. Anybody has anything to say?" There was a long pause, until Mister William got up and gave his opinion.

"I have something to say on the library. The library is closed and it is one of the tools for education in each community. Why is the library closed? If the council does not have

the money, the parents can pay someone to work as a librarian. That is it Toshao. Thank you."

Toshao asked for more suggestions, and also reminded everyone that is a decision concerning Tunaîmî more than the other villages. Villagers wanted to know what the condition of the books were, and someone responded that one of the councilors checked on them on the previous week and they were all in good condition. Daniel got up and offered his suggestion.

"Just another suggestion to add to what Mister William already said. Since there is no one volunteering to be a librarian, I was thinking if the teachers couldn't take the kids into the library under their supervision. At least that way they are using the resources we already have. On special days, the teachers can take their classes and have supervised readings. I think this will do a lot of good for our community because I hear about children who still don't know how to read. This is something I want to challenge the teachers to do." No more suggestions or comments on the library were made after this point.

The next topic on the agenda was health. The Health Worker from Ka'poi was not present because he was attending a training in Lethem. The Health Worker from Tunaîmî was also not present. The Toshao then explained:

"I saw the health worker from Tunaîmî this morning, but he sent me a note." The Toshao paused for a brief moment while opening a folded piece of paper and starting to read from it.

"Toshao, I am having abdominal pain..." after reading this sentence the Toshao interjected saying: "...maybe he is having diarrhea...? I don't know." That comment generated loud laughter from the villagers. He then continued reading from the note.

"Therefore I am not able to attend the meeting." After reading the note he added: "Therefore, our Health Worker is sick and he is unable to report on anything health-related."

The meeting moved on to the reports on the schools in the three villages. First, the Head Teacher for Kukui reported their PTFA had no Chair Person, since the previous person moved to Brazil about 5 years ago. She added that the meeting attendance was good and that she was very happy that fathers were more active participants in the PTFA than they had been in the past. The Hot Meal Project was still going on and they had not yet touched the money coming from the government. They were still using funds from the previous funding arrangement. Because they had extra money, they decided to buy cows with it. To conclude, she informed the villagers that Kukui had 28 children enrolled in the school. There was a round of applause when she sat down.

There were a few other exchanges with questions about the operation of the generator at the school, how important the PTFA

meetings were, and Toshao noting how proud the teacher had been when she spoke about the graduation of children from her school. He added that if none of the children passed their entrance exams, it meant there was something wrong with their schools.

Miss Daniela, the Headmistress of Tunaîmî School, said that she did not have much to say, because everyone had heard most of it already. She simply gave a few announcements concerning the upcoming exams at the school, and reminded parents to check the timetable exams of their children. As she finished her announcement, rain started to fall. The sound of raindrops hitting the zinc roof trembled and echoed within the building.

The Ka'poi Headmaster stood up in front of the audience and as he started to speak, the pitter-patter intensified. The heavier and fatter rain drops falling on the roof, together with the erratic gusts of wind, produced a deafening symphony. The teacher was speaking as loudly as he could, but people could barely hear him over the roar of the rain. He never stopped his report, and continued through the thunderous sounds of rain and gusts of wind.

"We had some difficulties with our local teacher," said the Headmaster from Ka'poi. "She was teaching but not getting paid. She applied for the position on three different occasions. They have misplaced all her applications, but I don't know how and where... if in Regional Office, or in Georgetown. Last week,

the persons from the Teaching Survey Commission visited the region and I personally raised the issue with them. These persons happened to be the Commissioners who make the teaching appointments. So, on the spot they appointed her and now she is our teacher." The rain stopped falling, and the Headmaster continued:

"As the School Year Plan goes, everything is doing ok. The Hot Meal Project is functioning and we also haven't touched the monies coming from the government. We are still using the previous [year's] funding. As the PTFA goes, we have good attendance of the parents. As I mentioned earlier, we have one teacher coming from Moco-Moco every day, so the community is in great need to put up an accommodation for her, since now that the rains are coming we cannot have her coming from Moco-Moco every day. Through the PTFA, together with the Village Council, we are working to provide accommodation to this teacher. That is all." There was an enthusiastic round of applause after he spoke.

Mister Jeremiah questioned the Headmaster about the operation of the large solar panels that were installed recently in the school compound. The Headmaster said that the panels were installed through an arrangement with the Hot Meal Funders, and that they were providing electricity to power their freezers, as well as the computers at the school, and that the children

were benefiting from the computer classes. Soon after he finished with the answer, the rain started to fall again, although not so hard as before.

There were a few smaller topics, until the Water System came up as a matter of discussion. Toshao commented that:

"Mister Tobias Edward received training to look after, maintain, and repair the water system. He also receives a monthly stipend that is four thousand dollars per month. This is a pocket piece. He is responsible to deal with anything related to water. I have seen in the community people complaining a lot about the shortage of water, leakage, and all sorts of things. And the children when they are going to and leaving school have the habit of destroying everything in their way. The system around the Women's Center is all destroyed - pipes, water tanks, faucets... everything! I tried to locate Mister Tobias the other day, but he was out fishing, out in Lethem, or elsewhere. He has three locations where he lives and I don't know in which one to find him!" There was laughter. He continued:

"The reason you don't get water sometimes is because the well itself has dried up. We can also ask Mister Tobias to look after the tanks, because right now our children are suffering from diarrhea and vomiting. The well is not open, but the tanks are, and they get dirty. That is it on the water."

The village meeting continued for a few more hours, in the same tone and at the same level of participation. Towards the end, the topic of the village rules was addressed, but there was not enough time, since it was approaching four o'clock in the afternoon. The Toshao suggested that those persons interested in the rules should come to the next meeting of the Village Rules Commission to know more about the rules that were being discussed.

Tunaîmî

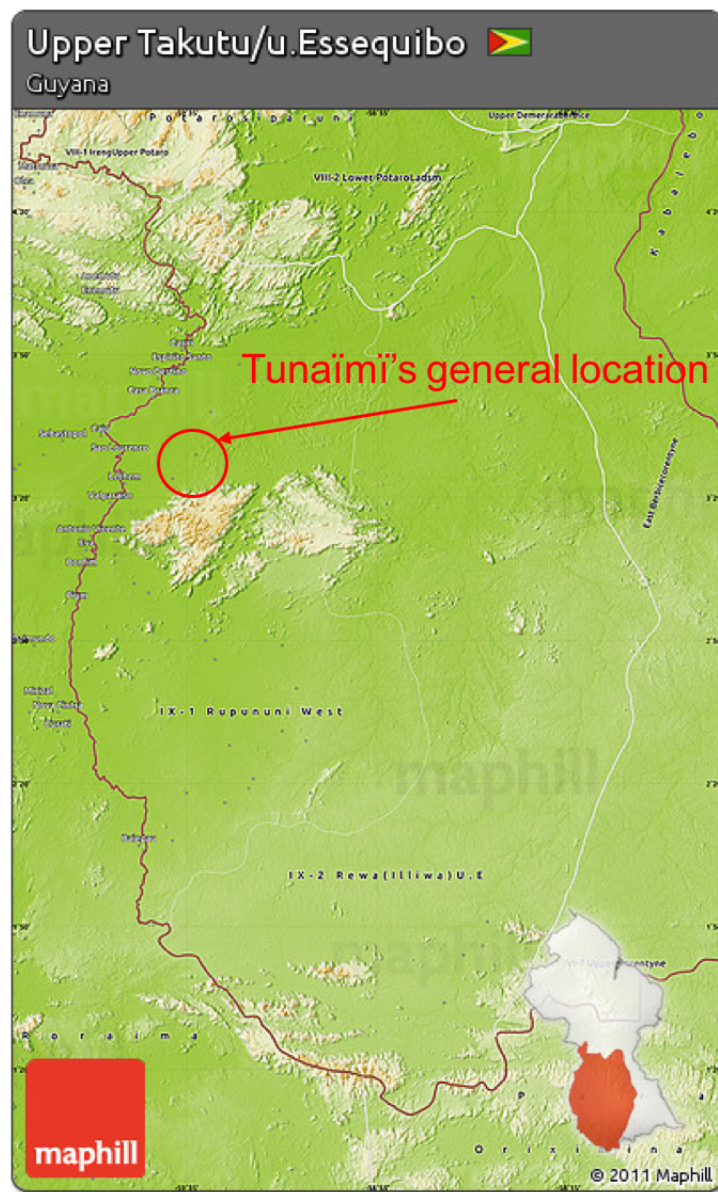
The description at the beginning of this chapter illustrates a typical General Village Meeting. Although the description was modified in order to fit the purpose of this work, I tried to be faithful to the feeling, tone, and overall experience of the event. One of the goals of this chapter is to present important issues debated at the General Village Meeting and explore the personal relationships that are not explicitly described in the text, but that operate as social framework, give meaning and boundaries to the Makushi people of Tunaîmî.

The vignette gives the reader a small glimpse of how Tunaîmî village looks and feels on the day of a General Village Meeting. Tunaîmî is the main administrative village of Tunaîmî

title land,¹⁰ which encompasses two other satellite villages:
Kukui and Ka'poi (see map 1).

Map 1

Upper Rupununi-Upper Essequibo



¹⁰ The title land has an area of 221.20 km²

In 2012, Tunaîmî had a population of around 700 people and 109 households.¹¹ Kukui is located further west, away from the Kanuku Mountains and closer to the stretch of open savanna. It has a population around 58% as large as the main village (400 people). Kukui's school, village office, health center, and sporting grounds are 5km away from Tunaîmî's. Because Kukui is located deeper in the savannas, its residents mainly farm in a large bush island closer to the village, but some also have farms in the Kanuku Mountains located 15 to 20km away. They use oxcarts and bicycles to go tend to the farm and transport produce. Ka'poi is located further south, very close to the mountains. It is the smallest of the villages, with a population 46% as large as the main village (320 people). Villagers farm in the forested area at the foothills of the Kanuku Mountains. However, there are two other household clusters composed of a few households. While these places are not considered administrative locations by the Government of Guyana (GoG), the Makushi people of Tunaîmî, Kukui, and Ka'poi consider them part of their larger community. The two areas are known as Jamaica and Tatu-

¹¹ The population actually fluctuates seasonally and due to occasional availability of jobs in other regions, such as mining, logging, and commercial agriculture. The population of secondary school-aged children also fluctuates, since the boarding school is not located in the village, but in the village of St. Ignatius. The latter is located alongside the Takutu River and very close to the border town of Lethem in Guyana and Bonfim in Brazil. The secondary school students stay in St. Ignatius most of the time, but come back to their villages of origin for school breaks and other village events.

bola. Jamaica is on the western outer edge of the Tunaîmî title land. There is no visible forest, and only a few small bush islands at a distance. The cluster of houses is located in the savanna proper, with an expansive view of grassy fields populated with scattered rolling mounds. The soil is very sandy, clayey, and large areas of the savanna get waterlogged during the rainy season, when the waters can reach up to three meters in height during a storm and for a few days immediately following it. The families living in Jamaica raise cattle and also go fishing frequently. In the dry season, residents fish in the small pools and ponds alongside the creeks. They also fish at the Tunaîmî and Pirara Rivers, where they leave their boats and canoes.

Tatu-bola is located outside the limits of Tunaîmî titled land. They are also further away from the mountains, but along the road connecting Tunaîmî to the Lethem-Georgetown road. Tatu-Bola is smaller than Jamaica, with only three houses. There is an older couple who lives with their younger son, their daughter, and her husband and children. Another son of this older couple lives with his wife and young children in another house. One of the older couple's daughters, her husband, and children live in the last house. They have some cattle that graze freely in the savannas and a farm in the Kanuku Mountains. They rarely

attend any village meetings, but Tunaîmî's Toshao visits them frequently.

Plate 2

Fishing pool at Pirara River during dry season



The School

An interesting example of a dialogue that sheds light on village politics is between Miss Daniela, the School Headmistress, and Mister Frank. They talked about the school's purchase

of cows and how people reached that decision. Here, Mister Frank questioned Miss Daniela's decision to spend money without consulting people. Although she is the Headmistress, in any group project, the Makushi say that people needed to reach an agreement before they spend money. However, everyone in the meeting knew Mister Frank was related to Miss Daniela's husband. They are parallel paternal cousins, and grew up together in Jamaica. They were raised mostly by their grandmother. Nowadays they were neighbors, and both also attended the same church as well as occasionally led services in the same village church. By Makushi kinship rules, they were categorical brothers, but being from the same church also made them spiritual brothers. Being someone's brother (*uwi menen* / *upi menem* - my older brother / my younger brother)¹² is a strong bond among the Makushi, which puts them in a particular exchange relationship. Miss Daniela's husband was not present at the meeting, and perhaps because of that, Mister Frank voiced his objection about the School Cattle Project. However, he did so without eliciting the names of the persons involved, and only raised the case itself. He neglected to provide the names as a deliberate action so the persons

¹² *Menem* marks the kin relationship as one-step-removed. *Uwi* and *upi* are marked with a first person singular possessive prefix, and are used by male speakers only.

involved would not lose face or feel shamed by his public speech.¹³

Since Frank mentioned the PTFA Meeting, Miss Vivian started to speak right after he finished his point. She also mentioned that in the referred meeting, people had stated that school funds were missing. Once again, there was no mention of who made that statement, who was responsible for the money, and who allegedly misused it. Immediately after this comment, there was a very brief, fast, and energetic exchange of words between Vivian, Daniela, and Robert. Miss Vivian is Miss Daniela's older sister, and Robert is Miss Vivian's older son. Robert quickly said he was working on the shelves for the school, but he was also working on his farm. Thus, he was unable to finish all the shelves, although he was also working towards completing the project. His quick statement was a preemptive response to what Daniela was about to say next. He knew she was going to address the points raised earlier, since Frank pointed out the unilateral decision of buying cows for the school. Moreover, Vivian had also mentioned some sort of mismanagement of funds. If she stayed quiet, she would lose face in front of the whole community. She was being marked and individualized, becoming a focus of attention and scrutiny. This individualization process puts

¹³ The topic of public shaming will be covered in chapter two.

the person under the spotlight and gaze of all meeting attendees, separating the former from the rest of the group. All were paying close attention to her, albeit momentarily. As will be discussed in chapter two, the Makushi constantly work against the individualization of persons and towards an equity among people. Although her name was never mentioned, everyone knew that she, as the school's Headmistress, would have a final say in how the money was to be used. Because the issues raised were serious, she felt she needed to say something. In her response, she defused the attention she had received in an attempt to once again be enveloped by the undifferentiated collective.

Concerning the Furniture Project mentioned by Daniela, Tunaîmî had received a Presidential Grant to build more tables and shelves for the school. Anytime monies come to the village to support a project, the assigned Project Manager hires labor and buys materials within the village. Some of the Makushi in Tunaîmî are excellent carpenters, so the work was distributed amongst them. Robert was not the best carpenter, but he was Daniela's sister's son. He received an advance with which to buy materials, and a fraction of the balance for every shelf and desk delivered. However, as Robert himself stated, he was working on the farm. He was felling trees in the forest on his father's new plantain farm. The rainy season was approaching soon, so they needed to cut the trees, burn them, plow the area,

and plant the farm with plantain suckers. He also worked very hard on the family citrus orchard, and a new cassava farm they had just cleared out. He was short on money, so he built one more shelf and delivered it to the school, but to his surprise received no money for it. He was behind schedule and had already received an advance. That whole situation created a misunderstanding, and he complained in a PTFA meeting about his non-payment. He said he delivered one shelf, so he should have received at least some money for it.

When Miss Daniela started to address the issues raised earlier, she did so by apologizing. She noted that what she was about to say was already discussed in a previous Village Meeting.¹⁴ She pointed out that Robert said that "money went missing," which was not the case. Miss Daniela explained she was withholding the money until all the furniture was delivered. It is interesting to note that the way in which she presented her point is not considered appropriate, since she named everyone involved in the process: Robert, who said that the money was missing; Brother Sam, who should not have paid anyone until the project was completed; and Mister Fox, who received funds with-

¹⁴ Each village has its own Village Meetings. A General Village Meeting involves members of all the communities and addresses matters affecting the Tunaîmî titled land as a whole. This would include Tunaîmî, Ka'poi, and Kukui.

out delivering any furniture. Nonetheless, she acknowledged Robert still had \$9,000 dollars to receive, and that she would make sure "money become available" when he delivered the remainder of the shelves and desks.

The grant being discussed as the School Cattle Project was actually received for improvements to the school infrastructure. However, during a Village Meeting, it was never agreed upon what to do with the money. Carpenters wanted it to be used for desks and shelves, while masons wanted the school to rebuild the old Village Office and make it into a Village Museum, and others wanted new latrines built. All of those would indeed be improvements in the school compound, but - because all work done in the school would be paid and the hiring of labor and purchasing of materials would be from within the village - each of these ideas would also only benefit a particular group of persons in the village. Because of the lack of consensus, Miss Daniela admitted to the decision to buy cows. The Makushi say cows are an investment and some sort of "savings account" because they can get fat and reproduce.

Cattle were introduced by Brazilians in the region in the 17th century to secure a claim over the region (Farage, 1991; Menck, 2009; Santilli, 2001). Since the late 1700s to the early 1900s, the Branco River valley economy was almost exclusively based on cattle. Amerindians were already well accustomed to

them and expert in handling these animals (Koch-Grünberg, 1917, 1924; Myers & Butt Colson, 1993; Williams, 1932). However, cattle in the Rupununi always graze freely and some herds become wild again. Thus, there is always the risk of cows becoming sick, being stolen, or eaten by jaguars.

Miss Daniela used all the money left to buy two cows. She never commented on the decision-making process for buying the cattle, but informed the assembly that the school was now sending the school children to look after the school's cows. When families have cows, the cows roam freely during the day, but are kept close to the house at night. This is to protect the cows from predators and thieves. During the day, cows can cover great distances, and they also break into people's farms and eat their cassava plants. This creates conflicts whereby the owner of the animal has to financially compensate the farmer for damages. Miss Daniela said she was sending some of the older school boys to look for the school's cows when they disappeared. She added that the incident with Frank's sons was not because they were out looking for cows, but because they stayed at her mango tree eating mangoes until very late. Mister Frank and Miss Daniela are neighbors, but cannot see or hear one another's households because of a small hill in between their homes.

Another very interesting point was Bill's comment about the purchase of cattle. He mentioned he was happy with the

Headmistress' decision to send students away from the classroom to take care of cattle. He was happy the school was training the village children into being *vaqueiros* and horseman, since these are viable economic activities and many Makushi and Wapishana not only work on cattle ranches, but also have their own herds. He even suggested the school buy its own horse. Bill's comments on the role of the school were significant because he had been the school's former Headmaster, and valued the formal and rigid ideas and content of education in Guyana. His own children got scholarships to attend the most prestigious secondary school in Georgetown, and today they have office jobs¹⁵ in Guyana and overseas. From the point of view of Bill and others, when the school sends children out of the classroom to look for cows in the savanna, it is actually teaching them important values they cannot learn in the classroom: a sense of collectivity, responsibility and duty towards the collective. In that way, the cattle embody a delayed return, since they have to get fat and reproduce before being slaughtered, consumed, or sold. But they also embody a delayed reciprocity, because they stand for the village as a collective. This is an instance in which the project of creating the individual in schools is undermined by Makushi practices.¹⁶ Taking children out of the

¹⁵ The Makushi perceive office jobs as icons of professional success, since persons get paid without physical exertion.

¹⁶ More about this topic in the next chapter.

classroom definitely affects their individual academic performance, but it is also looked at as an investment in the collective of the village, a delayed reciprocity. When the children of today get old and have children of their own, it will be this new generation's duty to look after the school cattle, which is a risky investment, but one that benefits the school and the entire village.

Village Cattle

Tunaîmî also received another grant to start a Village Cattle Project. This grant was received in the year prior to my arrival. By the time I left, no cows had been purchased yet. The previous Toshao, Mister Charles David, had made a business arrangement with Andrew Kevin. Charles was an approximately 75 year-old Wapishana man from Sand Creek, a Wapishana village. Andrew Kevin was a cattle owner from the same village. One of the reasons the business was never finalized was because the cows were being bought from a Wapishana person, in a Wapishana village, but for a project in a Makushi village. The prices negotiated were in fact local market prices, but cattle owners from Tunaîmî were furious that the money was being spent elsewhere. As I mentioned earlier, every time there are outside funds, supplies and materials must be bought from within the village. This is the case even when village prices are more

expensive. The former Toshao was favoring a specific kin relation outside of Tunaîmî, where he now lived with his wife, and where he had spent most of his life. His children were born and raised in Tunaîmî and are considered by all to be Makushi. Therefore, all villagers in Tunaîmî thought the Toshao should buy the cattle from Tunaîmî itself. But since Mister David was from Sand Creek, he decided not to favor his wife's kin in Tunaîmî, but his own kin from Sand Creek.

Kinship relations especially come into play when there are external monies for projects to be developed in villages. Another project funded during Charles' time as Toshao was the Chicken Farm Project. The project goal was to provide an alternative source of animal protein, and at the same time reduce the environmental impacts of fishing and hunting activities of the growing Makushi population. Another objective was to create a source of income for participants in the project. The Village Council paid villagers to build a large chicken coop, bought hundreds of baby chicks, as well as animal feed and medicines. The price for the chickens was set beforehand at a Village Meeting (the price was the same as that used in Lethem to sell the frozen chickens coming from Brazil) and once the chickens reached the right weight, they were sold in the village. The

result of the project was a loss of \$200,000 Guyana dollars.¹⁷ The project only paid a small stipend to the Toshao's son-in-law, who was responsible for feeding and looking after the chickens. Some of the villages wanted the coop to be built closer to the center of the village, but instead it was built next to the Toshao's son-in-law's house. This was one condition imposed by his son-in-law, so he would not need to walk far to look after the chickens. One of the reasons for the financial loss was the high price of chicken feed, and the high cost of transportation into and out of the village. Because the project did not generate profits, they could not buy more chicks, feed, and pay the stipend. Those directly involved in the project kept asking the Village Council to finance the Chicken Project again, while those not involved wanted the project to be funded by outside sources.

Hot Meal Project

In the vignette, we saw many similar cases where the financial viability of projects was not certain. Some of the projects in Tunaîmî included the Tractor Project, the Cattle Project (village and school), the Water Tank Project, the Hot Meal Project, and the Village Library. Nonetheless, there were also

¹⁷ \$1,000 US dollars.

very successful cases such as the Transportation Project (ambulance) in Kukui, the Dam Project, the house for the school teacher in Ka'poi, and the Hot Meal Project in both satellite villages. I argue that one crucial factor in the propensity of these projects for failure or success was the size of the village in which they were carried out. In the examples of Tunaîmî, Kukui, and Ka'poi, we see that the smaller the village was, the higher the rate of success. The most illustrative case was the Hot Meal Project, since it had a similar funding structure and it was active in the three villages in Tunaîmî title land. The project was part of a GoG program to foster school completion rates, and the program was funded by the World Bank and European Union (World Bank Group, 2013). The project provided a meal during the day to every child attending nursery and primary schools. To participate, each village had to secure its own funds to maintain the kitchen equipment and building for the first four years. Four years was the duration of the project, and after that time the funding structure would change.

To better understand the operation of the Hot Meal Project, we need to realize that prices of materials, goods, and services in the villages do not fluctuate based on the intersection of supply and demand and reach a position of equilibrium as envisioned by political economic thought (Adam Smith 1776; David Ricardo 1817). Although prices for exchanges in the village were

fixed, because the Hot Meal Project was funded by outside persons, people in Tunaîmî decided not to use village prices. In the project budget, there was a salary for the Project Manager, Cooks, and Cooks' Assistants. The Manager did an excellent job of bargaining and buying the items sold in Lethem in bulk (oil, salt, sugar, flour, canned goods, chicken meat, etc.), but when it came to items available in Tunaîmî (beef, pork, mangoes, oranges, tangerines, cassava bread, eddo, farine, hot peppers, long beans, etc.) he paid a higher price than what these items would have cost in Lethem. Sometimes, the Hot Meal Project paid twice as much as Lethem prices for the pound of beef, salted fish, or salted beef.

Because the funding structure was being changed prior to the end of the school year, there was a Village Council Meeting in which Councilors wanted to know how each Hot Meal Project was addressing this change. It was in this meeting that Councilors found out Tunaîmî's funds would end 2-3 weeks before the funding period. In investigating the reasons for this, people found out that Tunaîmî's Hot Meal prices were the same as, or higher than, Lethem prices. All other Hot Meal kitchens were paying the same as or less than their village prices (each village has its own prices that are set in a Village Meeting). They argued it was a matter of fairness, that the farmer did not need to go to Lethem to sell his produce, and that in buying

in large quantities the Hot Meal Project could negotiate a better price. Because of that, the Managers from Ka'poi and Kukui said they could not pay Lethem prices.

The Manager for Tunaîmî argued that his Hot Meal pricing practices were fair, because when the Hot Meal Project needed food items from Lethem, they also needed to pay for transportation. Therefore, the Hot Meal Project added these costs to the prices it would normally pay for these items in the village and used Lethem prices. Some Councilors said this would be ok if there was money in the budget, but since the budget was small, they could not overpay. Taking a different tactic, one of the Councilors said that because the food was going to the village children, perhaps each farmer could provide some of their yield, free of charge. This comment provoked another discussion and they argued that some farmers had children of school age, while others did not, and giving food to the school would not be fair to everyone, since farming was the main economic activity for villagers. Tunaîmî's Manager said that since the funds were coming from overseas, and soon the GoG would take responsibility for the project, all farmers should get paid when giving food to the Hot Meal Project. Other Councilors agreed, but as long as there was money to pay the farmers. Kukui's and Ka'poi's Councilors also added that since the Kitchen bought in bulk, and locally, they did not need to pay Lethem prices. Most farmers

in the Ka'poi and Kukui were happy to sell their produce to the Hot Meal kitchens because they knew that then the village children could eat quality food. Throughout the meeting, people were joking and saying they would not go to Lethem to sell their cows, oranges, plantains, or farine, but instead they would sell them at a higher price to Tunaîmî's Hot Meal Project. In Tunaîmî, the Hot Meal Project Manager was the Toshao's parallel cousin, and the Cooks and Cooks' Assistants were also related to the village leader (they were wives of his father's brothers' sons, or daughters of his father's brothers). I have an educated guess that only a few farmers actually sold items to the Hot Meal kitchen, and that this also followed the kinship structure.

Outside Money Logic

There is a shared idea among the Makushi in Tunaîmî that with outside funding, everyone involved in a project must get paid. In smaller villages where everyone is closely related to one another, a great deal of unpaid collective work exists during village projects. That is the case in most projects, since they account for sums of money that are not large (between \$2,500 to \$5,000 US dollars).¹⁸ When smaller villages receive

¹⁸ Although most projects have international funding, the GoG is responsible for the allocation of funds through a series of national programs. Regarding Amerindian development, grants of \$2,500 to \$5,000 US dollars are given to villages. The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs Presidential Grant Development Initiative even states that no single grant will be more than \$25,000 (USD),

grant money to fund a project, the funds are normally spent to buy materials not available in the village and to pay for meals for the workers. Villagers are called on to volunteer their labor in organized collective work called *mashramani* or *mash*. Besides working on projects, villages also organize community work days where everyone gets together to address one particular issue such as to prepare the sporting ground for a football match, paint the walls of the school, fix a damaged roof, cut a new road in the forest for the oxen carts, or help geo-reference the village limits, etc.

Kukui, Ka'poi, and Tunaîmî are autonomous in organizing their own village work days, and no one is expected to participate in village work other than in one's own village. However, when there is outside funding, Project Coordinators in Tunaîmî make sure to pay workers because "money is available." One example was the payment of carpenters and masons the Toshao mentioned in the General Village Meeting vignette. Tunaîmî received a grant for its Eco-tourism Project, and the money was spent fixing and improving the installations, as well as on cash flow for the tourism business. However, the Tourism Project also generated huge losses in 2012.

but I have never heard from my informants of any grant of more than \$2,500 (USD).

Plate 3

Tunaîmî village work day.



Eco-Tourism has grown significantly in Guyana in the last 20 years. Iwokrama is the most well-known case, but in the Rupununi there are also Caiman House, Surama Eco-lodge, and Rock View Lodge. Caiman House and Surama Eco-lodge are located in Makushi villages and are village-run enterprises. Rock View Lodge is owned by a British expatriate who married a Makushi woman from Annai, and the lodge is next to the village.

Plate 4

Ka'poi village work day



To give a sense of the magnitude of local tourism, in 2012 Surama received over 500 tourists, while Tunaîmî's Eco-lodge only received 23 guests in a year. Caiman House, Surama Eco-lodge, and Rock View host a great number of international researchers conducting their work in the Rupununi, and in these locations all guests have access to internet, electricity, showers and flushing toilets. The cost varies from \$60 to \$125 US dollars per day (meals included). The stay in Tunaîmî's lodge

comes at about the same cost, but the business does not have the same volume of visitors to scale it up. Nonetheless, most Amerindian villages hear about other success stories of community-based tourism, and they try to replicate the projects in their own villages. Because of Tunaîmî's large population, the low volume of visitors restricts the number of paying activities in their community-based Eco-Tourism business. At the beginning of the Village Meeting, an announcement was made about the graduation of two youths who participated in a two-month training internship in Surama's Eco-lodge. Although many youths were interested, the participants were the Toshao's younger cousins.

The Water Project

A few years back, the GoG drilled wells and installed solar pumps in all Amerindian villages to provide potable water to be used in the schools. Previously, it was part of the children's duty to collect water in nearby hand-dug wells to be used for drinking and for personal use by the resident teachers. The water from the drilled wells has a slightly salty taste, so people prefer to drink from the hand-dug wells. But not every household has its own well, so families collect water from the closest well to their homes (this tends to follow kinship lines as well). Another source of water is the rain collected from new buildings with zinc sheet roofing. However, during the dry

season, many hand-dug wells dry up, and there is no water in the rainwater tanks. Therefore, many people walk further afield to collect water, and depend more on the drilled well (which at times also dries up). The GoG built a tower and installed four large tanks on top of it, plus one tank in each school building. The pump is turned on only a few times a week to fill the tanks and is then turned off again. There was a discussion at one of the Village Meetings, and the village decided to buy the materials to create three distribution lines from the tank, going towards the areas with more houses in the village. The Village Council bought a great number of 1/2" PVC pipes and villagers helped dig ditches along the road where the pipes would lay. Spigots would come out of the distribution line at certain places where people would fill their buckets.

During the construction phase, the Village Health Worker went at night and removed a section in the length of pipe, added a joint in the distribution line, and created an extension on the line going directly to his backyard. People saw that the original pipe was smaller, and also saw the dugout outline from the main pipe to the Health Worker's house, at the end of which there was an erect piece of white PVC pipe with a spigot on top. They complained to the Toshao that someone stole some of the PVC pipes, but without mentioning who it was. Since the Health Worker was the Toshao's father's brother, everyone doubted that

anything would happen to him, or that he would be reprimanded. The Toshao only advised people not to fight over the issue.

Even with a shorter line, all families alongside the distribution lines collected water from them. But very soon the water stopped coming. No one could understand why, since all the equipment was working, and they did not find signs of leakage. All this changed when the school children saw the Health Worker going to the cashew grove, kneeling down, and then going back home. They went to the place where he kneeled and found a hole covered with straw. Hidden under the dried grass was a shut-off valve. The Health Worker had secretly installed the valve so that when he was at home, he could have water pressure and fill out his buckets fast, and never run the risk of the water running out during the day. Once the children found out about his secret it became common knowledge, but he kept shutting off the water in the mornings and opening it up on his way home. But if the water was not running when it was supposed to, adults would send their children to the cashew grove and tell them to open the water valve.

The Health Worker's actions were far from the notions of beauty in Makushi aesthetics¹⁹ of being, since he was acting out of selfishness and greed. And this was how most people not

¹⁹ See chapter two.

related to him described him. However, he frequently attended Village Meetings and was even present at the General Village Meeting described in the beginning of the chapter. He voiced his opinion to support the purchase of the minibus, so patients could be taken to the hospital. He was sitting in front of the room, but throughout the meeting kept looking back and around the room. At one moment I saw him leave, and just a few moments later, the Water Project came up as a topic of discussion. To avoid being shamed (or "more shamed" as the Makushi would put it), he left the meeting before others could mention the problems with the water distribution. Although no one had ever mentioned his name out loud in the meeting, everyone knew he was the one who installed the valve in the pipe and was the one who was not respecting the rules on use and distribution of water. The Tractor Driver was also someone who avoided shame by never attending meetings. There were always complaints about his drunkenness while operating the tractor. Those comments were always made in meetings, and I have never seen him in attendance.

The Village Tractor

As we have seen in the examples above, kinship plays an important role in accessing financial resources in the villages. The report on the Tractor Project is another example of this topic, but also sheds light on group association. Mister Kevin,

the Tractor Project Manager, is the Toshao's father's older brother. The Driver and Porter are Kevin's sons-in-law, and live around Kevin's household, where the tractor is kept. The tractor belongs to the village and both the Toshao and Kevin mentioned that the Tractor does not get paid when they are working on village projects. However, Kevin is firm in ensuring the Driver and Porter get paid when they work on a village project that is not for Tunaîmî. Therefore, the Tractor Project has to take money from its accounts to pay them their daily allowance (\$5,000 for the driver and \$3,000 for the porter). "It is not their village," was the reason why they needed to get paid, according to Kevin. This highlights the statements that I constantly heard during my research from the Makushi people, not only in my research village, but throughout the Rupununi and Brazil. In Tunaîmî proper, people would differentiate themselves from others from the satellite villages by saying "they are Kukui people," or "they are Ka'poi people," even though most extended families had members in both villages (and beyond). This differentiation was used to mark a separation from other villages, too: "they are Yupukari people," "they are Karasabay people," "they are Cumu people," "they are Surumu people," and so on and so forth. The difference in locality and all the daily effects of this difference were pointed out as reason to mark a social distinction between groups (e.g. the distance to farms

changes the way people farm and move around in the territory; likewise, the availability of good fishing and hunting grounds changes the kinds of foods they eat, thus also changing many activities in the village - see Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). Distinctive slang, vocabulary, or emphasis on intonation were also pointed out to mark a separation between groups. Some were even emphatic in stating that people from different villages claim to speak Makushi, but it is a different Makushi than their own. Thus, the Makushi see everyone from different places as different categories of people, even when they share a great number of social features.

Historical Context

One of the ways identity is constructed in Euro-American societies is by naturalizing social and cultural features, which becomes one component in the construction of national identity (Handler, 1988). Westerners frequently take elements such as language, body movement, and even culinary preferences, and give these an essentialist and physiological reason for being. A frequent reference is "it is in our/your blood." Once again, identity is linked to the idea of DNA and genetics (Smedley, 1998). The Makushi also make constant analysis of social/cultural features and their relationship with physiological characteristic of the body. Nonetheless, contrary to the general

thought in Guyana, Brazil, and elsewhere, to the Makushi these social and cultural features are the ones that stay the same, whereas the body is the one that changes (Lima, 2005; Viveiros de Castro, 1996a). Rather, they acknowledge that all groups want to live well and appropriate social lives, in accordance with their own aesthetics of being. But these aesthetics change based on the locales where they live. Locality is important because it directly influences the kinds of activities needed to live a good life (e.g. building a house, farming, hunting, fishing, being able to see the terrain) and determines the relationships and exchanges a person will have. It is through the interaction with friends and foes that substances are exchanged, thus making the ever-changing body (Crocker, 1985; G. Mentore, 2005; Viveiros de Castro, 1987).

In the General Village Meeting vignette, we notice that one clear characteristic of the meeting is its attempt to follow a formal and juridical model. When I asked the Makushi how meetings happened in the past, they said villagers would meet very frequently and everyone would come to these gatherings. On the day before a gathering, the Toshao visited every household and family and talked to them about what needed to be done, on what activity they needed to work together as a community. These were activities such as cutting a new farm, building a house, or going on a hunting or fishing expedition. On the following

day, even before the howler monkeys howled, the Toshao would walk out of his house and shout very loudly: *"Good morning everyone. It is morning again and I have food for everyone to eat. Come and eat plantain porridge, cassava bread, boiled fish, smoked fish. Come and eat the food I have for you to eat."* Villagers would come to his house, and all the persons he talked to the day before would arrive one by one. They would eat, drink, and converse once again about the same matter discussed on the previous day. After eating and talking, the villagers would return to their own homes to start their daily activities.

This description was given by people who participated in such events not so long ago. In the past, the Toshao was a male figure who connected the Makushi matrilineal family clusters. Historical and more recent accounts detail how such a leader managed to convey and direct the intent of those around him (Brett, 1868; Butt, 1960; Diniz, 1971; Farabee, 1924; im Thurn, 1883; Kenswil, 1946; Koch-Grünberg, 1924; Myers & Butt Colson, 1993; Roth, 1915, 1929; Schomburgk, 2006). The villages were much smaller, and in the early 1900s Eggerath (1924) describes most of the villages he visited as averaging from 5 to 10 houses. He also pointed out that there were a few exceptions of larger populations where the number could reach up to 20 houses. Koch-Grünberg (1924) suggested that this pattern is already a variation on the previous model of communal houses. Both scholars

agreed that the households were organized and built around an older male figure, which reflects what Schomburgk (2006) observed in the early 1800s, and what Rivière categorized as the political system of the Guiana region (Ibid., 1984). The Makushi of Tunaîmî say the role of the Toshao was occupied by a respected and more mature man, who was also skillful in connecting and convincing those around him to come and work together. The leader talked to his sons-in-law who, because of the predominant uxorilocal pattern, lived close to his house. That is why he only needed to walk out and shout from outside of his house. Partaking in food is also important, because it is through the sharing of food that one also creates the idea of "those of a kind" (Overing, 1989), or the idea of growing and producing real humans (Crocker, 1977; G. Mentore, 2005; Overing-Kaplan, 1981). During the time the Makushi identify as "time of warfare,"²⁰ the Toshao was also responsible for organizing revenge attacks against other groups.

As a general rule, the great majority of productive and extractive activities (fishing, hunting, attending the farms, cooking, weaving, firewood cutting, house maintenance, etc.) are performed by the members of each household, without the

²⁰ The Makushi normally refer to the "time of warfare" as prior to frequent contact with non-indigenous peoples (missionaries, colonial, and government officials), when there were many more conflicts between different Amerindian groups.

general involvement of outsiders. Nonetheless, there are other arrangements of participation in such activities, where one or a few members of other households are invited to participate in a particular activity. These arrangements are *ad hoc* and are not called by the Toshao. Currently, it is still possible to witness manifestations of calling for participation in collective work, but this is generally limited to kinship relations of a specific household group. New houses are still constructed around the wife's parents' house, which ensures the father of the married daughter easier access to the labor of his sons-in-law, following the political organization for the Guianas (Rivière, 1984). However, due to religious missions and government-sponsored projects of development, the semi-nomadic and seasonal residency practices of the past are rapidly changing to a predominately sedentary and fixed residency pattern. This changed not only the size and demographics of villages, but also practices of conflict resolution (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). The uxorilocal residency pattern is still predominant, people now have to also negotiate how close and far they are from other family groups and the sites of public services (school, health center, water pump, radio station, etc.).

Generally in Amazonia, a common way to resolve conflict between groups is fission (Rivière, 1994). When the differences

between persons and groups of persons reach a point of irreconcilability, the collective breaks up and one part moves away to settle a new political unit in a different locality. They still maintain ties and kinship relations with the persons that stay in the original site, but they are treated as a different political collective. The centralization of services in one location disincentives villagers to live too far away from these services. The Makushi from Tunaîmî also dislike living too close to other people, because they feel crowded and the other houses are noisy and obstruct the view. They say one of the many beautiful aspects of their village is that "you can see far." In fact, looking towards the west you can see the Kanuku Mountains where they rest, looking to the East you see the savanna stretching all the way to the Pakaraima Mountains in areas of both Guyana and Brazil. Looking north, you see a stretch of savanna that almost reaches the horizon, being interrupted by a dark green horizontal line connecting the Pakaraimas to the Kanukus. When building a new house, the Makushi always think about pros and cons of the site, such as proximity to the road, to a source of water, to the village center, to other houses, etc. That means that Tunaîmî is becoming more densely populated, and some conflicts can no longer reach resolution by physical relocation.

Final Remarks

Although there is an attempt by the government to impose a juridical model of political organization and political representation, the real politics are still being made and negotiated at the level of the household and extended families. The family and the household become the units in which belonging is marked at the most intimate level, because the constant sharing of substances nurtures bodies with an equivalent moral aesthetic of being. The distinctions of kinship relations from household to household are the basis on which the distinction of different categories of persons are created. These can be brought to the foreground when people want to highlight their differences from one another.

CHAPTER TWO

AMERINDIAN ACT

Introduction

This chapter will explore and analyze key concepts and contextual situations to better understand how the Makushi position themselves in the region in relation to other Amerindians, to the national government, as well as to their Makushi counterparts in Brazil. The juridical thread guides this chapter, so the discussion explores some of the regulations contained in Guyana's Amerindian Act and explores underlying assumptions. In such a way, this chapter will analyze the ways in which the government imposes its own logic onto Amerindians in a way that lacks sensitivity to cultural differences between Amerindians and non-Amerindians, as well as amongst Amerindian groups themselves. This imposition has Guyana's own ethos of nationhood, its racial politics and colonial history, and its attainment of modernity as a backdrop.

The chapter not only elicits some of the differences between the Coastland and Hinterland in Guyana, but also positions such differences in a historical context. In this context, Am-

erindians are portrayed either as coadjutants or main protagonists in the regional and national context. In the case of the 1969 Rupununi Uprising, the government capitalized on the situation to impose strict policies that controlled the movement of people in the region. In Tunaîmî, villagers mentioned that after the failure of the secession attempt, many families retreated to the mountains in fear of police violence. At that time, many were tortured and accused of conspiring against the State.

Although Guyanese government places Amerindians and Amerindian villages within a legal system, some Makushi ideas and ideals are constantly refuting the juridical way of thinking. Some of these ideas relate to their own political organization, and even the idea of cohesive group membership can be challenged by Makushi thought. Grouping, or delineating groups is important to the legal aspects of governance and the politics and management of population by the State. However, the Makushi tend to organize themselves in large kinship groups, following an uxori-local marriage pattern. The imposition of fixed residency within the boundaries of an Amerindian title land challenges some Makushi political and organizational dynamics. The chapter will explore some of these issues and compare patterns in Guyana to the ways in which Amerindians in Brazil adjust to the pressures and impositions of the Brazilian government.

Modernity in Guyana

As we can see in chapter one, the topics in Tunaîmî's General Village Meeting come and go as the conversation flows in a somewhat free manner. However, there is a structure and format to which the meeting tries to adhere. That format is imposed and taught by government representatives, as well as workers of large NGOs and international aid agencies. As a rule of thumb, Amerindians in Guyana are constantly being trained and evaluated in their knowledge of these procedures by frequently participating and helping with the organization of village meetings, workshops, seminars, and other events sponsored by national and international agencies of governance and development. The Makushi people from Tunaîmî clearly identified an otherness and a level of strangeness in the way these events are planned and executed when compared to the manner in which they routinely think and do politics in their own village, as well as outsiders. This otherness is particularly emphasized in discourse when compared to the ways in which their parents and grandparents dealt with important affairs in the past. A more detailed discussion on this topic will be presented in chapter four. Nonetheless, such an outside model on how to organize community affairs operates as a diacritical distinction between Amerindians and Coastlanders, where the latter occupies a position of superiority. As a general rule, Amerindians in Guyana

try - for the most part successfully - to adhere to the juridical form and decorum set by the contemporary Euro-American standards that Coastlanders claim to follow. Guyanese citizens think of themselves and their country as a modern nation, and the government purports to be representative and the producer of a modern State. Because of its geographical position in the Caribbean and its colonial history, the intellectual, political, and economic elites in Guyana today look at Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago as models to follow. These models stand for the idea of a world capable of being transformed by human effort; a complex social and economic inter-web of relations that extend to the industrial complex and market economy; and ultimately a society that lives in the future and not in the past (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). Guyanese elites think of themselves as producers of and participants in modernity because they understand and adhere to juridical procedures, and frown upon those who fail to do so. However, my first impressions in Georgetown, Guyana's national capital, were the opposite of a sense of modern efficiency.

When I arrived in the country to start my research, I had to stay a few weeks in "Town" (as Guyanese normally refer to Georgetown) waiting for all my papers and permits to come through before being able to go to the Hinterlands. During that time, I attended many government-sponsored events and observed

that what was occurring contradicted my first impressions. In fact, there was such great attention to procedures, in an overly detailed way, that efficiency in allocating time and resources were no longer the main concern. Rather, protocol was. I also assisted in the organization of a public lecture, and I observed the hierarchical distribution of assignments, from prestigious to less prestigious tasks (e.g. contacting political figures and inviting them to attend the event, determining the menu for the reception and arranging the catering service, helping set up the chairs in the main lecture room, and subsequently removing them, and cleaning the room after the event was done). The organizers were extremely attentive in all tasks relating to the lecture, such as preparing the venue, choosing the day of the week, scheduling the time, producing an invitation, sending the invitation out, contacting the television networks, radios, and newspapers, determining who would introduce the presenters, who the honorary guests were, the order of speakers, etc. A to-do list of tasks was carefully crafted, and they were assigned following the institutional hierarchy and social differences among those involved in the organization of the event. For example, contacting government ministers (and/or personal secretaries) was considered prestigious, and was done by the most prestigious persons on our team. Contacting the media, designing posters and invitations, and outsourcing for printing services

was not so prestigious, and it was done by a mid-level person on the team. Cleaning the venue and making sure every piece of equipment was working were the least prestigious activities and were done by the least prestigious members in the team. The meritocracy of the bureaucratic system, and the legalistic subjugation of the individual, are perceived as crucial elements of a modern government and society, since it rationalizes the use of resources, including human resources (Foucault, 1977, 1991, 2008; Weber, 1958, 1968). However, what I observed in Georgetown was that contacting other high-level government officials was the most prestigious task of all, thus being executed by high-level officials.

One reason this is done is pragmatic. The delegation of such tasks does not have the same result, because there are two extra layers between these high-level officials: the subordinates on each side of the communicating party. This is because ministers are deemed very busy people, needing not only to supervise and direct their own staff, but also to fulfill a representational role. This is performed by attending public events and other governmental meetings during their work schedules. Because of scheduling constraints, high-level officials prioritize invitations given and received in person, rather than through the mediation of their staff. Moreover, not everyone

can meet right away with a minister or another high-level politician. Their staff work as an institutional and personal buffer. Thus, being able to meet such persons right away indicates a pre-existing level of institutional and personal rapport.

This aspect can help to explain why Guyanese bureaucrats and elected officials prefer, in certain contexts, to extend invitations in person. This is more often the case when the giver and recipient of invitations have equivalent hierarchical positions. When the recipient of an invitation has a lower hierarchical status, a staff member will send out the invitation. When the recipient has a higher status, the organizer will jump through bureaucratic hoops to extend the invitation in person. The people engaging in this practice, both in the private and the public sectors of Guyana, are always negotiating their own position in a system of hierarchies. At times, individuals try to mark their superiority by using the institutional bureaucracy. But they also try to create equivalences by evading institutional structures and engage in a personal, face-to-face interaction. What this practice does not do is to question the notion of hierarchy itself. In fact, that notion is acknowledged and reinforced by persons through their actions. Instead of questioning the system of hierarchy, what participants attempt to do is to change their vertical positions within the system.

In the case of the public lecture I helped to organize, the organizer had a previous, behind-the-scenes negotiation with a certain minister considered to be the most relevant political invitee. The date and time of the event were chosen to fit the schedule of this particular VIP guest. The public lecture was planned and executed as a cultural event, but also served as a political gesture of support between specific public institutions in Guyana and their respective representatives. In the end, the event was considered a great success, despite the fact that the VIP guest did not attend, since he/she was also invited to another cultural event sponsored by the Chinese Embassy. Many foreign mission representatives attended the latter event, whereas the event I participated in only had the attendance of select Guyanese intellectuals, researchers, and international aid volunteers.

The aforementioned context is a good example of how most Guyanese work to shape Guyana into a modern society, and its government into an exemplary model of modern efficiency. Ideas of national sovereignty, governance, checks and balances, meritocracy, an authority that transcends personal rights, political legitimacy in representation, and the use of coercive force (Agamben, 1998; Althusser, 1978; Bourdieu, Wacquant, & Farage, 1994; Escobar, 1995; Foucault, 1991; Graeber, 2009; Gupta & Ferguson, 2002; Krupa, 2010; Mitchell, 1999; Scott, 1998;

Trouillot, 2001; Weber, 1958) are considered to be already constituent parts of the Guyanese State and government. From a strictly modern intellectual perspective, the institutions in place in Guyana fall short in achieving the goals they set for themselves. While the Euro-American model of modernity may be the goal announced by large cross-sections of society and government in Guyana, in practice governance is not limited to Euro-American values. One of these "other" values is the personal, face-to-face interaction. For example, it is still possible for an ordinary citizen of Guyana see the President of Guyana leaving the Presidential Residence and walking to his car to go to work. Or, perhaps one might see a minister standing in the line of a fast food restaurant during his/her lunch break. These high-level political figures customarily walk down the street without any special security detail accompanying them (except for the President, who might have a security detail with him). Not only can an individual identify and see high-level officials, but they can (and do) also approach these public figures to engage in conversation. They may talk about the weather, the last international news concerning their particular interests, ask for political favors, give them advice on how to address a specific national issue, or even wag their fingers at the politicians and complain they are not doing what they prom-

ised during the election campaigns. They can also accuse politicians of being liars, crooks, and thieves. This finger-pointing and literally "in your face" conversation can have more political and pragmatic results than seeking an ombudsman or filing a grievance with the appropriate governmental office. In Guyana, whether on the streets, in the restaurant lines, or on the busy streets and sidewalks of Georgetown, the hierarchy set in place by the political apparatus still exists, but is denied by the immediacy of the moment and human interaction. In these encounters, the people involved are equals, and tend to address one another in that manner. This proximity and immediate access, where social and political hierarchy can be equalized, is a Guyanese cultural trait.²¹ In small democratic countries, such as New Zealand and Luxembourg, it is possible to imagine that when citizens are running their errands they might occasionally run into ministers and prime ministers. It is also more than possible to speculate that they might approach these public figures and engage in a dialogue. However, I suspect that in these situations, the hierarchy between them will not be nullified in the same manner as it is in Guyana (however, this claim needs to be tested).

²¹ Perhaps different manifestations of the denial of hierarchy can be found in other countries as well.

Guyana Regional Politics

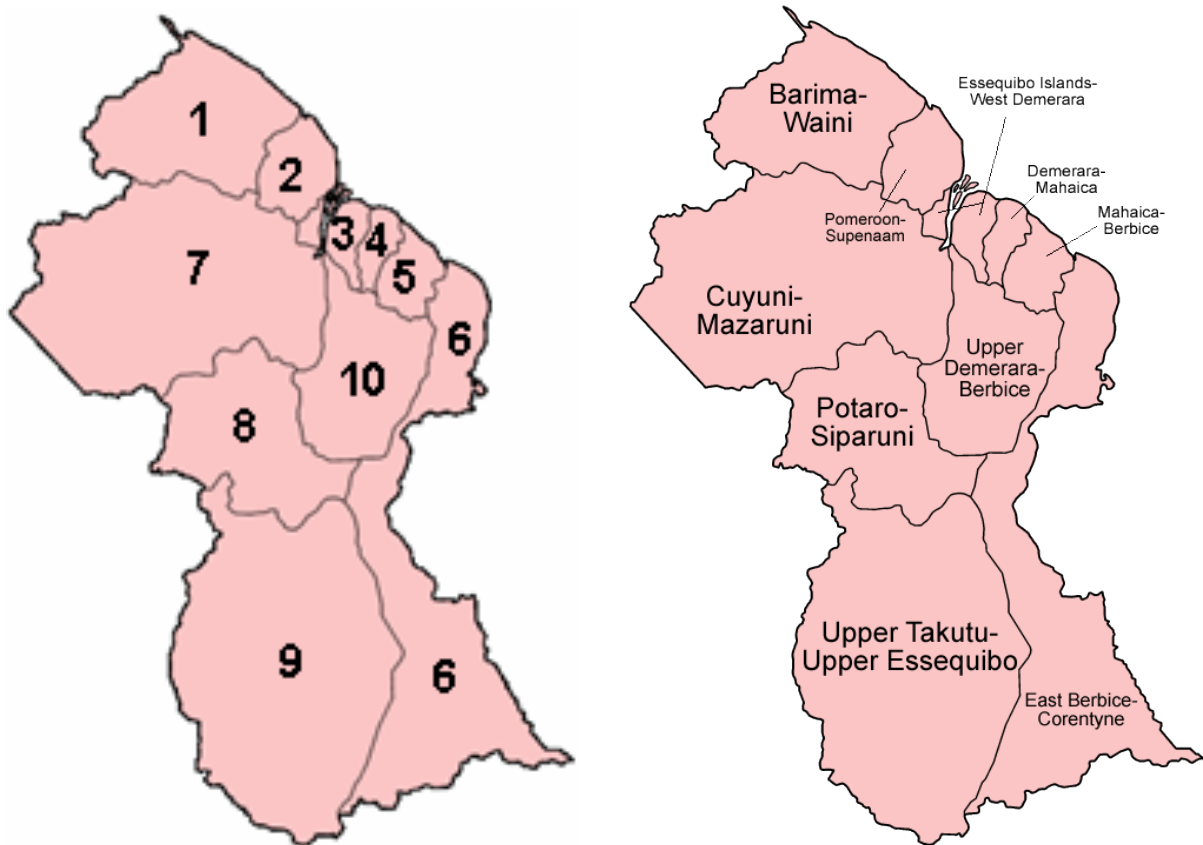
Although the discourse in Guyana is that the Government of Guyana (GoG) follows international legal principals of good governance with checks and balances set in place, in practice the GoG inherited many colonial ideals and procedures when Guyana became independent in 1966. One example is the lack of an elected local government, whereby all functions of the government are essentially centralized in Georgetown. The country is divided into ten large regions, and each region is administered by a Regional Democratic Council (RDC), each of which is headed by a Chairman (see map 2). These administrative regions are then divided into Neighborhood Democratic Councils (NDCs²²). The President nominates a Regional Executive Officer (REO) for each RDC and he/she has an oversight role, but the RDC's Chairman and Vice-Chairman are chosen by the elected members of the National Assembly. This means that, in practice, all are carefully selected by the winning party after each presidential election to carry out the party's plan of government for each region. Such positions in the RDCs and as REOs also serve as rewards for key regional party members who played a significant role in acquiring votes in their regions during the National Assembly

²² Not all NDCs are in fact operational. For example, Region 9 has nine NDCs, but only one is being administered (see Guyana, n.d.).

elections. In the Hinterland, this means securing Amerindian voters.

Map 2

Guyana political map



Amerindians play an important role in Guyanese elections, but they do not fit into the racial bias that marks Guyanese politics. Guyana's People's Progressive Party (PPP) is supported primarily by Indo-Guyanese, while the People's National Congress (PNC) is supported by Afro-Guyanese. These two groups represent about 90% of the national population. The PNC party had held

power since independence, but PPP won the 1992 elections after a political opening that had been initiated by the PNC president Desmond Hoyte in the late 1980s (Ishmael, 1992). Since then, politics in Guyana became marked by racial issues, creating a division reflected in party lines. Although Amerindians are 9% of the entire population, they do not have proportional political representation. They associate themselves with either the PPC or PNC, making them "swing" voters. Since the political system in Guyana follows a bi-racial distinction that does not include Amerindians, the latter can swing the election to either side. Prior to the 2011 elections, the PNC formed APNU - A Partnership for National Unity, together with several small parties. AFC - Alliance for Change - was one such small political party. The new alliance was referred to as APNU+AFC. In the 2011 elections, the PPP won 32 seats in Parliament, APNU won 26, and AFC won 7. The final result was that the opposition APNU+AFC had 33 seats, while the ruling party won 32 seats (Ishmael, 2015a, 2015b). However, the PPP managed to retain power because the election rules state that the leader of the largest single party becomes president. In 2015, APNU and AFC combined into one party, winning 33 of the 65 chairs. PNC leader David A. Granger thus replaced PPP's leader Donald Ramotar as president (more on Guyana's politics - see Ishmael, 1992; Ramdayal & Ishmael, 2010). Nonetheless, the change in ruling parties in

Guyana has not changed the bi-racial polarity between Indo and Afro-Guyanese that marks the country's politics. Amerindian issues are still only tangentially addressed in national politics.

Due to the racially biased influence, and the population's concentration in the coastal region and Georgetown, the presence of the GoG in the Hinterland is insidious, punctual, and task-objective (Chris, 2014; Kaïeteur News, 2015). Moreover, since local government officials are, in effect, nominated by the central government to carry out the party's project of governance, they do not necessarily have the interests of the local communities at stake. Instead, the GoG sets goals and objectives and proposes these to the RDCs and NDC Chairpersons. The GoG also nominates REOs to make sure the RDCs are following the GoG's prerogatives (Gampat, 2015). It is crucial to point out that the majority of the population in Guyana (90%) occupies only 10% of its territory. The highest population densities are in Georgetown and in Region 4 (140.4 people per km² in the region). The Hinterlands are scarcely populated and have an average density of 0.6 people per km² (see table 1 on population distribution, Guyana, 2012, p. 38). Nonetheless, the area represents 90% of Guyana's landmass. Region 9 has a density of 0.42 people per km²²³.

²³ According to the 2012 Census, the Coastal regions have an average density of 9.6, the Hinterlands of 0.6, and Guyana as a whole of 3.5.

Table 1

Table 1 Population Distribution

APPENDIX A.6: POPULATION DENSITY, GUYANA: 1980 - 2012									
Region	Area in Km ²	Population/Census Year				Population Density			
		1980	1991	2002	2012	1980	1991	2002	2012
Region 1	20,339	18,320	18,431	24,275	26,941	0.90	0.90	1.20	1.30
Region 2	6,195	42,321	43,455	49,253	46,810	6.80	7.00	8.00	7.60
Region 3	3,755	104,700	95,978	103,061	107,416	27.9	25.6	27.4	28.6
Region 4	2,232	316,679	296,635	310,320	313,429	141.9	132.9	139.0	140.4
Region 5	4,190	54,583	51,652	52,428	49,723	13.0	12.3	12.5	11.9
Region 6	36,234	152,674	142,496	123,695	109,431	4.20	3.90	3.40	3.00
Region 7	47,213	14,383	14,793	17,597	20,280	0.30	0.30	0.40	0.43
Region 8	20,051	4,483	5,616	10,095	10,190	0.20	0.30	0.50	0.50
Region 9	57,750	12,867	15,058	19,387	24,212	0.20	0.30	0.30	0.42
Region 10	17,040	38,554	39,559	41,112	39,452	2.30	2.30	2.40	2.30
Guyana	214,999	759,564	723,673	751,223	747,884	3.50	3.40	3.50	3.50
Coastland	69,646	709,511	669,775	679,869	666,261	10.2	9.60	9.80	9.60
Hinterland	145,353	50,053	53,898	71,354	81,623	0.30	0.40	0.50	0.60
Note: Coastland regions include: Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10, while Hinterland regions include: Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9.									

Amerindians and the Hinterland

The State apparatus and bureaucracy cannot efficiently reach the sparsely populated regions of the Hinterlands. Much of the interior is occupied by Amerindians, and many live on Amerindian titled lands. Also, the lack of a transportation network means that transit between communities in the interior uses Amerindians paths, rivers, and roads. There are paths used during the dry season, when swamps and creeks are dry, and there are paths used during the rainy season, when large extensions

of savanna and forest are waterlogged and flooded. Even the Georgetown-Lethem road was built on top of the paths Caribs took to raid the Rupununi region. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the former raided Makushi and Wapishana villages and sold them as slaves to the European colonists on the coast. Once the English made the enslavement of Amerindians illegal, the Caribs continued with their raids in the Rupununi, but then crossed into Suriname to sell the captives to the Dutch settlers. The Makushi from the Upper Rupununi call this path "Death Road" because those who went that way, never returned. The village of Surama has its name based on the encounter of a Carib raid party with a Brazilian raid party. Villagers from Surama say that the Caribs had come to capture them, and sell them as slaves to the Dutch. Many were killed in the fight, but the Caribs won. They took the dead, and cut off their heads, arms, and legs, and started to roast them. They were having a feast when from a distance they saw a dust cloud rise up from the stomping cavalry of the Brazilian military. The Caribs left the roasting meat behind and allowed the captives to flee before the Brazilians could arrive. Since then the place became known as *shura mantra*, and today simply as Surama (*shura*: roasted meat, barbecue; *matra*: spoiled, ruined).

Today, some communities have airstrips, making them accessible by small planes (in some communities, this is the only

reliable way to get in and out). There are a few military checkpoints on the road connecting Georgetown to Lethem, and an immigration outpost in the latter. The immigration outpost is located right before the bridge that was constructed by Brazil in 2009 to cross the Takutu River. Prior to the bridge, the crossing was done by ferryboat or canoe. In the dry season, in some areas of the Takutu it is possible to jump from boulder to boulder to cross the river. Today, people (Amerindians and non-Amerindians alike) constantly cross the Takutu, moving back and forth between Guyana and Brazil. Many people use the bridge, but the movement back and forth also occurs in places where there is no oversight by the Brazilian and Guyanese governments as to who crosses their international borders. The Lethem-Georgetown road is the main land connection between the coast and the interior, and thus the main supply channel between these areas and beyond (more on the road - see MacDonald, 2014). Cargo trucks supply Lethem with oil for the city's generator, as well as fuel, flour, rice, clothes, and other industrialized items. During protests in Mahdia in 2012, protesters blocked the road for over two months (Joaquin, 2013). The movement of people and goods via ground routes was significantly jeopardized. Many used planes and other paths through forest, savanna, and rivers to detour the blockade. Some truck drivers were able to pass through, due to *ad hoc* agreements, bribes, and kickbacks between

them and the protesters. However, not all of these new arrangements and paths were suitable for all sorts of goods, creating a shortage of industrialized products in the interior and higher prices on the few products that managed to reach Lethem. The negotiation between government and protesters in 2012 took about two months, and only then was the road cleared for general transit.

Sparse Presence of Government

Each of the scattered police stations present in the interior is staffed with only a few policemen. Most are from Georgetown and work on a rotation scheme, coming to the Hinterlands for three months before returning home. After a period at their home stations, the policemen are sent back to the Hinterlands again, this time to a different community than the one where they stayed before. Non-Amerindian policemen bring with them differing degrees of discrimination and prejudice of the interior and its inhabitants, categorizing them as backward people. Notwithstanding the fact that there are a few Amerindian policemen, when they are at work they reproduce the same discrimination and preconceptions that non-Amerindians have towards Amerindians. This is because these presumptions appear to have become structural, as a part of the role and behavior of a government employee. Notwithstanding, when Amerindian policemen

interact with civilians, they have a different body posture and way of gesticulating. They only stand facing their interlocutors directly, with their chests up, shoulders back, chins slightly elevated, gaze fixed on their interlocutor, and with no facial expression. Their gestures traverse and move through the space around their rigid bodies. Their hands move across and within vertical and horizontal lines, and the movement of their arms and hands emphasizes the tone and content of their speech. The Amerindian policemen in the interior interact in this manner when dealing with both Amerindian and non-Amerindian peoples.

Because village Toshao are also rural constables, they interact tangentially with Guyana's National Police Force. Every Toshao becomes a rural constable and receives a special identification badge. The rural constable role is permanent, and continues to be carried out even after the person is no longer a village Toshao. The government instructs the rural constables to work together with the local police and to inform the latter of any crime, suspicious activity, or mishaps in the village on the State lands surrounding the villages. Besides the rare encounters with Guyana's Military, the occasional encounter with policemen on the main road and in Lethem, the irregular village visits of REOs, RDC Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and visits to the hospital, the government is not present or significantly marked in lives of Amerindians in the Rupununi.

Venezuela's Claim and the Rupununi Uprising

The Government of Guyana's preoccupation with information about the interior can be better understood when taking into account the Rupununi Uprising of 1969. Reported accounts of the events are still fresh in memories of both Coastlanders and Amerindians, but they are also lived experiences to many people in the Rupununi. One of the accounts reports that the Venezuelan government supported the Guyanese leaders of the revolt, offering them refugee once the uprising failed. Most of them were members of the local Rupununi elite, formed by cattle ranchers of European descent. This elite was composed by the Melville and Hart families (Ishmael, 1992; MacDonald, 2014; Silva, 2005). Nonetheless, the Venezuelan government denies any support and participation in the uprising. The international aftermath of the Rupununi Uprising was that Venezuela declared a 12-year moratorium on its reclamation of the *Guayana Esequiba*, and once the moratorium expired in 1982, Venezuela resumed its territorial claim (Ishmael, 1992; Silva, 2005). The territorial claim extends from the current western border with Brazil and Venezuela all the way to the Essequibo River (about 40% of Guyana's territory). In May 27, 2015, the Venezuelan government of President Maduro established a maritime military zone, which extends over a large part of Guyana's water (see map 3).

Map 3

Venezuela's Maritime Border Claim



Due to the land claim, a maritime border was never drawn, since Venezuela claims all the territory on the west bank of the Essequibo River. Analysts say that the Venezuelan announcement was filed by an Exxon announcement saying that the company had found oil in the waters of Guyana and was interested in conducting more studies to investigate the site.

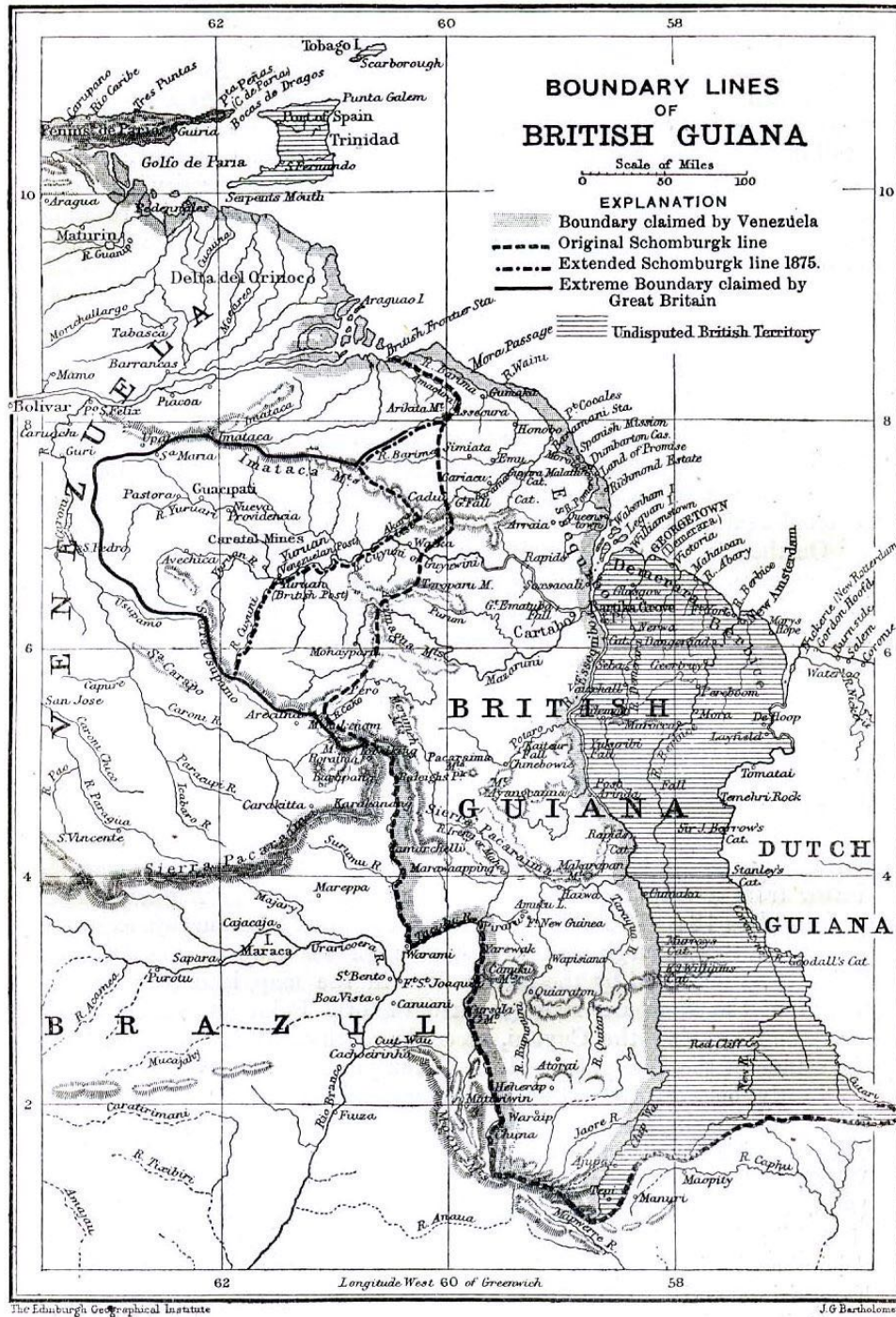
The recent maritime dispute is only another chapter on a longstanding dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana. In the early 1800s, England claimed sovereignty over the mouth of

the Orinoco River and its surrounding territories, and in return Venezuela claimed sovereignty over the territory extending all the way to the Essequibo River. They agreed to use the Schomburgk line of 1835 as a boundary and not to settle on the claimed areas (see map 4).

However, some English-speaking persons established a settlement beyond the line in the Cuyuni basin after finding gold. In 1876, the Venezuelans reiterated their claim, and in return the English extended their claim to include the Cuyuni-Mazaruni region. There was a diplomatic crisis between England and Venezuela in 1895, which was settled in 1899 with the arbitration of the United States. In this settlement, Venezuela gained full control of the Orinoco River, but the United States (U.S.) ruled in favor of most of England's land claim. At the time, Venezuela protested the decision right away, and in 1962 raised the issue once again, alleging behind-the-scenes negotiations between the Russian arbitrator (intended to be neutral) and the English government, according to the Malle-Provost memorandum (Dennis, 1950; Ishmael, 2013).

Map 4

The Schomburgk Line



Malle-Provost was the official secretary of the U.S./Venezuela delegation during the arbitration tribunal. In his memorandum (published post mortem), he assumed from the behavior between the tribunal judges and the Russian panelist that a private arrangement had been made, forcing the U.S. delegation to accept the deal that deprived Venezuela of the least amount of territory. It is relevant to point out that the Venezuelan claim was written into its own constitution in 1961, therefore even if the national political climate is interested in a settlement with the now-independent Guyana, such a settlement cannot be reached without first modifying Venezuela's Constitution. Any agreement reached through international courts would be void and unconstitutional from a Venezuelan legal perspective.

Amerindian Act and the Problem of Mediation

The Amerindian Act is the main legislative body in Guyana that governs issues specific to Amerindian peoples. However, instead of qualifying Amerindians within the national legal system and granting the group differentiated rights (such as the right to cultural diversity; access to differentiated education and health systems; rights to cultural, physical, and economic reproduction, etc. - see Clinton, 1990; Holder & Corntassel, 2002; Kymlicka, 1995), the Act mostly sets up an organizational structure that villages must follow, as well as

determines a series of reporting duties that the Village Council needs to perform and how to perform them. The Amerindian Act bestows collective land rights on each individual Amerindian community, as well as sets the processual and daily routines of village organization and administration. The latter was established and determined a priori when the Amerindian Act went into effect, and these administrative requirements must be followed independent of cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic differences between and amongst Amerindian groups and communities²⁴. All village activities must be documented, recorded, and reported back to the Minister of Amerindian Affairs (MoAA)²⁵. These activities involve land use for farming and extraction of natural resources²⁶; selling, buying, and slaughtering cattle; discussions and decisions made in Village Meetings or regarding topics concerning the whole village; and even the movement of people in and out of Amerindian titled lands.

Many Makushi people and other Amerindians in Guyana told me that during the discussions concerning the content and extent of the Amerindian Act, Amerindians wanted the Act to allow them

²⁴ Each community must have village leader, deputy village leader, treasurer, secretary, and village council. The minimum and maximum number of councilors is also determined by the Act.

²⁵ In 2015, the new government changed the name of the ministry to the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs.

²⁶ Strangely enough, the extraction and use of animal resources goes unnoticed. Perhaps the emphasis on the forest has to do with monies from the carbon market and the United Nations' Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation initiative (REDD+).

to persecute and kill kanaimas²⁷ that threatened their villages. However, in the end the Act did not grant Amerindians the right to kill kanaimas. This is not because legislators do not believe in the figure of kanaimas and in their intent to do harm, but because granting this right to Amerindians would be an affront to the State's monopoly on the use of violence and the right to kill.

One of the reasons why the Amerindian Act was put into place was to solve the problem of mediation. However, the idea that human life needs to be regulated by laws comes from a model of social life that belongs to industrialized societies, not to Amerindians themselves (Strathern, 1985). Therefore, by identifying the problem of mediation, the Amerindian Act creates the very problem for which it is purported to be the solution. As a consequence, the Amerindian Act of Guyana conceives and addresses each Amerindian Village as analogous to a government body and treats the Village Council (an institution created by previous colonial policies, and reified by the Act) administrations as an extension of the MoAA. The Act also mediates or prevents the production of "illegitimate" deaths in Amerindian villages, by not granting legal rights to Amerindians to kill kanaimas.

²⁷ Kanaimas are trained killers. They will be discussed further in chapters three, four, and six.

Amerindians Through a Legal Lens

According to the Amerindian Act, Amerindian communities are differentiated as Villages versus Satellite Villages. This distinction is not based on Makushi politics, and doubtfully from Amerindian politics for that matter. It is, in fact, an administrative imposition upon Amerindian communities to regulate territorial occupation and manage and arrange demographic units. In the end, the notion of what constitutes a Village and a Satellite Village is strongly related to the way in which the GoG perceives Amerindianness.

The Amerindian Act is a body of rules mainly concerned with managing and administering Amerindians as a racial-demographic component of the national population. This particular concern is specially focused on the use of resources and ownership of collective land titles. Per the Act, an Amerindian is *"any citizen from Guyana who - (a) belongs to any of the native or aboriginal peoples of Guyana; or (b) is a descendant of any person mentioned in paragraph (a)."* (Amerindian Act, 2006, article 2) An Amerindian community is *"a group of Amerindians organised as a traditional community with a common culture and occupying or using the State lands they have traditionally occupied or used"* (Ibid.). A village, on the other hand, is *"a group of Amerindians occupying or using Village Lands,"* and *"Village lands means lands owned communally by a Village under*

title granted to a Village Council to hold for the benefit of the Village" (Ibid.).

We can see that within the scope of the law, an Amerindian person under the Amerindian Act is a citizen of Guyana, from a native or aboriginal group, or descended from such a person. The Act, on the other hand, does not define native or aboriginal, therefore the meaning of the term is open to interpretation. It is also unclear whether there is any transition from native/aboriginal to non-native/non-aboriginal. This is a crucial point in understanding racial politics in Guyana, and the conceptualization of the Nation. For example, the National Anthem has in one of its passages the verse:

*Great land of Guyana, diverse though our strains,
We're born of their sacrifice, heirs of their pains,
And ours is the glory their eyes did not see,
One land of six peoples, united and free.*

One can infer that the Guyanese notion of nation is ideologically constructed as resulting from a successful struggle with England. The racially-stratified colonial Guianese²⁸ society was composed of East-Indians, Africans, Chinese, Europeans,

²⁸ The term "Guianese" marks the historical period prior to independence. "Guyana" and "Guyanese" mark post-independence contexts.

Amerindians, and Portuguese. The creation myth of the nation states that they united to oppose a common other (the English), thus declaring independence and sovereignty (*We're born of their sacrifice, heirs of their pains*). This idea of national unity is also clearly stated on Guyana's Coat of Arms, on which is emblazoned the motto: *One People. One Nation. One Destiny*. This idea of unity formed by the erasure or overlooking of differences and the emphasis on similarities helps us to understand why, until very recently (from independence to the aftermath of the 2015 presidential elections), the government's official position was that the label of "Indigenous Guyanese" applied to every single citizen of Guyana, since all struggled and opposed the English rule. Therefore, following that line of argument, Amerindians were only one segment of the "Indigenous Peoples" of Guyana.

In 2005, the GoG distributed a small information pamphlet to Amerindian communities. In this brochure, the GoG explained why the Act is not named *Indigenous Peoples Act*:

"Why is it still called the 'Amerindian Act' and not the 'Indigenous Peoples Act?' 'Indigenous Peoples' is a very wide term that means different things to different people. Everybody has a right under international law to define themselves as 'indigenous.'

In addition, the Government looked at many international definitions and found that some of them include not only Amerindians but also other sections of the Guyanese community.

Some people suggest that we define 'indigenous' so it only applies to Amerindians but then it means that other Guyanese would no longer be able to call themselves indigenous and this would breach the principle set by international law.

All people have a right to call themselves 'indigenous peoples' if they want. Indeed, earlier this year a French delegation made a presentation to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva as the Indigenous Peoples of France" (Guyana, 2005).

This argument was used to evade many issues concerning international treaties and norms on Indigenous Peoples' rights, since the GoG argued that the entire population of Guyana, except for foreigners, was Indigenous to Guyana. At many public events, I witnessed government officials arguing that Amerindians did not need Indigenous Peoples' Rights, or International Laws concerning Amerindian Rights, since they were already protected by Guyana's own Amerindian Act. I heard many times from government employees and advocates of the Act that Guyana's

Amerindian Act was one of the most progressive and modern pieces of legislation concerning Amerindian rights in the world. When the Act was voted on in 2006, there was pressure from Guyana's Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) and other international NGOs to name the piece of legislation the *Indigenous Peoples Act*. But since the term "Indigenous" was understood by the government to be synonymous with "citizen," the Act was named after the racial category "Amerindian" (MacKay, 2005). I do not pretend to claim that naming Guyana's specific legislation as Amerindian Act instead of Indigenous Peoples Act was done exclusively and intentionally to evade international pressure on how to address Indigenous (Amerindian) Peoples' issues. I do not think that this reason alone explains the politics in Guyana regarding Amerindian/Indigenous rights. The central point of this argument is that it illustrates how Guyanese society thought of itself as a cohesive group, and of its own transformation from being Guianese (belonging to a colony) to becoming indigenous to Guyana, and thus Guyanese (becoming a nation).

Within the nation of Guyana and its legal system, the Amerindian Act defines an Amerindian as a citizen of Guyana, distinct from the five other indigenous peoples. This distinction is based on the category of native or native descendant, which in turn is not defined. Per the Act, Amerindians can organize themselves collectively in groups, in accordance with their

traditions and culture, but only on State-owned lands. Here, there is a qualification of the ways in which Amerindian Communities organize themselves and where they may do so. Their organization and occupation is according to Amerindian tradition, but the lands they occupy and use are State-owned lands. The exceptions are lands that have already been titled.

In 2006, Guyana revised the previous Amerindian Act of 1976 that was based on a series of regulations and recommendations dating back to early Colonial times. For example, the Amerindian Act of 1976 replaced the Amerindian Ordinance of 1951, which extended the logic of the Amerindian Ordinance of 1902 (Brosius, Tsing, & Zerner, 2005; Ifill, 2009; La Rose & MacKay, 1999). These ordinances gave the government the legal right to take, seize, and dispossess Amerindians of their property for the purpose of the care, management, or protection of the same property. The government could also take any children into custody for their education and welfare, and could relocate any community to anywhere else in the country. These regulations deprived Amerindians of legal autonomy and placed them under a system of tutelage. Butt Colson called this the “‘administrative annexation’ of Amerindian peoples and their territories,” where Amerindians were to become part of the administrative uniformity for the sake of development (Butt Colson, 1983 - in Brosius et al., 2005). These previous Acts and Ordinances contained in

their text the boundaries of Amerindian communities and lands, many of which were drawn without consulting Amerindians themselves. Today, Amerindians complain about surveying methods that were used in the past. In some cases, Amerindians also complain that the government disrespects boundaries set in previous agreements between the English government and Amerindian communities. In the past, as in the present, demarcations of Amerindian land fail to recognize the whole extent of Amerindian territory, to include all areas used for farming, fishing, hunting, and gathering of resources. Land titles mostly refer to the region where the majority of houses have been built and most of the farms have been located.

The complaints regarding land demarcation bring to the fore the uncertainty in the Act as to what constitute traditional practices and (Amerindian) culture. The Amerindian Act acknowledges a moment of transition between native and non-native, traditional and non-traditional, since it defines Amerindians as belonging to a native community, or descendent from members of a native community. So Amerindian is at the same time an inherited category as well as a category of practice. Although the Act acknowledges that Amerindian communities can occupy State lands, the legislation also addresses the transference of ownership by granting the land titles to lands that communities have been occupying traditionally. Contrary to what happens in

Brazil, in Guyana Amerindian communities actually gain ownership of the land. In Brazil, Amerindians retain the inalienable possession and use of land, however it still belongs to the Brazilian State. Amerindians in Brazil have the inalienable usufruct right over the land, but the government can legally remove communities from these lands in case of natural disasters or for the national good, broadly defined. During my field research in Guyana, many Amerindians told me that land titles issued to their communities did not represent the area they actually used, or what they requested, or even represent the old boundaries that had been established in early years with the English Colonial authority. Once a request for an Amerindian land title is submitted, it is analyzed by surveyors and politicians, who almost always reject or reduce the total area the community claims. If a community already has titled lands, however, it can always request an extension. Tunaîmî has filed for three extensions in the last few years, and all of the documents that were submitted to the MoAA have been ostensibly misplaced during the MoAA's evaluation process. Amerindians say that the persons responsible for analyzing their requests have stated the communities are asking for too much land, and that they can produce and farm in smaller areas. "Why you need all this area? This is what they tell us," was what the Makushi from the Rupununi told me about what they had heard from politicians concerning their

Amerindian land titles. Although "a group of Amerindians (is) organised as a traditional community with a common culture and occupying or using the State lands they have traditionally occupied or used," titled lands tend to be only a fraction of the territory they traditionally occupied and used.

Article 60 of the Amerindian Act is the article that addresses titling of lands, and it is worth reproducing here in its entirety:

60. (1) *An Amerindian Community may apply in writing to the Minister for a grant of State lands provided:*

(a) it has been in existence for at least twenty-five years;

(b) at the time of the application and of the immediately preceding five years, it comprised at least one hundred and fifty persons.

(2) An application under subsection (1) shall include:

(a) the name of the Amerindian Community;

(b) the number of persons in the Amerindian Community;

(c) the reason for the application;

(d) a description of the area requested; and

(e) a resolution authorizing the application and passed by at least two thirds of the adult members of the Amerindian Community.

(3) An application shall be signed by at least four adult members of the Amerindian Community.

(4) If a Community Council has been recognised under section 81, at least four of the signatories to an application shall be members of the Community Council.

In this particular article, we can see some arbitrary definitions that do not necessary apply to the native, aboriginal, or descendants of such peoples that once occupied and still largely occupy State-owned lands in Guyana. The most arbitrary requirements are in relation to the number of residents and on the village's years of existence. Such requirements disregard Amerindian demographics, social and political organization, and patterns of semi-nomadic territorial occupation. As described in chapter one, the communities of Jamaica and Tatu-bola are, in practice, self-sufficient and independent from the administrative center of Tunaîmî. Tatu-bola is even outside the limits of the titled land, but within the boundaries of the requested extension. Even the extension line does not cover all of the area used by the Makushi in Tunaîmî, but they say they are afraid of requesting "too much" and being rejected by the government. But they say they will request more land in the future. This is a strategy shared across many Amerindians and village Toshao. The Toshao from the Upper Rupununi had gathered and

discussed all their ideas on extension.²⁹ They came up with the proposal that each village should apply for a land extension, in such a way that the boundaries of the extension of one village would reach the extension boundaries of another. Therefore, the scattered Amerindian land titles currently spread across the region would become a solid Amerindian territory, formed by individual land titles but without State land in between them. This is similar to the approach taken by the Wapishana communities living south of the Kanuku (Gomes & Wilson, 2012; Isaacs et al., 2006; Pearce, 2015).

The objective of having a larger cluster of Amerindian lands is twofold. First, it is more representative of the actual land use practiced by the Amerindian peoples, which varies significantly from the rainy to the dry season. Second, it prevents the government from leasing the land between Amerindian titled lands. The practice of demarcating small sections of territory as Amerindian titled lands threatens the maintenance of Amerindian ways of life and population growth, since the lands bordering their titled land become part of the GoG calculations of national development through logging, mining, or extensive monoculture farming. This is especially the case since the homologation of the Raposa Serra do Sol territory in Brazil in 2005.

²⁹ The piece of news about Nappi village's extension is illustrative of this context (see Gordon, 2016).

Brazilian rice farmers operating within Amerindian land were forced to leave and started to move their activities into Guyana. Large areas that were previous used by many different Makushi communities for hunting, fishing, and gathering of natural resources began to be leased to rice agriculture. The areas have been leveled, courses of rivers and creeks have been changed, and barbed wire fences were built with signs of *No Trespassing* (see plate 5). No environmental impact assessments were conducted, and the local Amerindian population was not consulted.

Nonetheless, the current Amerindian Act is an update from the previous legislation, and now grants Amerindians the right of self-representation. It also grants Amerindian communities more autonomy than before. Nonetheless, this autonomy is restricted and shaped when the Act configures the ways in which the bureaucracy of "village business" should be carried out, and what must constitute a village.

As we see in Article 60, the time of occupation and the amount of people required to constitute a village is clearly a way to "efficiently" manage and distribute state resources, as well as to emulate the attraction and reduction projects carried out by religious missions. From the historical accounts of the Rupununi and the Branco River valley, there were always more and less densely populated localities, and the population living the region was semi-nomadic and transient (Brett, 1868;

Eggerath, 1924; im Thurn, 1883; Koch-Grünberg, 1924; Roth, 1929; Schomburgk, 1841; Stradelli, 1889). One of the problems of living in a village with as large a number of families as Tunaîmî is that conflict and friction between families will eventually emerge, and fragmentation of the different groups frequently occurred in order to avoid or as a result of physical violence. The practices of the government and the legal system in Guyana have altered this dynamic in larger communities.

Plate 5

Santa Fé Ranch Sign



Historical Demographic Changes

To the Makushi people, physical proximity does not equal affinity and empathy. A person could have someone living 500 meters from his house, and siblings living 2km in the opposite direction, and he will interact more with his siblings than with his neighbors. To this day in Tunaîmî, people choose to build a new house where they have enough space to plant fruit trees and a garden, to dig a well and latrine, without encroaching on their neighbors. Ideally, one should be far enough away not to hear another household during the day, but close enough that you could hear them if someone were to shout. As families get older and their children bring in in-laws, once the bride service is fulfilled the new couple builds their own house close to the wife's parents' house. When the church, the government, and NGOs started to provide services in the villages (places of worship, schools, health centers, village offices, etc.), many families started building their houses close to these services. As the population increased, the ideal spots to build a house became scarce and people started to live even closer to other families.

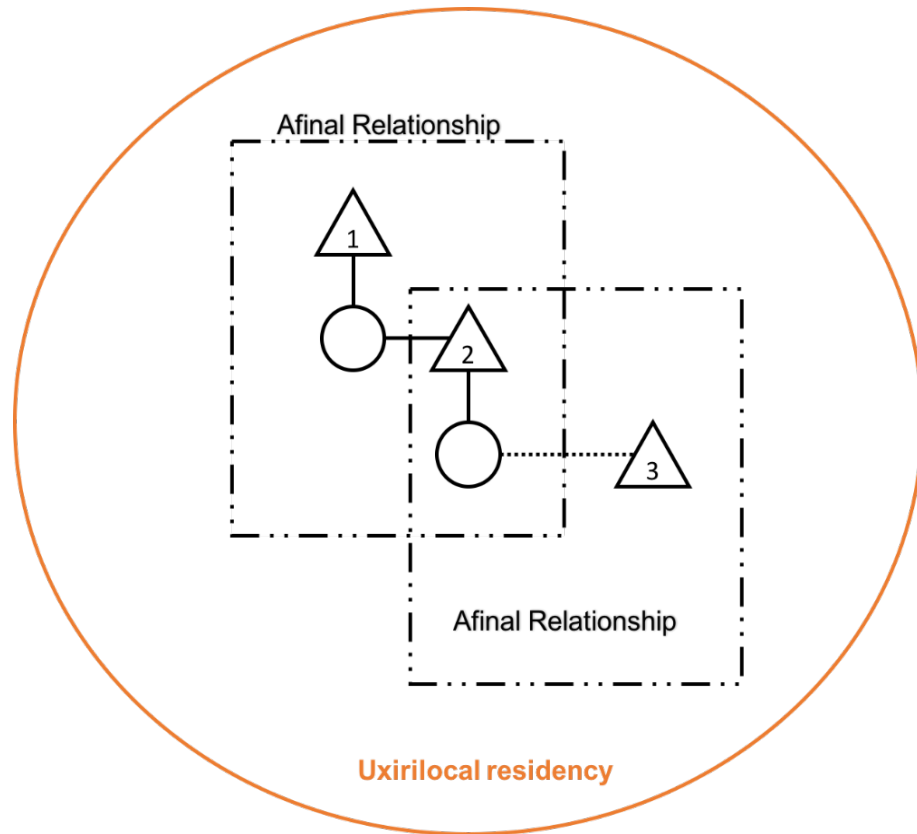
This would not be such a problem if the Makushi could still move freely and settle in other places to their liking or of their choosing. When a young couple starts their own family and their daughters bring in new sons-in-law, the daughter's father

begins to engage with others from a new kinship position. He was always the son-in-law to his wife's father and a brother-in-law to other village men in the same generational group. With a daughter bringing in a man, he also becomes a father-in-law to the newcomer into the larger household cluster. The new father-in-law begins to be a "big man," as the Makushi say. This also creates a friction with his own father-law (see chart 1). In the chart we see Male-1 is in a *tori-payun*³⁰ relation with Male-2. When Male-2 establishes a *tori-payun* relationship with Male-3, 1 and 2 are in equivalent structural positions. This creates friction, since 1 will continue to treat 2 as a son-in-law, at the same time that 2 may try to treat 1 as an equivalent. In a not-so-distant past, this contradictory relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law would reach a point at which the extended household group would fracture. Male-2 with his wife, children, and sons-in-law would move to another location. When Male-2 establishes new afinal relationships in which he occupies the higher generational position, the Makushi say he is "becoming a big person." The political importance of a person depends on how long their descendent line is and how well they articulate the intent of cognates and afinals into a singular goal.

³⁰ *Tori*: father-in-law, *payun*: son-in-law. *Payun* is the noun, while the vocative term is *paitoma* (male-centered term).

Chart 1

Afinal Relationship and Uxirocality



Married couples with children live with the wife's parents until the bride service is considered paid. Only then they feel free to plant their own farm and build their own house. In large villages like Tunaîmî, there are around four to five main family groups. Most of these clusters grew out of the same group that came from the Napoleão community in Brazil in the late 19th or early 20th century. They left the flats on the Eastern side

of the Surumu River at the foothills of the Pakaraima range and crossed to the Southeast to settle on the Northwestern face of the Kanuku Mountains. There were already many settlements in the Kanuku region, and even Robert Schomburgk (1841) described his passage through Tunaîmî. Nonetheless, during my research the Makushi affirmed all the older residents are descendants of Magalhaes and his people (see chapter three). In Tunaîmî, every person old enough to be someone's grandparent was not born there. In almost all cases they were born on the other side of the Takutu River, in what is now Brazil.

Everyone could trace their direct kinship ascendancy to a grandparent. Above that, they would say that they could not know, because they had not met them. The Makushi also could not give a detailed ascendant line of the afinal kin. They had little to no interest in such inquiries. What they knew without a doubt was how all villagers from Tunaîmî, Kukui, and Ka'poi were related to each other.

Satellite Villages

Smaller villages have fewer and more scattered households following a kinship pattern. However, the Toshias from satellite villages work together with the main Toshao to present their demands as a whole community. This tends to be the case when dealing with the national government. Most of the time, the

issues, problems, and demands of one particular satellite village are the same as those of the main and the rest of the satellite villages (e.g., lack of medications, problems on the road, insufficient school teachers, insufficient funds for village projects, etc.), so presenting the argument as multiple communities pressures the government to take some action. The discussion presented in chapter one, especially on the matter of purchasing a minibus, is a good example of this relation of independence and interdependence. Toshias from the satellite villages have autonomy, but the main Toshao has oversight over them. Nonetheless, each satellite village has its own Village Structure as set forth in the Amerindian Act.

These village sites have been occupied for generations, but their relatively small population can be explained by migration and semi-nomadic practices. Natural facts like severe floods or droughts also influence patterns of movement in the region. However, the knowledge of an abandoned site remains among the emigrating residents and their descendants and with the wider Amerindian population in general. This knowledge is maintained and explained via their *pantoni*, which are spoken stories/histories about the creation of time and people's journeys in the world (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). In the case of abandonment, many of these sites are or can be reoccupied in future years. Currently, people move out of their villages to

seek work in the diamond and gold mines, large logging concessions, farms and ranches in both Brazil and Guyana, and in urban centers. Due to Brazil's proximity and larger economy, the Makushi of the Rupununi prefer to migrate to Brazil (mainly Boa Vista and Manaus), rather than to Georgetown. Many have kin living in Amerindian communities in Brazil as well as in the cities, and they use these relationships as a support system during the transition from Guyana to Brazil (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015; Namem, Fioretti, Carneiro, Rodrigues, & Tomaz, 1999; Namem, 1996; Rodrigues, 2002).

Governmental Control of Resources

The tradition of a central government and Coastlanders' prejudice towards Amerindians, perhaps both inheritances of colonial times, help us to understand the oversight and reach of the Amerindian Act on the daily affairs of Amerindian villages. While in Georgetown, I heard from taxi drivers, shop attendants, university students, government employees, and most of the people I met during my daily activities that Amerindians cannot do anything right. These persons added that if Amerindians were left alone, the latter would stay in their hammocks *liming*³¹ and would not prepare for the future. Georgetown's residents believe

³¹ In Guyanese English this means "to sit or stand around idly talking with others."

Amerindians are not only unable to improve their own livelihoods, but that they are also incapable of surviving without external help. Most State officials also doubt the capabilities of Amerindian communities to organize themselves as political units, since their political organization differs from Euro-American models. That being the case, the Amerindian Act is a government instrument that prescribe a *minutiae* how villages must organize themselves politically and administratively. Yet the Amerindian Act is more than just the enforcement of a juridical model onto village affairs. It is also a way to mold Amerindians into a model and plan of development that the central government has deemed appropriate for the nation (Butt Colson, 1983). The political organization of the RDC, REO, and NDCs, shows how limited the influence of individual citizens is in local matters. Their only participation in the system is by voting in the National Assembly Election.³² This limited representation is an interesting issue, especially when it comes to Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), the International Carbon Market, and the United Nations' Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation initiative (REDD+). This is the case because a significant amount of forest lands

³² The National Assembly is elected using closed-list proportional representation from a single nationwide 40-seat constituency and 10 sub-national constituencies with a total of 25 seats. Seats are allocated using the Hare quota.

are located within Amerindian titled lands and their surrounding areas (Alamas et al., 2014; L. Mentore, 2011). A large number of Amerindian Villages have already applied for land extensions, which would enlarge their lands two or three fold, thus encompassing more forested lands. As discussed previously, villages that have not already applied for land extensions can do so at any time. Therefore, any monies received from carbon sequestered in these areas technically belongs to the lawful owners of the land, which in the case of Amerindian titled lands would be the respective Village Councils. Members of the government and many people living in the coastal regions already have ideas of how to use the resources originating from Guyana's LCDS. Nonetheless, they do not raise the issue that a significant amount belongs exclusively to Amerindian Villages. Many Amerindians themselves hear about these projects but do not know the mechanism of the Payment for Environmental Service (PES) and REDD+. I agree with L. Mentore (2011) that some communities may nevertheless opt in the PES proposed by the government of Guyana, and that the consultation and agreement process may be written and carried out in accordance with national and international regulations.

However, the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), while supporting PES and REDD+ to some extent, have a negative opinion

on how the government of Guyana has been engaging with Amerindian communities. APA has also pointed out many inconsistencies on the part of the government in its discourse and on how it manages development and environmental issues (for a more detailed account, see Alamas et al., 2014). APA organizes many workshops around Amerindian communities throughout Guyana, covering an extensive array of topics. During my stay in the field, I attended some of these workshops, and participants and the APA representative frequently raised issues outside the scope of the workshop. One of the most striking topics of conversation was the fact that Toshias and Village Councils were being co-opted to sign agreements with the government. Such agreements gave away payment rights from PES and REDD+ within Guyana's LCDS initiative. Many participants said that such agreements were signed without any participation of the community or without the majority of the community. Therefore, the process of obtaining free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) was carried out improperly, since not enough information concerning the issues was provided, and not all stakeholders participated in the process. There were also reports of FPIC processes in which the community had to decide immediately if they wanted to opt in or opt out of PES. The excluded stakeholders could be explained by government only reaching out to the Village Council of each community.

During these workshops, Amerindians also mentioned that the government was creating another institution to manage PES and control the disbursement of funds to Amerindian villages. APA representatives explained that this was the case because the government had a negative view of Amerindians and that "they [the government] like to keep everything to themselves." All participants agreed with both statements. The APA representatives mentioned that according to the new proposal, Village Councils would have to submit a grant proposal to this new ministry or agency in order to request funds for village projects. Specialists in the government would analyze and evaluate the proposals and make alterations that they deemed appropriate. In the end, the proposals could be approved, approved with significant changes to the project budget, or rejected. Whenever this new proposed government agency surfaced as a topic of conversation, almost everyone had something to say. All of the opinions were negative. The participants voiced their dissatisfaction with the intermediation of the government's PES in Guyana's assumed lucrative LCDS. Participants also added that this new ministry was, once again, another way for the government to steal money and practice nepotism and party favoritism.

The Makushi participants of these workshops also complained that, whenever they sent projects to the Presidential Grant

Program,³³ their projects came back with so many alterations that they became unviable. These project alterations included a change of budget items to the cost of supplies in Georgetown. In remote locations of Guyana, the price of goods and food can be 10 to 20 times more expensive than in Georgetown, since items can only arrive by plane and or canoes. This is especially the case in mining regions, where miners pay for commercial transactions in in gold and diamonds. One of the APA representatives gave me a personal example. He/she is from a village in a mining region, and the Village wanted to build an airplane hangar and charge daily fees of the planes parked there. The project had a budget of 20 million Guyana dollars, but the government only approved 2 million dollars.³⁴ Another complaint came from the execution of the projects. In their projects, Amerindians typically budget for a small salary or stipend for the persons directly involved in the building of infrastructure, maintenance, and execution of project activities. In their budgets,

³³ The Presidential Grant is a development initiative within the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. Grants range from G\$500,000 to G\$5,000,000 (2,500 to 25,000 US Dollars). From 2007 to 2014 the MoAA has released a total of G\$695,670,779. However, the MoAA defines the main project areas it will fund. These are: transportation (procurement of boats, engines, mini buses, trucks, tractors, trailers, 4X4 pickups, and ATVs for general transportation); agricultural projects (cattle farming, chicken rearing, cash crop farming); machinery and equipment (chain saws, brush cutters, generators, solar systems); Tourism (Guest houses, Eco Lodges, *benabs*); productive infrastructure (pavilions, multi-purpose halls, Village Office, village shops, roads, trails, bridges, revetments). See Guyana & UNDP, (2014).

³⁴ The original budget was \$100,000 US dollars, but only \$10,000 was approved.

villages account for the difference in the local price of supplies and material. Yet when the budgets come back from governmental review, no one has a salary and all workers are expected to volunteer on these projects.

The institution APA referred to was the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRID), a governmental institution that was chosen to receive payments for Guyana's climate services, in anticipation of the full establishment of an international REDD+ mechanism. The agreement established with Norway in 2009 entailed the potential delivery of up to US\$250 million in payments to Guyana, based on an independent verification of deforestation rates and country performance on a set of social and environmental issues. In 2012, at the UN Rio+20 meetings, Guyana's LCDS was announced as a best-practice model for "green growth," with the potential for duplication in other developing countries (Byone, 2012). However, in 2013, Guyana only met two out of the ten LCDS indicators of the 2009 agreement with Norway (see table 2. Source: Alamas et al., 2014).

Table 2

LCDS Verification Indicators

Item	Status
Transparent and effective multi-stakeholder consultations continue and evolve	Not met
Participation of all affected and interested stakeholders at all stages of the REDD+/LCDS process	Partially met
Protection of the rights of indigenous peoples	Not met
Transparent and accountable oversight and governance of the financial support	Partially met
Initial structure for the Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM)	Met
Continuing stakeholder consultation on the European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (EU-FLEGT) process	Met
Continuing development of a national inter-sectoral system for coordinated land use	Partially met
Continuing stakeholder consultation on the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)	Partially met
Measures by the GoG to work with forest dependent sectors to agree on specific measures to reduce forest degradation	Not met
Mapping of priority areas for biodiversity in Guyana's forests	Met

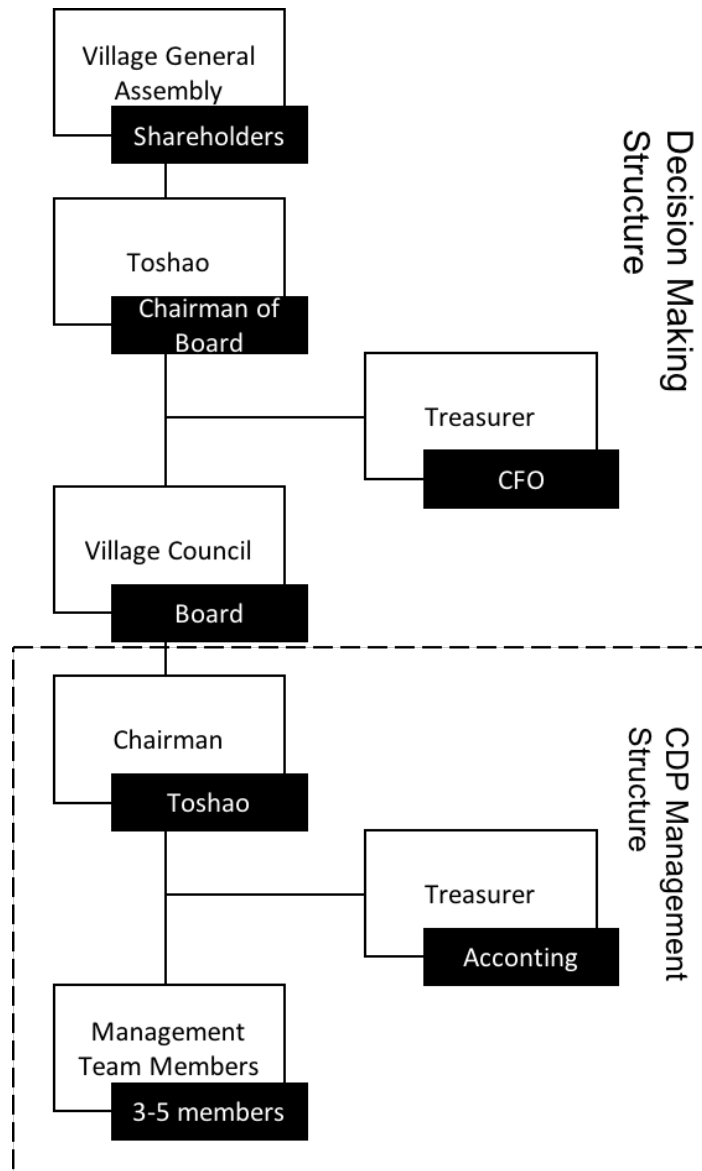
The GRIF financed a series of environmental-friendly activities, and part of the resources were directed to the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF), which supported the development of communities in the Hinterlands (Guyana & UNDP, 2014). The GRIF-ADF follows the structural model established by the LCDS, with the oversight and funds of the United Nations Development

Program (UNDP). The UNDPs GRIF-ADF program period was actually set to run from 2012-2016, but the activities phase is from September 2016 to September 2017. The total funds allocated to the Program are US\$ 6,259,414.32 (Ibid.). Because of the different levels of national and international oversight, projects funded through the GRIF-ADF have to follow a strict planning and execution structure (see chart 2). Although villagers are put at the top of the chart, being considered the shareholders of the activities, they need to negotiate and navigate a maze of procedures and committees.

Therefore, the complaints directed towards GRIF as the institution controlling PES has been that most of the monies acquired through LCDS would be spent in the operation of the agency itself, instead of actually funding Amerindian projects. In fact, looking at the detailed GRIF-ADF, we see that out of the US\$ 6,259,414.32, only two million (31.95% of the funds) were to be used as grant money, and the latter would arrive directly to Village Councils (Ibid.). The rest of the budget was marked for elaboration, planning, execution, evaluation, and exit strategies.

Chart 2

CRIF-ADF Project Structure



Once again, the solution of mediation exists to resolve a problem that it itself creates. In order to have a solution, mediation also needs to create a problem. The “problem” that

mediation is there to "resolve" is applicable to the Euro-American mindset preoccupied with notions of sustainable development. The "problem" is not necessarily an issue in the minds of the Makushi and other Amerindians. As a matter of fact, the Makushi and Wapishana people participating in the workshops run by APA were right in their assumption that most of the funds would be spent in Georgetown, and with the government apparatus. About US\$ 2.7 million was spent on the inception and operationalization of the ADF plan, and the balance would be spent on consulting services, travel, furniture, equipment, office supplies, workshops and training (about US\$ 1.5 million).

Movement of Amerindians

As discussed earlier, the government is more present on the coast, leaving a sparse and *ad hoc* presence in the Hinterland. This was the case both before and after the Rupununi Uprising of 1969, when as a result of the failed uprising the whole region became a restricted area. The only people allowed to move to and from the interior were Amerindians and government employees (Ishmael, 1992). The restriction on movement in the Rupununi was a government attempt to prevent other attempts at secession. The isolation compromised both the supply chain and communication between the interior and the coast. Today, the interior is no longer a restricted area, except in part for

Amerindian lands. This is the case because the Amerindian Act requires any person who does not reside on Amerindian lands to have prior permission from the Village Council and the MoAA to enter the land. An exception is made for persons working for the government who need to enter the villages to perform their official duties. As seen in chapter one, as a result of this requirement, villagers read letters of intent to visit during council and village meetings. Since meetings are registered in minutes, there is now a written register of all such requests. Nonetheless, such requests only represent a small fraction of the actual movement of visitors. Most requests are done in person with the village Toshao. In most cases, the Toshao is informed that a person has arrived. Informing the village leader of visitors is considered morally appropriate, and also safer for the visitor. If anyone sees an unknown person or group of persons wandering about the village, he or she will be concerned and seek out the Toshao for an explanation and a plan of action. If the Toshao knows of the visitors, he will explain who the visitors are, their relation to their hosts, the period of stay, the reason for their stay, and where they are from. The Makushi never view visitors as independent individuals. Instead, they are perceived as being within the kinship network of their hosts. They are also social and moral ambassadors of their com-

munities of origin, and any misbehavior on their part will reflect on their whole village since they are "people from that place." In the case that the Toshao was not informed of a visitor, and villagers reported stranger(s) in the village, this generated a sense of insecurity, threats and violence rapidly grew, and people would quickly move from household to household, trying to assess the situation and ascertain what to do. During my fieldwork, there were many cases of Brazilians coming to the village looking for workers. They would come in off-road vehicles and go back with 3 or 4 teenagers and young adults. There was always the promise of good pay, room and board, and easy farm work. Some people actually worked on watermelon farms in the outskirts of Boa Vista. However, there were many cases of people who never returned, or who upon returning informed their families that they could not leave work, were not getting paid, or were doing very hard physical work in logging camps.

There was one young boy (about 16 years old), who left Tunaîmî with the promise of working in Boa Vista. Upon arrival, his employer said the labor contract had changed, so they would send him to Manaus. Arriving in Manaus, he stayed in a nice hotel for four days, then got on a boat. After a few days on the river, he found out by talking to other passengers that the boat was going to Colombia. He worked in a logging camp with other Amerindians from Brazil, Guyana, Peru, Venezuela, and even

Suriname. The workers were always being watched by their employers. One day, in the middle of the night, he managed to escape. He arrived back in Tunaîmî about six months after he had left with this amazing story. I heard many similar stories in which Amerindians were tricked with the promise of a good salary and easy work, and they ended up in indentured servitude and in slavery. This practice closely resembles the acquisition of labor for Christian missions and during the rubber boom (Hemming, 1978a, 1990; Santilli, 2002, 2014; Wilckens, Ferreira, Amoroso, & Farage, 1994). Today women are also included in the trafficking of persons for labor. They become sex workers in the mines and even in Georgetown, where they are locked in brothel rooms. Men end up in very remote regions, where they are overworked, underfed, and under constant watch.

Today, the movement between Georgetown and the interior is significantly improved since 20 years ago, where the fastest route was a cattle trail expanded in the 1920s to transport the Rupununi cattle to Georgetown. In 1995, the Brazilian company Paranapanema³⁵ was contracted to build a road along the same trail. This was an attempt by the Brazilian government to connect its interior with the Caribbean and its export markets (MacDonald, 2014). Before the road was built, whenever villagers

³⁵ Paranapanema is the same company that built the road from Manaus to Boa Vista in the 1970s. For more information on contact with the Waimiri-Atroari group, see Baines 1993, 1994, 2000.

from Surama³⁶ needed to go to Georgetown, they would take the Buruburo River to the Rupununi, then the Essequibo. It took about one week to arrive in Georgetown, and two weeks to come back upriver to Surama. Therefore, they preferred to go to Lethem. Most of the materials sold in Lethem came from Manaus, via the Branco and Takutu Rivers (Myers & Butt Colson, 1993). Today, there is more free movement between the interior and coast. However, the presence of the State, in the physical form of people working in the government (police, armed forces, or local administration), is extremely minimal, taking into account the size of the region and its population. Thus, the government of Guyana relies on data produced and provided by Village Councils. Another function of the Village Councils is to assist the government in the execution of particular development projects (e.g. agricultural projects, capacity development, etc.), therefore Village Councils and village leaders are constantly traveling to Georgetown to attend meetings, workshops, and other sorts of training. In this way, the government not only imposes on Amerindian communities the duty and responsibility of formally documenting all relevant activities of individuals in

³⁶ Surama is the Northern-most Makushi village in Guyana, at the Southern limits of the Iwokrama Natural Preserve. Northwest of Surama is the Cuyuni-Mazaruni region. Most villages are a combination of Patamona, Akawaio, and Arekuna groups.

their communities, but it also equates the right to traditionally occupied lands (not the idea of territories, but the notion of plots of land) to the responsibility of surveying and reporting. The government treats each community as a single administrative unit, regardless of shared linguistic, cultural, territorial, and kinship patterns. As Bruce Miller (2003) points out, Nation-States try to control their populations (indigenous and non-indigenous), thus each recognized Amerindian community becomes a unit of measurement in the politics of national demography. The need to manage populations as unambiguous units of identity, especially in situations where certain groups are granted special rights, is a necessity of the modern Euro-American State (Eriksen, 1992). The overlap between the lack of an effective governmental presence with the need for a certain kind of data is one of the reasons why the Guyanese government imposes a juridical standard on how Amerindian Villages must manage their own affairs. Another reason is that the reminder of an evolutionary thought filled with the colonialist moral obligation to "improve" the life and condition of the primitive peoples, and the pastoral need to guide and protect them, even from themselves. Finally, the lack of understanding of cultural differences may also help explain the imposition of a Euro-American model onto Amerindians in Guyana.

Political Representation

Because of political and economic pressures, Guyana's government strives to account for and survey all of its sparsely populated territory, especially in the Hinterland. In chapter one, we can witness a clear attempt to extend the juridical logic and structure present in national governments, as well as modern bureaucracy, to villages. In the General Village Meeting, the agenda had already been determined by the Village Councilors and was organized by topics. There are many issues, demands and discussions that are imposed by the MoAA, with which Makushi villagers spend a great amount of energy and effort to comply. During meetings, attendants pray the Our Father and sing the National Pledge, and most village officials are present. Moreover, each meeting has recorded minutes, and participants have to correct and approve minutes from the previous meeting. Although some of the prescribed juridical forms and elements are present, these logics and structures fail to adhere completely to the effervescence of sociality in the room, as well as that within the village itself. This can be seen in the description when people bring up issues they discussed earlier in the meeting, and even in previous meetings. This creates a non-linear argumentation analogous to their idea of synchronicity, Makushi pedagogy and narrative strategies (see chapter six). To the

Makushi, there are also no polarities between public and private, and domestic and political as they are represented in Euro-American terms (Strathern, 1988). Following Makushi narrative strategy, villagers also talk about facts they know from personal and direct experience. No person will represent or speak for someone else, since no one can claim to know that which the other person knows or feels. In other words, there is no representation, no alienation of will (P. Clastres, 1987). This impossibility of alienation also operates against the first of the many functions that the Amerindians Act attributes to Village Councils, which is to represent the village. The impossibility of the alienation of will is more clearly exemplified and explored in the next section.

Makushi Aesthetics of Being

Determining what the village rules were was one of the impositions of the Amerindian Act. I attended some of the Village Rules Committee meetings (there were meetings for Tunaîmî, Kukui, and Ka'poi, as well as meeting for Tunaîmî title land as a single collective), and these meeting were organized to discuss what matters should be regulated and how. These discussions happened prior to General Village Meetings, where open participation was incentivized. One Saturday, when I reached home after spending eight hours in a Village Rules Committee meeting,

I encountered my host lying in a hammock under the mango tree. She had her grandchildren playing around her and she was taking care of her youngest granddaughter.³⁷ She asked me what the people talked about in the meeting. I tried to summarize all the rules, the most polemic topics of discussion, and some of the compromises and decisions people had made in the meeting. One of the most polemic issues was fishing with poison, since the poison suffocates all fish in the pools and creeks where it is used. It kills the small species of fish, and the fry of large species that seek refuge in the headwaters until they are big enough to swing back to larger rivers. Fishing with poison is now frowned upon, and one of the causes of that are the discourses on environmental protection, mainly spread amongst Amerindians by international NGOs.

Once I finished telling my host the points from the meeting, she looked at me, smiled, and said while giggling: *"This is not new, meetings for the village rules. They are talking about it for over three years now. But no one will respect it."*

³⁷ Her son married a Makushi woman from a neighboring village whose parents were forcing him to work on their farm, or else give them money to buy goods in Lethem. This was causing a great deal of friction in their union, and my hosts told me the wife's parents were drunkards. The father was now a Councilor and former village Toshao in their own village. But they mistreated their grandchildren, and left them alone and hungry, so every time the son came to visit his mother, he would bring his two children along with him. Her son's wife also had an older child with another man. That son would stay behind with the wife's parents, and rarely came to Tunaîmî, even when the young couple came together with both of their children.

If I want to poison, I poison. If they [someone] want to do it, they will do it."

The Makushi are excellent fishermen and have three different fishing poisons. They are made from different plants, and each produces a different effect, and therefore it is used in a unique way. The Makushi also acknowledge the predatory effects of fishing with poison, and do not use it during the spawning season. However, when they use poison, they catch and eat all the kinds of fish that surface, including species they normally do not eat. They would eat them because they were killed by their actions, and not doing so would be an act of spoilage. Wastefulness in Makushi society is always avoided and is considered a moral violation. It is a violation of their aesthetics and it is talked about as being something ugly. Overconsumption also fits into the same category as wastefulness, thus considered not a proper way of being. The moral ideal of the beauty of being for a Makushi person has to do with maintaining a constant balance and appropriateness in all aspects of life. One should not talk too little or too much, eat too little or too much, have too much hot pepper or not enough, sleep too much or too heavily, drink too much or too little water, etc. (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). So, in this constant moral imperative of seeking balance, any catch obtained by poisoning should be shared by many people. The number of people would depend on the

quantity of different fish gathered. Men and women fish with poison, and they share their catch with their households and in-laws. The number of in-laws invited would also depend on the quantity of fish. It is also considered ugly to invite people and not give them enough food to eat. In any event, there should be enough food to satiate one's hunger, but not so much that there are leftovers.

The statement "If I want to poison, I poison" points to the absurdity of the idea that a written rule (law) will govern one's actions. My host knew all the kinds of fishing poisons, how to prepare and use them, and during her lifetime had participated in many fishing activities where poison was used. She also knew how devastating poisoning of the water could be and that it killed indiscriminately - it kills small species of fish and young individuals of larger species. She also knew where the different species of fish would spawn and when. Nonetheless, all this would already be accounted for in her own decision of whether or not to use poison, and with whom she should share the fish that were caught.

Another example of this ultimate individual freedom is expressed in the Health Worker's actions in relation to his use of Tunaîmî's water supply. Although there were clear rules about when to use the water, he acted with the interests of his own

family in mind (see chapter one). However, the social consequences of fishing with poison and controlling the distribution of water were very different. Fishing with poison is almost always a collective activity and the spoils would be shared with all participants. The results of the Health Worker's actions could not be shared with others, and also restricted others' access to water. Therefore, the Health Worker was considered selfish and was not invited to partake in collective activities such as farming, harvesting, and processing cassava. All those who participated in these activities received a share of what was produced from the owner of the farm. This is part of the network of substance exchange that results in producing the human body and the position in the realm of social relatedness that each one occupies. The Health Worker had a limited network, and lived almost exclusively from the salary he received from the government. To most Makushi in Tunaîmî, the Health Worker was from the village, but at the same time an outsider. He was the "odd one out," and his presence was tolerated because of his position as the Health Worker.

Kinds of People

Even as the Village Rules regulate against certain activities, a person does not feel morally obliged to follow such

rules. Acting or not acting is ultimately an individual decision. In the same way that people may choose to respect the Village Rules at one time, at another they may break the same or different rules. Moreover, a Makushi person can do this without identifying any intellectual contradiction in his or her actions. In the end, the most important aspect of living in a Makushi village is how you relate morally with others. This points to a problem in Clastres' definition of chiefdom, or leadership. Clastres defines leadership in terms of a group that appears to have a fixed and stable composition (1987, 1994). In his definition, the chief is the receiver of women and the giver of objects, but ultimately he is a hostage of the group (Ibid.). This is not necessarily the case among the Makushi, since it is hard to define what "the group" is in the village. Makushi use the suffixes *-go* or *-ko* to indicate a group of people from a certain place, and *-gon* and *-kon* as pluralizers.³⁸ The name of a locality is the word stem to which the suffix is added. For example, Tunaîmî people are *Tunaîmîgo*; Ka'poi people are *Ka'poigo*; and Kukui people are *Kukuigo*. This is also reflected in many ethnonyms used for groups in the region. For example, Ingariko in Makushi is *Ingiri'yako* (*ingiri*: bush; *-ya*: suffix to indicate locality, as in 'the place of'), or "the people who

³⁸ These are pluralizers of categories and inanimate singulars. Animate categories use *-yamî* as pluralizers. For example, *pemongon'yamî* (persons).

live in forested places," or simply *bush people*. Anthropologists know that in most cases, the name of a group is not necessarily the name persons from the group use to identify themselves. Ethnonyms are normally given by outsiders who categorize the others based on their appearance, social practices, or place of residency. The members of a group tend to call themselves "people" or "real people," in relation to the other sorts of people out there in the world. For example, Magaña (1982), gives a list of the Arawak and Carib ethnonyms used in Northern and Northeastern South America. Among them are the *aku:si:yana* (*aku:si: agouti*;³⁹ *yana: people*) "men not taller than acuchies and whose language had only one sound" (Ibid.) and the *paki:ra:yana* (*paki:ra: collared peccary*),⁴⁰ "people who wandered day and night, had no fixed place of residence and, like the peccaries, fed from everything" (Ibid.). The Makushi called themselves *Makushi: makushipe uîrî* (I am Makushi), but do not know, and do not care, what *makushi* as a word may mean, in the same manner as *ingiri'yako* means "bush people." Perhaps it could be an ethnonym originating from another Carib-speaking group and the Makushi took it as their own sometime in the past. The Makushi also tell the story of very fast runners from the tribe of the *Parawian*. They lived around a big lake and could traverse great

³⁹ *Dasyprocta acuchi*

⁴⁰ *Tayassu tajacu*

distances. They always ran from place to place. Older and more recent accounts do mention the *Paraviana* (the Brazilian Portuguese equivalent of the ethnonym, but there are many variations of the term in historical accounts) as a large and predominant group in the savannas, but who had disappeared long ago (Koch-Grünberg, 1917, 1923, 1924; Lobo d'Almada, 1787; Ribeiro de Sampaio, 1825; Schomburgk, 1841; Stradelli, 1889). The Makushi today do not know what Parawian means, only that it was a group of people who ran fast. There are other kinds of people such as *tunabarigo*, the water people who live in the mirror image of our world (see chapter six); *ramonogo*, flatland people (savanna people); *mo'naiko*, mountain people (in the Surumu river region); *pishawogo/pishawoko*, forest people; and *yaio*, hunting people. All variations of these names appear in the literature mentioned above, as well as in the documents presented by both England and Brazil during the boundary arbitration (Brazil, 1903; Great Britain, 1903), but only a few are used today.

Makushi is an umbrella term, but many of the different terms are still in use as collective identities by the "Makushi" people. For example, *mo'naiko* was the term used by the Amerindians in the Kanuku mountains. Many old people told me today they called themselves Makushi, but their parents actually told them they were *mo'naiko*. Myers (1993) and Koch-Grünberg (1917, 1923, 1924) observed the use of *mo'naiko* as an ethnonym by local

Amerindians in the first quarter of the 20th century in Takutu region. Myers derives the ethnonym from the Makushi word for twin *monoi'* (*monoi'yamî*: twins). Therefore, *mo'naiko* would be the persons from one's double. However, the ethnonym actually derives from the word *mo'*, which means worm. *Mo'naiko* thus refers to "those fished with worm." So the story goes that there was a man fishing with hook and line on the Surumu River. He had worms as bait. He felt a big tug on his line and when pulled up, he had caught another man with his hook. The man told the fisherman: "You caught me with worm, brother-in-law!" The fisherman removed the hook from the man's cheek, and brought him ashore. He looked good, but had pointy ears. The fisherman brought the man to his village, where he got him a wife. The man never left, and their descendants are the *Mo'naiko* people. The people fished him with worm. *Pishawoko* also derives from the Makushi word *pisa* (bowl). They say the *Pishawoko* all lived in one collective house and ate out of a single large bowl, hence the name.

What we can see from the General Village Meeting (chapter one) is that there is no clear line of group association, but that it tends to follow kinship ties. They are all *Tunaîmîgo* since they live in *Tunaîmî* title land. Nonetheless, some people are also *Ka'poigo* and others are *Kukuigo*. These differences emerged at times during village meetings, which mark differences

between groups of peoples and places of dwelling, even as their kinship network reaches all three villages, and at times even Jamaica and Tatu-bola. During the meeting it is possible to also see closely related people putting themselves in opposition to one other. Yet at the same time, they can also come together in opposition of another kin group that is farther removed.

Politics and Kinship

The favoring of specific persons in economic and exchange transactions not only strengthens the kinship relations between them, but also creates them. The Makushi kinship system is Dravidian and most of the terms used to address others are kinship terms. Men, for example, always use *ya'ago* (brother-in-law) when interacting with someone from the same generational level who is not their brother. This not only recognizes an equity between them, but creates a kinship relation with that person. It situates them in a specific kinship position in relation to others as well, a position that creates reciprocity. Another term used when addressing people is *yumba* (kin) and *younbaya'mî* (kin persons). These are used to address large gatherings (such as a village meeting) where a similarity is marked, but without imposing specific reciprocity. *Youmba* is a "well know person," or a friend, because he or she is also kin to the speaker. It is

different than the word for ally (*kalumbey*), which is in fact a stranger (*karan*) that is not an enemy (*yeyaton*).

In addressing someone with a specific kinship term, the persons are inserted into the kinship structure following the ramifications of whatever kinship position is being used. However, this position is never fixed, but contextual. For example, when I arrived in Tunaîmî I was inserted into the kinship context of one particular family. They were my reference point, and how other villagers saw me in the context of Tunaîmî's realm of social relatedness. For all purposes, I was the categorical son (*mîne*) of this family. However soon after I had arrived, the couple got jobs at a ranch close by and left the village, and instructed me to look after their house. Soon after, I became very close with one of my neighbors, a man who was about 20 years older than me, whose oldest daughter was about my age. His wife was the oldest daughter of the couple who received me at first.

My male neighbor and I visited each other's houses, and I frequently ate at his house. He occasionally had coffee and biscuits at my place, but these were not considered real food. I worked on their farm with the rest of their family, and in return I received oranges, grapefruits, and farine. They occasionally gave me salted fish, and in return I gave them over-the-counter painkillers and other remedies that I had brought

with me. I was considered the youngest son since I had no farm of my own, no house, no children, and my wife was far away. A few months into my research, the owners of the house I was using came back, and again that changed my position in the kinship structure.

I had become the categorical son of this second couple as well. But, my first categorical parents were parents and in-laws to my second mother and father respectively. So I was both a son and a brother-in-law, a younger brother and a son, but never at the same time. The position I occupied always depended on who was present in the relationship (children and siblings of either couple) and what sorts of activities I was doing with them. The variation on these elements determined my temporary position in the kinship structure. Therefore, even kinship positions between parents and children are contextual and can change if not reinforced by the exchange of substances through sociality (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). The kinship structure is permanent, but the persons occupying certain positions vary depending on how they relate to one another in a particular context.

Kinship relations are constantly being constructed and remade by the daily practices in and outside of the village. Depending on the actions and goals of the persons involved in each interaction, some relationships can be brought into the

foreground while others are pushed into the background. Of course, this does not mean that all actions are preemptively thought out in order to produce gain or profit. There is a moral and ideal way of interacting with others, and using the appropriate kinship term is important. These terms mark the position and set the stage for kinship obligations for the persons involved. These relational positions are even used when the Makushi interact with oma' and oma'gon (plural form). *Oma'* is the word for other-than-human beings and persons. It is incorrect to translate *oma'* as animal or non-human. *Oma'* refers to desires and conceptions that go far beyond the scope of ugliness in the Makushi moral aesthetics of being. As discussed earlier, this aesthetics is based on a sense of appropriateness and balance. Any deviation from the normal curve would be considered ugly, but to *oma'gon* the deviation is the norm. Their desires and actions are what makes a being into *oma'*. Humans can also become *oma'* by constantly acting outside the standards for beautiful being. Nonetheless, *oma'gon* are still people and have their own perspective of the world. And all *oma'go* prey on the Makushi or take advantage of them. In this context, there is a clear predatory perspective logic at play (Lima, 1996, 2005; Viveiros de Castro, 1992, 1996b).

The Makushi also use kinship terms with domesticated plants (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015; Daly, 2015; Rival, 2012). These

terms mark a feeding and dependence relationship. The Makushi feed the plants certain inedible foods, to in turn eat the children or the offerings of their plant-kin. It is an exocannibalism or a delayed exchange of non-edible foods. Each party is giving to the other a food it does not eat, but that the other can eat. In such a way, one could even extrapolate that it was the Cassava Mother who domesticated people, by teaching them how to plant and process cassava. In chapter six, I mention how the kin relationship is used to produce *muran* and the associated kinship obligations in the *muran*-person relationship.

Losing Face

The Makushi are always careful and aware to not shame people. Another example in the meeting that illustrates this point is Jeremiah's comment and question after the Secretary reads the minutes of the previous meeting. Jeremiah notices the minutes mark the late arrival of the Toshao. He then asks: "Did he and his wife have a fight and he couldn't come?" Jeremiah himself admits to not having been present at that meeting, but he does not problematize his own absence, and no one else does either. Jeremiah individualized the village leader and even suggested a quarrel between the latter and his wife. The Toshao responded to his question in a manner that any Makushi would deem correct. The former explained that he was addressing a

domestic violence situation regarding another couple. It is important to point out he did not name the couple. Although cases of domestic violence occur from time to time in the village (where both women and men are victims), the Makushi believe these events are already too ugly in and of themselves for the people involved and the village as whole. In that way, acts of violence and other behaviors considered inappropriate are not openly discussed. Instead, they are talked about in the privacy of the household, without an audience around. Speaking of these actions maintains the memory of their ugliness fresh in people's minds, which in turn produces an unpleasant sentiment. It makes people feel sad, angry, afraid, nervous, and ashamed. Shame is perceived as something targeting someone else, and when people talk about cases of domestic violence they are shaming the persons committing these actions. But shame is also socialized because it follows the kinship relations of its target. During my stay in the village, I heard of many other moral transgressions and even witnessed some frowned-upon drunken behavior that later would be talked about in laughter. On the other hand, the more serious moral violations were only mentioned briefly, rarely, and amongst close family members.

Deconstructing the Individual

There were many instances in which some structures at play underscored and differentiated a particular person from the group. In all these events, there was always a subsequent action that brought the focus back to the collectivity as an undifferentiated mass. This deconstructed the idea of a singular individual or a group formed by the sum of autonomous individuals. One of these instances was during the school graduation ceremony. During graduation, the Headmistress called each class to the front of the room, organizing them side by side before the audience. The audience was composed of other students, teachers, parents, and their friends and family. Nearly the entire population of Tunaîmî was present. Each graduating class was called up and walked to the front of the audience. The students kept their heads down, wobbled from side to side, and kept exchanging quick glances at each other. They avoided the audience's gaze. The Headmistress called every student individually, and one by one they left the line, walked to the Headmistress, and grabbed their diploma from her. But they were being called based on the grade of their final exams. The grades were also mentioned after their names were spoken. The walk to and from the Headmistress was brisk, and the students barely looked towards the audience. Not all students from each class were called out. The ones not

called did not get a passing grade on their exams and would have to repeat that grade.

The graduation ceremony not only publicly marked a cohort of students, but it also created a hierarchy amongst them. But interestingly, as soon as an entire group of students had received their diplomas, the Headmistress explained that a student who received the highest grade was not necessarily the best student in the class. The reason was that the graduation grade was based on their final exams, and students could have been nervous during the exams, thus affecting their performance. Other reasons were also given, such as lack of sleep, anxiety, sickness, fatigue from working on their family farms, as well as a lack of studying. At the end of the ceremony, the Headmistress announced how many students passed, how many failed, and how many would attend secondary school in the village of St. Ignatius. St. Ignatius had a boarding school for all secondary students from the villages in the South-Central Rupununi region. In relation to the students that failed, the Headmistress said they were not worse than the rest of the class. They only failed because of their performance on the exam, but they could be even smarter than the graduating students.

This example is interesting because is not only a matter of losing face or shaming, but a reaction to the construction of the individual. The educational system and the graduation

ceremony in Guyana are inherited from the English. The results from the Common Entrance Examination, which is taken at the end of primary school, are used to grant scholarships in the country to the most prestigious schools in Georgetown.

During the colonial era, as it is today, Guiana was economically and racially stratified. After its independence in 1966, instead of starting anew, Guyanese society reproduced the same structures and policies that had subjugated most of its population before. Thus the racial and economic hierarchy still exists, but without the presence of the white European as a racial category. Although there have been great changes in the education, political, and social aspects of society, which entailed a universalization of services and rights (Ishmael, 2012; S. N. Jackson, 2012), there are still structures in place to maintain a society divided and qualified in terms of race and class.

The example of the graduation ceremony in Tunaîmî is the manifestation of a set of social values that prevents the establishment of hierarchy and structural stratification. It is quite fascinating to observe how teachers and students understand the logic of the education model put in place. But they also undermine its hierarchy-building properties and disassemble the hierarchy when it is established. We can observe this in the words of the Headmistress, as well as in the behavior of

the school children. They felt uncomfortable being the center of attention, being the target of everyone else's gaze. After receiving the certificate of graduation, the apex of the school individualization process, many walked or tried to walk towards the audience to regroup and sit with the rest of the school children. The students were under the spotlight, atomized, and individualized in a strange, discomfoting, inebriating, and even a dangerous way. The danger of this position lies on the fact that as individuals, they were ripped from the realm of social relatedness that made them one of Tunaîmî, a *Tunaîmîgo*. They had to be redirected to the front, back into being the target of the group's gaze, but with jokes and laughter from parents, friends, teachers and other students. The jocular tone and laughter were ways to ease their anxiety and to bring the students back to the nurturing relations of the group (Brabec de Mori, 2013; Overing, 2000; Rosengren, 2010; Schererger, 2005). The audience was laughing with the students, and not at the students. The same Headmistress who marked the hierarchy amongst the students by calling one-by-one based on grades erased it by stating that grades were not that important. This is a rite of passage that reinforces the notion of a nurturing group by individually removing persons and contrasting their individual singularity vis-à-vis the group relationality. In

the end, these individuals were reincorporated into the undifferentiated whole of the community.

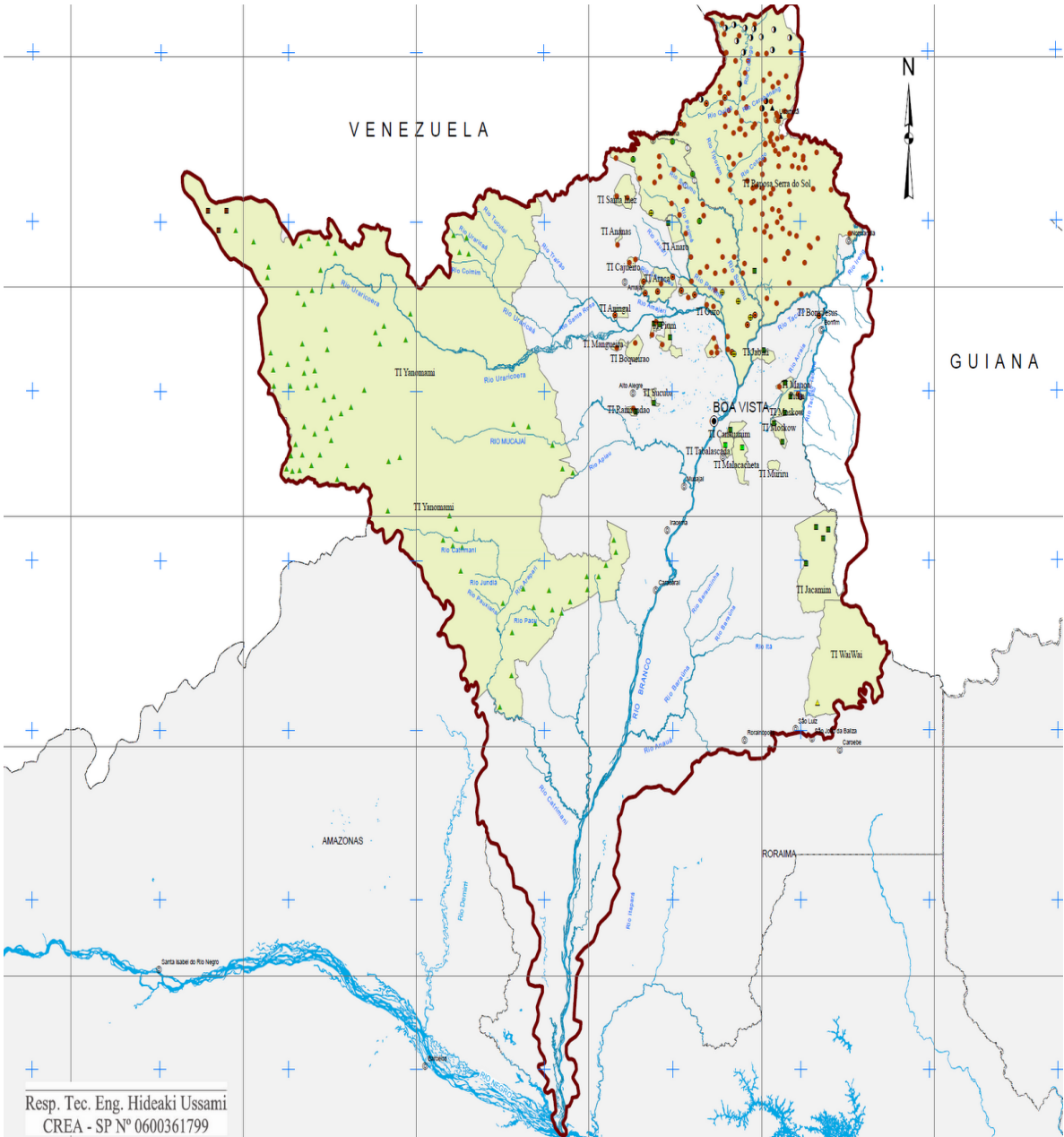
Land Demarcation

The demarcation of Amerindian titled lands in Guyana was done by assigning small plots to Amerindian communities. Many of the land surveys only asked where the groups lived, and assigned a perimeter to the clusters of houses. The government was either aware at the time, or did not care, about Amerindians' seasonal use of a vast territory. The assignment of small areas of land to Amerindian communities is what the indigenist movement in Brazil refers to as "island demarcation" (*demarcação em ilha*). In these situations, most villages' traditional territory is outside of their titled land perimeter, and this endangers their economic and cultural survival.

The Brazilian *Terra Indígena* (Indigenous Territory - TI) Raposa Serra do Sol (bordering Venezuelan and Guyana), and TI São Marcos (bordering Venezuela and Raposa Serra do Sol) are multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic indigenous territories (see map 5).

Map 5

Indigenous Territories in Roraima State



The argument to corroborate this large extension of lands is that Amerindian land use needs to respect their traditional

practices and cultural ideas. The use of resources follows a seasonal calendar, and each area of their territory is abundant in one specific resource. Therefore, although they live and farm on a somewhat small section of their territory, they use a much larger expanse of land. Some of the uses include hunting, fishing, farming, extraction of resources like timber, plants, and for shamanic training. One of the results of the demarcation of territory is that villages in Brazil are much more numerous, but smaller. I argue that one of the reasons behind this phenomenon is that village fissions are still very much part of the praxis in conflict resolution among the groups residing in the TI Raposa Serra do Sol and TI São Marcos. The official data shows an average population of 102 people per village in TI São Marcos and 107 in TI Raposa Serra do Sol. The main village of Tunaîmî has a population of about 700 people, and 120 households. Ka'poi has around 320 people, while Kukui has close to 400. The total number is approximately 1,500 people, which yields a population density of 6.75 people per km². This shows a difference with Amerindian areas in Brazil. TI Raposa Serra do Sol has 1.2 people per km², while TI São Marcos has 0.71 people per km². There is no data on individual communities from the aforementioned TIs, but if we use Tunaîmî's average residents per household (5.8) we can infer that on average, the communities in Brazil have 18 to 19 households. This is close

to the upper limit of what has been described as an average population of an Amerindian community in the Rupununi and Branco River valley by Schomburgk (1841), Koch-Grünberg (1924), and Myers (1983). However, I have met many Toshaos from communities in Brazil coming from communities of only 20 to 45 people. This population configuration much more closely resembles what previous travelers encountered in the region long ago.

Final Remarks

As a recently independent country, Guyana has constructed its own identity as a nation, with its own origin myth based on the common struggle with English colonial oversight. Yet instead of changing the colonial social structures based on race and class, the new country adopted them as its own. The colonialist position of superiority came to be occupied by PNC party members. The "Land of Six Peoples" was not, as the motto stated: "One Land. One Country. One Destiny." This chapter illustrated how the Makushi have struggled and made do in a bi-racial national political system that offers little to no assistance to a small percentage of the population, which on the other hand occupies the largest sum of the country's territory. Amerindians in Guyana are the *Muralhas dos Sertões* (the Walls of the Hinterlands), to use Nádia Farage's words (1991).

The Makushi people as well other Amerindian groups in the interior have had to deal with the constant oversight and imposition of a way of being and thinking that is not their own. Rather, the way in which it is imposed is not their own. Amerindians in general are extremely capable of adapting and using new knowledge. However, the procedures and capacities that NGOs and other international development agencies teach the Amerindian population are not used in a *sensu stricto* - as they were taught to be used. It is not that there is a syncretic logic, but it is as if there were two autonomous systems that govern how people think about and do things in and out of the village. Sometimes these systems converge, other times they diverge. This contradictory duality is not a problem for the Makushi, since they conceptualize of a cosmos of interconnected, yet different and equivalent layers of existence.

CHAPTER THREE

TUNAÎMÎ PANTONI . PATA PANTONI

Introduction

Pantoni is the Makushi word for stories or history. But *pantoni* is more than just a collection of stories. *Pantoni* is also the source from which the Makushi draw meaning, since the interrelation of each *panton* that forms *pantoni* explains the world and the universe. It is in the remembering and retelling of *pantoni* that the world is constantly being created, as it always has been. The *pantoni* in this chapter focuses on Tunaîmî; these are the stories and history of the place - *pata pantoni*.

The *panton* The One Next to God was told to me by many different Makushi in the Rupununi and even in Brazil. *Paaba Mengie* is the main character of the narrative and he was the son of Magalhaes who was the founder of Tunaîmî itself. One interesting aspect of the story is that *Paaba Mengie* died three times in similar accounts as Bichiwung, who was the founder of the millenarian Alleluia religion and supposedly also from Tunaîmî.

The Journey is a *panton* which tell us about the Makushi migration from Napoleão village in Brazil to the Kanuku Mountains. This narrative was told to me by many of the grandchildren of Magalhaes, who was the leader of the group. Magalhaes was a *pia'san*,⁴¹ an Alleluia priest, and the leader of the group. This *panton* is related to Sacred Heart Hill, where the descendants of Magalhaes told me about the arrival of missionaries in the region, the many deaths during a malaria epidemic, and how Magalhaes left the mountains to settle in the savanna.

The *panton* Frog in a Jar was told to me directly, but I arrived in Tunaîmî just a few months after the events recounted had occurred. The family described were my neighbors, and the mother was my classificatory older sister. My brother-in-law was one of the great-grandchildren of Magalhaes and also related to Luis, the main character in The Smell of Spirits. My brother-in-law was the minister in one of Tunaîmî's church, and he constantly mentioned that only God could save us from evil. However, Luis was my brother-in-law's father's brother, so the latter was conflicted about his familial relationship with the spirit world and his own beliefs in Christianity.

The Smell of Spirits is my own account of Tunaîmî's *pia'san* at work. Luis was a very old and reserved man. In my first

⁴¹ Shaman.

interaction with him, I had my voice recorder, fresh batteries, earphones to check the microphone level and his willingness to talk to me. We talked for about two hours about his training and experience as a *pia'sa*. When I arrived back home, I wanted some assistance in translating the songs he sang to me. To my surprise, the entire memory of the digital recorder was blank. The people around tried to come up with possible reasons why there was no recording: the batteries had died, or the recorder was too far away, or I had not pushed the record button, etc. I had good answers to all of them and an eyewitness who confirmed the recorder's red light being on throughout our entire conversation. At the end they laughed and said: "That is the *pia'san*. That is Luis. Only he can do this."

The Cheating Wife and the Jealous Husband is a well-known *panton* which I heard versions of in different villages. Their differences were mostly in the style of telling the *panton*, and I composed the narrative in a way that incorporates the different versions, changing some very minor facts in order to prevent the reader from creating a killing *muran* (see chapter six for the discussion on *muran* and knowledge's own agency).

The last *panton* is about the deadly *kanaima*. From Place to Place was told to me by a person who actually met one of the characters from the plot. The main characters were not actually from Tunaîmî, but their journeys were well known in the region.

The One Next to God

Paaba Mengie was one the most powerful *pia'san* from Tunaîmî, and perhaps from the whole Rupununi region. All of the elders and adults who knew and lived alongside the old shaman said he was able to perform amazing feats. Amongst them was cheating his own death and being possessed by angels.

Whenever *Paaba Mengie* got drunk, he had the tendency to become aggressive and would also mumble incoherently. When the mumbling occurred, family and friends would carefully take him to his hammock and watch over him, because on many occasions he convulsed and hurt himself. If he had a convulsion, they held his head, arms, and legs in place until he calmed down and his entire body relaxed again. He would then get up and wander around the compound, walking very slowly and gracefully, pointing to things and people around him. In this state, he also spoke in a very fine, high-pitched, feminine voice, and would ask everyone's names, the name of the place where he was, point to pieces of furniture and ask what they were, and inquire the names of the plants in the yard. He constantly looked around and uttered sighs of wonder and admiration. This could take up to a full hour and would normally end when he announced that he needed to leave. He would emphatically and politely thank his hosts for showing him the place as he was accompanied back to his hammock, where he would convulse one more time, then fall

asleep. Once awake, *Paaba Mengie* would have no memory of what had happened, and his family and friends would then recount what had happened and convey any message that they received when he was wandering around. They say that on these occasions, his body was taken by a *kapongon* (an angel), and that is why he had to ask the name of things around him and what their purpose was. During some of these visits, the *kapongon* would also give messages and advice to the people to pass on to other villagers. One such message was that the *pia'san* himself was going to die three times. The *kapongon* added that this was because people were not treating him right, and they would try to kill him. Nevertheless, because *Paaba Mengie* was such a good shaman, his spiritual allies would help him defeat his opponents.

The first time *Paaba Mengie* died, it was due to poisoning. He got very sick, and gradually his body collapsed due to the sickness. He died late at night, and his family mourned and cried all night. However, as the sun rose on the following day, so did *Paaba Mengie*. The second time he died, he was attacked on a village path and struck in the head. Other villagers found his bleeding body on the side of the road. They brought him home, but his body was already cold. However, in the middle of the night, as some people were mourning him, he came back to life. The third and last time that *Paaba Mengie* died was when he was stabbed many times in the stomach. He had already bled

out too much, and by the time they brought him home, his wounds could not be healed. *Paaba Mengie* had finally "gone dead."

The Journey

"They came from *Napoleão*. They were running away from their enemies," is what almost all the villagers over 65 years of age told me when asked about their parents and grandparents. *Napoleão* is a village located in Brazil. The people talk about fleeing to a better place, located southeast and known as *Kanukuru'ya* (the place of fertile land). During the journey, the group established many temporary settlements to rest and to gather provisions for the rest of the trip alongside ponds and river bends. Their leader was a man called Magalhaes. He was a *pia'san* and an Alleluia priest. Before crossing the Takutu River, they encountered a large expedition from the Brazilian Army and they exchanged some items with the soldiers. After some negotiation, Magalhaes received a horse-cart with metal wheels, a large amount of rations, a military uniform with a cap, a sword, and a metal insignia. The Military expedition made the leader of that fleeing group Toshao of all the territory from Boa Vista to Pirara, and all Amerindians living in that region were to be under his authority. In exchange, the Makushi leader gave one of his young sons to the group of Brazilian soldiers, who took the boy with them. After this encounter, the group of

Makushi kept moving southeast and until they reached *Kanukuru'ya*, the mountain foot of what are known today as the Kanuku Mountains. They settled there for some time, but with the arrival of outsiders they eventually moved into the forest, where they built a small Alleluia Church. They lived for years in a village called Crashwater, deep in the Kanuku Mountains.

Sacred Heart Hill

An English missionary arrived in the region in the early 1900s and built his church on the tallest hill in Tunaîmî's savanna. This was the Sacred Heart Church. There were some families living scattered around in the savanna area, but most of the Makushi followed their Toshao into the bush where they settled in a village called Crashwater, located in the headwaters of Tunaîmî creek. In Crashwater they had an Alleluia Church where every day they sang songs that God gave directly to the Alleluia priest, who in turn taught them to his people.

However, there was a dramatic change when the region was affected by a malaria epidemic. Many people died of malaria, and most of the members of the Alleluia Church got sick and died. However, cases of malaria were not so widespread among those living in the savanna around the Sacred Heart Church. The English missionary encouraged everyone to move out of the forest into the savanna, claiming they were getting sick because they

were living in the forest like animals, and because they refused the true word of God that was only found in the Christian Bible. The missionary tried to convince the Alleluia priest to move his people, but the Toshao was adamant about not abandoning his church. However, after a few more months of sickness and many more deaths amongst his people, he decided to abandon Crashwater and moved to the savanna. His followers built their houses around the Sacred Heart Church, but the missionary (who was already in the area) forbade the construction of an Alleluia Church. The Toshao also built his house on the hill and planted his mango and orange trees there. That is where Magalhaes raised his children and had many more. There is also where he died. One of his sons, Luis, became a *pia'san*. Luis was following his father's footsteps in becoming a powerful *pia'san*. In later years, he was widely reputed amongst the Makushi in the Rupununi. He was known as *Paaba Mengie*, meaning "The One Next to God."

Frog in a Jar

My neighbor's oldest daughter had died about one year before I arrived in Tunaîmî. Some people say she died of leukemia, others that she died of *muran*. The people told me they have heard many stories about how the teenage girl died, but they do not know which one is right.

Some say that people wanted to do harm to Miss Daniela. Daniela was the girl's mother, and she was also the school Headmistress. One particular old lady wanted to blow Daniela because the Headmistress had mistreated and humiliated her granddaughter at school. One day, the old lady went out to the Headmistress' clothesline and blew on some of her clothes to make her ill. However, the clothes she thought were Daniela's belonged to the daughter, and so Camila got sick instead.

Because both of Camila's parents were Christians, they refused to believe that their daughter was a victim of *muran*. Camila was sick for a while, and her condition only got worse. She suffered from constant migraines and widespread body ache. Daniela and her husband continued to deny that their daughter had been attacked by *muran*, refusing to take her to the *pia'san*. Beatrice, Daniela's older sister's daughter, was so frustrated with the parents' stubbornness that she took some of Camila's clothes to the *pia'san* to find out what was wrong with the girl. The *pia'san* told Beatrice that, in fact, someone had used *muran* against the girl, but that the original target had been the mother. She did not know how to tell Daniela and Daniela's husband. The whole family got together and went around the village inquiring from the older people who knew the good and the bad kinds of *muran*. One day, Felix went around in the village looking for the people who knew how to use *muran*. One night,

there was a drunken gathering of older people who were all making accusations against each other, saying that one person or the other was the one who had made the girl sick. No definite conclusion came out of the bickering. However, one lady who was thought to be capable of curing Camila was invited to come and see her to see what she could do. Felix was too afraid to go alone and get this lady on his motorbike, so Uncle James went along, and the three of them - Felix, James, and the old lady - went riding to Camila. Sadly, by that point, although she tried, the woman said it was too late for a cure and there was nothing she could do.

Camila continued to get worse, so the parents decided to bring in another healer from far away, this time from Suriname. Although everyone that knew the healer was staying in their house, the parents did not want anyone to see her. The only description I got was that she had gold rings everywhere: in her hair, on her arms, on her fingers. And that she was always in white clothes. The parents took the healer to try to save Camila. Camila was not staying at the Lethem hospital, but in a room in Lethem that they had rented for her while she was receiving care. Camila kept complaining about her throat. She could barely eat or swallow. The Surinamese lady found a frog inside her throat, and removed it. The frog that had been taken out of Camila's throat was put into a jar in Camila's room. Each

time any person looked directly at the jar, it was said that the frog would put its head down. Camila just kept getting worse, until one day this healer lady from Suriname said, "She has 13 days to live." She added that if the frog died, Camila would also die. The girl died nine days later.

The Cheating Wife and the Jealous Husband

I heard this narrative when I was visiting another village, in the Central Rupununi region. It tells the story of the husband who was suspicious that his wife was having an affair. All the villagers were telling him that his wife was not good, and that he should leave her. He did not believe them. After receiving too much unsolicited advice, he confronted his wife.

"They are lying to you! I am a good wife. They are jealous because we are good to each other and they want to spoil us. I am a good wife," she said to him.

He believed his wife, but people kept telling him the same thing. One day he went fishing and caught a kind of fish that has a very sharp fin. He removed it and kept the fin with him all the time. Another day he went to the farm, and when he was returning home, he saw from a distance a couple having sex in the savanna. He stood there waiting at the bush-mouth until they finished, and each one went their separate ways. Instead of going home, he went to the spot where he had seen them have sex.

He saw the butt print the woman had left on the sand, and he took the fish fin and stabbed the butt print with it. He then walked back home.

Upon arriving home, his wife said she had been okay during the whole day, but that a few minutes earlier she had started to feel pain in her legs. A few days later, she could not walk, and both her legs were covered in rashes and blisters filled with pus. She died a few days after that.

The Smell of Spirits

It was around 5:30 pm when I arrived at the assigned compound where the *pia'san* was going to beat leaves to help one of his friends who had fallen ill. Kids were running around while the adults were conversing in the kitchen area. I saw a few heads popping out of the window and looking in my direction as I was approaching the compound, but besides a few curious looks, my presence there was not given much attention. The son-in-law of the house's owner, João, was the only adult who came to greet me and talk to me. He was not originally from Tunaîmî village and, like me, had never seen a *pia'san* beat leaves. We sat outside the kitchen and started conversing, but moments later Luis arrived at the compound. One of his grandsons brought him on the back of a motorcycle and left the compound right away. We both greeted the *pia'san* who walked slowly towards us.

Luis asked me if I had brought the tobacco as previously discussed. I then gave him the store-bought plastic bag with shredded tobacco leaves that I had brought back from Boa Vista. Luis asked João to collect six branches of *whitie* leaves⁴². João came back with the branches requested, but upon inspection, Luis refused them. He told João the branches he had were from the guava, and not the *whitie* tree. He said he could beat leaves using *whitie*. João was not sure which was the right tree, so I pointed out a medium-sized tree growing on the outskirts of the house compound, just a little further from where the guava trees were. Once the new branches were inspected and approved by Luis, he informed us he was going to talk to his friend inside the house, and that we should wait for him there. When the sun was starting to set and twilight filled the open space of the kitchen, Luis came back from inside the house, and told us his friend did not want to have the procedure, so he would beat leaves just for us. We entered the building and cleared some space close to the farine parching pan. We also closed all the doors and windows. Luis told us we still needed to wait until nightfall. João and I were sitting next to one another and Luis sat six feet across from us. As the dark of night was closing in on us, Luis stepped outside the building for a few moments

⁴² *Whitie* is how the most Guyanese address species of the *ingá* genus. The *whitie* tree produces an edible fruit.

without saying a word. When he returned, he closed the door behind him and checked all the windows. He asked João for a glass of water and a spoon. João gave him a full glass of water, of which he then poured half on the ground. He placed the half-full glass next to him on the wooden bench, and reached into his pocket to retrieve the plastic bag with shredded tobacco. He filled the palm of his hand with a bunch of the shredded leaves and dumped them into the glass, stirring it for some time with the metal spoon. He told us he was going to drink the tobacco water through his nostril, and then he would start to beat leaves. He said that he would go up and a spirit would come down and talk to us. When he came down again, he would end the session.

By this time, night had already fallen, and the *pia'san* started to undress himself. He took off all his clothes except for his briefs. With some freshly picked mango leaves, he scooped the tobacco water from the glass and poured it into his nostrils by leaning his head backwards, carefully ladling the tobacco-infused water into one nostril with the mango leaf. He ladled the brown liquid into one nostril at a time. After each application, he curved his entire body inward, rubbing his nose and face and uttering a prolonged "ahhhh." This was done a total of six times, alternating nostrils each time. Then he grabbed

the branches of leaves, arranged three branches in each hand, and started to chant and beat the leaves.

The rustling sound of the leaves started at waist height and moved up, following the cadence and rhythm of the *pia'san's* chant. However, the rustling of leaves suddenly stopped when they were about to touch Luis' shoulders, and I heard them hit the ground next to him. Although the beating of the leaves had stopped, the chanting continued uninterrupted. The rustling sound returned, as the sound of the leaves moved from where they had hit the ground and moved slowly but steadily higher in the air. The sound moved just a little higher from where it had previously stopped and once again ceased, followed by the sound of the branches hitting the ground again. This process continued, but each time the rustling sound moved a little higher until I could hear the beating of leaves coming all the way from the top of the roof, 20 feet above my head. Once the leaves hit the ground from the highest point, the chanting also stopped and there were a few seconds of silence. An overwhelming scent of smoked meat filled the dark room and I heard an announcement coming from the vicinity of where the *whitie* branch had hit the ground: "*Cheguei. Meu nome é Felipe.*"⁴³

⁴³ The *pia'san* spoke in Portuguese. He said "I have arrived. My name is Felipe."

Felipe was a spirit helper who Luis brought down. After introducing himself, Felipe told us that we could ask him any questions at this time. His voice was a whisper and higher in pitch than Luis'. He also talked exclusively in a regional dialect of Portuguese. Because there was no patient who needed to be healed, and João and I were not expecting to ask questions, Felipe very quickly interjected and said "*Já vou.*"⁴⁴ The rustling of leaves and the chanting restarted, and it was just as before with the height of the rustling gradually increasing, and with a few intervals where the leaves hit the ground and started to rise again. On the last time that the leaves dropped, there was a scent of fresh flowers that filled the room completely. The smell of smoked meat was only there while Felipe was talking to us, and now there was a more pleasant sweet smell affecting our senses. The other spirit announced himself by saying "*Rebangî wai.*"⁴⁵ He then started a monologue in Makushi, but his vocabulary was unfamiliar to me. The tone of his voice was low and his speech was slurred, which made understanding him very hard. He talked by himself for about five minutes, and after pausing, João and I just sat quietly. He then said: "*Inna. Tîmbî wai youmbayamî.*"⁴⁶ The beating of the leaves started once again and it followed the repetitive, monotone chanting. The rustling

⁴⁴ "I am leaving."

⁴⁵ "I have arrived."

⁴⁶ "I am leaving now friends"

sound would come from higher and higher in the building until it suddenly hit the ground one last time. At this time, a faint scent of sour or fermented cassava tubers filled the room. We once again heard Luis, but speaking with a much weaker voice he said: "I reached." He then asked how many people had come down and how much time the whole session took. We told him that two people had come down and that it took something between 15 to 20 minutes. He asked us for a flashlight because he could not find his clothes. Using a flashlight, we could see that Luis was standing up and trying to put his shirt back on. His balance was very weak and he was constantly wobbling from one side to the other. João and I helped him button up his shirt, and he leaned on me as we walked outside. Luis sat for a while behind the house outside the kitchen, staring at no particular place. He stayed there for a while, without saying a word and without moving until suddenly he asked to be taken home. João and his wife helped me put Luis on the back of my motorcycle and I carefully rode to his house. His arms and forearms were tense and stiff, and his upper body was wobbly, making the short ride tense as I painstakingly tried to avoid the muddy and sandy spots that are only noticeable from up close when riding a motorcycle at night in the savanna. Once I arrived at his house compound, some young adults came towards us to help him get down from the motorcycle. As soon as he got down, he looked around

and asked me if he was already home. He still had the same look as if he was staring into a void or into nothingness. But this time, his reflexes and condition were worse than before. He needed the help of two adults to walk him home. When I returned home, some people asked me if Luis beat leaves for us, and what he had said and done. I told them he beat the leaves and two different spirits came to visit and talk to us. Laughing and smiling, they asked me how I knew that he was not lying, and pretending to bring sprits. I could not answer that question. They all laughed at the situation. They added that this Luis is not a real *pia'san*. The real *pia'san* was the old Luis, *Paaba Mengie*, his grandfather.

From Place to Place

He lived in a village not too far from Tunaîmî. When he was younger, he noticed that every time a particular older man visited the village, a young child died. They were all victims of kanaima, because they had vomiting and diarrhea. He did not share his opinion with anyone, but kept thinking about it, until the older man visited the village again. One morning when he knew the visitor's hosts were at their farm, he went to their house to talk to the old man. He then said:

"Uncle... I know you are kanaima. Every time you visit, a few days later someone around the village dies. I am not going

to tell anyone, but I just want to know why that is. Why is it that you kill people? If you want to kill me, you can. But I do not want to do anything to you. I just want to know."

The visitor just stood there and stared at him for a few seconds, then the old man responded:

"You are right. I am kanaima. I am not going to kill you, but if you really want to know the answer to your question, meet me at [*a location in the village was given*] in two days, a few hours after nightfall."

The young man was surprised and scared by the knowledge that the old man was a kanaima, and that he did not kill him. He went back home and thought about what the old man had said. But he really wanted to know why he killed people. Two days later, after everyone in his house had fallen asleep, he snuck out to meet the kanaima. He arrived at the place, and a few moments later the man was there. He felt really afraid, because he did not know whether the kanaima was going to kill him or not. The old man then said:

"If you really want to know why I kill, come with me. If not, go back." Then he started to walk in the savanna under the darkness of the night sky.

The young man paused for a moment... but followed him in silence. They walked all the way to a house on the outskirts of their village. As they got close to the house, the old man

extended his arm and raised his hand to his companion, signaling him to stop. He did. The old man approached the house, reached into his rucksack, and threw something inside the house. After a moment, the old man looked at his companion and nodded twice towards the house. The old man went first and when he reached the house, both entered through the window. Inside there was only a young lady sleeping in her hammock. The old man knew that her family was spending the night on their farm processing cassava. The old man took the young lady out of her hammock and placed her on the floor. He reached into his rucksack again and removed a bundle of leaves. He then worked on them and force-fed them to the girl. He shoved it all the way down her throat. He then took a piece of wood with a small transversal piece on one of its ends. He inserted that end into the girl's rectum. As he turned and twisted the piece of wood with one hand, the other massaged the girl's belly. When he pulled out the wood, part of the girl's intestines came out of her anus. He prepared a mixture with the leaves and spread it on her inside-out intestines. He then put her back together. Before placing her back in her hammock, he broke both of her wrists, elbows, ankles, and cut the frenulum of her tongue. The young man saw all this and did not say anything. They then left the house. The old man said:

"Meet me at her gravesite the night after her family buries her body," he said, and then walked away. The young man agreed, and also walked back to his place. The next morning, the family of the young lady returned home and found out that their daughter had been attacked by a *kanaima* during the night. She could not walk, could not speak, and had no memory of what had happened. Her vomit and diarrhea were green. They called the *pia'san*, but he said that there was nothing he could do. He added that she was going to die in a few days. The family was very sad, and did not understand why someone would attack her. "She was such a nice young girl," the parents told people. Seven days later she did indeed die, and they mourned her. Everyone came to see her dead body and cry, and later they buried her.

The young man was afraid someone would find out he had been there on that night, but no one did. As arranged, he went to her burial site the following night to meet the girl's killer. When they were both there, the old man said:

"You wanted to know why I kill. This is why I brought you here. Now help me dig her body up."

They worked for some time to dig out her body, but it was not so difficult because it was a new grave. When they brought the body to the surface and opened the fabric used to wrap the corpse, the belly and the face were already swollen, inflated, and somewhat disfigured. The old man walked to the bush a few

meters away and cut the stem of a tall grass plant to make a drinking straw. With a knife, he made an incision around the area where the liver would be and inserted the straw there.

"Now you suck from the straw. But not too much!" he warned his assistant.

The young man knelt next to the corpse, and sucked the straw once, then twice. Suddenly he felt a rush of vitality course through his whole body. When he looked up and looked at the sky, he could see all the stars. They were very bright and colorful. He saw ten times more stars than he normally could. When he looked to the horizon, he could see far. His gaze could reach great distances. When he looked around, he was able to identify every detail of everything. He could count the leaves on a tree branch if he wanted to. And the darkness of night was as bright as day, and even more colorful. He could hear the insects chirping, the birds flapping their wings, and the sound of branches snapping under the footsteps of large animals in the bush. The old man also sucked from the straw twice. He called his apprentice to follow him as he started to walk in the savanna.

"We can also take the body of animals. When you find a footprint, take off your shoe and place your foot on top of that footprint," said the old man.

The young man looked around until he found the footprint of a fox. He followed the instructions and the instant he placed his foot on top of the footprint left by the fox, his perspective changed in a flash. He was close to the ground and the sky was even more colorful than before. He smelled the sweetness of wet grass from the rain that was falling far in the savanna. He then felt like running, so he ran. He ran, and ran, and did not get tired. He liked the feeling of the cold night breeze on his face and thrill of jumping over obstacles he found on his way. But suddenly he saw his body lying on the ground. It was motionless. But he could hear and smell his own breathing, and hear his heart beat inside that body lying on the ground. Next to his body there was a giant-anteater. When the anteater's gaze crossed his own, he felt a jolt and everything changed again. He carefully stood up and was in his body again. He saw the anteater also walking away, and the old man was coming towards him from the opposite direction.

"Do not worry. You are okay. While you were running with the fox, I stayed here and looked after your body. You asked earlier why I kill. This is why I kill. To really feel and be in the world. To run in the savanna, to walk in the bush, to swim in the rivers. You can do whatever you want. And once you do it, you want to do it again. But the only way to do it is as

I showed you. Now you are my apprentice, and I will show you everything I know."

The relationship between these two men continued for many more years. The old man taught this apprentice everything that he knew, and they spent many years traveling in the region, going to other villages to visit their relatives. Everywhere they visited, they killed someone in the same village or close by.

Over the years, the old man went crazy and then died. The surviving kanaima continued to travel for many more years, until he also started to go crazy. People said he would suddenly get down on his hands and knees and start running. He would disappear for hours and come back disoriented and full of cuts. Once he was fishing with one of his sons-in-law, when he took off all his clothes and jumped in the water. He dove in and stayed underwater for so long that his son-in-law thought he had drowned. But then his head came up out of the water and he had a fish in between his teeth. He eventually got very sick, and people around were saying that he was a kanaima. Villagers started to warn one of the women that their father-in-law was a kanaima, and to get better he was going to kill her. The people told her that to protect herself she needed to place a pile of ashes next to where the old man slept. She did not want to believe in what everyone said, but the old man's episodes were

becoming violent, and she felt threatened and afraid. She did as instructed, and the old man died on that same night. This is because when the kanaima leaves his body, he cannot return if there are ashes around the body. So this is how the kanaima died.

CHAPTER FOUR

DARK AND LIGHT SHAMANS

Introduction

This chapter will explore issues related to Makushi shamanic thought and shamanism. First, the chapter defines some of the practices that are encompassed by concepts and notions of shamanism, magic, and witchcraft. Eliade (1972) argues that the idea and phenomenon of shamanism is universal. Nonetheless, the term is not, and she uses the Siberian name to describe the phenomenon. The nouns *shaman* and *shamanism* have been, or could have been, adopted by many languages throughout the world. These new words are introduced in different social contexts by colonialism itself, since they were first used by the European explorers to address “primitive religion” (Frazer, 1890; Lévy-Bruhl, 1923; Marett, 1909; Tylor, 1871). Notwithstanding this historical fact, the practices and knowledge that Europeans named as shamanic already existed in that context prior to their inclusion in this new category. It is the case that many “primitive religions” might have adopted outside terminology in order to engage with interlocutors outside their own cultural context, or even to deceive such outsiders. Hence keeping some of their

true meanings and practices in secrecy and secluded from outside influence and moral scrutiny. Therefore, the adaptation and the use of terms like *shamanism* and *shaman* in a language may come from the need for a reflexive construction of a cultural idea of "self" in relation to an "other" (Wagner, 1981). The use of the term introduces a semantic variation in the phenomenon it is naming. Moreover, the use of shaman and shamanism as general categorical concepts homogenizes and dilutes significant cultural differences and practices in particular contexts. To prevent this homogenization and loss of cultural specificity, I will use the Makushi⁴⁷ terms.

A shaman is someone who is a specialist in other-than-human beings, who is able to communicate, and to travel to their dwelling place. The shaman is also someone who can heal and kill others by using knowledge provided by other-than-human beings. The Makushi call this person *pia'san*.⁴⁸ This term and its close variations are shared among other Carib-speaking groups of the circum-Roraima region. In the Makushi language, the term is

⁴⁷ Because 80% of the total Makushi population lives in Brazil, they also use *Pajé* to address the shaman. Although shaman and shamanism also exist in the Portuguese language (*xamã* and *xamanismo* respectively), the preferred terms are *pajé* and *pajelança*. The etymology comes from *pa'ye* in Tupi. The Makushi in Guyana who speak English occasionally use the noun "shaman" but prefer the term *piaiman/peiaimen*, which is an Anglicization of the native term *pia'san*.

⁴⁸ *Pia'san* is a male shaman. Females can also be shamans, but the role is considered typically male due to its physical hardship. A female shaman is a *pia'sanba* (-ba is a female gender suffix marker).

composed of the noun *Pia* with the nominalizer suffix *-san*. According to some Makushi, in the beginning of times there were three brothers: Inshikiran, Ani'ke, and Pia. Pia was the oldest and the most knowledgeable, but also the one with the weakest body. Because of his physical condition, his younger brothers killed him. But before dying, he taught others how to know the things he knew. In other words, he taught them how to access the knowledge of the beginning of times. This is also an important aspect because knowledge cannot be owned, it simply is in the world. The ones who decided to follow Pia's teaching became his people, and that is what the term signifies in its etymology.

A *pia'san* accesses the knowledge from the beginning of times, from when the demiurges walked the earth. This is done by leaving one's body and venturing into another realm, the realm of the spirits. The land and place of spirits is called *to'pata* (their place). These beings are the spirits of animals, of other humans (dead or alive), and even of places such as mountains, lakes, rivers, and ponds. When the *pia'san* is in this spiritual realm, he perceives everyone as human and is also perceived as such by other beings. In this way, he can communicate and engage in social relations with others. These relationships are analogous to the ones in which he is in his own body. But while he is engaging with other spiritual beings, the

former can also come down from *to'pata* into *anna'pata*⁴⁹ (our place, our world) and into the body of the *pia'san*. When this happens, the spirits interact directly with the people the *pia'san* left behind. This direct interaction between the other-than-human being is mediated by the *pia'san's* body. This means the *pia'san* creates a reflexive two-way channel of communication. In order to communicate with spirits, a person's spirit needs to leave his own body, and to leave *anna'pata*. Once the spirit is no longer fully connected to the body, it can travel to *to'pata*. Once there, he/she sees everyone from the same perspective and can interact with them socially. In order to communicate discreetly and intelligibly with human persons, a spirit needs to leave its realm (*anna'pata*), travel to our level or reality (*to'pata*) and acquire a human body. Once in a human body, the spirit sees everyone from the perspective of the human body, and can interact with other human bodies socially.

We can see here that the terms *anna'pata* (our place) and *to'pata* (their place) are interchangeable depending on the reference point. The perspectivist logic (Lima, 1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1996b) is clear in this process, because both the *pia'san* and the other-than-human beings see their "others" as "alike" only by taking their point of view. The *pia'san* needs

⁴⁹ *Anna* is an exclusive 3rd person plural pronoun. It does not include the interlocutor. *Uurugon* is the inclusive 3rd person plural pronoun.

to leave his body, and the other-than-human needs to enter a Makushi body. Other-than-human beings can - and do - enter other bodies (animals, for example). When this happens, there is no clear communication, because they do not share the same point of view, but the Makushi occasionally identify such events. For example, when they have an unexpected encounter with a jaguar or giant anteater in the forest, these animals are said to be dead relatives who died recently and are still sad, longing for their family members. People's spirits can also enter bodies that are not their own, but only kanaimas have this skill. Kanaimas do it to deceive, attack, and kill their victims.

The referential body/place paradigm is important for understanding the Makushi cosmology because, to the extent of my knowledge, there is no word or term in their language to address what frequently appears in the anthropological scholarship as *Spiritual* or *Spirit World*. Although they argue that the world is composed of different layers of reality, the human experience encompasses all of them. This idea of a wholeness composed of different layers is a particular trait that is not shared among all Amerindians. For example, some peoples identify distinct layers, spheres, or worlds, where their elements can be visible or invisible. Moreover, the "real" forces or agents behind the web and flow of life and death are imperceptible to people. It does not mean they do not exist, but they can only be smelled,

hypothesis for South America. That is, the religious leaders work towards the maintenance of an egalitarian society and against the creation of the State and hierarchy (H. Clastres, 1975; P. Clastres, 1987, 1994).

Abreu (1995) has a comprehensive presentation of the Alleluia movement in Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela and of how it has been perceived and interpreted in the anthropological scholarship. However, the main goal of the chapter is not to explore the theoretical conversions and diversions on Alleluia in the scholarship, to test P. and H. Clastres' hypothesis, nor to compare Alleluia to other millenarian movements from South America. The goal is to look at the religion from the point of view of Makushi shamanic thought, and through that shed light on other topics such as Makushi leadership, territorial occupation, movement, and ideas of knowledge.

Rupununi Cattle

As seen in chapter three, the establishment of the Church in Tunaîmî resulted from the new society that was being formed in Georgetown at the time and its pastoral preoccupation with the population in the Hinterlands (Schomburgk, 1841). In the late 1800s, the savanna grasslands were already being used as pasture by cattle ranchers who, although of European descent, had married Makushi and Wapishana women (Silva, 2005). When

Coastlanders referred to the first families of cattle ranchers to arrive in the Rupununi (Melville, Hart, D'Agua, and Silva), they mentioned that the first European settlers (men) took advantage of the local female Amerindian population because they were being offered to them as wives. The offering of wives is probably close to what actually happened. But the reasons behind it according the Makushi are not the same as the ones presented by Coastlanders. The latter assumed Amerindians offered wives as gifts, indicating that they recognized a superiority in the Europeans. From an Amerindian point of view, local leaders gave their daughters as wives to create a *tori-payun* relationship, emulating the same logic presented in the discussion about the Makushi *pia'san*. That put the receivers of women in a hostage position in relation to the group (P. Clastres, 1987, 1994). In this particular relationship between ranchers and Makushi and Wapishana in the Rupununi, the European *payun* had to provide material goods as payment for this bride service.

These European men also came to the region with leases titles for large expanses of lands for their cattle. These lands were alongside Amerindian territories and communities, some of which were already surveyed by England. But the cattle grazed freely and became almost wild again. They were only captured prior to transport to Georgetown. In the beginning of the 1900s, the cows were butchered in Lethem, and then transported by plane

to supply the beef market on the coast. The cows were still roaming free, and Amerindian *vaqueiros* only captured them prior to slaughter. The involvement of local Amerindian groups was imperative to the Rupununi cattle business, because Amerindians were eyewitnesses to the different herds of cattle and their whereabouts. The *vaqueiros* were Amerindians from the region, mainly Makushi and Wapishana. Because the cattle wandered through different Amerindian territories, local Toshaos had agreements with ranchers. In the Rupununi, Amerindians were hired and received a salary to work as *vaqueiros*. In the Brazilian savanna, instead of a salary they received one calf for every four calves born as payment for their work (Silva, 2005). In the Rupununi, Toshaos also receive some cattle as gifts for letting the herd roam though-out Amerindian lands. This model strengthened and reified the kinship relations between ranchers and Amerindians villagers. These exchanges were conceived of within the *tori-payun* system of obligations. One of the reasons for the success of the cattle industry in the Rupununi in the end of the 1800s and beginning of 1900s was because earlier settlers married into the local Amerindian kinship network.

Village Leader

In the section *The Journey and Sacred Heart Hill* of chapter three, we can see the strengths of Magalhaes in keeping his

group together. For Pierre Clastres, the leader is in fact a hostage of the collective and has nothing intrinsic in his person that makes him a leader (P. Clastres, 1987, 1994). George Mentore gives similar and detailed account of how leadership functions among the Waiwai people. For the Waiwai, a good leader is one who can order, convey, and agglutinate peoples' actions in a momentary cohesive social force (G. Mentore 2005). This chapter has indicated how the Makushi *pia'san* fits in P. Clastres' hostage logic, as well G. Mentore's description of the leader as a conveyer of intent. The social and dietary prescriptions and restrictions a *pia'san* has to follow constrain his ability to provide for himself and his family. But his support comes in the form of generous gifts from other villagers. Traditionally, the *pia'san* has also been the man to whom fathers wanted to marry their daughters. Once married and with grown daughters, he would also rely on the many *payun* of his daughters to live close by and pay bride service to him. In this manner, the *pia'san* was a vector through which things and people circulated. In addition, he also served as the political leadership of the village.

In 1944, Myers (1993) accounted for a Toshao named Luis, living in Tunaîmî with his male brothers and descendants. According to Myers, Luis' father (Magalhaes) founded the village. However, in her accounts they belonged to a virilocal hereditary

line of village leaders going back generations. If this was really the case, it is an exception on the kinship patterns of the region. In recent years, some of Magalhaes' male descendants have indeed been village leaders of Tunaîmî at a certain point, but they do not talk about being leaders as an inherited right.

Due to the historical context, I assume that Magalhaes' enemies were Brazilians coming from the Branco River valley or even Manaus looking for Amerindians as slave labor in the extraction of latex or even to work in the national cattle ranches in the Branco River valley. But we cannot exclude the possibility that Magalhaes' enemies were internal to his own village in Napoleão. As discussed in the section on historical demographic changes in chapter three, Magalhaes' departure could as be also interpreted as - and resulting from - an outgrowing *tori-payun* relationship. In this last scenario, the two males in equivalent structural positions (*tori*) fission the larger group in favor of kin group independence. This is a context of "pure affinity" or strangeness where there is not an agglutination between filial and afinal relations (Rivière, 1984). The leader as a conveyor of intent is inefficient.

In Makushi communities today, there is greater differentiation between the role of the political leader, the *pia'san*, and even the religious leader. Some scholars argue that this

differentiation was stimulated by the introduction of Christianity, which really took root among the Amerindians of Guyana in the last 60 years (Butt, 1956, 1960; Butt Colson, 1985; Whitehead & Wright, 2004; Whitehead, 1996, 2002).

Conquering Souls

The migration of Amerindians from what is now the savanna region of Roraima in Brazil happened throughout the 18th century as an attempt to avoid enslavement. Slave raids were frequent, and Brazilian raiders captured Amerindians to use as labor in the rubber industry that bloated the economy of Manaus during the rubber boom (Farage & Santilli, 2009; Farage, 1991; Hemming, 1990, 1994; Santilli, 2001, 2002). However, Protestant missionaries also came from the Caribbean coast to the Hinterlands to establish missions, and one of their goals was to safeguard Amerindians, protecting them from Brazilian raiders.

John Armstrong created the first mission in the interior of Guiana in 1831, in Bartica, at the peninsula between the Mazaruni and Essequibo Rivers. In 1833 he went upriver on a short trip and reached Pirara village in the first attempts to engage in friendly relations with the Makushi population. He went back to Bartica, and in 1835 returned to England. Also in 1835 Robert Schomburgk, in a surveying mission for the British crown, was requested to deliver a letter to the capital of Grão-

Para (now Manaus). When he arrived in Pirara, he wrote a letter to the Brazilian commander at the São Joaquin Fort (at the meeting of the Urariquera and Takutu Rivers, where the Branco River starts) who came to receive the letter. Schomburgk was surprised to find out that when the commander arrived, he was received with fresh meat and used Pirara as an entrepôt between the Branco and Rupununi Rivers. He also found out that the troops at São Joaquin frequently moved between these two locations (Menck, 2009).

In 1838 an Anglican mission was established in Pirara, led by a missionary named Thomas Youd. Youd visited São Joaquim, and concerns were raised by the Brazilian commander because the mission was taking away indigenous laborers from the fort, and it was also located in Brazilian territory. When Youd returned to Pirara, he found the population on alert because a group of slave traffickers had arrived at the Fort and were moving up river. For his return, Youd had taken a longer route to visit the Makushi communities at the foothills of the Kanuku Mountains. This started a series of events and legal battles between Great Britain and Brazil over the definition of the international borders, which would only be settled in 1904.

In order for a mission to be successful, it needed not only to convert Amerindians to Christianity - by capturing their souls - but also had to use their labor for the upkeep of the

mission itself - capturing their labor (Santilli, 2002). The Pirara case is an important example for the region, and perhaps the taking of Makushi labor from São Joaquim Fort was what pushed the Brazilians to question the Anglican mission and the position of Great Britain in the region. Yet the Brazilian military was sent to Pirara with the excuse that missionaries were teaching the Makushi the gospel in English (Staat, 1996). So, instead of framing the conflict on Pirara as being over the use of Makushi labor, it was framed in terms of a moral justification for military intervention. Because of Brazilian military pressure, Youd abandoned Pirara, returned to Georgetown, and ordered the Government of Guiana to take action against the Brazilian occupation of the Rupununi and the use of the Amerindians as forced laborers.

Between the advancement of the Protestant missions into the Hinterlands of Guiana and the Brazilian raids to capture Amerindian labor, the Makushi and other Amerindian groups in the circum-Roraima region were entrenched between two arduous tasks: to resist both the conquest of their souls and the conquest of their bodies.

This is the historical context in which Magalhaes and his followers settled in the Kanuku Mountains⁵¹ (see chapter three).

⁵¹ The Kanuku mountain chain runs North-Northeast from Boa Vista and it is entirely on right side of the Takutu River. There are two main mount chain that forms the Kanuku and the Rupununi cuts through the Kanunku heading South

They were seeking refuge from the expansion of Brazilian national society and the raids that captured local Amerindians forced into labor. Magalhaes was the leader of the group, an Alleluia priest, and a *pia'san*. In settling deep in the mountains, he was drastically restricting the influence of outsiders on his group. However, it is interesting to note that while they were still on Brazilian territory, the group was intercepted by a military expedition. It is not clear what the purpose of the expedition was, who was leading it, and when this meeting occurred (before or after the settlement on the international border). But the Makushi discourse of what happened in that meeting goes with *praxis* of the time, which was to bring the Amerindians in and make them allies. The leader of the military troop bestowed upon Magalhaes the title of toshao from Boa Vista to Pirara. This suggests the encounter occurred prior to 1904, when the land claim was settled by the King of Italy.

When dealing with claims with neighboring countries, Brazil always argued it maintained possession and influence over its territory, even in the absence of government officials. This influence was attested to in the legal cases by demonstrating

where its headwaters are. The location where Magalhaes and his group have chosen provides shelter from Brazilian raids because there is no way to navigate waters from the Takutu to the Kanuku, and the terrain is also difficult to travel through. An easier approach for Brazilian raiders was to follow larger rivers running North and Northwest from the Branco River.

the evangelization of the Amerindian population and its conversion to Catholicism (Farage, 1991). The idea was that by recognizing Amerindians as having a soul that needed saving, they became subjects of the Portuguese Colony and later of the Brazilian Empire. The establishment of trade routes and a presence in parts of a territory was deemed to secure sovereignty over the entire territory. This was the argument used by Joaquim Nabuco during arbitration with England. However, the arbitrator Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy, argued:

“That the occupation cannot be held to be carried out except by effective, uninterrupted, and permanent possession being taken in the name of the State, and that a simple affirmation of rights of sovereignty or a manifest intention to render the occupation effective cannot suffice. That the effective possession of a part of a region, although it may be held to confer a right to the acquisition of the sovereignty of the whole of a region which Constitutes a single organic whole, cannot confer a right to the acquisition of the whole of a region which, either owing to its size or to its physical configuration, cannot be deemed to be a single organic whole *de facto*” (Victor-Emmanuel III, 1904).

Entrenchment

The section *The Journey* from chapter three can be considered a side story to the region's main economic changes. These took place in parallel to the international hunger for latex. Amazonian rubber barons enslaved Amerindians in the labor-intensive latex extraction process. But the international market changed significantly when the English succeeded at cultivating the rubber tree outside of Amazonia. In 1876, Henry Wickham smuggled seeds out of the Amazon to Sri Lanka, Singapore, Java and Malaysia (J. Jackson, 2008; Wilkinson, 2013). The result was a drastic change in the international latex market at the beginning of the 20th century. As of 1905, the total output of the Eastern plantations was 171 metric tons, but in 1910 it jumped to 8,753 metric tons. By 1913, plantations in Asia were producing more than the Amazon region, and in 1915 the British, Dutch, and French colonies produced two-thirds of the world's latex (Weinstein, 1983).

Forced labor, conflict, and displacement of the native population were only few of the many social transformations in the circum-Roraima region as well as in the Amazon. (Albert & Ramos, 2002; Hemming, 1978b, 1987, 2008). The section *Sacred Heart Hill* from chapter three illustrates some of the impacts in the social context of the Rupununi produced by the English missionaries. England was never economically interested in the

interior of Guiana due to the lack of valuable natural resources, and the difficulty in reaching the region. Its focus was always the fertile and profitable plantations on and around the coast. Due to the fertile lands and two rainy seasons, these plantations provided two harvests of sugar cane per year. The proximity to Georgetown and positioning alongside the coast also meant managing such areas was much easier and cheaper than in locations far removed from the colonial administration. Although England was not economically interested in the Hinterlands, its society in the 18th century was concerned with enslavement. Schomburgk's reports (1841) on the Brazilian enslavement of Guiana's native population made the Hinterland and its population socially relevant to the Metropolis.

It is interesting to note how the Makushi and Amerindians from the Rupununi more broadly were doubly affected by macroeconomic interests. To their South, the rubber industry grew exponentially but it could still not supply the Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America's demand of for latex. Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples were enslaved or placed under slave-like conditions, as well as became hostages of employers who deliberately made sure workers could never pay off their debts. Enslavement and debt servitude were practices used to acquire the labor to supply the demand for latex at a low

cost. To their North, in the coastal regions, the colonial administrators and entrepreneurs had little interest in the situation in the Hinterlands. They had their lives tied to a wealthier life-style fueled by the international sugar market. The economy was also supported by the indentured work of East-Indians, Portuguese, and of former slaves. From the North, the Makushi and Amerindians in the Rupununi were affected by the lack of economic interest, but also by the moral preoccupation to prevent slavery. From the South, they were faced with the great economic interests in the region as a source and reserve of slave labor. This left the mission enterprise with no competition.

The arrival of the English missionaries in the region in the late 1800s is a response to Schomburgk's denouncement of Amerindian enslavement in the Rupununi and an attempt to establish a presence in the interior. The missions were to be a safeguard to Amerindians, protecting the converts from internal tribal wars and from Brazilian raiders. Missions in the interior also brought with them a new set of moral values and knowledge. Amerindians were capable of seeing the missions' advantage vis-à-vis the new society and a nation that was taking shape in Georgetown (Staat, 1996). The Makushi clearly identified what they could gain by adhering to these new values and knowledge, or by adding them to their own social practices. In relation to

Alleluia followers, they were not convinced by the mission's reduction attempts. They already had the words and the teachings of God, so the missions had to offer something else. *Sacred Heart Hill* illustrates this attempt clearly, since the Makushi were faced with a malaria epidemic on one side, and promises of healing on the other. But the priest claimed healing only came for those who abandoned Crashwater and converted to Christianity. I visited the area that the Makushi identified to be the place of the former Alleluia Church, and it was located one and a one half day's walk from Sacred Heart Hill.

There is a clear distinction in the places chosen by Magalhaes and by the missionaries. The difficulty in accessing Crashwater suggests the site was selected to protect and to shelter residents from their enemies (see chapter three). Sacred Heart Hill was also carefully selected because it has a panoramic view of the terrain and the surrounding savanna. One of the goals of any mission is to bring people together and to place them around the *locus* of power - the Church building. This transition was not easy, and perhaps would never have completely happened if it were not for the malaria epidemic that killed many of Crashwater's people. The minister argued that Magalhaes, as an Alleluia priest, was a false prophet. Only the minister had access to true word of God in the form of the Christian Bible. Not everyone believed in the missionary's claim, since

he never said he met God. Magalhaes, as an Alleluia priest, could make this claim. In the end, what motivated many to move out of the forest was the threat of death from a malaria epidemic.

Magalhaes eventually left Crashwater and moved close to the mission Church. Once at Sacred Heart, he tried to rebuild his Church, but the missionary priest forbade it saying his Alleluia chants and songs were not the teachings of God. Most of the people continued to sing the songs at home, but any large gathering of people singing Alleluia songs was frowned upon by the minister who would punish those involved. With the passing of the years, most Alleluia songs were forgotten, since they were no longer sung in public. The houses built on the Sacred Heart Hill collapsed, and so did the Sacred Heart Church. What is left today atop the hill are some square and round clearings from the old buildings where no grass ever grows, and very large mango trees planted in straight lines. The children and grandchildren of the settlers from Napoleão built new houses close to the fruit trees planted by their forbearers. There were still enjoying their sweet and succulent fruits, as well as their shaded shelter from the scalding sun. In visits to the old compound, an older woman (one of Luis' granddaughters) showed me where the metal wheels from the cart received by the old man rested. The people re-appropriated and continue to use the

wheels, years after the cart had broken down and the wood structure had rotted away. Eventually, the wheels also succumbed to the rust brought by incessant use, rain, traversing waterlogged paths, and the hot and humid air of the Rupununi.

Bichiwung - the One Who Met God

Audrey Butt Colson traces the origin of the millenarian Alleluia religion to a Makushi man named Bichiwung who was taken to England by missionaries (Butt, 1960). Upon his return to Guiana, he brought with him an Indian Bible, as well as a few other items God gave him, and started to preach to his people. Bichiwung said he had met God himself, that the missionaries were telling lies to the people, and that he needed to save the Amerindians by letting them know about the true word of God (Ibid.).

To better understand the social significance of Alleluia, it is important to look at Bichiwung's personal experience from an Amerindian stance. Bichiwung was probably from somewhere between the Pirara and the Takutu Rivers, since Butt Colson suggested he was from the Kanuku region and even from Tunaîmî proper (Ibid.). This means he was used to open stretches of savanna, small to midsize rivers, large bush islands, and steep mountains with thick forests. He went to work for a missionary while in the region, but later ended up in Georgetown. To reach

Georgetown, the group had to have taken the same route from the Rupununi, up the Essequibo, and finally reaching *parana*, the ocean. This was the same route taken by the Caribs on their raids, and by many Europeans in their search for El Dorado (Hemming, 1978b; Raleigh, 1848). Once in the colonial capital, Bichiwung worked for the missionaries and after some time (weeks or perhaps months), he boarded a ship to England. Let us imagine Bichiwung's experience during his time in colonial Georgetown and during his journey to England. Instead of living in a place where he knew everyone, he was in an urban center, filled with strangers, who spoke a strange language, ate strange foods, and filled the place with strange smells. His ship quarters were probably not spacious, and once again he was eating strange and unfamiliar foods. The people around him were not his kin - *yumba*. They were *karan* - strangers. Imagine a man who was born and raised in the open savannas of the Rupununi, able to see the golden colors of the savanna disappear into the horizon where the golden colors marry the blue hue of the open sky. A man who could see within the scope of his gaze a stretch of savanna that was only challenged by the dark green of the forest in Kanuku mountains in one side, the rolling foothills of the Pakaraima mountains on the other, and the blue sky above. Once he started his journey to England, Bichiwung would only see *parana* - the big water. It would be as if the floor of the world

had been taken out of existence. Below the wooden deck all was blue water, around the boat all was blue water, and even above the boat, all was blue.

Now, let us imagine spending weeks in this stage of suspended existence where even one's experience with gravity is distorted.⁵² When the trip ended, Bichiwung arrived in London, coming though the Thames River, where he probably could see all the edifices and constructions along the river as he approached the European city. The way people dressed and talked was significantly different from the colony. The cold, soggy, and dark climate of England substituted the calm Caribbean breeze. It took the place of the warm and humid air of the Rupununi. It was as if Bichiwung was in another world. And that is precisely what I want to argue.

Bichiwung's Journey

Avoiding familiar social relations and establishing temporary residence in a strenuous environment are the first steps in a *pia'san's* training (see chapter six). It is hard to speculate what sorts of foods Bichiwung consumed while in Georgetown, or even if he ate the same foods as the missionaries. But it is safe to speculate that he did not enjoy everything

⁵² I mean suspended existence in a more literal sense of the word, since everything was buoyant and floating.

that was offered to him, or even that he did not consider everything to be food. I do not want to suggest that by staying in Georgetown and going to England he experienced the same level of physical challenge a *pia'san* apprentice goes through during his training. My argument is that we can imagine this as a wholly unique and rare experience in the life of an Amerindian living in Lowland Amazonia in the early 18th century. Being on a ship crossing the Atlantic was perhaps the most difficult and strange experience for Bichiwung up until then. For weeks, the only thing he saw was the immensity of the ocean, with its water reaching far into the horizon in every direction that he looked. At night, even the familiar constellations and stars (*shiri-kîyamî*) gradually disappeared, giving way to others. The only one that followed him was *kaiwano'* ("big morning one" - Venus).

We can interpret Bichiwung's trip to England as a shamanic journey, in that it produced the same structural and symbolic changes. When a *pia'san* beats leaves, his spirit leaves his body and travels to a different context of existence which is analogous to, but not the same as, the current plane of existence. In other words, where people have their daily routine and everyday life. During the journey, there is an absence of terrestrial aspects, because the *pia'san* needs to "go up," he needs to travel to the places of spirits, and their places sit vertically above the middle layer where people live. During Bichiwung's

journey to England, he was inside a large vessel with no fixed reference point for orientation. During the rainy season in the Rupununi, one can see the surface of the waterlogged savanna reflecting the golden hue of the sunset far off on the horizon. Even then, in the middle of this freshwater ocean, one can always find in another point of the horizon the bluish outline of the Pakaraima or Kanuku Mountains, sitting majestically above the water. That was not the case for Bichiwung. There were no mountains, no rivers, no hills, and not even fixed stars to orient him.

The arrival of the ship in London following the Thames River once again emulated the movement between layers of existence. The water is a separation medium, a buffer, or even a membrane that separates different planes of existence for the Makushi. The journey from the Rupununi to Georgetown started by following small rivers and waterways to larger rivers until they reached the mighty Essequibo, which then made way to the coast. The Makushi cosmos is composed of layers in vertical juxtaposition to one another, with an aquatic layer that has a unique relational position to the rest. The water layer is a mirror image of the middle layer (and perhaps to all of the other layers as well), where the bodies of water and the water surface work as a permeable membrane separating these layers. Thus, the long journey to England could be interpreted as a long shamanic

journey. Instead of going to different layers by moving alongside their vertically juxtaposed position, a person can move by traversing the water buffer that connects and separates these layers (a more extensive discussion on Makushi cosmology will be presented in chapter six).

It is not clear if Bichiwung was indeed a trained *pia'san*, but even if he was not, all adult Makushi know intimate details about a *pia'san's* training. Bichiwung had been taught the Christian Gospel by his sponsor, but the Makushi men started to disagree with him. This disagreement became unresolvable because God had personally told Bichiwung that the missionary was tricking him (Butt, 1960). It was out of this direct encounter that God gave Bichiwung the Indian Bible, a few other items, and the songs he later taught his people back in the Rupununi.

Upon returning to Guiana, Bichiwung reported to his fellow Makushi people that he himself had encountered the God of the *paranakîrî*⁵³ (the white people), and had received instructions on how to save Amerindians from the destruction of the world. This revelation was twofold. First, it gave the missionaries some legitimacy because they talked about a God that, in fact, existed. Second, what the missionaries preached and did in the

⁵³ *Parana*: big water, ocean; *kîrî*: term designated to address different sorts of fishes that are found in specific bodies of water, a small mound that that is not flooded during the raining season, or different kinds of insect larvae.

name of their God might not necessarily be what God itself wanted. The missionaries acknowledged that they could not interact directly with God, but used the Bible to legitimize their work in the name of God. The Alleluia priests challenged the sovereignty of the Gospel and its monopoly on God's will. Others have already extensively described the nuances and the historical consolidation process of Alleluia as a belief system in the circum-Roraima region, as well as its impact on the regional political system (Abreu, 1995; Brett, 1868; Butt, 1960; Butt Colson, 1985; im Thurn, 1883; Koch-Grünberg, 1924; Whitehead, 1996). In chapter three, some of the stories give a historical context to the expansion and movement of the Alleluia practitioners in the region. Although the religion had originated in the Kanuku region, it was no longer being practiced by the time Magalhaes came from Napoleão. Today, there are only a very small number of Makushi who know Alleluia songs, and even fewer who still sing them. Current residents retell the move to Tunaîmî from Crashwater at the headwaters of Tunaîmî creek deep in the mountains. That was where they first settled when they arrived in the Kanuku Mountains.

Paaba Mengie - the One Next to God

Paaba Mengie was the son of Magalhaes. Old Luis or grandfather Luis, as he is also referred to, was very loved by the

people in the village and had two wives. In the past, the Makushi considered being a *pia'san's* wife to be very prestigious. However, being a *pia'san* implies obeying a series of social and dietary restrictions that significantly affect his ability to support his wife/wives and their children. However, the *pia'san* receives gifts from his work. The work of the *pia'san* is not only offered free of charge, but he has the obligation to help those who come to him. This is unlike works with *taren* and *muran* that are commercialized. The person receiving the assistance of the *pia'san* has a moral obligation to provide a significant gift for the latter. Grandfather Luis would sometimes receive a whole cow when he worked on a sick child or adult. Most of the gifts given were animal, salted fish, salted meats, farine, cassava bread, fruits, etc. Today, those are still gifts people give to the *pia'san*, but they also give batteries, fishing line, fishing hooks, ammunition, pots and pans, knives and machetes, clothes, and money. The Makushi gift the *pia'san* in acknowledgment of the hardship he has had to endure to comply with the social and dietary restrictions to be able to interact appropriately with other-than-human beings. The well-being of others may depend on the social relations the *pia'san* can form with the former. In the past, the *pia'san's* social importance was such that he could support two or more wives. Or in other words, the village could

support two or more *pia'san's* wives. This is another good example that illustrates Pierre Clastres notion of the leader as a village hostage (Ibid., 1987, 1994).

The section "The Smell of Spirits" in chapter three describes a shamanic ritual in which the *pia'san* (the grandson of *Paaba Mengie*) goes up into the world of spirits, and some of his spiritual allies come down into his body. My firsthand account of the event is almost identical to all other situations of beating leaves reported by other people concerning the work of Luis, or other *pia'sans*. The account in "The Smell of Spirits" is also on par with other historical accounts (Brett, 1868; im Thurn, 1883; Kenswil, 1946; Koch-Grünberg, 1924; Schomburgk, 2006). The work of beating of leaves appears to have changed very little in the region since it was first recorded, however the perception and relevance of the shaman in the political and social life of the village have changed dramatically. Many Makushi in Tunaîmî said that Luis was not really a *pia'san*, because he was not as good as his grandfather was. They accused him of lying, misinforming, and cheating by not really "going up" but pretending to do so. He was always compared to his grandfather, who could "for truth," as they say, go up and wander in *to'pata* - the place of the spirits. *Paaba Mengie* also had a small woven box with a removable lid. The box was the house of some of Luis' spiritual allies. Among them were the bark of trees, the leaves

of plants, and the bones and teeth of animals. When *Paaba Mengie* beat leaves, he left his body, and another spirit took his place. The spirits of the things in his woven box also came, and they would come out of the box and walk around the room. People could hear the crackling sounds of bone and wood hitting against each other. These were the sounds of *Paaba Mengie's* allies walking about. They also heard simultaneous conversations coming from different directions within the room, with completely different tone and pitch in their speech. They said no one could be able to put on such elaborate forgery. They also added that when *Paaba Mengie* beat leaves, the sound of the ruffling bundle of *whitie* started in the room, but it would move up all the way until it started coming from outside of the house. Then it would come down all at once, from above the roof until it hit the location where the *pia'san* was to be inside the house. To add to the truthfulness of *Paaba Mengie's* work, the Makushi added that he had died three times, and mentioned in laughter that Luis would only die once.

In the past, I was told the *pia'san* was the most prestigious man in the village. A *pia'san* had more than one wife and his parents wanted to marry their daughters to him. Amerindians came from near and far to ask for his advice, to have him heal their illness, to prepare enchanted objects and potions, as well as

to cure dark shamanic attack they had suffered. The *pia'san* was the most important protection a village had against *kanaimas*.

***Kanaîmî* - the Dark Shaman**

Anthropological reflections on South American shamanism have tended to emphasize shamans' healing powers and positive influence. But there is also the assault sorcery, which involves physical harm, pain, suffering, and sometimes even death. *Kanaimas*⁵⁴ fall into this category of assault sorcery and dark shamanism because their practice is predatory and results in the suffering and even death of their victims. To the Makushi, a *kanaima* is someone who is trained in a series of techniques to find, track, deceive, attack, and kill one's opponents and victims. Most of the academic research on *kanaimas* in Guyana was carried out by Butt Colson (2001; Butt, 1977), Whitehead (2002), and Desrey Fox (1977; Caesar-Fox, 2003). Amerindians in Guyana who met some of these scholars point out that their health issues and death were the result of *kanaima* attacks. In other words, the researchers got too close and asked questions no one should ask, or wrote about things one should not talk about.

⁵⁴ *Kanaima* is the most used term in the literature, but the Makushi word is *kanaîmî*. The Akawaio and the Waiwai words for *kanaima* are *itoto*. In Brazilian Portuguese, the word is *canaimé*.

The notion and practice of *kanaima* is widespread in the Guiana Shield region, and traverses linguistic and group identity boundaries. One characteristic of a *kanaima* attack is a delayed and painful death. Death is always the final result of an attack, and it is almost always achieved in about seven days. During this time, the victims vomit a greenish, leafy substance, as well as have greenish diarrhea. People say that during the attack, the *kanaima* makes his victims go unconscious, and makes them swallow a mixture of plants. The *kanaima* also removes part of the intestines of the victim through the victim's anus and rubs on them a mixture of plants. These are some of the techniques people openly discussed about such killers: the ability to quickly make his/her victim unconscious, use plants and create powerful combinations, and physically manipulate the human body. *Kanaimas* also use specific *muran* and *taren* to enhance their abilities to execute their activities precisely and efficiently

Nowadays, the light shaman (*pia'san*) cannot easily teach his sons or their brother's sons the old songs and rituals that would allow them to contact and relate with other-than-human beings and persons from the spiritual world. Even locating an apprentice outside the line of descent is difficult. Young men do not want to want to become *pia'sans* because of the avoidances they have to respect (especially sexual avoidances). Also, there

is much less social prestige in being a *pia'san*, which does not compensate the hardship that the social prescriptions and restrictions of the role bring to the *pia'san's* family. The main factor in this change in perceived prestige was the undermining of shamanism by Christianity. Shamanic knowledge was labeled as a set of practices from the occult and frowned upon by missionaries. Missionaries, priests and ministers introduced themselves in role of protecting communities from spiritual evildoers. To the different churches, *kanaimas* were associated with the Devil. Churches preached that believing in God, praying, and supporting the Church would provide protection from future *kanaima* attacks. God would protect the communities. Over the last 60 years, the social significance of the *pia'san* in Amerindian villages has dropped considerably in comparison to historical accounts.

Nonetheless, there is a twist on the presence and adoption of Christianity by most Amerindians. Unlike what has occurred with the role of *pia'sans*, Christianity has increased the social significance of *kanaimas* in the region. Many Makushi people laugh and joke about their local *pia'san* and note how it is cheaper at times to go to the hospital than to seek help from the local specialist or healer. But they never joke about *kanaimas*. In their words, *kanaimas* are real persons, capable of

shapeshifting, who kill for the sake of killing. Because Christianity relates the kanaima phenomenon to the Devil, the contradiction is that the proliferation of Christianity as a belief undermined and discredited the social role of the *pia'san* at the same time that it validated the violent death produced by kanaimas. However, Christianity does not offer solutions to treat the threat of kanaima, as the *pia'san* does. The Church talks about a protection of the spirit in the afterlife, or guarantees safeguards after death. Meanwhile, the *pia'san's* work is preventive of death. The Makushi still believe that only a good *pia'san* can protect a community from kanaimas but the former are rarer to find nowadays. Like *Paaba Mengie* and Luis, the knowledge and respect that the *pia'san* of today receives is never like that received by those in the past. To the Makushi, the quality and quantity of *pia'sans* of the past, in a historical context where Christianity was incipient, were significantly higher than today. Today Christianity, at some syncretic level, undermines the credibility of local *pia'sans* at the same time that it legitimizes the logic of kanaima attacks, but without providing an efficient counter measure to the latter. Villagers then refer back to *pia'sans* to protect them from kanaimas coming from the outside boundaries of the village. But these *pia'sans* are not as powerful and knowledgeable as their ancestors. This predicament leaves villagers in a state of terror, since kanaima

attacks are as real and deadly as they have even been, but the knowledge to protect the community from such evildoers is diminishing by the day.

During my stay in the village, there were three deaths attributed to kanaima. They all occurred within a period of about 10 days, and all in different households. Among the dead were an old man, a young child, and an adult woman. All started to have green vomiting and green diarrhea. These are normally the signs of a kanaima attack, since the body is purging the vegetable mixture that the kanaima applies to the victims' bodies. The mixture is introduced orally and anally (see chapter three). Some villagers related to the old man who was killed told me that he woke up in the middle of the night, paralyzed. Nonetheless, he was able to see a person on top of him, kneeling on and massaging his belly. The old man could not speak or move, but he saw the dark contours of a person on top of him, and felt the person's hands pressing on his belly in circular movements. He lost consciousness and woke up the next morning much worse than before. All three people died between 5 to 7 days after the green vomiting and diarrhea began.

My data on the kanaima phenomena corroborate the historical accounts in the academic literature. One of the differences between the Makushi beliefs and what Whitehead (2002) and Butt Colson (Butt, 1953, 1956, 1977) described about kanaimas refers

to the body of the kanaima itself and what he does to his victims. The aforementioned scholars stated that the act of killing produces a harmful heat in the kanaima's body. If not controlled, it can kill him. What they do to control it is to ingest the fluids inside the corpses of their victims after they are buried. The corpse is able to produce a cooling substance for a few days, before it is depleted. By drinking the fluid, the kanaima's body can be sufficiently cooled. However, it is not a permanent state, so gradually their bodies warm up again until they need to be cooled once more. According to Whitehead and Butt Colson, to the Akawaio and Patamona from the Pakaraima Mountains in Guyana, it is the cooling and warming of a kanaima's body that produces an intermittent series of deaths in villages. The Makushi did not mention this cool-warm relationship between the kanaima and the deceased's body. To them, kanaimas consume a particular liquid from their victims' bodies because doing so produces an enhanced awareness of the world. The consumption of liquids inside the cadaver produces a temporary euphoria and an altered (enhanced) mode of perception. I have no data on how long this lasts, but based on existing ethnographic data, it is safe to assume this state of euphoria is not permanent.

Kanaimas access this altered or enhanced mode of perception through an excessive consumption of substances by eating and feeding. As discussed in chapter two, the Makushi aesthetics of

being praises a balanced ratio of consumption, which is in opposition to the out-of-balance consumption and desires that kanaimas develop. Once the euphoria passes, kanaimas appear to return to "ordinary" levels of perception shared by most people. It is an apparent return because from their experiences, they were able to draw different meanings and learn different knowledge of the world that are not accessible in to most people from their daily activities. Nonetheless, it appears that each experience leaves a cumulative residue in the kanaima's body and mind, which over the years will take a toll. The kanaima needs to satisfy his excessive desire, cravings and hungers that only perpetuate the cycle of death. There is another perverse element in being a kanaima that will be better discussed in chapter six, which relates to his moral obligations with his *muran*. It is also important to note that the kanaima is consuming other-than-human foods (the decomposition fluids of human bodies), and in such a way is creating social relationships with other-than-human beings. Chapter six discusses in more detail how kanaimas use commensality to establish alliances with such beings. But in the process of becoming a kanaima, and creating alliances with other-than-human beings, there is also a structural change in the kanaima's position since he is eating, being fed, and feeding other-than-human beings. Because kanaimas participate in this circle of commensality, they are becoming one

of the former. Nonetheless, this transformation is incomplete because kanaimas still eat together with their Makushi friends and family. The village, community, and family to which the kanaima belongs try to stabilize the transformative properties of the body, keeping it from expressing excessive and out-of-balance desires and hungers. They do the same to every single person, since the body is never a fixed but rather an ever-changing amalgam. However, the other-than-human beings with whom the kanaimas interact are doing the same thing: they are trying to stabilize the kanaima's body to their aesthetics (other-than-human) by feeding him their foods.

Another difference is that to the Makushi, a kanaima is always a person. There are some narratives, especially among the Wapishana people⁵⁵ that a kanaima becomes possessed by an evil spirit, who allows him or her to commit incredible feats and creates a desire to kill (Baldwin, 1946; Foster, 1990, 1993). The Makushi believe kanaimas are always persons who undergo apprenticeship with other kanaimas. They have the knowledge of special *muran* that, for example, let them traverse great distances very fast, see at night, and stun their victims from a distance. Moreover, they also are trained in a series of

⁵⁵ Wapishana are an Arawak-speaking group that lives in south of the Makushi territory both in Brazil and Guyana.

techniques to avoid detection. For example, if a kanaima suspects he is being followed, he takes a little detour on his path, and then continues walking towards his destination, but walking backwards. When the tracking party reaches the detour, they will see the two sets of footprints converging in that site, and they will not know which one to follow. Also, when kanaimas find the footprint of their victims, they can use a *muran* on the footprint. This will cause pain and discomfort on the person who left it, thus reducing their pace. I am not sure if they use the same *muran* as the jealous husband from the story in chapter three, but the logic is the same. When a kanaima attacks someone in the bush, the victim starts to feel ill and quickly faints, thus losing consciousness. They wake up hours later in the same place as before, but with the assurance they were victims of kanaima. Only kanaimas attack people that way. The victims arrive home, and some cannot even speak or walk properly. They have the green vomiting and diarrhea and die over the course of seven days.

Talking About Kanaima

During the research, I did not talk to anyone who self-identified as kanaima, and no one was identified by others as such. Nonetheless, the world was filled with them. They were all around us, I was told. The logic was that "talking about

kanaima brings kanaima," so I was sure not to mention it. However, the topic frequently arose in conversation, especially when talking about old stories. I worked to establish social contexts in which people would talk about *muran*, *taren*, plants, animals, sickness, healing, death, shapeshifting, etc. Our conversations were filled with silences that I made sure not to fill with new questions. My most precious and incredible pieces of information came from questions I did not ask. At those moments, I did not know enough to ask the right questions, and as I learned more, I also learned I could not ask some of the questions I wanted to ask. Once I heard enough of their stories and the village affairs, I began to understand that many relevant points are deliberately covert. I learned about what was present in their absence by using the Makushi pedagogical method: gathering a series of apparently dissonant and incongruent pieces of information, from many different accounts, until formed a cohesive and intelligible sum. And they did.

When talking to friends, my goal was always to create social contexts that would make a subject want to be talked about, and always among people with whom I had already built rapport. In relation to the subject of kanaimas, most of my questions dealt with the victims of such attacks, and not with the trained killers, and I would only ask questions after someone else brought up the topic. By asking direct questions about kanaima,

one creates social doubt about his own identity as a trained killer. It was told to me that the interlocutor's train of thought is something like this: "Why is this person asking about kanaima? What does he want to know exactly? Does he want to hurt someone? Perhaps he himself is a kanaima!" Once again, nothing is what it appears to be, and everyone is a potential kanaima since kanaima identity is secretive. By focusing on the victims, instead of inquiring about the malevolent act of killing another person, I asked about the unfortunate situation of being murdered by someone else. This changed the focus of inquiry, also changing the focus of suspicion. But in the end, I learned about the different kanaima tactics, strategies, *muran* used, how they approach their victims, what they do to their bodies, how they shapeshift into animals, what they do with the corpses of their victims, how they socialize their *muran*, about the location of secret sites for training and gathering, and other specifics.

Final Remarks

This chapter brought important historical contexts, figures, and social roles to the fore that are present in the lives of the Makushi people from Tunaîmî. One of the goals was to see the migration to Tunaîmî within the historical context of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the economic and social pressures

brought forth by the rubber industry, cattle ranching, and expansion of the Alleluia religion. Another goal was to present and discuss the similarities between Bichiuwang (as the personification of an Alleluia leader) and *Paaba Mengie* (as the personification of a spiritual and political leader) and contrast them with the unknown killer that comes from the outside - the *kanaima*. The Alleluia priest and the *pia'san* bring people together by nurturing and caring about them. The *kanaima* breaks this cohesion by nurturing and caring only for himself and his own needs, through predatory actions that result in the death of people. Therefore, he needs to be conceptualized as an outside member of the community. Nonetheless, the mechanism and procedures by which the Alleluia priest, the *pia'san*, and the *kanaima* access knowledge are equivalent and analogous to one another. The Makushi believe the world was created by two brothers: Inshikiran and Ani'ke. It is incorrect to say that one brother is good while the other is bad. In the Makushi *pantoni*, there are moments in which Ani'ke is the "wicked" brother, while in others Inshikiran is the "wicked" one. Nonetheless, there is a structural relationship between their deeds, since one is always undoing or changing the things that the other did. Both are creators and destroyers within structurally different positions. The *pia'san* and Alleluia priest occupy the same structural position in opposition to *kanaimas*, since one undoes or

changes the deeds of the other. But both are capable of nurturing and death. Death and nurturing are only different focus in the state of being, or two sides of the same coin.

CHAPTER FIVE

WAKING UP INTO THE DREAM OF LIFE

Introduction

This chapter presents an ethnographic description of a traumatic event that occurred in Tunaîmî and its ripples in the social fabric of the village. The presentation of this account is relevant because it exemplifies a series of social relations and interactions with other-than-human beings in the Makushi's everyday routine. However, the description does not discuss some of these points from the beginning, because I myself was unaware of the interwoven human/other-than-human, spiritual/physical aspects of these relationships. I had only fragments of the whole narrative that started to make sense in the days that followed. In the discussion sections of this chapter, some of the elements of the puzzle will be put together, but most of the topics presented here will be further analyzed in chapter six.

One of my host's grandchildren played with twigs, branches, food tins, and other discarded or broken items that he found around the guava bush in the back of the house. To him, these were guns, bow and arrows, canoes, fishing rods, cutlasses, and

other tools adults use frequently. In his playtime, he was emulating the ideal representation of a Makushi man: one that cuts a farm, is a good huntsman and fisherman, and can provide for his family. He put items together with twine, pieces of rope, and balata⁵⁶ to create his own "tools of trade." He was an excellent *bricoleur*, and when he saw me looking at him during his bricolage he would say, "I am pasting it up." To make his words mine, this chapter will examine "loose" and "decontextualized" references in the ethnographic description and "paste them up" with metaphoric balata and rope to create the anthropological "tools of the trade."

Waking up into the Dream of Life

It was a warm Saturday afternoon when family and friends gathered under the mango tree on the west side of the house. Some were sitting on a long wooden bench, others on the doorstep leading to the kitchen. There was also a slung hammock, tied between a coconut tree and a branch on the mango tree. Lourdes, the owner of the house, normally lied on the hammock with one of her younger grandchildren, as the rest of the adults used the bench and the doorstep. As Lourdes moved around to do chores, her grandchildren would lie on the hammock, but would not stay

⁵⁶ Balata is the hard rubber-like material obtained from latex of the *Manilkara bidentata* tree.

there for too long. They played with rocks and branches in front of the house, ran around the yard, and picked guavas from the many trees in the yard. Lakshmi, Lourdes' daughter-in-law, was also there with all of her five children. Lakshmi's oldest child was a 14-year-old boy named Kiran. He was approximately 1.65 meters tall, his hair was straight and black as a new moon night, his skin was of a light brown color, but he had some discolored patches that spread over his whole body. His left eye was always looking in an upper left direction, so whenever he talked to someone, he never looked his interlocutor straight in the eye. Kiran was always holding up his trousers so they would not fall down. He was so skinny that his knees, elbows, and hands seemed disproportionately large. One could always see the impression of his rib cage and hipbones pushing against his skin. He was very curious, yet reluctant to talk to strangers. Nonetheless, Kiran always smiled as he conversed with others.

Everyone knew that although he was older, his mind and behavior were of a small child. They said his developmental problems were a consequence of something that had happened during birth. They were not sure exactly what caused it, but they knew it was something that happened to him at birth or in his first few days of life. Kiran took a long time to walk and talk. He was only able to do so after his younger siblings had already

mastered those skills. From a very young age, Lourdes, his grandmother, was the one who raised him.

Lakshmi's youngest child was Kogo'. *Kogo'* actually means grandmother, but Lakshmi's two youngest children were addressed by all in the village as Kogo' and Mogo' - *mogo'* being the Makushi word for grandfather - because of their resemblance to those family members. Kogo' was a very strong two year-old girl. She was a little shorter than the other children her age, but she had a wider torso and shoulders, as well as very strong arms and legs. She had short and straight black hair. Like Kiran, she was also very shy towards strangers. Kiran and I would converse for hours, but I never managed to get more than a few words from Kogo' before she ran back to her mother's skirt.

That Saturday afternoon, Lourdes, Lakshmi, and I were laughing and gaffing under the mango tree as the children ran around the house, playing with each other. One of the topics of our conversation were the different kinds of animals the Makushi people still ate. Lourdes told me that her father was a great huntsman. He was able to hunt savannah deer, bush deer, alligator, bush hog, agouti, spider monkey, capuchin monkey, howler monkey, tapir, and many other animals. Some of these animals she had not eaten since she was a child. She said it had been years since she last ate monkey and she would probably not be able to eat it now. A few years back, she visited some relatives

in another village. They offered her some food and she accepted, but after being told that what was in the pot was a monkey, she could not swallow it.

"I could not make it go down," she said.

"What if you did not know it was monkey?" I asked.

"Then I would eat!" she answered, as she leaned back and giggled.

Tapir is one of those animals that was eaten more frequently in the past than in the present. One needs to be a good huntsman to kill a tapir with an arrow, because of the animal's thick skin. On other occasions, I heard of encounters of hunters and tapirs in the bush. Many Makushi hunters are armed with only axes and dogs. The dogs scare the hogs and agouties out of their holes, as the hunters wait for them on the other side with axes in hand. When the hunters are only equipped with axes and their dogs, whenever they encounter larger prey like deer or tapir, they only acknowledge each other's presence and part ways. However, when they kill a tapir the huntsman has to blow⁵⁷ the meat prior to human consumption. If he/she does not know how to blow, someone else must do so. I asked Lourdes if she knew this blow, but she said that she did not. She also added that normally only the old people had this sort of knowledge,

⁵⁷ Refer to the *taren* section in chapter six.

and it was dying as they died. According to her, the younger people do not believe in some of the old knowledge, and they also do not hunt as much as their parents used to. Now, people are buying what they eat.

That was my case. I had bought a large piece of smoked tapir that came from a different village. The meat was a donation made to the Brethren Church and the proceeds from the sale would support its activities. Since I had some cooked tapir meat with farine, I offered some of it to Lourdes and Lakshmi.

"If you want to give, I will take" answered Lourdes as she hunched over her shoulders and with a smile looked at Lakshmi.

"I have never eaten it, you know?" said Lakshmi. I told her that if she would like to try, I would give her some meat.

"I cooked it 'good'," I said.

I gave them both a bowl with tapir meat and some farine. As Lakshmi and Lourdes were eating, Kogo' came running and grabbed the side of her mother's dress. She was pulling the dress and looking straight up, trying to catch a glimpse of what her mother was eating. Lakshmi spoke a few words of reprimand as she gently tapped on Kogo's hands. Kogo' was asking for food. I offered her some, and she immediately looked back at her mother. Lakshmi pushed her away and said "Go Kogo'. Go get some meat." The young girl started to walk toward me very slowly and, halfway from the three meters' distance between us, she stopped

and looked back at her mother. After hearing more encouragement to go and get some meat, she kept walking and came very close. I took a morsel of cooked meat and extended my arm towards her. She reached out and grabbed the piece of meat with her whole hand, at the same time that she was looking back at her mother and grandmother. After retrieving the piece of cooked tapir, she ran back to her mother and clung tightly to the side of her long skirt. We all smiled and laughed as we looked at Kogo' eating next to her mother. A few minutes later, Lakshmi and her children went back to their house down the hill. One by one, they came by and said *sabondan* (goodnight) to me and to their grandmother. We both responded to each and every one of them. This was the last time I heard Kogo' speak.

The next morning, the day started as usual. I went to fetch water from the well, Lourdes cleaned some dishes from the day before and kneaded dough to fry some bakes.⁵⁸ James, Lourdes' husband, was outside, and handpicked the leaves that had fallen from the mango trees overnight and raked the yard. Kiran was sitting inside waiting for food and drinks to be prepared. After eating, Lourdes started to clean the Church of Christ for the Sunday Service. That was the Sunday morning routine, but on this day Lakshmi and her husband Shikari came to the house and started

⁵⁸ Fried dough is very popular in the Caribbean. "Bakes" are also known as Fried Bakes, Trini Bakes, Guyanese Bakes and Floats. When it is put in hot oil, the dough floats to the surface and puffs up.

to talk to Lourdes. After about 2-3 minutes, they came towards my direction and told me that Kogo' was very sick. She had developed a high fever, accompanied by vomiting and diarrhea. She had vomited and soiled herself throughout the night, keeping both parents awake. Early in the morning, they took her to the village Health Worker who, after examining her, radioed to the Hospital in Lethem. The instructions given were to wait until the next day, and if she had not improved, they (the family) should try to send her to the hospital. Lourdes told me that her granddaughter was very sick, and that they did not want to wait until the next day. She added that they did not have a motorbike, nor did they have money to hire someone to take the mother and daughter to the hospital. I said that I would take them on my motorcycle. I just needed a few minutes to get my papers and put some gasoline in the tank. Meanwhile, Lakshmi went back home to pack and to get ready for the ride to Lethem.

In ten minutes, I was ready with all documents necessary in case the police stopped me on the road. Arriving at Lakshmi and Shikari's place, I encountered the couple and all their children outside their small zinc roof house. They built the house only a few years back, thus the fruit in the yard were either still saplings or dead. It was very different from Lourdes and James's home, which was surrounded by orange trees, tangerine trees, mango trees, coconut palms, cashew trees, guava

trees, dong trees,⁵⁹ and *whitie* trees.⁶⁰ At the young couple's house, there was not a lot of vegetation to provide shade from the sun, just a few guava trees and one still young mango tree. Lakshmi had changed her clothes, tied her hair in a ponytail, and she was wearing shoes instead of her slippers. Shikari was barefoot, without a shirt on, and wearing a pair of sun-bleached orange shorts. He wore his hair loose and it ran past his waist. When I arrived, I gave Lakshmi an extra helmet and we tied her duffle bag to the back of the motorbike. After fastening his wife's helmet, Shikari went inside the house and brought his younger daughter out in his arms. Kogo' was dressed in a white shirt and light blue pants. She was unresponsive to any stimuli and her limbs were all relaxed. Shikari handed the child to Lakshmi who held her tightly. Although she was almost two years old, they were holding her like they would a newborn, with one arm supporting her waist and back, and the other holding her head. Shikari was always a man of few words, but on that morning he was even quieter than normal. Since I arrived to collect them, he had not said a word until I was ready to leave.

"I am going," I said to them.

"Good," said Shikari, and then after a few tense seconds, he added, "Don't fall."

⁵⁹ *Ziziphus jujube*.

⁶⁰ One of the many edible trees belonging to the Inga family.

The ride took place during the dry season, which meant that that there was no waterlogged savannah that needed to be crossed, nor slippery black mud. Even so, a distance that normally would have taken 50 minutes to traverse took 90. Kogo' did not regain consciousness during the motorbike ride, but she would occasionally throw a fit. Lakshmi caressed and held Kogo's body against her own in order to comfort her. The fits only lasted for 2-3 minutes at a time, but during the intervals she would groan loudly. Halfway through the trip Lakshmi asked me to stop so she could check on Kogo'. Her skin was paler than when we left, her clothes were soaked, her face covered in large beads of sweat, and her skin was cold to the touch. Lakshmi untied her duffle bag and changed her daughter's clothes, and unsuccessfully tried to give her some water to drink. We continued the ride to the hospital in the town of Lethem.

Arriving at the hospital, we went straight to the emergency ward. There was no one at the entrance, and the hallways were poorly lit and without any indication about where to go. After asking a few people, I found the Head Nurse and explained the situation to her. She took us to another room, with four stretchers, all of which were empty. The Head Nurse asked Lakshmi what was wrong with her daughter. Lakshmi sat on the same stretcher where Kogo' was lying, with one hand on her daughter's head and the other on her own lap. Lakshmi was looking straight ahead

with her body hunched over and shoulders slumped. After a long pause, Lakshmi said that she had received a note from the village Health Worker explaining the girl's symptoms, but she had left the note in her bag outside. Right after Lakshmi finished speaking, I started to tell the Head Nurse all the symptoms Kogo' had, from the time they started to manifest and how they had developed over night. The Head Nurse looked at me with piercing eyes and with a loud, crisp, and rigid tone of voice said to me:

"I am asking the child's mother. You are not the child's mother. I want her to tell me."

The Head Nurse asked once again about the child's symptoms. Lakshmi was even more hunched over than before, her voice was almost inaudible. Without looking at the nurse, she said that she could not tell what her daughter had, that she did not know the words, and the she had to take the note from the village Health Worker. The Head Nurse asked her to go and retrieve the note. Lakshmi retrieved her duffle bag, sat on the stretcher, and was looking for the Health Worker's note. The Head Nurse stood next to her, motionless, looking down at the mother's struggle to find the note. Once Lakshmi found the piece of paper that the Health Worker had given her, she tilted her head down holding the note in her hand, and then extended her arm towards the Head Nurse. Lakshmi, with her body hunched over even more

than before, and as if looking into a void, said she could not read. After reading the note, the Head Nurse called another male nurse and a physician to look at Kogo' (the note said that Kogo' had diarrhea, vomiting and fever, and that she was taken to the village health post at 9 o'clock in the morning).

The physician asked the nurse to undress Kogo' and leave her on the stretcher. He took her temperature and her heart rate. As she lay there, she groaned constantly. Her skin was pale, her breathing was accelerated, her abdomen contracting inharmoniously, and she was uncontrollably flailing her arms and kicking with her legs. They gave her a cold bath and she was towel-dried. Lakshmi dressed her in a new pair of panties. They frequently monitored her heart rate and temperature. After a series of injections and about 15-20 minutes, she calmed down. She was no longer groaning, no longer waving and kicking her arms and legs, no longer throwing fits. But her forehead was covered in large beads of sweat, her breathing was accelerated, her heartbeat was rapid, and her whole body was cold to the touch. Throughout this entire time, Lakshmi sat next to her daughter, but was told not to interfere. When the physician and nurses said she was stable, they allowed the mother to touch her daughter once again, and Lakshmi started to run her hands along her daughter's arms and legs, massaging the child's body. The doctor left with the male nurse and only the Head Nurse

stayed with us. She told me that I could leave. But before I left, I asked her what diagnosis they had reached. What was Kogo' being treated for, and how long would she be in the hospital? She looked at the patient form and told me that the child had moderate dehydration, and that they would keep her in the hospital for as long as was necessary. She also told me that she knew Lakshmi, but it was the first time she had met her youngest daughter. The Head Nurse was Lakshmi's mother-in-law's brother's daughter and had grown up in Kukui. She told me she knew Lakshmi's husband Shikari better than she knew his wife. The Head Nurse had a mellow tone of voice, and was always smiling as she told me of how she fit into the kinship network of Tunaîmî. Meanwhile, Lakshmi had not left her daughter's side. She was still next to Kogo', running her hands from her daughter's shoulders to her hands, from her chest to her feet, and from her back to her feet. I told Lakshmi about the Head Nurse's kinship relation to her family and about Kogo''s diagnosis. I asked if she needed me to stay, or if she needed me to do anything for her. She told me that she was alright, and that she remembered the Head Nurse coming to Lourdes' house once. She told me she was a good person, and that they laughed and gaffed for a whole afternoon. I left and returned to the village. Two hours after I had arrived, we were informed via radio that Kogo' had died.

A Father's Dream

On the night that Kogo' was sick, Shikari and Lakshmi were constantly checking on her. Because of their daughter's condition, they were trying to make her as comfortable as possible during the night. However, at one point, Shikari drifted off to sleep and ended up in the bush. He was in one of his usual hunting grounds and started to wander the many paths that existed in the forest. He then encountered a tiny bush deer. It was a female deer. This particular tiny female deer saw Shikari but continued moving along her path. Shikari then heard a loud bang. The deer was now down on the ground. One of the villagers came out of the bush holding a bush gun.⁶¹ He approached the animal. The deer was already dead. Shikari awoke and Kogo' was having a fit. Both parents started to hold her tightly and to run their hands along her arms and legs to calm her. They told me she was feverish, and that she started to mumble some words.

"What is it baby, what are you saying?" said Lakshmi to her daughter.

"I am going mommy... I am going," Kogo' responded.

"Where, baby? Where are you going?" the mother inquired.

⁶¹ Bush guns are old shotguns that the Makushi keep hidden in the forest. Many Makushi people suffer police violence and imprisonment because they own unregistered guns. A bush gun "lives" in the forest. It never comes to the home of its owner. Its house is the bush.

"I am going mommy... I am going," were the last words spoken by Kogo'.

Shikari's dream is revealing because it refers to one well-known spirit that interacts with people. It is the tiny deer - the father/owner of all deer. All animals have a father or an owner, who interacts with them as one would with family and/or pets. The father/owner looks after and cares for the wellbeing of his family/pets. If anything happens to them, the father/owner will seek revenge by inflicting the same harm on people that they inflicted on his family. For example, when the Makushi people encounter something unusual in the savanna or in the bush, they advise people "don't trouble it." These unusual events could include encountering a large group of deer gathered together in a bush clearing. It is unusual because deer are alone or in small groups and they are easily startled by people. Another example is encountering a very large camoudie⁶² in the bush, where the narrow part of the snake is the size of the circumference of the circle created by joining one's index fingers and thumbs. Another example is finding a whole group of monkeys sitting on the ground of the forest in a semicircle, or an agouti sitting down, with its hands on its face, and uttering the same sounds as a child crying. All of these examples are

⁶² Camoudie is how the anaconda is referred to in Guyanese English.

actual reports of encounters where the people knew they had stumbled upon a dangerous situation. The appropriate action is to leave without doing harm to the animals one encounters in these conditions.

All encounters with animals that are deemed unusual are thought to be so because these special animals belong to a spiritual father/owner, and they may also not be animals, but other powerful beings in the bodies of animals. When any of them are hurt or killed in a hunting expedition, for example, the spiritual father/owner will track those who did the killing. Once they are found, the spirit will then kill the huntsman's children, family, and friends. Everyone in the household will be killed. This is done to reciprocate the feeling of returning to one's family but only encountering the space filled with the emptiness of their deaths. The huntsman will wake up and will find his house empty, no one to ever be found. He will then realize his own mistake of overkilling animals, or killing some very special animal. He who was once a huntsman became the hunted.

The tiny deer is not only the father/owner of deer, but he is also the taker of children's spirits. The Makushi say that when parents leave their young children unattended, the deer will see that the child is alone. Being alone is always seen as a punishment. All human suffering is thought of as punishment,

and the Makushi will always refer to it as "I am punishing," rather than "I am suffering." "I am punishing" does not mean that you are punishing someone, but that you are the target of someone's actions that do you harm. These actions are deliberately planned and executed to prolong harm and pain. Being alone is one of them. When parents leave a child alone, if he cries there will be no one to hear him. If he gets uncomfortable, there will be no one to comfort him. If he gets hungry, there will be no one to feed him. If he messes himself, there will be no one to clean and clothe him. The deer takes the child's spirit to save it from the punishment it has been enduring. The deer takes the child's spirit and carries it on his back to his own house, in the spiritual world. After completing the journey, he will raise the child as one of his own. Once the deer takes away the spirit from the infant's body, the child will start to throw fits. The fits will become more frequent and if the spirit does not return, the child's body will die. The cure for the child's illness is simple. There is a specific "blow" (ritual blow - *taren*) used in this case, which calls for the help of other animals to bring back the missing spirit. The house of the deer is very far, across the savanna, forest, lakes, and mountains. The deer can traverse that distance almost instantaneously because he is the tiny deer, and this is what he does. He is very fast. The other animals are asked to help bring the

child's spirit back. The harpy eagle is the one who flies over the mountain ranges, the duck is the one who flies over the lakes and swamps, and the lizard is the one who runs through the savannas. Each animal has a particular advantage in certain parts of the terrain where the Makushi live, and these advantages are used to rescue the child's spirit.

Bush Medicine

The story of how the animals are asked to help a mother rescue her child's spirit is chanted to the child, as someone rubs the child's arms and legs. This can also be accompanied by the use of bush medicine, which in this case is called the "deer antlers" because of the appearance of the plant. There is also a tree bark that is used to produce a bath that is given to the child (see plate 6). These last two are examples of bush medicines, while the first one is a *taren*. On the Sunday morning that I took Kogo' to the hospital, Kogo's grandmother Lourdes asked one of her father's brother's son to go to the bush and collect the two plants for her. She was going to prepare the bush medicine for her granddaughter once she returned to the village. However, in Kogo's case, the deer was killed before it could reach home. The fact that it was also a tiny female deer was a clear indication to Shikari that she had taken his daughter's spirit. Someone killed the deer, thus making Kogo's spirit

become lost. It was now in a place where it could not be found by the animal allies, since these can only be called upon to rescue the spirit from the deer's abode.

Plate 6

Bush Medicine



The end of his daughter's life was certain for Shikari, even before asking for transportation to the hospital. He already knew she was going to die because of his dream (see chapter

six). Kogo' herself acknowledged that her spirit was leaving by saying to her parents, "I am going." Her spirit was leaving her body never to return, and the body without a spirit cannot communicate coherently, thus her inability to speak from that moment until her body had given up. Although the deer was murdered by a villager who was recognized by Shikari, it is possible that it was not that person who had killed the deer. Since that was a disembodied experience, it could have been another person making him/her appear to Shikari as the villager he had recognized. Nonetheless, it was clear to him, and to the rest of the family, that Kogo' had been killed. She was killed by someone, a person yet to be identified, but nonetheless a person.

Tapir Meat

When Lourdes talked about her father as a huntsman, she pointed out that he did not know how to blow. *Blow* is how the Makushi generally refer to ritual blowing in English.⁶³ However, Lourdes' father did not know how to blow the tapir meat, so he relied on other people from the village. Only with blow does the meat become safe for human consumption. The act of killing

⁶³ See chapter six for a more detailed discussion on Makushi shamanic practice and thought.

creates a prolonged separation between spirit (*yekaton/katambî*)⁶⁴ and body (*esa'*) by harming the body itself. The spirit cannot occupy a dead body. However, because of the physical strength of the tapir's body, its *katambî* can find its double - the body - even after the huntsman has gutted, quartered, and smoked its meat. If one eats the tapir meat, the tapir's *katambî* will locate the person and make him/her sick. It is not clear if the sickness is caused by an act of revenge on the part of the tapir's *katambî*, or if it is the result of the tapir's *katambî* trying to take the person's body as its double. The correct *taren* is use to make the tapir's body lose its memory, thus making it impossible for the disembodied spirit to find it.

Epilogue

As soon as the news of the child's death reached the village, I began to worry. On the previous day, the family had told me about the dangers of eating certain animals, especially when the huntsmen do not blow the animal's dead body appropriately. I had bought the smoked meat of an animal that was killed by someone that I did not know. Who was the owner of the tapir that was killed? Was the animal owned and/or a pet of a powerful

⁶⁴ *Yekaton* is the Makushi word for spirit, but *katombî* is the word for "someone's spirit."

forest being that was then seeking revenge for an unprovoked murder, by murdering those who consumed the tapir meat? Did the tapir's body receive the appropriate *taren* to make it fit for human consumption by removing the spirit-body memory? Would they think that I murdered the child since I was the strangest person in the village, an outsider, a *karaiwa* (Brazilian)? It was clear to me that there are no accidental deaths in Amazonia. All deaths are murders and they are all predatory. That was the case with Kogo's death. The ideas of murder and predation were circulating in my thoughts for the next few weeks after her death. In addition to that, my body, mind, and spirit were sad not only because my classificatory niece had died. At that point, after months of sharing meals, laughter, and being in each other's presence, I felt like part of the family. I also sensed that they felt I was one of them. Kogo's death brought all family members together in sadness. Everyone had a silent and quiet demeanor, and all of our gazes were lost in a void distance, as if trying to catch the last sliver of the sun setting on the horizon of the open and unobstructed savanna.

Kogo's body stayed in the hospital for about four days after her passing. The government flew in a medical examiner to perform the autopsy and to determine the cause of death. The official report stated that Kogo' had had pneumonia and dysentery. Lakshmi was in the village when she received notice of

the end of the investigation and the final report. She was also informed someone from the family needed to go to the hospital to collect the body. She left early on a motorcycle ride to Lethem. During the day, Shikari worked on his child's coffin with his brothers-in-law and other male relatives. The workers used the boards of one of the church's benches to build the coffin. Shikari is a skilled carpenter, and together with his father and his mother's brother's son, he transformed the church pew into a child-sized coffin. The work on the coffin occurred without any instructions being given or received. Most of the time, each person was occupied doing a distinct activity like measuring the board, planing the wood, nailing the frame, etc. Shikari's brothers and in-laws stood around as the coffin was being built. Some of the children were running and playing, but the adults were quiet and exchanged words only occasionally. All of them had red and watery eyes, and every now and then I would catch a teardrop running down someone's face, who would quickly wipe it off with their hands or by rubbing their heads against their shoulders.

The work on the coffin took a few hours. People gathered and waited in the shade of the mango tree at Daniela's house. Daniela is Shikari's older sister, and her husband Martin is the minister at the Brethren Church. The house is on the right side of the main road that goes to the border town of Lethem

near Brazil. In the middle of the afternoon, a 4x4 pickup truck arrived and stopped on the road close to the house. One of the passengers riding in the cargo area was Lakshmi. The passengers came out of the vehicle and the people that were gathered under the mango tree approached the vehicle. A group of men started to unload a small wooden box from the pickup truck. They carried the box and placed it on a table that was protected from the scalding hot afternoon sun hitting the tree's canopy. The box was a small child's coffin, and inside was Kogo's body. As the coffin was carried and placed on the table, Shikari approached Lakshmi and told her that Mogo', their youngest son, was very sick. He had started to vomit and to have diarrhea that morning. Lakshmi said that she did not want to go back to the hospital. She was tired and said she would take her son tomorrow. I intervened and reminded her what had happened with Kogo', how fast the sickness had set in, and how hard the trip to Lethem on the motorbike had been. Now she had a hospital vehicle in the village that was going to return right away to Lethem and to the hospital. Mogo' would be looked at immediately. If she stayed overnight, on the following day they would have to take him to the health worker first, who then would call for a vehicle, that in turn could come or not to the village. She said she wanted to be there, to see her dead baby once more and to bury her. I then told her that if she did that, she might have to bury another

child a few days later - Mogo' could probably be very sick by the time he finally made it to the hospital. "It is better not to bury her, but to make sure Mogo' comes back from the hospital alive!" I said emphatically. The surrounding family opened their eyes wide, and exchanged a few words in Makushi that I did not understand. Lakshmi took her duffle bag and started to walk to her house. Shikari stayed behind and I asked him where his wife was going.

"She is going to see Mogo'. She will decide what she will do then," he told me.

I walked back to where the coffin was and James asked me to help him open it. The top was jammed-in. Once we got it open, we saw the dead corpse lying inside. Her skin was grayish in tone and cold to the touch. Her head was tilted back and her mouth was slightly open. She was wearing her pajamas, but we could still see the autopsy stitching that went from the bottom of her neck to below her belly button. James went into Daniela's house and came back with a piece of cloth that he wrapped around the neck of his dead granddaughter, thus covering the signs of the autopsy. Although the family had built what I thought was a better-looking coffin, the body remained and was later buried in the wooden box in which it had arrived in Tunaîmî.

Many people came and looked at the body without exchanging many words. Some would ask if it was the mother who provided

the pajamas that were used to dress the dead child, while others would point out the corpse was already starting to swell up. Parents called their respective children and said, "Come, come. Come look at the dead baby. Look at your dead sister. She is dead now."

Kogo's name was not used. They referred to her as "child," "baby," "sister," or "she." "She go dead now," was how her death was announced. Many children who looked at the body asked the adults if the baby was dead, why the skin was so white and cold, and why the face was puffy. Sometimes those questions were answered, and the answer was always a variation of "Yes, she go dead now."

Abigail - Kogo's father's sister - asked me if I had my camera with me, if I was taking pictures. I answered that I did not have the camera and had not taken any pictures. She then asked if the battery was not charged. I told her that I had a charged battery. She instructed me to run and fetch the camera to take pictures of the dead baby. When I returned, they were finishing preparing the corpse, making sure the pajamas were not stained in any way, and that the cloth around the girl's neck was looking nice and covered the autopsy stitches. On the road, I saw the hospital people getting ready to depart. Among the passengers was Lakshmi, who carried Mogo' in her arms. They would stay at the Hospital for three days, and once they both

returned, she would tell me the children's ward had been filled with sick children. "This time of the year is sickness season, that is why people are getting sick," she informed me.

When I came back to the house with the camera, the family told me to take pictures of the body in the coffin, instructing me as to how they should look, and from what angles they should be taken. They evaluated every picture taken by checking them on the camera's LCD display. The photographs they liked the most were taken top-down just of the child's face, and top-down of the whole body in the coffin.

After family and friends looked at the body, Shikari, James, and Martin carried the open coffin and placed it next to the grave they had dug earlier in the day. The grave was dug about 20 meters away from Martin's house. It was almost halfway between his house and the Brethren Church, but a few meters to the East, thus not right next to the path from the main road leading to the church. Martin's mother and daughter were also buried there. Their graves had no markings and the wooden cross that marked the burial site had long disappeared. Only the elevated ground of the graves was still visible but the family knew exactly who was buried where. People once again gathered around the coffin to take a last look at Kogo's body. Kogo's older sister approached the coffin and placed a small doll inside. Her older brother also approached the coffin, reached into

his pocket, and grabbed some sweets, and placed them next to the doll.

Martin and Shikari carried the top of the coffin and put it in place. The body was no longer visible. Shikari took a hammer and pulled some nails from his pockets. He then put some between his lips, one in his left hand, and the rest back into his pocket. With precise blows, he hammered the coffin shut. One nail in each corner, one at the half-length mark of the smaller sides of the rectangular box, and two alongside the longer sides. Kogo's siblings were crying and sobbing, while the adults had watery eyes and a few tears running down their faces. Martin called the attention of all around to say a few words and a prayer. A few seconds after he started to talk, he fell down in tears and could no longer speak. He was crying so impassionedly that it looked like he was trying to gasp for air in the short pauses between cries. After he calmed down, he continued his speech and we all said a prayer at the end.

Two sets of rope were used to lower the coffin into the grave. Shikari, Martin, James and I, each holding an end of rope, carried the coffin to the grave. Slow and steady, we lowered the body into the grave. Once down, Martin and Shikari started to shovel the pile of dirt next to the grave back into the hole. A few of the kids approached the pile, filled their hands with dirt, and threw it back into the grave. Martin stopped working

the shovel and gave it to James. Kogo's father and grandfather finished the burial task, including marking the grave with a white wooden cross. Once that was done, the people around quickly started to dissipate, and in a sudden move, James (Kogo's grandfather) threw the shovel on the ground, kneeled next to the grave, and crying and shouting he said, "I am burying you my daughter. You are dead now and I am burying you. I will no longer see you in the house, give you food, hear you talk, or see you grow. I am really sad. I am burying you today. You are dead, and I am burying you. I am sad!"

That made a few of the adults shed more tears, but everyone was quiet and no one said anything else. James stood up, grabbed the shovel, and started walking home. The burial site was atop a little hill, and I could see all families heading back in the direction of their own homes. It was a sad day, but all knew that life would go on. And so it did.

CHAPTER SIX

ON SHAMANIC THOUGHT

Introduction

This chapter is intended to introduce some themes related to Makushi shamanic thought and discuss how they are present in the daily life of Tunaîmî. Some of the topics are more clearly related to Euro-American notions of shamanism, for example how the Makushi think of the cosmos, how they prepare "magic and spells," and how a shaman is trained. These will be covered in this chapter, but the presentation and discussion will focus on the Makushi understanding of the topics. For example, the notion that bodies are not finite biological vessels, but instead cultural constructs that are carefully maintained to be in a state of beauty. Otherwise, these bodies can become bodies of beasts (*oma'gonyamî*). Another Makushi idea is that certain works (*ta-ren*) have a *suis generis* quality once uttered, and that they will act upon the world because they exist in the world. *Muran* is another interesting concept, which describes the socialization of plants (or animal parts). These *muran* become part of their owner's family and acquire rights and obligations based on this kinship relationality. However, a *muran* can go through

another transformation based on a commensality of death, thus becoming an assassin. Another relevant discussion is the fact that Alleluia songs are learned in an analogous way as shamanic knowledge - out of direct contact and interaction with other-than-humans. For the *pia'san*, he learns the knowledge from the spirits; for the Alleluia priest, he learns the songs from God.

Other topics not directly related to Euro-American shamanism are related to the Makushi dreamscape. The Makushi believe that in dreams, people's spirits can leave their bodies and wander around in the spiritual world. This is a way in which everyone can experience the shamanic flight of the *pia'san* and access a kind of knowledge of the world that comes from the upper layer. However, the recall of these experiences is problematic because if the person's spirit goes too high, it may never come back; if it is too low, it did not go high enough into the spiritual world. During sleep, the spirit moves back and forth in the vertical transition between layers. Yet the dreams one can remember represent a visualization of a possible outcome, or the realization of an outcome that has yet to be visualized. In the spiritual world, present, past, and future fold into themselves in a singularity of the presence of time. That Makushi experience and focus on the presence of time, not on the passing of time, is reflected in the ways they tell stories and events. To them, stories and jokes do not need a

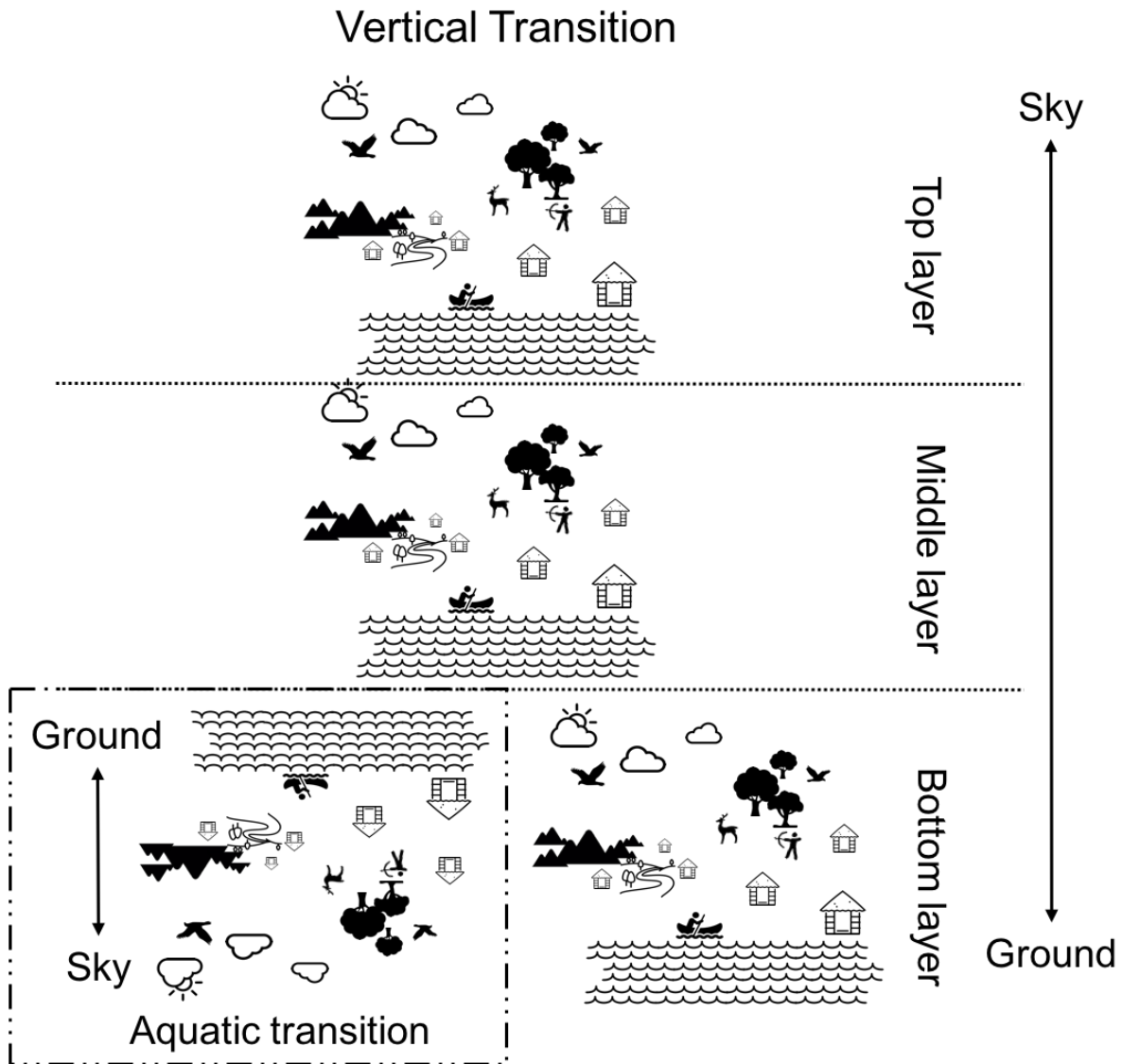
punchline, because they exist in synchronicity. Although their communication with others occurs mainly through language, the experience of events in the dreamscape (perhaps even in the middle layer) is synchronous.

Makushi Cosmology

To the Makushi, the world is composed of a finite number of superimposed layers. The layer where people spend the most time, build their houses, farms, villages, and where they go hunting and fishing is the middle layer. Different peoples as well as animals and *oma'gon* also share this layer, and the relationship amongst middle layer dwellers can be either friendly or not. There is also an underground/bottom and an aquatic layer located below the middle layer. Both are very similar and can even appear identical to the central layer, albeit with slight differences. "It is like us, but not like us again," is what the Makushi told me repeatedly when describing these various layers of the world. As I discussed earlier, the Makushi do not have a proper name for the "spiritual world," nor for any of the other layers. They simply identify such places using a possessive pronoun of their inhabitants: *to'pata*, or their place (see chart 3)

Chart 3

Representation of the World in Makushi Cosmology



The specificity of the place is determined by the context of the conversation and what sort of beings are being discussed. The main difference between the underground and the aquatic

layers is the way in which one moves between them. From the underground to the middle layer, one starts his or her journey by climbing a high mountain, flying, or being lifted up somehow. The person will emerge into the middle layer through a cave, a deep well, or a hole on the ground. The journey from the middle into the bottom layer follows the opposite path. It involves going into the ground, into the depths of the earth so that one falls from the sky into the underground layer. Each layer is ontologically cohesive, and the middle layer is physically located on top of the bottom layer. On the other hand, the aquatic layer is a mirrored projection of the central layer. The transition from one layer to the next is through the water's surface such as that of a river, pond, or lake. The body of water is sometimes described as a shared buffer, separating the ground surface of both layers. To enter into the aquatic from the central layer, a person has to dive and swim deep, to later emerge into the aquatic world as if he/she was coming out of the water. Other times, the transition between these two layers is immediate. This is the case the when this shaded buffer is as thin as the surface of the water. Thus, these two layers are separated by a water membrane. The Makushi describe cases in which if a canoe flips over on a river, it is instantaneously in the aquatic layer. Those aboard the canoe would still be floating down a river with deep forest on its margins and birds

flying atop them, but they would be in the *tunabarigoya* (the place of the water people). These instantaneous transitions have been witnessed by some of my informants a few times, when traveling deep in the bush.

They added that one time, as they were turning a river bend, they saw a dugout canoe coming their way, about 30 meters ahead of them. When the passengers of the other canoe noticed the traveling group, the dugout canoe suddenly flipped over. The group sped in their direction to help, but they did not see anything on the surface of the water, nor on the margins of the river. They surveyed the area and traveled downriver looking for people and debris, but could not find anything. I was told that when they realized these were no ordinary people, they became afraid. They told me that everybody knew at the time that these were "water people," but they were so afraid that they only talked to each other about it days after they returned to their village. Such encounters with the inhabitants of the aquatic layer are deemed very dangerous. These encounters normally happen in the headwaters of rivers, creeks, waterfalls, lakes, and year-round ponds. Since the surface of the water is usually the only separation between these two layers, the "water people" or *tunabarigo* can shoot arrows through the water and harm people in the central layer. There are also the water-jaguars whose fur are completely white. These are much more

aggressive animals, only seldom seen at the headwaters of rivers close to waterfalls. The witnessing of a water-jaguar is very rare, but when it occurs, it causes fear, vomiting, and diarrhea. The Makushi have also seen and described the water-giant-anteater and the water-deer, both of which have completely white fur.

The top layer is the one above the central layer, which is similar to the middle and bottom layers. The top layer is where the spirits tend to stay. They come to the central layer by falling and return by going up again. *Ka'* is the Makushi word for sky, and *kapongon* is what they call their inhabitants - "sky people." The transition between layers is conceived by the Makushi as a constant possibility and the movement between them can be either voluntary or involuntary. All inhabitants from all layers can move between them, and people from the middle layer (*pemongon*) travel to the top layer when they dream. However, this transition between layers and interaction with other kinds of people has its own set of rules governing it.

As discussed earlier, the broadest sense of the term shamanism encompasses mysticism, magic, and religion (Eliade, 1972). The Makushi, on the other hand, separate these practices and ideas, but relate them to each other conceptually. To better understand Makushi shamanic thought and practice, we also need

to explore two distinct but related ideas that are widely disseminated amongst the Makushi and other Amerindian groups of the circum-Roraima region: *taren* and *muran*.

Taren

Taren is also known in Guyanese English as "blowing" or "blow." To blow someone is to utter a specific word, or set of words, that will hit the targeted body (human or not), causing the person to become "spoiled." When used in English, blow always refers to a malevolent act, intended to inflict harm, and to cause pain, suffering, and even death. However, in Makushi the term *taren* is a ritual blowing that has both malevolent and benevolent connotations (for a description of ritual blowing among the Akawaio of Guyana, see Butt, 1956). Healers can use both bush medicine as well as *taren* to cure illnesses and maladies. They can be used separately, but most frequently are used together.

Also, to the Makushi, illness and sickness are almost always caused by someone's *blow* or *taren*, which means that physical symptoms have a non-physical cause. Some healers can cure the mental and physical manifestations of a malady. However most *pia'sans* not only cure the spoiled person, but can send the ill-intended *taren* back to the person who blew it first. This creates a looped cycle wherein a *taren* revenge attack can be interpreted

by the receiver as a new *taren* attack, which in turn requires social vengeance (Douglas, 1970; Rivière, 1970). The need for revenge is especially great when sickness is followed by death.

The Makushi were always adamant in stating that there are *taren* for healing and killing. Because of this duality in the ability to blow - "blow to kill and blow to heal" - a healer or anyone who is known to have this particular knowledge is generally avoided and treated with deference and caution. Anyone who knows *taren* will always deny knowing the ill-intended kind and having used it to do harm. But the Makushi believe killing and healing go hand-in-hand, so if one knows how to cure those who are sick and help those who are dying, surely they must know how to cause sickness and death in others.

In blowing, a *taren* is whispered into the air in the direction of the target, or whispered into the blower's hand that later touches his/her targets. Nonetheless, a *taren* can also be uttered towards an object, animal, plant, or food. The words uttered comprise a whole or partial narrative of a *panton* - a particular story of mythological times or ancient past. In other words, *panton* is one story, incident, or myth from the Makushi narration of events that happened to, or were caused by, the

demiurges⁶⁵ and other inhabitants of the world during mythological times. *Panton* can also be an event or series of events that occurred in the ancient past (between the recent past and mythological times). All the different *panton* when taken as a whole are the Makushi *pantoni*. *Pantoni* is the collection of stories that explain the creation of the world, as well as explain the current state of affairs of the world.

Taren can also entail very specific and difficult-to-pronounce words, and are only heard on these occasions. Once the words are uttered correctly, they gain an agency that is independent from the agency of those who brought them into being. In other words, the *taren* acquires a *suis generis* quality. By recounting some effects of the mythical time, the *taren* creates the potency for specific effects to come into being in the current state of affairs. Such narratives tend to be *taren* used to strengthen a weaker body, make one's child or farm grow faster, or find one's enemy.⁶⁶ In addition, blowing is considered to be dangerous, since if it is not done appropriately, one can invoke effects different than the ones desired. Besides its potential danger (deliberate or accidental), every adult person

⁶⁵ The most important characters in Makushi mythology are the two brothers Inshikiran and Ani'ke. The world as we see it today is a result of their adventures and misadventures.

⁶⁶ Perhaps the *taren* used to harm can also be of this nature, but since no one would admit to knowing them, they are not practiced in the open and under the gaze of others. Healing *taren*, on the other hand, are practiced in semi-private contexts (e.g. someone's house, farm, or at the healer's house).

in the village has some knowledge of *taren*. The underlining danger in blowing and the particular ability to memorize a repertoire of *taren* are the reasons behind specialization.

Because of this inherent danger, there are those known as *blowpeople*, who are specialized in all sorts of blows. A *blowman* or *blowlady* is not the same as a healer. *Blowpeople* and healers alike can both heal maladies and disease, but only the *blowman/blowlady* make and sell potions or charms to find one's enemy or gain the love of a young woman. The services of a healer and a *blowperson* are hired and can be paid for in cash or bartered. Because a *blowperson* makes charms for sale, he/she is further in the liminal position between good and bad than the healer.⁶⁷ A healing session and the work of the *pia'san* are both semi-public events that happen in the context of the household unit. Unlike the former, the selling and buying of potions is private and secretive. The general idea is that, because a *blowperson* not only heals, but sells other potions, he/she must also know how to harm and kill people. For the right price, he or she might even give you the right potion intended to kill or do harm and instruct you in how to use it. Therefore, the arrangement should be hidden from others.

⁶⁷ A healing session might cost from \$5,000 to \$20,000 Guyana dollars, depending on the relationship with the healer and his/her notoriety, and if he is from or outside the village. A potion from a *blowman* or *blowlady* costs from \$50,000 to \$500,000 Guyana dollars. The prices vary depending on the purpose of the potion and its strength.

One of the reasons *taren* and charms are so effective is because their victims do not realize they are being attacked at the moment a *taren* and/or potion is deployed. The realization comes after the fact, when the physical and/or mental effects start to manifest. Because *taren* can be an effective and elusive attack, people are very cautious towards strangers and fellow villagers. They do not want to say or do anything that might cause others to feel angry or jealous of them. According to the Makushi, jealousy, anger, and shame are the most significant reasons to harm someone.

The story *The Cheating Wife and The Jealous Husband* in chapter three is a great example that illustrates some of the points discussed thus far. The husband received many warnings from other villagers about his wife and was encouraged to leave her. After questioning his wife, she insisted to him that people were telling him lies about her because they were jealous of him. Because he separated the fin of a particular fish, and he blew into it before catching his wife cheating, we can infer that he was not truly convinced by his wife's arguments. The motive that finally led him to kill his wife was not anger, but shame. The whole village told him to abandon her, but he chose not to listen to them and instead stayed with his wife, who continued to cheat on him. He lost so much face that to him, the only way out of that situation was to have his wife killed.

It is also important to note that he did not go to a specialist, nor did he buy a *muran* from someone else. He himself knew of an attack potent enough to cause a painful death. This illustrates the general practices and the reasons why people are so concerned about not making others feel angry, jealous, or lose face. Anyone can spoil anyone, and when one detects an attack it is normally too late.

Muran

The other common and widespread practice among the Amerindians of circum-Roraima is the use of *muran*. *Muran* is a plant (in the majority of cases) that is used to add another set of substances into the co-substantiality of one's body. In other words, *muran* is an altered plant or animal part that, if used correctly, changes the capabilities of a body (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). Almost all *muran* are farmed plants that are carefully looked after, and then later prepared to be used on the body. Some of these plants can easily be found in the forest, while others are rare. However, a proper *muran* has an owner, and its efficacy is a result of the social relationship it has established with its owner. The same plant found in the bush can be used as bush medicine. But when the plant is "minded for," as the Makushi explained to me, its efficacy operates on a completely different scale, and the *muran* can allow a person

to do things that the bush medicine cannot do. An owner will talk to his plants, fence in the area where they are growing to protect them from animals, water them during the dry season, fertilize the soil, and even name them. Depending on the *muran*, the owner will address the plant as *my son*, *my daughter*, *brother-in-law*, or *sister-in-law*. By addressing plants in kinship terms, owners create kinship rights and obligations between the entities involved. They also say that *muran* can have a spiritual owner/father and that by treating the plants with respect, they are also establishing an alliance with its spiritual father/owner.

The relationship with plants is not exclusive to *muran* but it extends to the domesticated varieties as well. A Makushi person will talk to his or her cassava plants on their farm as well as to corn and other plants. However, this practice has largely been abandoned. On one occasion, I witnessed the cassava plant being addressed as brother-in-law. It was the case of a 30-year-old man talking to the cassava leaves he had brought from his farm. He was setting cassava cakes for fermentation. In order to prepare *parakari*, a drink made out of fermented cassava cakes, leaves of the cassava plant have to be placed in between the soaked cassava cakes before the pile is wrapped in banana leaves. This creates a bundle that is placed in a large container and set aside for fermentation. Without the leaves,

the Makushi say there is no yeast and that fermentation will not occur. As he was placing the leaves in between the soaked cassava cakes, he asked his brother-in-law to help prepare a good *parakari*, a strong *parakari*. The drink was going to enter a village contest during the Tunaîmî Amerindian Heritage celebrations and compete with other brews made by other villagers.⁶⁸

The Makushi also have a story that recounts the origin of diseases in which one of the main characters is the Cassava Mother. The story tells of a woman who was pulling cassava and who, after collecting what she needed, left the farm untidy. She left all the cassava sticks and leaves tossed all over the place. The next time she returned to the farm, the cassava sticks appeared to her in a form of a woman who said, "I am your mother, you have to respect me, and look after me." The Cassava Mother added that the farmer must keep the cassava sticks neatly organized in a bundle, with one end buried in the ground. After telling the woman this, the Cassava Mother made her sick, and the woman died from this sickness. The Makushi say that prior to this day, there was no sickness in the world. This story is another example that illustrates how the Makushi extend their kinship network to include other-than-human beings. The use of kinship terms marks social obligations and practices of caring

⁶⁸ This was the winning *parakari*.

and feeding, implying and imposing a specific moral obligation of support, nurturing, and sharing food. The farmer prepares the land for plants, protects it from other invasive species, and in return, the plant shares with the farmer what it has produced by being nourished from the ground. This relationship is common with domesticated plants, either edibles or plants kept for decoration or other purposes (like the *muran*).

To understand how *muran* works and why it works, it is important to remember that throughout Amazonia, Amerindians do not think of the body as a container, or an indivisible unit. The body is conceptualized as an assemblage that is affected by what it eats, how it moves, how it communicates, where it lives, etc. (G. Mentore, 2005). Therefore, the use of terms such as “embodied” or “incorporated” cannot appropriately convey the correct Amerindian concepts and understandings of the body. Incorporated and embodied assume the existence of a cohesive unit with a delineated, identifiable, and fixed boundary between one unit and others, and between the inside and the outside. To incorporate and to embody is then to bring something from the outside inside this delineated and fixed unit that is the body. To Amerindians in general, the body is malleable, and has a porous separation between the inside and the outside. The skin is a permeable membrane that allows for the exchange of substance (Kondo, 2015) between the inside and the outside of the

human body. The openings of the body are also places through which substances from the outside can enter, and through which substances that were inside can exit the body (Ferrié, 2015; Rahman & Echeverri, 2015). For example, Walker (2012) argues that of the Urarina's practices of caring for a young child, particularly the way in which they use rattles under the child's hammock, are designed so that the infant's body can absorb the sound waves produced by the rattle. The sound produced by the rattles and its interaction with the infant's body eases the abrupt separation from the womb upon coming into the world (Ibid.). Also, the collective effort and materials used to fabricate the rattle amount to an early assertion of the kind of person the child will become (Ibid., p. 49). In general, throughout Amazonia a human body is constantly submitted to a process of fabrication, by mixing and exchanging substances from other bodies - either human or other-than-human bodies (Crocker, 1985; G. Mentore, 1993; Viveiros de Castro, 1987).

Becoming a *Pia'san*

In the process of becoming a *pia'san*, the apprentice needs to speak directly with other-than-human beings. The former has to be able to listen and understand what is being uttered to him/her by the latter. In this process, the apprentice learns about the *taren* and *muran* that are already all around him/her.

But the apprentice must first establish social relationships with some other-than-human beings who are the spiritual owners and fathers of a particular *muran* and the source *taren*. For example, the apprentice would learn about the deer antlers *muran* from the *Deer Father* himself. But in order for knowledge to circulate, the appropriate social protocols need to be followed and the persons involved need to be in good standing or social relations with each other. The Makushi see each piece of knowledge to be learned as an agent. Therefore, what people want to talk about needs to desire to be talked about. When certain social conditions and environmental contexts are right, topics and subjects will emerge and people will discuss and get to know them. That dialogue will place the knowledge within a network of social relations, but one in which it is an agent, not a passive subject (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). However, some kinds of knowledge will not let themselves be known all at once. They will gradually germinate in a person, who would gain a better understanding of them over time. This is because the knowledge is cautious and is getting to know the person slowly. Once knowledge is learned, it can also be taught to others through similar experiential practices. These relationships can be maintained or broken throughout someone's life.

In the shamanic training, the *pia'san* and his apprentice leave the village and go towards the mountains.⁶⁹ There, they stay alone for three months. Training involves drinking tobacco water and repeating the songs and chants the *pia'san* sings. Food provisions are minimal or non-existent. The consumption of tobacco water is constant. Tobacco is drunk only through one's nostrils, and by ingesting it both the apprentice and the *pia'san* feel neither hunger nor thirst. All they want is to constantly drink more of it.

Teaching and learning among the Makushi comes from observation and hands-on trial-and-error. This is the case in all activities, including preparing tobacco water, drinking it through one's nostril, and beating *whitie* leaves. The *pia'san* lets his apprentice prepare the tobacco, drink it, and beat leaves until he gets it right. The tutor sings chants and makes sure his apprentice memorizes all the songs and pronounces them appropriately. The chants call for the help of spiritual allies - *yekaton*. One of the abilities the *pia'san* has is being able to hear animals and plants. This ability to hear and communicate with them comes gradually through the course of training, and by the end of the three months, the apprentice is no longer an apprentice but a fellow *pia'san*.

⁶⁹ Although *pia'sanba* is a female shaman, I do not know if a woman's training is the same as a man's. Social space is strongly marked based on gender. This chapter describes the training of a male apprentice.

A few days into training, the apprentice's body starts to show signs of fatigue due to lack of sleep, food, and water. He must resist the urge to eat and abandon the mountains and return to the comfort of his own village. Part of the training is learning how to cope with hunger, thirst, heat and cold, and any other bodily discomfort. Once the apprentice no longer minds what his body is feeling, he stops feeling all bodily discomfort. The consumption of tobacco water and the chanting both train and condition the body not to feel the need for food. I was told that they can survive on very small morsels of food. For example, only certain animals should be eaten, and a hummingbird has to provide enough meat for four days of rations after being roasted. When the apprentice no longer feels hunger, thirst, cold, or pain in his body he starts to hear voices. These are the plants, animals, the wind, the rain, and all other beings that surround him. They are talking to him, and he can hear them. Because the convivial life with other persons in the village is so vibrant, this vibrancy and all other substances that make a person numb the senses to all other beings that do not share the same vibrancy. It is as if each being had opposite sound frequencies that canceled each other out. Thus a conversation between them only generates silence.

Far from the village and deep in the mountains, the apprentice is not distracted by any ordinary affect such as hunger, thirst, sexual desire or pleasure, the taste of food, the cry of a child, the heat of a hearth, or any other fact that is taken for granted in conviviality. Only when his body is transformed by the drinking of tobacco water and the avoidance of food can he hear the environment around him. This does not mean that only then do other-than-human beings start to speak to people. The former are constantly talking to us, but we do not have ears that can hear their words and understand their speech. The ability to start hearing only comes after this training, which is analogous to death.

The experiential elements of the training involve the abandonment of one's social life. For months, the only human body, voice, and touch the apprentice experiences will be those of the *pia'san* (if the *pia'san* chooses to provide any). The apprentice will almost exclusively consume tobacco water as food, which previously would have been considered a non-food, or a food for the spirits (for more on tobacco use in Amazonia, see Russell and Rahman 2015). Any other foods are consumed in small quantities and must fall within a comprehensive set of dietary restrictions.⁷⁰ The training is conceived in order to push the

⁷⁰ I could not gather precise information on what these rules must be, besides the fact eating is restricted to almost nothing. I suggest that the rules

body to its limits, or even beyond them. Once the *pia'san*-to-be starts to hear the plants, animals, environment, and spirits, he can learn how to ask them for help. This is a unique and singular experience, and the allies that the apprentice makes are not the same as his tutor. The tutor's role is to guide the pupil in learning to hear all the other-than-human beings around him and to pay attention to what the world has to say.

The second phase in the training process is to make sense of what one hears, and what the environment is saying. The apprentice has to memorize the chants that are being sung to him by different entities. He has to sing them repeatedly until their meaning comes to him. They can later be used to produce powerful *muran* and *taren*. Those *muran* are given the name of the entity from which the apprentice heard and understood their meanings. There are the spiritual owners of these *muran* and *taren*. In the course of the training, the apprentice becomes able to travel to the upper layer of the world, and interact directly with the inhabitants of *to'pata*⁷¹ - the place of spirits. These shamanic flights⁷² are used to gain knowledge of the spiritual world, a world where people live without their own

are more comprehensive during apprenticeship than during the rest of the life of the *pia'san*.

⁷¹ *to'*: 3rd person plural pronoun; *pata*: place, locality.

⁷² We can see how the shamanic journey starts as a shamanic flight, since the movements the *pia'san* makes while holding the *whitie* leaves are similar to the flapping of birds when taking flight. In this way, the *pia'san's yekaton* is taking off, going up, and leaving the physical body behind.

bodies. After three months of training, both the master and pupil return to their villages. Their bodies will be weak, but their spirits will be strong.

A Village *Pia'san*

A Makushi *pia'san* is trained by another Makushi *pia'san*. Traditionally, apprenticeships follow kinship descent lines and the role can be occupied by both men and women. The Makushi accounts of Magalhaes, *Paaba Mengie* and Luis in chapter three are examples of generational and familial lineage between tutor and apprentices. However, Luis said his uncle trained him.⁷³ Nevertheless, there are significantly more *pia'san* than there are *pia'sanba* (female shaman). The Makushi say the physical and sexual hardship in becoming and being a *pia'san* are more fitting for a man.

There are a few cases in which a *pia'san's* descendent did not become his apprentice. In one case, the *pia'san* sought to persuade a knowledgeable female healer to become his apprentice instead. The healer was approximately 50 years old, married,

⁷³ I am not sure whether "uncle" in this case refers to father's brother, or mother's brother. It could also be the case that my assistant translated father's brother as "uncle," but Luis had actually said *papai* (father's brother). The kinship terms for father and mother are *uyun* and *usan*, respectively. Makushi almost always use kinship terms with a possessive prefix. This is the case above (u-: 1st person singular). However, I commonly heard adults using *papai* and *mamai* (which are also used for categorical fathers - father's brothers - and categorical mothers - mother's sisters).

and she had learned about different bush medicines and *taren* from her mother (the mother was still alive and was around 102 years of age). The *pia'san* himself was already 65 but he looked much older and was constantly in poor health. The sought-after apprentice's house bordered the bush, and to reach her house the *pia'san* had to go by her father-in-law's house. She recounted that almost every time the *pia'san* walked over to talk to her, the children playing near her father-in-law's house ran to her and tell her that the old man was coming. She then instructed an older child to look after the younger children and hid in her farm. The *pia'san* always arrived and upon not finding her, walked back to his own house. He always left a message telling her to go and visit him at his house, which she never did. She said she was afraid of what he would ask. Because the *pia'san* was old, in poor health, and none of his children had followed his path, she was afraid he would ask her to become his apprentice, and then would have to take his place as the *pia'sanba* in the village when he passed away. Refusing such a request would show disregard for the whole community, and selfishness, traits that are both frowned upon. She still had young children and spent much time looking after them and did not want to stay alone with the *pia'san* for too long. She also had a jealous husband. Her strategy to not refuse a request of the *pia'san* was to prevent such a request from being made in the

first place. By the time I had left the field, the *pia'san* had started training one of his nephews. However, he still visited the healer occasionally, and she continued to hide in her farm.

Kanaima *Muran*

The difference between a regular *muran* and its deadly variety is in the kinds of foods an owner "feeds" his/her plants. As described in chapter four, kanaimas consume parts of the body of their victims. However, it is not only these killers who partake in the eating of their victims. The *muran* of the kanaimas also feast on the dead. As we have seen previously in this chapter, *muran* are plants that have established a social and kinship relationship with people. People talk to them, protect them from predators, fertilize their beds, etc. This creates a social obligation, and in turn the plants, now transformed into *muran* through sociality, protect their kin. Some plants are considered dangerous, even if their common use is protective. For example, to the Makushi, protective *muran* such as *turara'* (the river otter), *pishana* (the pussy cat) and *pana-pana* (the big ear) can also be trained to kill. This is done by feeding these plants human blood, flesh, and bones.

When this occurs, the metaphysical potencies of the *muran* are enhanced, in a way analogous to how the kanaimas' metaphys-

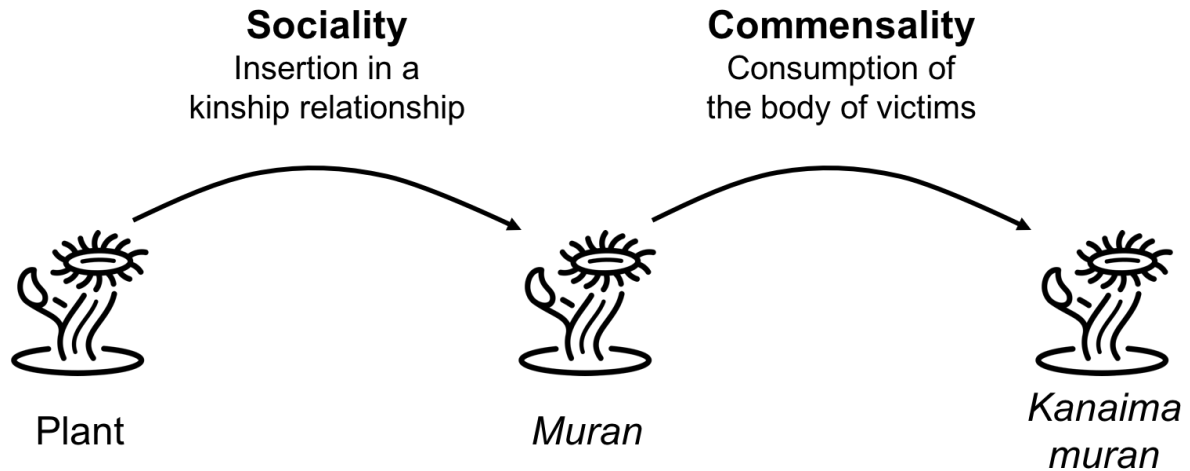
ical potencies are enhanced by consuming the juices of the cadaver, as described in chapter four. Kanaimas have their own *muran*, and because they feed them human blood, flesh, and bones, their *muran* have extraordinary strength and abilities. It is important to highlight that because these *muran* are eating human parts, they have acquired a taste and hunger for human flesh. Only new deaths and new bodies can satiate the *muran's* desires. Kanaimas are in a situation where they have to satiate not only their own excessive desires for the enhanced mode of being that is provided by consuming the death juices of their victims, but also have to satiate the desires of their kin - their *muran*. This is a burden, because if they do not provide the object of the *muran's* cravings, the latter will eventually take matters into "their own hands." They will kill their owner, kill and devour the kanaima. The *muran* that had previously helped and assisted the kanaima, the latter being the main perpetrator of the killing, becomes the killer itself. There is a positional change, where if kanaimas neglect their kin obligation with their *muran*, the kanaimas change from killers into victims.

As for the production of a Kanaima *muran*, there is also a double transformative movement for the *muran* (see chart 4). The first movement is when an ordinary plant is transformed into *muran* by being incorporated in a kinship relationship. These plants look like ordinary plants, but their owner knows they

are not ordinary. Owners know they have a subjectivity and a personhood that interacts with their own. The second transformation is through commensality, whereby the owners and *muran* eat human flesh and drink fluids of dead bodies. Once again, these *muran* look like ordinary plants, which in turn also look like ordinary *muran*. Only their owners know they are of a deadly kind. In both cases, one cannot tell what properties or intent a *muran* might have (protective vs. destructive) based on its external appearance. There is a common Makushi phrase that illustrates this uncertainty: "Nothing is what it appears to be." What this means is that superficial layers can be used to trick others. A "true" or "better understanding" of someone can only be established when one knows and understand the social network of the other person, where they are coming from, and how they behave in their daily activities. This is one of the reasons why protective *muran* are only exchanged amongst close kin. A *muran* that appears to be of a protective kind can be of a deadly variety. By the time a receiver of an exchange finds this out, it is already too late. To the Makushi, only close kin are less prone to kill close kin. Everyone else is a potential *kanaima*.

Chart 4

Muran Double Transformation



Fabricated Bodies

To the Makushi, knowledge is reached through feelings. It is the tactile, olfactory, auditory, and visual experience that allows one to gain knowledge. Moreover, through emotions a person can also attain knowledge. This is further realized in the Makushi language because the verbs "to know" and "to feel" are expressed by the same transitive verb: *epu'tî*. So if I decide to poke a Makushi person, they do not perceive my need to ask two different questions such as, "Do you feel that I am poking you?" or "Do you know that I am poking you?" because these are the same thing. Another interesting example came out of verb elicitation, in my attempts to conjugate some verbs according

to the different grammatical persons by adding the correct prefixes and ergative markers. There were cases in which people told me that I used the correct words, but that what I said made no sense. For instance, I can say "I am hungry," but it is completely strange and senseless to a Makushi if a speaker says "you are hungry," "he/she/it is hungry," "they are hungry," and "we are hungry." They told me that one cannot know if the other is hungry because they are not that other. Therefore, although stating, "You are hungry," may be grammatically correct, it is epistemologically incorrect. The proper way to express sentiments and knowledge of another is to say something like, "It appears to me that you may be hungry." Unless the speaker's spirit moves into the body of his interlocutor, he cannot say that he/she/it is hungry. As previously discussed by other scholars (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1940), there is a correlation between the way people speak and the way people think.

The Makushi have an embodied epistemology wherein the body is the house of sentiment/knowledge about the world. Contrary to a Hegelian ideology (Hegel, 1967; Knox, 1952; Mowad, 2010; Rauch, 1983), the Makushi people do not share the same conceptual separation between mind and body and an intellectual focus on the former. T. M. Knox's commentary on Hegel's *Philosophy of Rights* illustrates well the Hegelian ideas of body and *geist* (soul/spirit/mind).

"The conception and its existence are two sides, distinct yet united, like soul and body. The body is the same life as the soul, and yet the two can be named independently. A soul without a body would not be a living thing, and vice versa. Thus the visible existence of the conception is its body, just as the body obeys the soul which produced it. Seeds contain the tree and its whole power, though they are not the tree itself; the tree corresponds accurately to the simple structure of the seed. If the body does not correspond to the soul, it is defective. The unity of visible existence and conception, of body and soul, is the idea. It is not a mere harmony of the two, but their complete interpenetration. There lives nothing, which is not in some way idea. The idea of right is freedom, which, if it is to be apprehended truly, must be known both in its conception and in the embodiment of the conception" (Knox, 1952, p 37-38).

To the Makushi people, as well as other Amerindians, the work of and on the body is always emphasized over the work of the spirit (except in shamanic contexts). The Makushi work against emphasizing the intellect over the body. For them, all people who go to schools and universities and spend hours reading in isolation from others go crazy. They become insane because they actually disconnect themselves from the mode in which

knowledge is perceived and understood - which is the phenomenological experience provided through the body in the physical world.

The Makushi also fabricate and manipulate the bodies of animals and plants, in order for them to develop, behave, and act in a desirable way. For example, a particular *muran* is used to make young dogs into hunting dogs. Some of the plants that are used look like little berries or small round peppers, which are prepared⁷⁴ and applied to the dog's snout and anus. These plants are grown in the huntsman's yard or farm, and cared for (fenced to protect them from goats, and fertilized with cow dung). The idea is not that a body (human, animal, or even vegetable) absorbs another exterior quality through its skin and orifices, but that the exterior body is folded in, is amalgamated in a corporation. The body is thus a cultural artifact, artificially planned and constructed (Santos-Granero, 2009). It does not mean that a body cannot grow without being cared for. That can be the case, but the end result of not being cared for is to be far from a Makushi ideal of a beautiful and proper body. *Oma'gon* are the ones who grow, develop, and live without concern with what they consume, or how they care for their

⁷⁴ They can be made into a paste, dried and pulverized, or burned. There are specific *muran* for different game animals.

bodies. This creates a vicious cycle which to the Makushi characterizes the "bestial" and perverted behavior of *oma'gon*.⁷⁵ Once it is constructed in its ideal and desired form, the body-artifact has in its configuration the knowledge used for its growth/making.

Makushi ways of perceiving the body are similar to those of the Cashinawa, in the sense that both believe the body is constructed and that it is grown through knowledge (Lagrou, 1998; McCallum, 1996). Nonetheless, knowledge for the Makushi and many other Amazonian peoples is not an exercise or potency of the spirit as envisioned in the Hegelian separation of body and mind. Knowledge is experiential, and accessed through one's body and how it interacts and reacts to other bodies in the world. Access to knowledge is achieved through tangible, linguistic, sonorous, and spiritual experiences with other bodies and substances. Amazonian ethnography has shown how sharing substances can create communities of substance, or in other words, social groups based on the consubstantiality of their members (Gow, 1991; McCallum, 2001; G. Mentore, 2005; Rival, 1998; Seeger, Da Matta, & Viveiros de Castro, 1979; Vilaça, 2002). Moreover, perspectivism offers a very convincing explanation for why this is the case: metaphysical potencies are not

⁷⁵ *Oma'gon* is the plural version or *Oma'*.

qualities of the mind, but rather located in the mind but in the body (Lima, 1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1992, 1996b).

Another Makushi example that adds to this discussion is the group's uses for hot peppers. The use of hot peppers as a stimulant has been addressed by other scholars (Lévi-Strauss, 1952; Myers & Butt Colson, 1993; Roth, 1929). However, this has not been from the Amerindian point of view of the constructed body, or a body that is not intrinsically fixed and finished. In a Makushi village, children help their parents perform an enormous number of daily activities in their households. However, children do not always do their chores. Parents will insist that their children do their chores by asking "Did you not hear what I said? Go and do what I told you to do!" When their children continue to be inattentive to such requests, the parents will send the child to their grandmother. The grandmother will prepare a mixture of hot peppers, put it under her fingernail and use the nail to make a small incision in the child's rectum (Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015). It is important to highlight that this is not intended as a punitive action. This is done in order to transform the lazy child's body into a more active and productive body. Adult men also "pepper" themselves when they feel lazy and do not want to work on their farms or go hunting. To the Makushi, an idle body is a dying body. The Makushi say that "burning with pepper" heats up the body, and a

hot body is prone to physical activity. This could also mean violence. Too much heat generates violence. Butt Colson and de Armellada (1983) pointed out similarities in Akawaio local Creole notions of wealth and sickness in Guyana. However, I argue that Amerindians are not using hot/cold medicines or substances in an attempt to achieve the equivalent of an economic balance inside the body, as per the Creole logic of heat and sickness. As we have discussed earlier, bodies are not containers in Amerindian thought. What the Makushi are doing in administering hot/cold substances is creating hot/cold bodies with different physical and metaphysical properties.

Although the body has a central role in accessing knowledge, executing activities, and marking social categories of persons, not all experiences are embodied, or felt through the body. For example, the *pia'san's* journey and dreaming are ways of relating with others outside the body. As we saw in the descriptions at the beginning of chapter three, the spirits of both Luis and *Paaba Mengie* left their physical bodies to enter *to'pata* - the un-bodied place of spirits. Their spirits needed to "go up," to move from the middle layer of the world into the upper layer. The beating of leaves is how a *pia'san* can move and deliberately leave his body behind. The *whitie* is also known as the shaman's tree, because it is only by beating bundles of

its branches that the *pia'san's* spirit can take flight. Symbolically, the beating of the two bundles of leaves represents wings of birds. With them, the *pia'san* can take flight and gradually take his spirit higher and higher. Although the *pia'san* arrives at *to'pata* without a body, he can hear, talk, see, and engage with the other spirits because these are also bodiless. Not only does the shaman talk with the inhabitants of *to'pata*, but he also can have sex, marry, cheat, kill, or be killed by them. People in Tunaîmî told me *Paaba Mengie* was married and had a family in *to'pata*, and would elicit his family and in-laws' help when needed.⁷⁶

Dreamscape

As discussed previously, to the Makushi knowledge and thought are experienced through one's body. However, there are moments in which the body is separated from the spirit (*yekaton*). The latter is what animates and gives vitality to one's body and without it, the body will die, decay, and rot. The *pia'san* is the one trained in leaving his/her body and to journey into the other layers of the world. But everyone also experiences the separation between body (*sea'*) and spirit (*yekaton*)

⁷⁶ It is important to note that although everyone appears in human form in *to'pata*, they are not necessarily human. They could be deer, tortoises, spider monkeys, river otters, as well as other people, including the spirits of deceased people.

when they dream. Experiences lived in one's dreams are as real as experiences lived through one's body. However, they do not mean the same things.

When dreaming, *katonpî* (the spirit of a person) leaves the central layer, but it does not completely disassociate itself from the body to reach *to'pata* (the spiritual world). The dreamscape is a liminal stage in which both layers overlap and intersect with each other. Contrary to the *pia'san*, lay persons cannot control this transition. To the Makushi, it is through dreams that untrained persons can engage with spirits in a way similar to that of the *pia'san*.

Because Makushi epistemology focuses on the body and conceptualizes thought and knowledge as phenomenological, experiences in the dreamscape are interpreted differently. The latter are the result of the direct interaction of one's spirit (*katonpî*) with other spirits (*yakaton*) without the intermediation of physical bodies. The shaman does this by beating leaves, and people do it by dreaming. It is during their sleep that people's spirits "go up." Nonetheless, social interactions in different layers of the world can occur with different bodies (bodies of other-than-human beings, or spiritual "bodies"). In these, people experience time, or the perception and accountability of time, in a way that is different from how they experience it while in the middle layer. The reason is because the

presence and passing of time are experienced through the body, so different bodies provide different experiences. As a rule of thumb, Makushi people interpret dream experiences as preceding those in the middle layer. They are announcements of possible conditions of being. But one needs to interpret the events from the spiritual world in order for them to make sense. This is a matter of perspectivism (Lima, 1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1996b). As Viveiros de Castro puts it: the blood of one is another's beer (Ibid.). So the Makushi are always constructing their own symbolic relations of meaning from dreamscape to middle layer.

For example, when a hunter dreams of a beautiful young woman who offers herself and the pleasures of her sex to him, he takes his bow and arrows and leaves for the bush as soon as he wakes up. Having sex in a dream is a clear sign of success in the hunt, because intercourse is understood as a willing sacrifice on the part of the animal towards the hunter and his family. Once awake, the hunter will bathe, clean, and prepare his body for an intimate encounter with his prey, an encounter that has already happened and been consummated in the dreamscape.

The Makushi occasionally talk about their own dreams with friends and family, creating shared mappings of dreamscape experiences. But these correlations operate more like guides to

help each person figure out for themselves what their own experiences mean. This is done through carefully observing one's routine and interpreting one's dreams. People are always looking for correlations between specific characteristics of the dreamscape with occurrences in their daily activities. When such correlations are found, they are tested once again. If that proves to be correct, people will know that a particular element from the dreamscape means a specific probability in the everyday life. Such findings are shared amongst family and friends. In this way, these shared mappings are only reference points, since they are constantly changing by discussions of new dreams and new correlations. Some common correlations of items from the spiritual world to items in the middle layer are: shit::money; snake::dangerous encounter, entrapment; tortoise::even greater danger; loose teeth::death.

One example of a dreamscape experience is in Shikari's dream of a small female deer being killed by a huntsman's arrow (see chapter five). In that case, Shikari found out his sick child would die, since her spirit had gotten lost. Although her body was still warm during the night, Shikari knew her spirit was in the spiritual world and lost. That is why Kogo' was feeling sick, and why she was going to die. She was convulsing and speaking incoherently, and the Makushi say that a body without a *yekaton* does not last for long.

The way in which a *pia'san* vis-à-vis a person remembers his experiences in the spiritual world is different. *Pia'sans* have total recall of what they experience when their spirits leave their bodies. In spite of the discontinuity between body and spirit, *pia'sans* can perceive the series of events that takes place in their work. They can clearly remember their shamanic flight, arrival in the spiritual world, interactions with others spirits, and their journey back into their own bodies. What they do not know is what their bodies did when they were not there. In dreaming, the recall of events depends on the spirit's position in the vertical transition between layers. Having a light sleep means someone's spirit cannot go up far enough. Having a deep sleep means the spirit went up too far, traversing to the top layer almost completely. In these two cases, the Makushi say you cannot remember your dreams. It is also considered dangerous because the spirit may not be able to come back. I almost never remembered my dreams in the field, so they told me I was "sleeping dead."

The ideal situation is a balance between the middle and upper layers. This balance allows one to have recall of the dream, awareness of one's environment, and even awareness that one is dreaming. This awareness is very similar to what has been described as lucid dreaming (Castaneda, 1993). However, because people normally fluctuate between deep and light sleep, the

Makushi say people cannot quite remember exactly what happened in their dreams. To the Makushi, this is why a dream is remembered as having abrupt transitions. It is not that the dream-scape does not have cohesion, but the dreamer is not able to recall the entire experience because his/her spirit is never in a perfect midway position in the vertical transition between middle and top layer.

Telling Stories

When talking about their dreams, the Makushi do not see any difficulties in reporting being somewhere at one moment, and in the very next moment being somewhere else. This is because the world itself (in any and all of its layers) is not represented in a sequential succession of events, but rather in simultaneity. Because of the focus on the presence of time over the passing of time, the relational positions of pieces of information are always being constructed, but each piece is also seen as an integral part of a whole. That is not necessarily the case for a Euro-American trained person. For example, when we produce a narrative, we tend to present the points of the narrative in a chronologically linked chain of events. An earlier discussed topic in the narrative presents the foundation and/or the causality trigger on all the other events to follow. But we are also capable of diverging from this pattern, through

means such as humor. Through a "punch line," a good joke is capable of changing the assumed causal effect reference of a plot or narrative. But it does so because the joke is told in such a way as to deliberately change the causal effect pattern it is building. Good novels use similar allegories to create twists and turns in the the story. And that is precisely what makes them good, the weaving of mystery and uncertainty within the plot.

Makushi narration narrative style, on the other hand, does not normally present punch lines, nor mysteries to be revealed at the end. Storytellers normally present facts, are "straight-forward," and this, at the beginning of my field research, left me wondering "and then what?" or "what next?" However, there was no immediate follow-up for a specific narrative or *panton*. As I head the same stories being told over and over again, I realized that the plot was told "out of order" or "out of sequence." But I only noticed this fact when I became familiarized with a great number of stories about animals who lived in the region, the people from the main and satellite villages, their kinship networks, marriage patterns, and the stories of other villages in the Rupununi and Roraima (Brazil). When I was finally able to make sense out of what my hosts had told me since my arrival, placing elements into a chronological order or chain of causation was no longer important or relevant. I was able to

understand every piece as an integral in itself, as well as being part of another integral. When the Makushi emphasize the presence of time, it is as if the past and the future fold themselves into the present moment in synchronicity.

Synchronicity also appears in the dreamscape. There, people can also see other-than-human beings as humans, as well as see human persons as other-than-human beings. The literature in Amazonia is full of examples of different "others" taking the human point of view, allowing for the development of a convincing argument of multi-naturalisms and a mono-culturalism (Viveiros de Castro, 2004). Nonetheless, the ability to see these other-than-human beings as humans is normally reserved for shamans (Fausto, 2001; Vilaça, 1992; Viveiros de Castro, 1992). It is generally on the shamanic journey that the shamans acquire the other's point of view, thus being able to appropriately interact and engage with other-than-human persons. Langdon (2007) argues that the spiritual journey, the separation of body and spirit, and the movement to a different reality, is what separates shamanism from other similar practices and heuristic models of healing and killing. But in dreams, everyone who manages to remain in the overlapping space between the top and middle layer of the world can see other-than-humans as humans, and vice-versa.

On Dreams

On one occasion, I started to tell my host that I dreamt my teeth were loose, and before I could say more, she quickly shushed me. She then told me that whenever someone dreams of losing a tooth or teeth, it means that something bad is going to happen. It means that they are going to die. What the person must do is walk to a *caimbé*⁷⁷ tree in the middle of the savanna, and tell the dream to the tree. The person must make sure no one else is listening to the conversation. The tree will slowly shrivel, wither, and die. It is the dream that causes the dying, but it is possible to remove this certain death from one being and pass it on to another. That is why you should never tell another person. If you do, you might kill him or her.

On another occasion, I also dreamt that a particular Makushi man who had left his wife and abandoned the village had returned and was visiting his old house, where his wife was alone looking after their farm and their grandchildren. I was told that this couple had always had a troubled married life during their 50 years of marriage. The wife once told me her husband customarily beat her and had recently started to

⁷⁷ *Coussapoa asperifolia*. This is a very resilient tree mostly present in the savanna areas. The Makushi say the *caimbé* is the first tree to appear in the process of forestation. It is a sign that the forest is taking over the savanna. The *caimbé* resists the scalding sun and the savanna fires. Under the canopy of the *caimbé* tree, other species can germinate with protection from the intense sunlight and heat.

threaten her life. She was, to a certain extent, content that the husband had left and she had stopped suffering domestic violence. In my dream, he had come back on a black motorbike and stopped right at their old house. On the morning after the dream, I approached her and advised her to be careful, because her husband was coming back to the village. She appeared startled and immediately started inquiring about the provenance of this information, asking if I had seen her husband in Lethem, or if someone who worked with him at the ranch had told me he was coming back. I told her I had a dream. She acknowledged that with a simple nod of the head and changed the topic of our conversation. Two days later, she came to my house in the evening to tell me her husband had come to visit her "for truth." He had arrived after lunch at her house to talk to her. He came riding on a black motorcycle from the ranch where he was working. He wanted to know if she was doing alright, and how things had been since he had left one month before. She told me they only conversed, and that everything seemed okay. He returned back to the ranch later in the afternoon. About one month after his visit, I had another dream in which he came to the house on a motorcycle again, and sat outside of her house. I went back to the wife, and told her that her husband was coming. She asked, once again, where I had learned of this, and I told her it was from another dream, just like the previous time. As before, two

days later, the husband came back to the house and spent the whole afternoon with his wife and some of their adult children who were in the village. As soon as he left, she came to my house to tell me he had come to visit her again. After these two events, some members of her family came to me and asked what I had dreamed of that night, and laughed with me about the meanings of dreams. I could not remember all of my dreams, and they soon came to the conclusion that I "slept dead" almost every night. In these open discussions about dreams, I told them that I once saw a small, shy, and very fast deer. This had happened back in the U.S. during a shamanic journey guided by one of my professors. They said they also had this deer and that it was the father/owner of all the deer in the bush and savanna. I added that after that experience, almost every day for the entire time I lived in Charlottesville, I saw one or more deer close to my house. Seeing deer before had been very rare; I never saw them. One person said he would take me hunting one day, so that we could catch deer. Everyone laughed and said that perhaps I was a *muran* for deer.

Exchanging Substances

Many examples described in this chapter illustrate the importance of dreams and dreaming to the Makushi. I want to stress that the laughing is not a way to discredit information, but

rather it is a way to intimately relate with someone else. It is through laughter and jocular relations that one can sometimes talk about things that are otherwise taboo or inappropriate. Schererger (2005) distinguishes two types of laughter among the Makushi: malevolent and benevolent. According to her, benevolent laughter is collective and occurs in public speeches, festivities, farms, and households. She argues the benevolent laughter, the act of laughing together, is free of the limitations of language, and also does not differentiate between speaker and listener, thus not only operating outside, but also working against the hierarchical distinctions present in language (e.g., active and passive, speaker and listener, etc.). Schererger concludes that "through the blurring and blending of voices in collective laughter, the sound of equity is achieved" (Ibid.). The malevolent laughter is the opposite, wherein the implicit hierarchical positions of language are emphasized. In laughing at someone else, it is clear to those involved or witnessing the event 1) who is doing the laughing and 2) who is the object and the target of the laughter. This type of laughter is not only offensive and frowned upon by the Makushi, but it can be used to do harm and cause death. This can be the case when someone dreams that an animal (most of the time a howler monkey) is looking and laughing at them. In the case of the monkey, they might even point, throw sticks, urinate, and defecate on the

person in the dream. The Makushi see the person being laughed at, peed on, and soiled as a target and victim of a dark shamanic attack (Ibid.).

In the daily life of the village, a Makushi person is almost always in the presence of others, and when they converse they constantly smile, make jokes, giggle, and laugh with one another. Even when there is a serious topic at stake, or a personal accusation, there is always a joke that comes to the surface that makes the audience and the interlocutors laugh⁷⁸ (see chapter two). I argue that this is not only a matter of social decorum and a destruction of hierarchical positions, but produces a shared substance. Looking at laughter through the lens of Amerindian notions of the body, laughing is a moment in which a sonorous substance is produced on and then enters into the body through the openings of the ears. The sonorous substance, the wave of sounds produced by individual laughter, combines with other laughter coming from other persons. Even though each laugh could be identified individually, the interaction and mixing of each laugh's sonic substance creates a collective amalgamation that enters peoples' bodies (Brabec de Mori, 2013, 2015). Therefore, laughing together is analogous to

⁷⁸ One exception to this is when physical violence is happening or imminent. Also, in the case of verbal attacks and offenses that happen during alcoholic intoxication, the drunk person is not laughing, but everyone else is laughing at the situation.

eating and living together. On the other hand, laughing at someone has the opposite effect as the nurturing aspects of laughing together. The sonorous substance produced by the laughing party is aimed towards one individual or set of individuals being laughed at. Because the laughter is unidirectional, not interacting with the sound waves from other laughter, its effects in the body are similar to the invisible arrows, *taren* and *muran*, that are used to do harm, cause pain, and even death.

Alleluia Songs

The Makushi learn and access new Alleluia songs in similar ways to how they learn and access shamanic knowledge. In the Alleluia context, God interacted directly with the first Alleluia priest and taught him the songs of worship. One can say that God first sang the songs to Bichiwung, who in turn sang them to his followers. The Alleluia congregation would sing together for hours, but the songs and chants were not to address Bichiwung, but rather to address God. The former was the interlocutor of the songs, not the latter. Alleluia practitioners learned songs by singing them over and over again, but God also kept singing and teaching new songs at first to Bichiwung, then later to other Alleluia priests, who then taught these new songs to their people. These new songs were added to the repertoire of songs and could be sung at the church. This is similar to

how a person learns new *taren* and *muran* and adds them to his or her repertoire. Not everyone who knows a particular *taren* or *muran* learns them directly from other-than-human beings. In fact, the majority of people actually learned them from other human persons by listening, and putting together parts of the *pantoni* that give away parts of the knowledge on some particular *muran* and *taren*. As in Alleluia, a person's *muran* and *taren* repertoire can increase as he/she acquires more knowledge of different plants and words from other-than-human beings, or by other human persons who know different plants and words. The learning process and the knowledge of *muran* and *taren* can be fragmentary in comparison to the Alleluia practice of singing one song ad exhaustion. However, in both cases the origin of the knowledge can be traced to a particular moment of interaction between two alterities who momentarily shared the same point-of-view. It is this conflation of perspectives that allows for intelligible communication and access to knowledge.

Final Remarks

The themes presented in this chapter can be used to build a model or scheme of shamanic thought and practices among the Makushi. Nevertheless, the goal of this chapter is not to develop a single paradigm capable of circumscribing the multiverse and complex system of Makushi shamanic thought and practices.

The borders and distinctions between the *pia'san*, *taren*, and *muran* are artificial constructs put into place to aid in understanding how these elements are woven and twisted together, like a *tipiti* that can expand and contract, changing its shape, form, orifices, thus changing the vectors of force it exercises.

As discussed earlier, knowledge of *taren* and *muran* has an other-than-human origin. It is the *pia'san* who first learns them during his journeys to the upper layer of the world, directly from the father/owner of the animal and plants. Because *taren* involves the recitation of certain words, which most of the time refer back to a particular story or *panton* (and the whole complexity of events of mythological times - *pantoni*), this suggests that when the *pia'san* travels to the upper layer, he is also traveling in space-time. Because the learning is experiential and the *pia'san* gains access to the knowledge Pia gave to his people, the upper layer is, for all purposes, the space-time of where and when the current state of affairs of the world are settled. It is the past, the present, and the moment of creation when all folds into a space of synchronicity. Not unlike other Amerindians, the Makushi also say that all the animals used to be people in the past. That underlining factor is used to argue for a notion of multi-naturalism and mono-culturalism (Viveiros de Castro, 2004), or animism (Descola, 2013).

On the other hand, the Makushi people themselves do not philosophize extensively on why only they, and some other peoples, kept their physical bodies, but the *pantoni* explains in detail why every animal looks the way it looks today, by shedding their human skin, or putting different layers on top of their human skin. Although people see animals in the middle layer in other-than-human skin, when the *pia'san* travels to the upper layer, he touches, smells, and sees other human bodies who he knows are from other-than-human persons and peoples (e.g. the deer people, alligator people, harpy eagle people, peccary people, *oma'* people, the dead, etc.).⁷⁹ It is by interacting with all these different types of people that the *pia'san* gains access to their knowledge, to the knowledge of the beginning of times, to the knowledge shared by Pia himself. As the training of the *pia'san* progresses, he starts to make sense of what these people are saying, because he starts to learn their language, to touch them, to smell them, and to laugh with them.

Although the *pia'san* gains access to pieces of knowledge that belonged to the beginning of time, he can pass this

⁷⁹ I want to highlight the importance of senses other than sight. I am using "people" rather than just the classification of animals because the Makushi do not make a simple distinction between humans and non-humans, but rather a distinction between kinds of people. It is also hard for the Euro-American intellect to imagine a "human person" without visualizing an example of the human body (*homo sapiens* as a biological category). To the Makushi, an initial visual inspection of one's body is not the most important aspect in defining a "human" person. One needs to know how that body acts, reacts, and behaves in the presence of other bodies and alone. Sound, scent, taste, and feeling are also very important.

knowledge on to others by teaching them how to bring forth a *taren* and how to prepare and use a *muran*. The use of *taren* and *muran* do not require a shamanic journey, perhaps not even fitting into a typological shamanic system as imagined by Eliade (1972). In fact, the logic of *taren* and *muran* practices and uses can also be understood within the models of sympathetic and empathetic magic (Douglas, 1970; Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Frazer, 1890). But because *taren* and *muran* have their efficacy linked to relationships established with other-than-human beings, I am treating them as elements of Makushi shamanic thought. Moreover, the way the knowledge of *taren* and *muran* circulates in the villages is analogous to the way the Alleluia songs circulate.

Conclusion

The six chapters of this dissertation present different elements that help us weave together a picture of Makushi understandings of political legitimacy and sociality. Ultimately, the dissertation presents and explores some of the differences between the Makushi/Amerindian and Guyanese/Caribbean understandings of the power to kill.

The main points presented in chapter one were Makushi strategies of conflict resolution; notions of village leadership; different logics that address internal and external sources of monies for village projects; and how the Makushi locate politics in the convivial interactions and negotiations that happen in daily life, not necessarily in public events such as a village meeting. It is in fact through daily life and living together that the Makushi of Tunaîmî give meaning to elements internal and external to their own village.

Chapter two discusses how the Amerindian Act is conceived to solve the problem of mediation amongst individuals and the State. This is, however, a problem that does not exist in Makushi nor in other Lowland Amazonian societies. This chapter also presents topics such as the current exploitation and enslavement of Makushi and Amerindian labor in the region; the use of an

environmental discourse to create policies and programs concerning Makushi hunting and farming practices; and the establishment of prescribed written rules to govern each Amerindian village in Guyana. Moreover, chapter two also introduces the notion of contextual kinship among the Makushi; how they categorize alterity in different kinds of people; and lastly how although participating in the production and reproduction of Euro-American institutions, the Makushi challenge and obviate them.

Chapter three presents different stories that give a clear imagery to some sections of the dissertation. Some of these stories can be classified as myths, others as ethnographic observation, and others as ethno-history. However, to the Makushi they are part of their *pantoni*, which is used to constantly create and give meaning to the world they live in. This constant process of creation of the world by giving meaning to things and peoples is further explored in chapter four. Chapter four presents a representation of history and the social *milieu* of which the Makushi are a part. This chapter discusses how the British, Portuguese, Brazilian, and Guyanese colonial projects influenced Makushi and Amerindian representations of resistance and death. In the circum-Roraima region, the *kanaima* is the most iconic figure of a threat and realization of death that comes from the outside. This representation is also connected and

related to the notion of conviviality and living well that is nurtured in the village, but in an opposite position.

Chapter five describes some of the events related to the death of a child in the village, and how the persons closely involved dealt with this traumatic experience. This chapter also presents the contradictory position in which the Makushi must put themselves in the context of Guyana as a nation and as a State. The figure of the Head Nurse is exemplary in this chapter, since she is at the same time a woman, a mother, and a kinsperson to Lakshmi, thus she cannot behave following all the roles she occupies. In the context described in chapter five, she is Head Nurse. She is an employee of the State. She has to be impartial and not let her personal feelings get in the way. More than the idea of a technocrat, State employees also impose their superiority over the non-State persons with whom they interact.

Chapter six adds to the discussion on the Makushi by presenting their cosmology and how the different layers of the world relate to each other. This relationship is important because it helps us situate Bichiwung's trip to England and the development of the Alleluia religion as an opposition to the logic of power imposed by European colonialism. Although Alleluia and Bichiwung are counter-positioning themselves in relation to the English and Christianity, the latter are already interpreted as possibilities that are ontologically valid. This

is the case because the world that the English and Christianity represent is simply one more world in the array of possible worlds that persons can move through. Chapter six finally deepens the exploration of themes presented throughout the dissertation. These are mainly the Makushi concepts of *muran* and *taren* and how people come to access them. As presented in chapter six, knowledge itself has agency, and it is knowledge that exchanges people, not the other way around. We can also trace this exchange back to a moment where other-than-human beings were involved. This is normally the case when people travel to the spiritual world in dreams or in shamanic flights. Other-than-human persons can also come to the middle layer and interact with the Makushi, but this interaction is deemed dangerous because the latter appear not in human bodies, but mostly in the bodies of dangerous animals.

As a whole, the dissertation is more than a presentation of Makushi ways of being and thinking, but a comparison between the Makushi and the non-Amerindian Guyanese society. In other words, it is a comparison between the cultural representations of these two systems: one Amerindian and the other Caribbean. The aspect in which these two systems diverge the most is the need for an institutionalized legitimacy to kill. In Guyanese and other Euro-American societies, the body is a natural given.

Everyone is conceived of as an individual citizen with a singular, unique, and non-replicable body. However, since not all bodies look alike, some of the differences between them are thought of in terms of race. This is especially the case in the context of the State and policies used to survey and manage populations. As a result, race becomes a natural and essential characteristic of the body of all individuals and citizens. Moreover, in Guyanese society (as well as in other State societies) individuals are thought to be equals and have the same potencies, but not all individuals fulfill their potential. The system then creates a hierarchy that mediates the achievement of these individual potencies and potentials (e.g., economic, social, and political).

Since the human body is perceived as a natural given in Euro-American thought, the hierarchies that the Guyanese and other State societies create, especially those with a high correlation to group identity, are thus perceived as natural distinctions. In Guyana (prior to and after colonialism), this created a hierarchical system based on racial aspects, where Blacks possessed literacy, East-Indians possessed wealth, and Amerindians were dispossessed of either. After independence, Blacks and East-Indians did not question the qualitative aspects of race, but reproduced them. However, they disputed amongst themselves the hierarchical position previously occupied by the

English. This hierarchy is also presented in bodily comportment that marks these structural differences (e.g., ways of dressing, modes of speaking, gestures, tone of voice, word choice and accent, etc.) There are several instances where these comportments appear in the ethnographic description, the most significant of these being when the Makushi interact with government employees, either non-Amerindian or Amerindian. For example, the hospital Head Nurse and the school Headmistress are both State employees. As such, they have to occupy a role with intrinsic hierarchical distinctions and traits of comportment based on the dualist racial categories of the Coastlanders: Blacks and East-Indians. Some of these traits show disrespectful and prejudicial views of Amerindians. When the Makushi and other Amerindians occupy these roles, they reproduce the mistreatment of Amerindian peoples, because this is what they have learned from experience when interacting with government employees. Amerindians reproduce the hierarchical racial structure of Guyanese society, since they have learned that Amerindians are dispossessed of the natural characteristics that make the Blacks and East-Indians "good" at politics and business. It is understood that marking this difference is part of what working for the government should be.

In contrast, to the Makushi and Amerindians in general, the body is not a natural given. The body is constantly fabricated, it is malleable and mutable, and it is not *a priori* fixed in one single shape or form. The Makushi themselves say they can become Guyanese or Brazilian, and some even shapeshift into other powerful beings. As presented in the dissertation, *kanaimas* are the ultimate threat, since they can shapeshift into animals and their uncontrollable desires threaten everyone.

Coastlanders naturalize some qualitative traits and aspects of race, as well as the notion of citizenship itself. This is not the case among the Makushi. To the latter, the person and the body are in a constant process of becoming. Becoming something else than what it already is, or becoming the same that it has been for a while. The process of becoming is carried out by the persons themselves, but it is also affected by interactions and exchanges with other beings, either human or other-than-human.

Besides the differences listed thus far, Guyanese and Makushi philosophies of the body coincide in locating the capacity to kill: both locate the capacity to kill in one's body. But for Guyanese society, the body is natural, while for the Makushi, the body is fabricated. To the Makushi, the capacity to kill is in every body, and anyone can exercise it. But there are some bodies more prone to produce death than others. The

tendency to violence is located in the body, or rather, in the configuration of certain bodies (depending on how they are assembled). Therefore, the Makushi pay close attention to those with whom they interact, what animals they eat, how they talk to each other, how much pepper they eat, etc. This is done in order to create and maintain docile bodies. Because Guyanese society also locates the capacity to kill in the body, which is thought of as a natural given, the capacity to kill is therefore also natural. Furthermore, this natural capacity stands as a threat of violence that can come from anyone, and from anywhere. Therefore, any and every one is a potential killer, and people live in a state where man is the wolf of man.

The last point about the threat coming from anyone may resemble how the Makushi understand and approach *kanaimas*, but this similarity is only superficial. In the Hobbesian world of nature, everyone lives in a state of generalized fear because everyone is a killer. Everyone kills indiscriminately to fulfill their uncontrollable desires. The Makushi also live in constant fear of *kanaimas*, and it is impossible to identify who the *kanaima* really is. But *kanaimas* are always outsiders, while in the world of nature, every single person is a threat to the other. So the Makushi generalize suspicions and fear only for outsiders. Another distinction is that in the Hobbesian world, fear comes from the certainty of knowing everyone is a killer,

while to the Makushi the fear comes from the uncertainty of not knowing who the *kanaima* is. Another interesting, albeit superficial similarity comes from what motivates the killing: uncontrollable desires. However, in the Hobbesian system this is generalized, while in the Makushi system that which is generalized is balance and control.

In Euro-American societies, the State emerges as the ultimate violent being, brought forth to control the excessive natural desires of man that threaten life itself. Thus, only the State must be able to exercise violence and kill legitimately. But since the capacity to kill is located in the body, the State needs a body. It gains a *Political Body*, which is also conceptualized as natural, in similar ways to the *Physical Body*. And since they are both natural, they cannot be changed.

To the Makushi, there is no distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence. Violence and death are simply another part of life, and another aspect of being in the world. Unlike most Guyanese, the Makushi have to hunt and kill the animals they eat. Makushi bodies are not only capable of producing death, but they must kill in order to survive. They eat their prey, in order to nurture themselves and their families. And since the Makushi believe all animals were once human, these deaths are seen as murders. This points to another contrast

between Guyanese and Caribbean societies, since amongst the Makushi and other Amerindians, their individual potential is always fulfilled. On the other hand, Caribbean and Euro-American societies have to control and mediate the fulfillment of the potential of their citizens. Among Coastlanders in Guyana, everyone has the same potential, but the system creates hierarchy. In other words, everyone begins as equals, but ends up in different positions in the social hierarchy. For the Makushi, the potential of the body is always fulfilled, but their worlds have different categories of bodies and of people. The potential of a woman, of a man, and of a child is always fulfilled when the people occupy these and other categories. In Guyanese society, the fulfillment of a person's potential is constrained and restricted by his or her hierarchical position.

In conclusion, the State's use of force and violence to kill has to be located in its capacity to kill another's body. In such a way, the State recognizes its right to exist as equally natural to the existence of the human body. This equates the political body to the natural body, but the political body exists to restrain the natural body from carrying out its full potencies. On the other hand, the Makushi do not conceive of the same dichotomy between nature and culture, nor do they fear the threat of violence from generalized excessive desires. But

as the Makushi and other Amerindians in Guyana become more active, participant, and relevant in the national and regional politics, Amerindians and non-Amerindians alike are forced to engage and interact with peoples that carry with them a significantly different understanding of the world and of the fulfillment of human potencies. I hope that in the process of nation-building and engaging in national and international politics, Amerindians and non-Amerindians alike can become aware of their cultural dissidence and start to engage with one another without cultural misunderstanding.

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