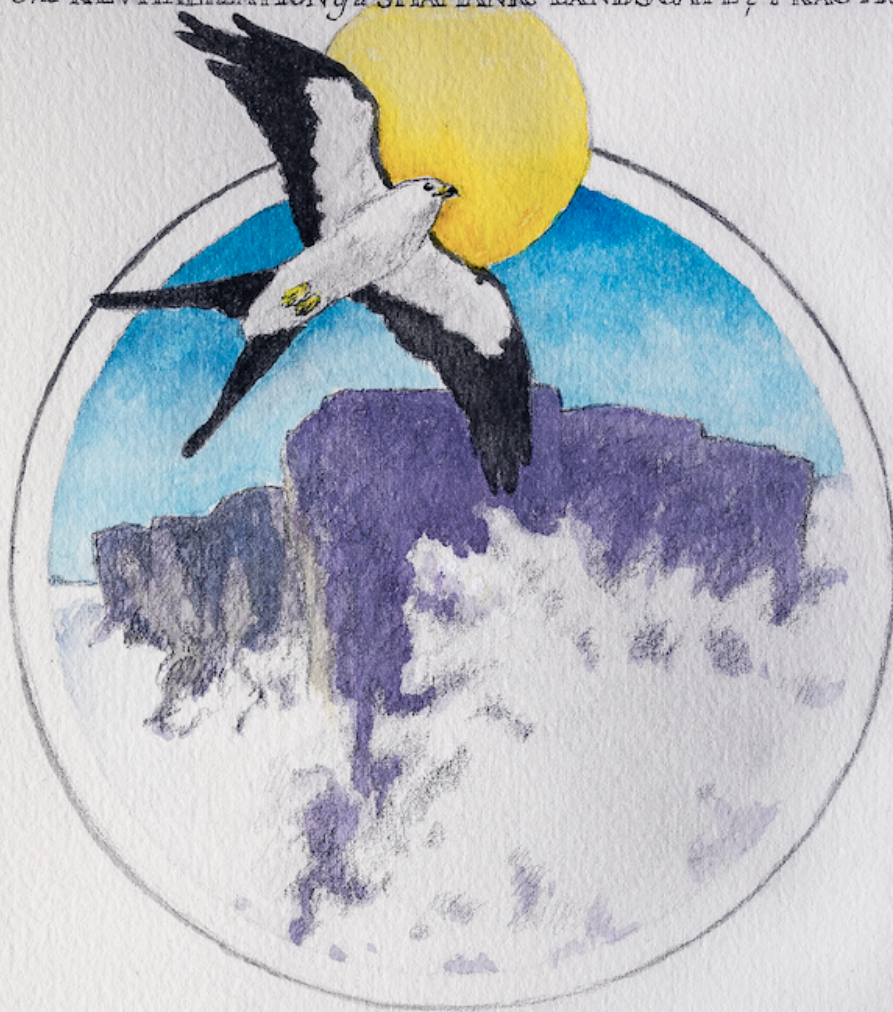


UNDER MOUNT RORAIMA
The REVITALIZATION of a SHAMANIC LANDSCAPE & PRACTICE



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**Under Mount Roraima:
The Revitalization of a Shamanic Landscape and Practice**

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Abstract

Humans have unique capacities to enhance and degrade landscapes. Many indigenous peoples embody conceptual systems that perceive, value and interact within landscapes differently than capitalist models of conservation and development. This thesis examines the spiritual ecology of the circum-Roraima landscape atop the Guiana Shield in South America. An extensive interdisciplinary literature review contextualizes primary data collected during 15 months of multi-sited ethnogeographic fieldwork among Pemon and Ka'pon members of the Carib linguistic family. Data in the form of narratives are interpreted within the theoretical framework of landscape that links subfields of historical, spiritual and political ecology. A detailed research program designed to collect qualitative emic data draws methods from ethnography, ethnoecology, historical ecology, grounded theory and decolonizing methodologies. An analysis of the adaptive capacities of situated spiritual ecological knowledge and practices is an important component of this research, since this dimension of landscape is often neglected in conservation and development studies. Ultimately, the project documents and analyzes endangered knowledge systems, reveals new historical details of the syncretic Areruya highland revitalization movement and articulates a shamanic land ethic.

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List of Acronyms

AC - Area Council
ADF - Amerindian Development Fund
APA - Amerindian People's Association
APNU - A Partnership for National Unity
BO - Boundary object
CARICOM - Caribbean Community and Common Market
CBD - Convention on Biological Diversity
CDP - Community Development Plan
CI - Conservation International
CIDA - Canadian International Development Agency
COBRA - Community Owned Best Practice for Sustainable Resource Adaptive Management in the Guiana Shield program
COCA - Community Owned Conservation Area (Konashen, among the Wai-Wai)
CPI - Corruption Perceptions Index
DGIS - Directorate General of International Cooperation of the Netherlands
EPA - Environmental Protection Agency of Guyana
FPIC – Free prior and informed consent
FUNAI - Fundação Nacional do Índio (the National Indian Foundation of Brazil)
GEF - Global Environmental Facility (part of the World Bank Group)
GIS - Geographic information system
GOIP - Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples
GPS - Global Positioning Systems
GRIF - Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund
GSF - Guiana Shield Facility
GSI - Guiana Shield Initiative
IBAMA - Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis (the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources)
IDA - International Development Association (World Bank Group)
IDB – Inter-American Development Bank
IT - Indigenous territory
IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature
KMCRG - Kanuku Mountain Community Representative Group
LCDS - Low Carbon Development Strategy
MOAA - Ministry of Amerindian Affairs
MOU - Memorandum of Understanding
MRU - Makushi Research Unit
MRV - Measurement, reporting and verification
NPDB - North Pakaraima Development Board
NRDDB - North Rupununi District Development Board
NTC - National Tshaos Council

NTFP - Non-timber forest product
PAR - Participatory action research
PNC - People's National Congress
PPP - People's Progressive Party
REDD+ - Reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation and the conservation, sustainable management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
RLF - Rupununi Learners Foundation
RLI - Rupununi Learners Incorporated
PES - Payments for Ecosystem Services
SDAC - Seventh-day Adventist Church
SES - Social-ecological system
UECC - Upper Essequibo Conservation Concession
UMDC - Upper Mazaruni District Council
UNDP - United Nation Development Programme
WWF - World Wildlife Fund

Chapter 1: Introduction

Ongoing religious conflicts, severe climatic events and market failures expose the limitations of our understanding of the interconnected nature of the world's spiritual, ecological and economic systems. Advances in technology and neoliberal policies are connecting increasingly urbanized populations in a global marketplace and hegemony of capitalist elites (Harvey 2005a). Languages, cultures, ecosystems and landscapes are invaluable information storehouses; however, economic development theory primarily imagines a commoditized environment where value, utility and power are derived from top-down logics of capital accumulation and exchange that marginalize local sovereignty and diversity at an accelerating rate. This thesis joins a growing chorus demonstrating the need to move away from individual and collective ideologies based on profit-maximization, to a re-imagined, equitable and environmentally just global society and shamanic land ethic.

Rich archeological, linguistic, ethnohistorical and genetic evidence suggests that diverse, mobile and migratory societies (Alexiades 2009) have maintained profound emotional, symbolic and material dialectics within Amazonian landscapes for millennia (Balée and Erickson 2006; Rival 2006). This thesis analyzes the continuity and transformation of Amerindian¹ conceptual systems, rituals and sacred sites within the landscape surrounding Mount Roraima in the Guiana Highlands of South America. Primary qualitative data on the spiritual ecological dimension of this landscape—a domain that is difficult to measure and quantify—is derived from oral histories, folklore and other narratives collected during 15 months of ethnogeographic fieldwork among Pemon and Ka'pon members of the Carib linguistic family. This data are then syncretized with secondary data to construct a comprehensive cosmology for the circum-Roraima landscape.

¹ Most informants for this project (listed in Chapter 2) refer to themselves as Amerindians rather than Native Americans, Indians, First Nations, Aborigines, Indigenous Peoples or otherwise. Therefore the word 'Amerindian'

There are three primary specialists in the shamanic ritual sphere within this landscape: the *piyai'san* (shaman, pronounced 'piyai-chong' or 'piyai-zong'; also spelled *piiai'chan*, *piiai'zan*, *piiai'san* or *piyai-man* in Creole English; *payé* in Brazilian Portuguese), *kanaimi* (sorcerer or dark shaman; *e'toto* in Akawaio, pronounced 'dōdō') and *pukena'* (the Areruya 'wise man' or 'prophet leader').² The tools and ecstatic traditions—what some Amerindians call 'high science'—of shamanism were developed through ancient animist dialectics with plants, animals, rocks, sacred sites, natural phenomena and diverse other-than-human persons.³

According to Amerindian animist conceptual systems situated within the circum-Roraima landscape, diverse other-than-human persons (Hallowell 2002[1960]) enforce a socio-ecological ethic that has long been lost in other 'more developed' parts of the world. These beings are integral to the maintenance of Amerindian landscapes, especially within the context of hunting, foraging, agricultural practices, healing, rites of passage and more. This unique sensitivity is articulated through rich linguistic, oral, ritual, medicinal, aesthetic, music and dance traditions and sacred sites. Research has proven that when infrastructure development, deforestation, resource extraction and agricultural and pastoral conversion encroach on Amerindian communities, they often lose their land and the animist ontologies that protect it (Southgate and Runge 1990; Davis and Wali 1994; Godoy et al. 1998; Schwartzman and Zimmerman 2005).

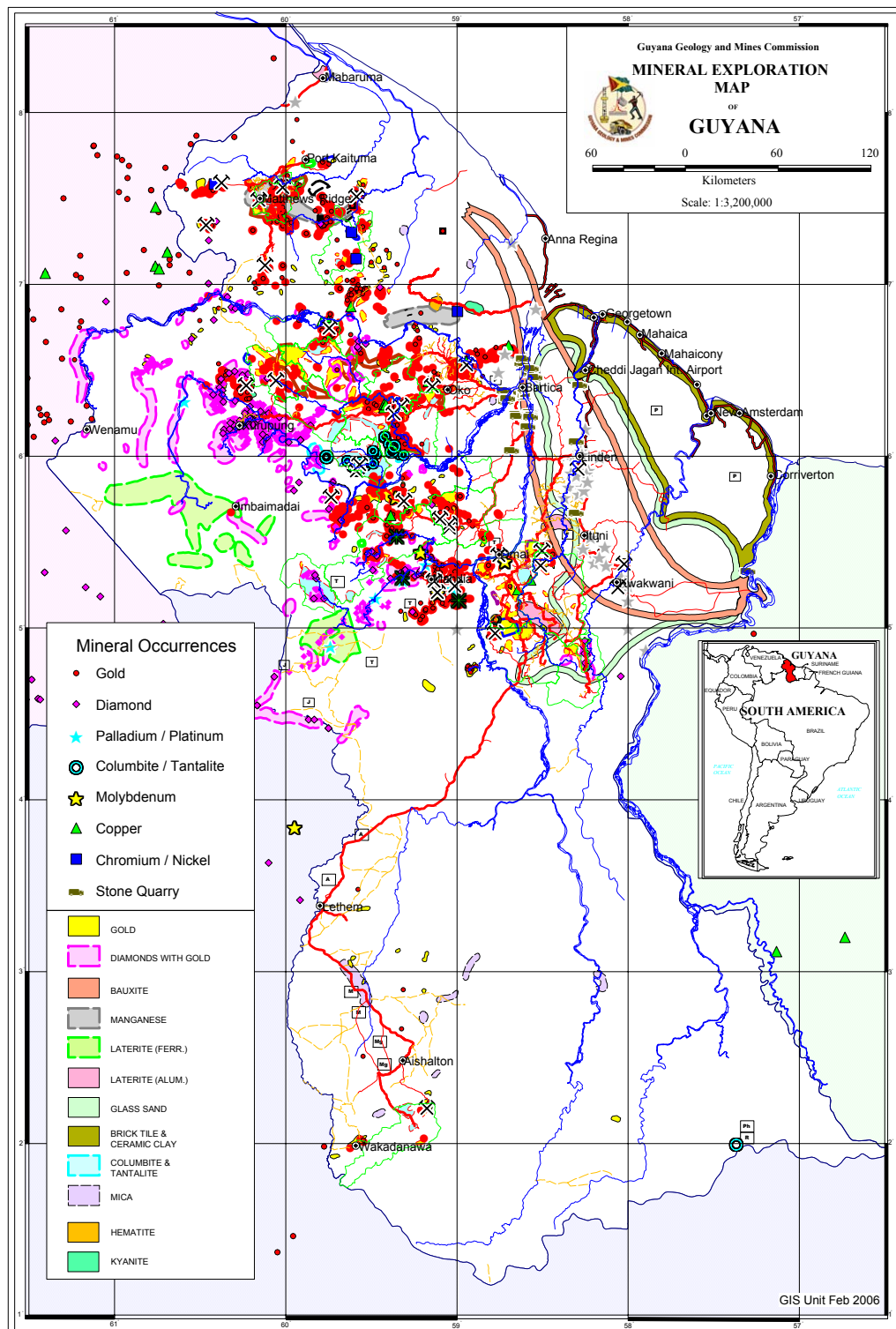
² Since a vast majority of the secondary data comes from the Akawaio, this thesis uses their spelling (*piyai'san*) that corresponds to a grammatical logic recently forged by the Akawaio in collaboration with trained linguists. Conversely, I use the word *kanaimi* instead of *e'toto* because it is more widely understood. See Glossary for a table of the Akawaio alphabet.

³ The term 'other-than-human person' was developed by Irving Hallowell based on his work with the Ojibwe of southern-central Canada and their animist perception of entities seen in dreams, the sun, masters and mistresses of resources including plant and animal species, myths and more as 'people' that have consciousness, souls, volition and an outward form that is changeable (2002[1960]). It is used here because the Ka'pon and Pemon similarly refer to the wider community of beings animating the circum-Roraima landscape including plants, animals, stones, masters and mistresses of resources, stories, mythological actors and more by saying that 'everything is people'. See discussion of biospiritual agents (Thornton 2011) in the theoretical framework below and a discussion of animism in the spiritual ecology literature review; also see Morrison 2000.

The four maps included in this thesis are intended to address contested postcolonial questions of belonging, rights and presence through exogenous, endogenous and collaboratively constructed imaginaries (Radcliffe 2010, 2012). Participatory maps do exist for the landscape, including one held by the Upper Mazaruni District Council, but they are not presented because many include sensitive information regarding sacred sites that Village Council members did not want publicized. Most maps of this landscape tend to focus on vast forested ‘wilderness areas’/resource deposits, such as Map 1, a mineral exploration map constructed by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission in February 2006. This map emphasizes mineral deposits and mines and not much more. It epitomizes the colonial-extractive geographical knowledge that many project onto this rich landscape; it also reveals the encroaching mining frontier.

Map 2 (page 5) is a physical and human geographical representation of the circum-Roraima landscape that is intended to emphasize Mt. Roraima and isolated Amerindian villages (especially those that were visited during fieldwork; see Logistics in Chapter 2 for a complete list) that are often neglected and would like to be included in depictions of this landscape. Map 2 was produced collaboratively and illustrated by Winfield Coleman in August 2014 taking multiple geographical imaginations and relational politics into consideration (Radcliffe 2010; 2012).⁴ Since there aren’t any reliable maps of the circum-Roraima landscape that include Amerindian villages, this map was constructed by integrating various maps of rivers and villages from different sources. Many of the Amerindian villages (not all are included), particularly those in the Upper Mazaruni River region, can be perceived as islands in a sea of primary and secondary forest and savannah (with forest islands).

⁴ Winfield Coleman also illustrated Map 4 and the title page with the image of a swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*; *kumara*’ in Akawaio), a primary shamanic helper or *imawari* (‘disembodied spirit’ in Akawaio) flying over Mt. Roraima. Coleman is an illustrator, painter, writer, editor, lecturer and ethnological researcher who has worked on many books, museum catalogs and research materials on native peoples and their art (see Coleman 1980, 2005; Tafoya 1997; Cowdrey et al. 2006, 2012; Roscoe 2013).



Map 1: Mineral exploration in Guyana

The principal physical attributes in Map 2 include the primary rivers and mountains such as Makarapan and the Kanuku Mountains in Guyana, as well as Mount Roraima and the adjacent Waiaka Piapi (the Tree of Life discussed in Chapter 3) that rise from the Pakaraima Mountains. Many of the mountains in this northeastern portion of the Amazon biome are flat or table-topped with sharp escarpments, including Mount Roraima that rises to an elevation of 2,810 m. (9,220 ft.) with a summit area of 31 km² bounded on all sides by cliffs rising 400 meters (1,300 ft.; Swan 1957; see Figure 3). In addition to elevation, the map does not show that most of the region is forested (including roughly 80% of Guyana) except for a large portion of savannah that stretches from the Rupununi River in Guyana through the Raposa Serra do Sol in the Estado de Roraima, Brazil to the Gran Sabana of Estado Bolívar in Venezuela. The map also does not show the ancient network of trekking trails and more recent airstrips and mining pockmarks. Solid red lines in Brazil and Venezuela are paved roads; dotted red lines in Guyana represent treacherous dirt ‘roads’ that are subject to frequent flooding, especially during the wet season.

Map 2 also shows the diverse political, cultural and linguistic frameworks of Brazil (Portuguese), Guyana (English), Venezuela (Spanish) and Suriname (Dutch). The international borders are highlighted in white with Mount Roraima trisected at its apex by Brazil, Guyana and Venezuela. Within Guyana, there are several ‘protected areas’ including the Iwokrama Forest, Kaieteur Falls and the Kanuku Mountains. The *Parque Nacional Canaima* in Venezuela is the largest of these models. It is also the most accessible portion of the Guiana Highlands with tourism infrastructure primarily focused on Mt. Roraima and Angel Falls, the highest free-falling waterfall in the world.⁵ The Brazilian territory includes the Raposa Serra do Sol and São Marcos indigenous territories. It does not show Mount Roraima National Park discussed toward the end of Chapter 3.

⁵ I visited Canaima National Park twice: once for a week while trekking to Angel Falls in 2008; the second time during a similar one-week trek up Mt. Roraima in Feb. 2012.

Map 3 (page 33) was constructed by a Pemon artist named José Antonio Figueroa, a member of the syncretic movement known as San Miguel in the Gran Sabana of Venezuela. It was given to Padre Cesáreo de Armellada (a Capuchin missionary) and was later adapted and published by David Thomas (1976:43). Attempts were made to construct a similar map during fieldwork among the Areruya Indians (Emmel 2008; Puri 2010b), but they are not included here in a visual format because there was not a clear consensus among Areruya Leaders regarding the structure of their universe and not enough time or willing local artists to construct a presentable map. Little information is available regarding the current status of San Miguel and other lesser-known syncretic movements in the circum-Roraima landscape. The San Miguel cosmological sketch is presented in Map 3 because it is an excellent example of how indigenous conceptual systems in the circum-Roraima landscape have transformed as a result of Christian teachings while maintaining certain fundamental shamanic principles, much like Areruya.

Map 4 (page 86) is a cosmogram of the shamanic universe constructed from emic Ka'pon and Pemon data collected from freelists, cultural domain analysis and cognitive maps recorded during fieldwork (Frake and Conklin 1962; Puri and Vogl 2005; Emmel 2008; Puri 2010b; see Chapter 2: Methodology) reinforced by ethnographic literature (Armellada 1964; Wavell et al. 1966; Colson 1971b, 1976, 1977, 1989, 1998; Colson and Armellada 1989; Whitehead 2002, 2004; Fox 2003) and illustrated by Winfield Coleman. After returning from fieldwork, I worked closely with Winfield to artistically present the data I gathered in a coherent system. It is contextualized and presented within the shamanic conceptual system articulated in Chapter 4. In many ways, it is a synthesis of this entire project, in a visual format. Ultimately, this cosmogram does not emanate from a specific individual, community, ethnic group or movement, but rather a wider landscape of interaction.

Research outline

The central aim of this human geographical project is to understand the biological, cultural and spiritual relations within the circum-Roraima landscape including shamanic responses to a transcendent cosmos. To achieve this, the investigation has three primary objectives: (1) to document the shamanic and syncretic conceptual systems and spiritual history of the circum-Roraima landscape; (2) to enrich the theory of historical ecological landscape with a spiritual ecological dimension; and (3) to demonstrate the relevance and value of shamanic land ethics for social and ecological sustainability at multiple scales.

The following questions guide the research toward the first objective: (1) What other-than-human inhabitants and sacred sites exist within the circum-Roraima landscape and how are they perceived and engaged with? (2) How does one become a *piyai 'san*, *kanaimi* and *pukena* and what is the nature of their disposition, interrelation and engagement with the environment? (3) What shamanic rituals and tools are used to engage with the spiritual dimension of landscape?

Another set of questions target the second objective: (4) What is the role of spirituality in landscape? (5) What is the relationship between culture, nature and spirit? (6) How do land use patterns and spiritual values co-evolve?

The third objective is addressed by asking: (7) How have Amerindian natural resource management techniques and land ethics been informed by spiritual beliefs and practices? (8) What constitutes a shamanic land ethic? (9) What are possible ways to apply a shamanic land ethic to revitalize local communities?

In order to answer these questions, the next section discusses the notion of landscape as a theoretical framework to develop a linkage between historical, spiritual and political ecology. A literature review of these fields, ethnographic materials for the Amerindian groups that occupy the circum-Roraima landscape, as well as other literature on the region and the broader field of

indigenous knowledge reinforce this framework. The ethnographic material provides a solid foundation of secondary data that strengthens the primary data collected during 15 months of multi-sited fieldwork discussed in detail in *Chapter 2: Methodology*.

The field research program explained in Chapter 2 was designed to empirically investigate shamanic conceptual systems through decolonizing (Agrawal 1995; Escobar 2008; Blaser 2010; Smith 2012), landscape ethnoecological (Sauer 1925; Johnson and Hunn 2010; Green 2013; Descola 2013) and historical ecological approaches (Swetnam et al. 1999; Balée 2006). Qualitative emic data were gathered within grounded theory (Glaser 2001; Charmaz 2014) and presented through a bottom-up survey of eco-spiritual religious revitalization movements (Wallace 1956, 1972, 2003).

Chapter 3: Historical ecology of a land of many waters describes the morphology of the circum-Roraima landscape beginning with a description of the physical geography and Amerindian cosmogonic narratives that have coevolved over the *longue durée*. This foundation informs the following sections on Guyana's colonial history and politics, Amerindian institutions, the missionary influence and recent developments affecting the landscape at the international level. This historical ecological discussion contextualizes subsequent chapters focused on the spiritual ecology of the landscape.

Chapter 4: Shamanism within a tripartite cosmos articulates a shamanic conceptual system that integrates the circum-Roraima landscape within a broader cosmology. It includes a cosmogram with the fundamental dimensions and characteristics of a shamanic universe superimposed by the principle shamanic practitioners (*pukana'*, *piyai'san* and *kanaimi*), animals and plants. This chapter also details the rituals for becoming a *piyai'san* and a discussion of the dark arts associated with *kanaimi* in order to understand their differentiation and interrelation.

Chapter 5: Spiritual ecology of an animated landscape includes taxonomy of the other-than-human masters of places and resources, including the physical attributes, unique domains

and dispositions of giants, little people, mermaids and more. It also delves into the complex of interrelationships between these beings, humans, animals and the entire landscape. This spiritual mapping is intended to enhance landscape ethnoecology and historical ecology with spiritual dimensions by demonstrating the integral role these beings play in maintaining a strict socio-environmental ethic.

Chapter 6: Medicine, magic and charms of the piyai'san is a detailed analysis of the tools of the shamanic trade including plant and animal charms (*muran*), resource stones (*tipu*), invocations (*taren*), smudging, séances and song and dance festivals. Sections on *tipu* and ant charms are especially unique since few have thoroughly researched these shamanic tools within the circum-Roraima landscape. An evaluation of these arts, especially *taren* and song and dance festivals are critical to understanding the syncretic Areruya movement discussed in the penultimate chapter.

Chapter 7: Areruya! A revitalized shamanic landscape and practice reveals previously unrecorded historical details of an Amerindian shamanic highland revitalization movement that had not collaborated significantly with a researcher since Audrey Butt Colson's visit in the 1950s. These narratives shed new light on how Areruya syncretizes shamanic and introduced (largely Christian) ontologies emphasizing the unique role of geography and spiritual ecology in its transformation. Ultimately, Areruya serves as a model for how communities can creatively adapt their spiritual ecological dispositions to a rapidly transforming cosmos.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: A shamanic land ethic discusses the contribution this thesis makes to existing scholarship and synthesizes the literature review and ethnographic chapters to construct a shamanic land ethic composed of three fundamental principles. The chapter also explains how such knowledge systems may revitalize current political and spiritual ecologies. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the project and questions for further research.

Theoretical framework

The spiritual dimension of the circum-Roraima landscape—an abstract concept that combines physical, ecological, cultural and metaphysical space—is the primary domain of analysis for this project. Central to this purview is the nature-culture ontological continuum (Descola 2013:79) and biocultural integrity (Maffi 2001; Loh and Harmon 2005) used by some scholars to make sense of the complex of dialectics that make up Amazonian landscapes (Posey and Balée 1989; Rival 1999, 2006). Before a review of the ethnographic literature on the region and other literature from the fields of spiritual and political ecology, this section analyzes the concept of landscape as a primary theoretical framework for this thesis.

The term ‘landscape’ has been used in various ways in different disciplines. Art historians trace the origin of the genre to the first half of the fifteenth century when painters began to portray an interior window, sometimes referred to as a ‘Flemish window’ that frames distant landscapes (Gombrich 1966:107-21; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995:2; Roger 1997:73-76; Descola 2013:57). In contrast, landscape for ecologists incorporates the physical and biotic components of an area and their inter-relationships (Wu 2006). However, landscape ecologists do not generally acknowledge the spiritual ecology of landscape that, according to many indigenous communities, is so integral to their composition and morphology.

Anthropological approaches to landscape tend to focus on cultural perception, understanding and meaning paying special attention to how local knowledge of landscape and place is imbued with individual and collective histories, symbols, myths and memories (Hill 1988; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995; Basso 1996; Strang 1997; Johnson and Hunn 2010:83). Santos-Granero’s work studies the ‘topograms’ and ‘topographs’ that are ‘written’ into the landscape among the Southern Arawaks—the Yanesha Ashaninka and Matsiguenga of Western Amazonia—as a historical and cultural product to be analyzed (1998; 2005:93). This project

aims to avoid the tendency of Santos-Granero and others to paint all landscapes with a heavy cultural hand by following the Amerindian ontology of a spiritually sanctioned landscape.

Many believe that the best way to analyze a landscape is through an ethnoecological lens, studying the biotic classification and use of plants, animals and landscape features including ecotopes—the smallest spatial objects, components or ecologically distinct units of landscape (Tansley 1939; Conklin 1954; Troll 1971; Hunn 1977; Berlin 1992; Johnson and Hunn 2010:83). Indigenous landscape classification has been the subject of a wide range of interdisciplinary studies (Parker et al. 1983; Sillitoe 1996; Fleck and Harder 2000; Shepard et al. 2001; Halme and Bodmer 2007; Shepard, Yu and Nelson 2004a; Johnson and Hunn 2010:83). In some cases, indigenous communities recognize more landscape diversity at the local level than do tropical ecologists working in the same regions (Medin and Atran 1999; Shepard et al. 2001; Johnson and Hunn 2010:83). This is reflected not only in overdifferentiation in species and place naming in relation to Western scientific taxonomies and geographic nomenclature, but also in the central importance given to ecological relations and phenological criteria in indigenous classification systems (Thornton 2008; Rival 2009:48).

Combining cultural and ecological relationships and understandings, ethnoecologists focus on the perception of and interaction with the land and the classification of its constituent parts in local knowledge systems (Posey 1988, 1992; Reed 2008; Johnson and Hunn 2010). While most ethnoecologists are not concerned with the spiritual and cosmological dimensions of landscape (Johnson and Hunn 2010:2), others recognize its importance (Toledo 1992, 2002; Thornton 2011). In ‘Language and landscape among the Tlingit’, Thornton uses a conceptual model that emphasizes four critical processes of landscape cognition: perception, affordance, practice and biospiritual forces (2011:276). For the Tlingit: “Biospiritual aspects of landscapes often derive from mythic time, when the world was formed or shaped by Raven and other metaphysical agents. These aspects remain strong by virtue of the fact that ancestral spirits

continue to dwell on the land” (Thornton 2011: 284). Thornton explains how these ‘metaphysical agents’ of landscape might be incorporated into how we evaluate sense of place and ecotopes. His conceptual model and recognition of the importance of the biospiritual dimension of landscape distinguishes his work and provides a model for enlarging the analysis of the circum-Roraima landscape to include its complex mix of biospiritual, human and other-agents.⁶

Landscape as understood by geographers encompasses spatial relationships among physical, biotic and human elements. This approach to landscape is akin to that of landscape ecologists, although geographical research is generally more concerned with toponymy, the recognition and naming of specific places (Johnson and Hunn 2010:1). Carl Sauer is widely credited with developing a theory of landscape in geography that integrates physical and cultural dimensions (1925, 1963). As a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, Sauer worked closely with anthropologist Alfred Kroeber when he developed his concept of landscape (Rival 2006:90). According to Sauer’s definition: “Landscape [is] a landshape, in which the process of shaping is by no means... simply physical. It may be defined, therefore as an area made up of a distinct association of forms, both physical and cultural” (1963:321).

Sauer’s work focused on the material basis of cultural life, especially agriculture and the domestication of plants and animals. His study of biological organisms combines dimensions of time, space, ecology and culture (Denevan 2009:185). *The Morphology of Landscape* (Sauer 1925) offered American geographers a window on developments in European—especially German (Hettner 1927)—geographic thought regarding the concept of not only landscape, but also culture and chorology (Mathewson and Kenzer 2003; Penn & Lukermann 2003; Denevan

⁶ I use the term ‘biospiritual’ to broadly describe all animated beings, including humans, mythological agents, disembodied spirits, other-than-human persons (Hallowell 2002[1960]) and sacred sites. Other-than-human persons/forces/beings refers most specifically to the masters and mistresses of resources discussed in Chapter 5 and the plants and stones discussed in Chapter 6.

2009:10-11). He attacked environmental determinism and is largely responsible for discrediting the environmentalist project within American geography (Denevan 2009:10-11). One of his students, Yi-Fu Tuan, developed landscape theory further, elaborating the concept of topophilia—human love and emotion toward place—as a critical component of human geography (1977, 1979, 1990; Johnson and Hunn 2010:5-6), a concept that is especially salient among indigenous peoples (Thornton 2008) such as the Ka'pon and Pemon.

Sauer was a strong advocate for the plight of rural peoples in general and indigenous populations in particular. He was outspoken about the rights of these groups to defend and extend their traditional ties to the land, especially in the face of 'development' and modernization (Denevan 2009:14). Recognizing the importance of perspective, *The Morphology of Landscape* established the discipline of geography on a phenomenological and dialogical basis, rather than being simply concerned with the environment's impact on culture or vice versa: "The task of geography is conceived as the establishment of a critical system which embraces the phenomenology of landscape, in order to grasp in all of its meaning and colour the varied terrestrial scene" (Sauer 1925:25).

Recent interest in bridging the philosophical tradition of phenomenology (Heidegger 1927; Merleau-Ponty 1945) with ecological issues (Abram 2007, 2010; Griffiths 2006) has brought renewed interest to the field of indigenous knowledge (IK) particularly within the context of overpopulation, environmental degradation and climate change (Hinzman et al. 2005; Green and Raygorodetsky 2010). While some have analyzed the eco-phenomenological dimensions of other indigenous communities, nobody has taken this approach in the circum-Roraima landscape focusing specifically on the spiritual ecological dimension.

Indigenous societies harbor a repertoire of situated ecological knowledge that is closely linked to the practical needs and management of local socio-ecological systems. As a result, indigenous peoples not only have detailed knowledge of plants, animals, fungi and certain

microorganisms, but also specific types of minerals, soil, water, snow, topography, vegetation, landscapes, as well as climactic and astronomical cycles (Berkes et al. 2000). According to anthropologist Virginia Nazarea, situated knowledge is a “priceless human heritage,” and we must “protect the vulnerable wellspring of this legacy” (1999:10). The body of literature on IK offers new and valuable insights into many current socio-environmental challenges. Historically, this field of ethnoecology has covered color categories, intellectual property rights, wildlife management, disaster risk management and much more (Conklin 1955; Berlin 1968; McCorkle 1989; Berkes 1993; Williams and Baines 1993; Dewalt 1994; Warren et al. 1995; Agrawal 1995; Brush 1996; Cleveland and Murray 1997; Ellen et al. 2000; Sillitoe et al. 2002; Cronin 2004; Giles et al. 2007, Mercer, 2010). The scope, depth, and equivocation in the research are evidence of its import as an interdisciplinary field.

Lesley Green’s ethnohistorical work (2003, 2009, 2013; Green and Green 2009) based on a decade of research in Palikur lands known as Arukwa along the Rio Urucauá in the Área Indígena do Uaçá, in Amapá, Brazil is a good reference for tracing different ways of thinking about space, time, and personhood in Amerindian traditions. Focusing primarily through an archeological lens, she successfully demonstrates that much of Palikur knowledge is based on movement and what she calls ‘story trails’ through temporal, spatial, cognitive and cosmic landscapes (Green 2013:vii). Green reinforces the importance of being aware of the diverse perspectives and narrative trails that make up place, coming to a logical adaptive conclusion: “Knowing the many different kinds of worldmakings (or worldmakeries) going on around you, enables you to survive predation; participating in the generosity of allies allows you to thrive” (2013:244). Green’s ethnohistory illustrates the phenomenological complexity of Amerindian landscapes, providing a solid reference for understanding the history and narrative complexity of the circum-Roraima landscape.

While at Berkeley, Sauer wrote: “I can define human geography as the natural history of mankind, as an historical ecology centering about the skill or lack of foresight with which he has made use of the materials at hand. This is a field that properly belongs to the geographer” (Sauer to L. S. Wilson, April 6, 1948; cited in Denevan 2009:240). Fifty years later, the field of historical ecology (Crumley 1987, 2007; Balée 1998, 2006, 2013; Rival 2006; Balée and Erickson 2006; Alexiades 2009) emerged much like a morphed palimpsest of Saur’s words and ideas concerning landscape history.

As Balée and Erickson explain in *Time and Complexity in Historical Ecology*: “The product of the collision of nature and culture, wherever it has occurred is a landscape, the central object of analysis in historical ecology. The landscape is where people and the environment can be seen as a totality—that is as a multiscalar, diachronic unit of study and analysis” (2006:2). It is difficult to detect a significant difference between Saur’s concept of landscape and that of historical ecologists, though the latter is more of an approach or research program (Balée 2006; Rival 2006). Rival clarifies the role of landscape in historical ecology: “As defined by historical ecologists, ‘landscape’ becomes a bridge between a whole range of disciplines and sub-disciplines pertaining to both the natural sciences and the humanities” (2006:90). Following this logic, this thesis uses an historical ecological approach to landscape as a bridge between spiritual and material ecology.

Historical ecologists have primarily focused on human physical modification of land through the building of canals and levees for agricultural production, soil enhancement (*Terra Preta do Índio*, *Terra Preta*, Indian Black Earth, Amazonian Dark Earth [ADE], Black Earth, biochar, etc.) and the selective cultivation and conservation of ‘cultural forests’ (Balée 2013) previously known as ‘wilderness areas’ or ‘forest islands’ in remote parts of the Amazon. According to historical ecologists, there are no true wilderness areas because humans have altered and in many cases managed nearly every corner of Earth, including through atmospheric

carbon emissions. This logic fits into the current climate change discourse and recent proclamations that since industrialization, Earth has entered a new geologic age known as the Anthropocene, wherein humans are seen as impacting Earth's fundamental processes, including ecological ones, in major ways (Crutzen 2002).

A primary goal of historical ecology is to determine how communities and biological interactions coevolve (Ricklefs and Schluter 1993; Stone et al. 1996). Balée argues: "We need to learn some management sense from the inscriptions in the living matter of cultural forests, and the traditional people who live in them" (2013:184). However, literature in this field contains little discussion of the spiritual inhabitants, dialectics and ethics embedded in landscape. Historical ecology builds upon Sauer's theory of landscape morphology and takes his ideas a bit further by focusing on coevolution and the human capacity to not only degrade, but also enhance landscapes over the *longue durée*. This approach was largely developed from Balée and Erickson's work in the lowlands of Brazil and Bolivia rather than the forests, savannahs and highlands of the Guianas; however, it provides a framework for a research program (see Chapter 2) designed to analyze the historical spirituality of the circum-Roraima landscape.

An extensive body of literature on being, place, space, language and landscape (Sauer 1925, 1963; Balée 1998; Basso 1996; Casey 1996; Feld and Basso 1996; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Thornton 2008; Green 2013) emphasizes the cultural meaning and construction of place. This research falls between cultural landscape approaches and environmentally deterministic models (Meggers 1996 [1971]; Diamond 1997) by focusing on a third dimension of landscape that is biospiritual (Thornton 2011), functioning as an interlocutor between traditional anthropological and ecocentric modalities as a determinate factor in landscape morphology.

Literature review

The interdisciplinary nature of this project demands a review of a wide scope of literature. This section begins with a brief discussion of Mt. Roraima in colonial history, followed by an appraisal of the most significant body of literature for this thesis: the secondary ethnographic material from the circum-Roraima landscape, also including relevant scholarship from the wider region. This foundation contextualizes a comprehensive survey of spiritual ecology, including literature on religion, animism and shamanism. The chapter concludes with a review of the field of political ecology in order to understand ethnodevelopment initiatives discussed in the conclusion.

Mount Roraima in colonial history

Mt. Roraima is cloaked in mysticism; it is often shrouded in clouds and there are numerous myths and legends associated with it. The first written reference to the mountain was by Sir Walter Raleigh (a former student of Oriel College, Oxford) who traveled through the region in 1595 in search of El Dorado, the fabled city of Manao or The Lost City of Gold.⁷ He didn't find a city of gold, but he did establish a lasting reputation for friendly dealings with the Amerindians. In his fanciful publication, *The Discoverie of Guiana* (1596) he describes how he was informed about a distant 'mountain of crystal' that is thought to be Mt. Roraima.

Between 1835 and 1844, Sir Robert Hermann Schomburgk a German-born explorer for Great Britain surveyed the boundaries of British Guiana recording some of the first geographic

⁷ In the North Rupununi of Guyana, near the village of Yupukari, there is a lake known as El Dorado that lies between the Amazon and Essequibo watersheds. During exceptional wet seasons, these watersheds meet here providing a point of cross-fertilization for fish and other aquatic species. On the other side of Yupukari, there is another body of water known as Steamer Pond that allegedly has a sunken ship beneath its surface 'that the *piyai*-man [shaman] can see.' If there is a ship there, it raises the question of whether it came from the Amazon, Essequibo, or perhaps only the Underworld. According to an Akawaio informant from the Upper Mazaruni, the legend of El Dorado could have come from Amerindians telling conquistadors that there was an underwater city of gold that belonged to *rato*, a water spirit force discussed in Chapter 5.

and ethnographic observations of the region for Her Majesty's Government (Rivière 1984). In 1884, the English explorer and botanist Sir Everard im Thurn (educated at Marlborough College and Honorary Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford) successfully climbed Mt. Roraima on an expedition sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society. Many believe that im Thurn's vivid descriptions of the Guiana Highlands inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to write *The Lost World* (1912) about the discovery of a living prehistoric world full of dinosaurs and primeval plants.

Between 1909 and 1923, the Jesuit missionary Cuthbert Cary-Elwes recorded one of the most intriguing ethnographic reports of the region (Bridges 1985) including details of his two visits to Mount Roraima and the Areruya Indians in the Upper Mazaruni region of today's Guyana (Colson 1998; see Chapter 7). He learned to speak fluently with the Makushi (Carib-speaking) and Wapishana (Arawak linguistic family) preaching the Gospel for 14 years, surviving malaria, typhoid, dysentery and all kinds of diseases until he became utterly exhausted and was sent by his superiors back to Britain.

Ethnogeography of the circum-Roraima landscape

Beneath Mt. Roraima in the frontier region between Venezuela, Brazil and Guyana there are two major Amerindian ethnic groups: the Pemon and Ka'pon. Arekuna, Kamarakoto, Taurepan and Makushi are all associated as Pemon. The Akawaio⁸ (known as the Ingarikó, 'people of the forest' in Brazil) and Patamona⁹ belong to the Ka'pon group. Each of these groups is descendent from the Carib linguistic family, though each speaks a different dialect and lives in a distinct geographical context. Despite these differences, Amerindians in the circum-Roraima

⁸ The name 'Akawaio' remains subject to speculation. Some have argued that it derives from the tobacco juice (*kawai*) ingested by shamans (Migliazza 1980) or the 'white cinnamon' (*akawoi*) sought by the Dutch in Guiana (Whitehead 2002). According to Colson, the most likely source of the name comes from *akawa* or *wakawa*, a Carib word for a kind of hawk, to which has been added the suffix *-yo*, an ending for Carib ethnic names (Colson 2009:78).

⁹ Patamona (*pata*: 'place') means 'inhabitant', 'dweller' (Butt Colson 1983-84) or 'owners of the land' (Whitehead 2003).

landscape have much in common including: Cariban linguistic ties; resemblant aesthetic and material cultures; historical linkages through trade, uxori-local marriage and genetics; similar ritual and animist beliefs and practices; the same creation myths, demiurge ancestors and other-than-human forces associated with Mt. Roraima; and a shared landscape. The Ka'pon say that Amerindians are all *tompa*, 'kin', just as the Pemon identify other Amerindians in the region as *yompa*, suggesting a common bond among all Amerindians. Coming from a semi-nomadic lifestyle, individuals and extended family groups travel often, sometimes for many days, in order to exchange goods, convey news, seek work and resources, or to learn and receive wisdom and healing from ritual leaders.

Pemon and Ka'pon are not ethnic self-designations, but are based on linguistic associations. Besides Amerigo Vespucci who traveled along the coast in the early 1500s, the earliest Europeans to visit this region were Spaniards who primarily explored the Orinoco Delta in what is now Venezuela. Many of the indigenous inhabitants they encountered (likely to be Arekuna, Kamarakoto, Taurepan and Makushi ancestors) were asked who they were and responded by saying that they were *pemon*, meaning 'people' (Colson 2009). Likewise, the Akawaio and Patamona said that they were *ka'pon*, also meaning 'people'. Various authors (Brett 1868; im Thurn 1885; Kenswil 1946; Colson 2009) have translated the term *ka'pon* as: 'people,' 'the people,' or 'celestial people,' 'people of the heights,' 'high people' (*ka'*: 'sky', 'elevated place' and *-pon*: 'those in'). This suggests a geographical logic to their name as the Ka'pon tend to inhabit highland areas. Amerindians in this region often refer to each other by naming the rivers they live near in a form of fluvionymy. For example, the Ka'pon say that the people from the Kamarang River are *Kamarang ko'* (meaning 'people of the Kamarang River') and those from the Kukui River area are *Kukui ko'*.

Many of the Amerindian monikers were applied by neighboring groups and were often used in a derogatory sense. Padre Cesáreo de Armellada, a Capuchin missionary who

worked among the Taurepan in Venezuela beginning in the 1940s suggests that Taurepan is a word comprised by *tauron*, ‘to speak’ and *pin*, ‘lacking’ or ‘wrong’, implying that the Taurepan are those who speak the Pemon language incorrectly, making this a pejorative designation coined by their neighbors (1964:7). Likewise, The Makushi generally referred to their Pemon neighbors in the Gran Sabana of what is today Venezuela as Arekuna, a term derived from the word *are*, meaning ‘water rat’ (Colson 1983-84:86-94). Despite the complications with naming, the ethnic differentiation of Pemon and Ka’pon can serve as a helpful classification that builds on previous literature and helps distinguish the numerous Amerindian groups and linguistic affiliations in the circum-Roraima landscape.

Ethnographic details of the Pemon and Ka’pon communities, particularly those in the Guiana Highlands, have been analyzed by Audrey Butt Colson¹⁰ (1954a, 1954b, 1956, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1965-66, 1966, 1966-67, 1971a, 1971b, 1973, 1976, 1977, 1983, 1983-84, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2009) and others (Schomburgk 1840; Brett 1868, 1880; im Thurn 1885; Roth 1915, 1929; Aremellada 1964, 1972; Rivière 1984; Bridges 1985). Colson has also written on the spiritual dimension of the landscape (1971b, 1976, 1977, 1989, 1998), analyzing mythology, cosmology, shamanism, healing and the syncretic Areruya religion (see also Thomas 1982; Staats 1996, 2009). Adding to this literature, anthropologist Neil Whitehead documented the phenomenon of *kanaimi* (2001, 2002, 2004), a form of violent assault sorcery discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Despite this body of work, there is no literature that integrates the Pemon and Ka’pon historical, spiritual and political ecologies within the theoretical framework of landscape.

While there are certain geographic, linguistic and cultural differences among Amerindians in the circum-Roraima landscape, most are intimately linked through shared

¹⁰ Audrey Butt-Colson’s publications from 1954a-1970 are listed under ‘Butt’ in the Bibliography. After marrying Robin Colson she changed her name; therefore subsequent literature can be found under ‘Colson’.

Makunaima creation myths and animist conceptual systems (Armellada 1964, 1973).¹¹ An analysis of these narratives and associated rituals and places reveals complex dialectics among diverse beings embedded in a shamanic semiotic landscape and practice. The body of recorded Pemon and Ka'pon myth is extensive (Brett 1880; Koch-Grünberg 1916-28, vol. II, translated in Koch-Grünberg¹² 1953; Armellada 1964, 1973; Colson 1976; Thomas 1982). The stories cover a wide variety of topics that differ in length and scope and were gathered at various times and places. This research is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the rich mythological traditions of the circum-Roraima landscape; however, it does analyze selected myths from primary and secondary sources, particularly those associated with Mt. Roraima.

One inspiration for this project is the pioneering work of Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians* (1971). This book provides a broad and integrative framework for symbolic interpretation of rituals, myths, deities, astronomical cycles and everyday life aspects of the Desana, an indigenous group that lives near the Colombian Vaupés River toward the eastern edge of the Guiana Shield. Reichel-Dolmatoff's detailed cosmology highlights the human and other-than-human constituents of the landscape and how socio-ecological order is maintained through the religious system. Despite some controversy surrounding his past (Oyuela-Caycedo 2012), his work has much resonance throughout the Guiana Shield and Amazonia.

A more recent and geographically proximate piece of literature that serves as an important reference for this project is *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* by Davi

¹¹ The Makushi refer to the Makunaima brothers as Insikiran; however, due to the fact that the ancestral creation heroes are more widely known as the Makunaima, particularly among the Akawaio, Arekuna, Taurepan, Patamona and others, they will be referred to here as Makunaima. According to a personal communication with Audrey Colson (June 2015), in the Cariban language, *maku* is a name given to various tribes in the region (Makushi) denoted as meaning 'original inhabitant'; *-ima* means 'great' or 'powerful'.

¹² German ethnologist, Theodor Koch-Grünberg published 5 volumes between 1911 and 1923 that include important linguistic, mythological and shamanic insights on the region, specifically those of the Pemon of Venezuela, Taurepan in Brazil and others, including the Makushi and Akawaio. He died of Malaria close to Boa Vista, Brazil in 1924.

Kopenawa (2013; see Yanomami territory in the lower left corner of Map 2). Anthropologist Bruce Albert captures the voice of Kopenawa in this collaborative work that brings the reader into the historical, spiritual, ecological and political landscapes that compose the Yanomami universe. According to a Yanomami narrative that parallels the circum-Roraima mythology, in the beginning of time, only the *yarori*—undifferentiated human/animal ancestors that constantly metamorphosed—existed: “It [the world] constantly became other until finally the sky fell on it. Its inhabitants were pushed underground and became the meat-hungry ancestors we call the *aōpatari*” (Kopinawa 2013:27-28).

The narrative of the falling sky and subsequent differentiation of humans and the *aōpatari* is similar to the Ka’pon and Pemon felling of the Waiaka/Tree of Life/Mt. Roraima (see Chapter 3) that disassociated humans from all other beings. At this point in the Yanomami cosmogony, the ‘images’ of the *aōpatari* became *xapiri* spirits. “The forest is alive. It can only die if the white people persist in destroying it. If they succeed, the rivers will disappear underground... The *xapiri* spirits who come down from the mountains to play on their mirrors in the forest will escape far away” (Kopinawa 2013:viii). These ‘images’ or shadow forces are comparable to the Pemon and Ka’pon conception of *imawariton* (disembodied spirits discussed in detail in Chapter 5). Given their geographic proximity, it is no surprise that the Yanomami cosmology is closely linked to the spiritual ecology of the circum-Roraima landscape.

Spiritual ecology

According to a recent demographic study of more than 230 countries and territories by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, there are 5.8 billion religiously affiliated adults and children around the globe, representing 84 percent of the 2010 world population of 6.9 billion (Pew Research Center 2015). Spiritual ontologies are often the primary source of worldviews, values, attitudes, motivations and lifestyles that profoundly affect how

people interact within landscapes (Sponsel 2012). The proliferation of religious identities and increased stress being applied to Earth's resources demand a thorough evaluation of the interface between spirituality and environmentalism. In his latest book, *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution*, Leslie Sponsel argues that spiritual ecology parallels other approaches to human-environment interaction like historical and political ecology (2012:xiii). Spiritual ecologists believe that in order to overcome the current ecological challenges, humans require spiritual development, not economic development. This section explores the field of spiritual ecology in order to add a third dimension to the existing nature-culture ontological continuum (Descola 2013:79) and biocultural integrity (Maffi 2001; Loh and Harmon 2005), creating a reimagined sacred trinity composed of nature, culture and spirit as distinct yet interpenetrating dimensions of landscape.

As explained by Sponsel (2012:7): "The roots of spiritual ecology are numerous and deep, perhaps extending back at least some 30,000 years in the case of the Upper Paleolithic cave paintings in France and Spain. Some experts have interpreted this prehistoric art as Animism, a belief in multiple spiritual beings and forces in nature." 'Animism', 'shamanism' and 'spirits' are Western constructs that have been used in a very general sense to interpret a great variety of prehistoric visual culture and rock art in particular (Harvey 2013a:307). The word 'animism' derives from the Latin *anima*, meaning spirit, soul, life force or animating principle. An object is 'animated' if it is regarded as the abode of a spirit. The fundamental idea behind this worldview is the spiritualization and personification of all natural phenomena such as animals, plants, trees, rocks, wind, water, fire, stars, and so on. The inclusion of these animated beings in the social sphere underpins many characteristics of the ethnobiological (Lenaerts 2004; Rival 2009:65) and biospiritual (Thornton 2011) classificatory systems and interspecies relations found among indigenous peoples in Amazonia and beyond.

In his landmark book, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* (1871), Edward Burnett Tylor defines animism as the characteristically religious ‘belief in spirits’ (1871; Harvey 2013a:4). He argues that religion was humanity’s pre-scientific attempt to explain the world. Tylor and Sir James George Frazer (see *The Golden Bough: a study in comparative religion* 1890) epitomized this nineteenth century view. According to religious scholar, Robert Segal: “Both assume that religion arises and functions either to explain (Tylor) or to control (Frazer) the physical world... Science, it was assumed by Tylor and Frazer alike, renders religion not merely redundant but outright impossible” (cited in Harvey 2013a:53).

In America, early ethnogeographers and anthropologists, like Boas, emphasized the animistic nature of Native views of the land (1934). Some philosophers also found solace in this transcendent view, including Henry David Thoreau who decided to spend a couple years in rural Massachusetts living on the land of his good friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson.¹³ Thoreau’s subsequent masterpiece: *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854) describes different seasons of natural and human development, spiritual discovery and the principle of self-reliance. Perhaps inspired by Thoreau’s reflections, Scottish-American naturalist John Muir carried the transcendentalist torch when he took a thousand-mile walk to the Gulf of Mexico (1867-1868) inspiring his critique of the religion-based anthropocentric view that he believed was inconsistent with many ecological facts. He later founded the influential environmentalist Sierra Club (1892). When referring to Muir and other environmental pioneers, Catherine Albanese notes: “Environmentalism, in short, had become one version of nature religion in the lingering shadow of American Transcendentalism” (2002:12; quoted in Sponsel 2012:60).

¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1836 essay ‘Nature’ is generally considered the moment when transcendentalism became a major cultural movement (Gura 2007).

In the twentieth century, religion became more compatible with science as scholars recognized that it serves other needs including to fend off guilt over human sexuality (Freud), to defuse or redirect aggression (Girard, Burkert) or to engage with the subconscious (Jung) (Harvey 2013a:54). In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1912) argued for a functionalist perspective of religion as a means to maintain social stability and solidarity by removing tension that can disrupt order. For Durkheim, a cohesive society is of fundamental import and religion is a mechanism for society to celebrate itself. Max Weber, a German sociologist and contemporary of Durkheim, believed that religion serves as a system that helps the social organism regulate itself to survive. He emphasizes the inter-relatedness of religion and economics and reasons that the ‘spirit of capitalism’ evolved from the Protestant work ethic (1905). Durkheim described religion as a ‘social glue’ while Weber advocated a more pro-active role for religion in stimulating and responding to social change. For Weber, people’s ideas are the initiating factors in social change. Religion therefore provides an ethical framework in which social change can take place. Most social scientists, including those mentioned above, would suggest that all of these religious responses are at some level driven by human needs—for order, meaning, change, motivation, etc. The locus of control may vary however.

Back in America, Aldo Leopold picked up this narrative thread to create a cornerstone of twentieth century environmental ethics: *A Sand County Almanac* (1968[1949])¹⁴ that includes an enlarged land ethic, stretching the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals collectively known as: the land. Leopold’s concept of land as a community and pyramid of interdependent beings tangled together in a web of food chains and energy circuits is an ecological perception of landscape consistent with the spiritual hierarchy and ethics manifest in

¹⁴ Together with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), these two works are arguably the most venerated and significant environmental books of the 20th century.

the circum-Roraima shamanic landscape, particularly with regard to the Akawaio ‘way of life’ known as *etrakuasoman* (*mayu*’ in Makushi; *marshruman* in Arawak; ‘self-help’ in Creole English, aka ‘community work’).¹⁵ Perhaps it is no accident that Leopold encourages us to ‘think like a mountain’, emphasizing the interconnections between humans and ecosystems (1968:129).

Thanks in part to the cultural revolution of the 1960s centered in Berkeley, California animism was revitalized leading to what Harvey calls ‘new animism’ (2013a:2) and a proliferation of ideas surrounding the concepts of perspectivism, multinaturalism and monoculturalism (Descola 1986; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Ingold 2000:111-31, 2006; Pedersen 2001; Harvey 1997, 2003, 2005b, 2007, 2013a, 2013b; Vilaça 2009; Fausto 2007). These movements reject previous scholarly attempts to identify animism as either some sort of imaginary delusion, exposing ‘primitive’ man’s inability to distinguish dreams from reality (Tylor 1871) or metaphoric, a projection of human society onto nature (Durkheim 1912; Harvey 2013a:275). This project builds on the work of the ‘new animists’ by challenging the primacy of Western metaphysics over indigenous understandings of landscape.

According to animist ontology, humans and other-than-human persons (Hallowell 2002[1960]) are made up of very different material, yet all have similar interiorities composed of an animating force that links all ‘things’ and ‘beings’ in an interconnected web of life. The principle human interlocutor of this multidimensional web is the shaman, the paragon of animism. The word ‘shaman’ comes from ancient reindeer hunting cultures in the Tunguska and Manchuria regions of Eastern Siberia including the Manchu, Evenki (meaning ‘he who runs swifter than the reindeer’), Baikal (a Paleo-Siberian Mongolian group) and other Tungusic and Samoyedic-speaking peoples (Balzer 1990). In Tungusic, the word *sama* means ‘to know in an ecstatic manner’ (Barfield 1998). Prior to contact with the Russians, the belief system of the

¹⁵ For more information on *etrakuasoman*, see Chapters 2 and 8.

Evenki and Baikal was purely animistic.¹⁶ This conceptual system and its associate practices are of great historical import because they retain ancient forms of belief and ritual that spread all over the world, including across the Beringia land bridge to the Americas approximately 10-30 thousand years ago (Hoffecker et al. 1993; Tamm et al. 2007; Perego et al. 2009).

The ancient Siberian shamanic world-view is composed of upper, middle and lower worlds (see Map 4) as well as a belief in the soul or spirit that can separate from its material body and inhabit other corporeal forms. Shamanism was of central importance in the Americas prior to the arrival of the Europeans and still plays a central role among contemporary indigenous groups as well as other segments of the population. Extensive research has documented this tradition among Amerindians in Amazonia (Eliade 1964; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971, 1975; Harner 1980; Schultes 1980, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1998; Davis and Yost 1983; Drury 1989; Wolf 1991; Cowan 1996; McKenna 1992; Plotkin 1993; Davis 1996; Narby and Huxley 2001) and elsewhere (Czaplicka 1914; Black Elk 1953; Backman and Hultkrantz 1978; Hoppal and Sadovszky 1989; Balzer 1990; Black Elk and Lyon 1990; Winkelman 1992, 1995, 2010; Lyon 1996, 1998). Contemporarily, shamanic practitioners, including pan-shamanic and neo-shamanic specialists, can be found all over the world, including in London, New York and other major cities.

A shaman is considered a medium to communicate with the spirits to heal, harm, prophesize and mediate in situations of social or environmental conflict, and much more (Winkelman 1992, 2010). Shamanism is an ecstatic tradition that often involves disembodiment and soul-flight to complex and interconnected worlds inhabited by spirits of animals, plants, trees, stones, other shamans, the deceased, therianthropes, and countless other-than-human

¹⁶ According to journalist David Stern (2012:117): “Most shamans in Central Asian countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where Islam predominates, regard themselves as devout Muslims, and their rites are infused with the mystic traditions of Sufism...In Siberia and Mongolia, shamanism has merged with local Buddhist traditions – so much so that it’s often impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins.” As discussed in Chapter 7 within the context of the Areruya movement, this syncretic tendency is also manifest in the Christian and shamanic arts of the circum-Roraima landscape.

beings. In order to enter into an altered state of consciousness, or what Winkelman calls an 'integrative mode of consciousness' (1995), a shaman may resort to sensory overload or deprivation through drumming, dancing, chanting, fasting, bingeing, smoking, vomiting, isolation, meditation, hyperventilation and more. Some shamans use psychotropic and entheogenic ('generating the divine within') plants such as tobacco, ayahuasca, peyote or psychedelic mushrooms often used in combination with one or more of the other techniques mentioned above. While in a trance, a shaman can journey into the 'unseen' world to acquire knowledge or persuade the masters of game to release their animals for the hunters, or lock them up.

Shamanism also commonly includes transformation or shapeshifting into an animal such as a deer, bird, spider or jaguar in order to visit or traverse a specific realm 'unseen', to perform a certain task or commune with game. The rituals involved with such metamorphoses often include a symbolic death and/or sacrifice to maintain a reciprocal relationship with the spiritual domain (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971). Just as feeding on game nourishes humans, the spirits of wild species consume the life force of humans. In most cases, a male shaman will 'marry' a female spirit of a game species. As explained by Harvey: "Thanks to his 'spouse' it is as a husband and not as an abductor that he will be able to hunt in the realm of wild spirits for promises of game... Where fishing is important, his marrying a 'spouse' in the aquatic world will give him access to the resources of this world" (Harvey 2013:286-87). These beliefs and rituals help indigenous people preserve their identity, health and a socio-ecological balance. With considerable spatial and temporal range, animist and shamanic traditions around the world have much in common, though each is unique and intimately connected to the diverse living landscapes and communities that they co-evolve within.

From a linguistic point of view, the global population belongs to between 5,000 and 7,000 cultures (Brenzinger 2007). It is estimated that between 4,000 and 5,000 of these belong to indigenous peoples. Thus, these peoples represent as much as between 80 to 90 percent of the

world's linguistic and cultural diversity. Areas with the highest concentrations of linguistic and cultural variance, many of which are forested, also tend to have high rates of biocultural (Maffi 2003), and biospiritual (Thornton 2001) diversity. For animist peoples, every act of appropriation of nature must be negotiated with all existing things (alive and non-living) through different mechanisms such as agricultural rituals and acts of shamanic and symbolic exchange. John Grim (2001), coordinator of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University with Mary Evelyn Tucker, calls this deeper cultural commonality the 'lifeway', a term used to situate the study of indigenous religious traditions, including animism, as a guiding force for economic, political, social and environmental life.

A central tenet of spiritual ecology is that science and Christianity have contributed to the disenchantment or desacralization of nature that led to the current 'ecocrisis' (White 1967; Swimme and Tucker 2011; Sponsel 2012:155). As explained by Lynn White Jr. in his seminal essay entitled 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' (1967:1205-1207; quoted in Sponsel 2012:75-77):

Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone... By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.

The various reactions by Christian theologians and others to White's thesis generated the field of ecotheology, a reactionary defense of Christianity (Hoffman and Sandelands 2004), but also an important component of spiritual ecology (Sponsel 2012:78).

Other major branches of spiritual ecology include the cosmic ecospirituality of the Jesuit priest, scientist and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1959) and of Thomas Berry, a 'geologian'—a portmanteau that describes his focus on relating humanity's spiritual and cultural evolution to the natural history of Earth and the universe (1988; 1999; 2011; Laszlo et al. 2011; Penaskovic 2011; Tucker and Grim 2014). In Berry's words: "The present urgency is to begin

thinking within the context of the whole planet, the integral earth community with all its human and other-than-human components” (1999:150). Ultimately, science and religion are not incompatible for these thinkers; they are both needed to re-enchant nature and resolve the ecocrisis.¹⁷

With the Gaia Hypothesis proposed by environmental scientist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Margulis in the 1970s, the world began to revitalize an ancient animist conceptual system of a larger scale of life-functioning. According to Lovelock and Margulis: "living organisms create the optimum conditions for their own existence, and in so doing create the superorganism Gaia" (1974:4). The Gaia hypothesis was another important component in the environmental movement of the 1970s that informed the field of deep ecology (Naes 1973; Devall and Sessions 1985).

According to Arne Naes, deep ecology is concerned with the fundamental philosophical and religious questions about the impacts of humans on ecosystems (1973). This approach stresses the importance of a more holistic, spiritual view of nature that enriches the phenomenological and anthropocentric perspectives by focusing on the deeper questions concerning *why* and *how* humans interact with nature. Some criticize deep ecology for being too eco-centric, projecting feelings and rights onto plants and animals (Pister 1995; Feinberg 2006) without acknowledging the co-evolutionary role that humans can play in maintaining and enhancing landscapes, especially within animist ontologies.

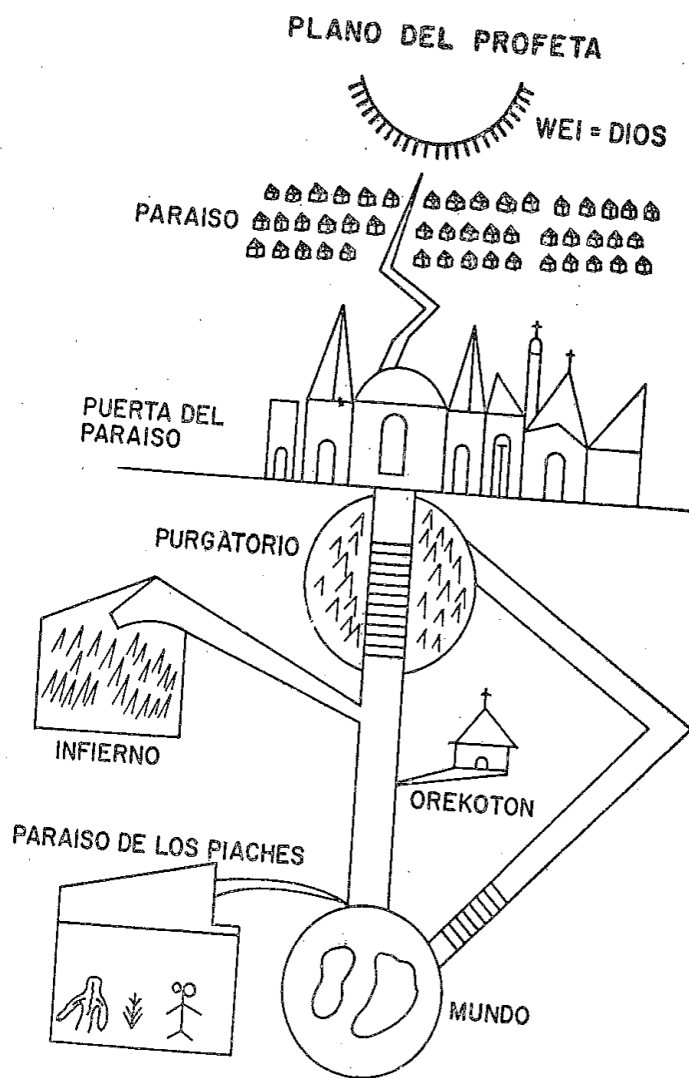
Spiritual ecology is similar to deep ecology in that both take a spiritual view of nature and recognize the inherent value of living organisms. Both also call for a restructuring of modern society to address the ecological crisis. Despite their relevance to the core questions of this project, deep and spiritual ecology are not methods, per se, whereas historical ecology and

¹⁷ See De Chardin 1959 and Berry 1988 for discussions of the ‘noosphere’; see also the ‘New Genesis’ movement (Sideris 2013).

ethnoecology are. Therefore, these approaches represent a more valid path to understanding cultural and spiritual diversity. After all, even Christianity—or Christianities, as represented by the ‘Christian’ Areruya movement—can be productively viewed through historical and ethnoecological lenses.

Areruya has been documented and analyzed by Audrey Butt Colson (1954a, 1954b; 1960, 1971, 1985, 1994/96) and, to a limited extent, by others (Kenswil 1946; Swan 1958; Henfrey 1964; Pereira 1967; Thomas 1976; Bridges 1985; Santilli 1987; Abreu 1995; Staats 1996, 2009; and Whitehead 2002). In addition to Areruya, there are several other syncretic movements in the circum-Roraima landscape (mostly in Venezuela) including Chochiman (from the English ‘churchman’), Chimitin (from the English phrase ‘church meeting’), Krichin (from ‘Christian’), Oli Go (Holy Ghost people) and San Miguel (adopted from Spanish).

Of these smaller movements, the only one that has been documented (to my knowledge) is San Miguel (Thomas 1976). The movement originated with a vision of San Miguel by a Pemon woman named Lucencia and her main follower, Hermano Ramón Oronoz. According to Colson: “This movement swept across the Gran Sabana and at one stage we thought it would replace Alleluia. It didn’t: instead, after a few years, it seemed to die out” (personal communication, May 2015). Fortunately, there is a record of this movement and a fascinating cosmogram created by a Pemon member of the church named José Antonio Figueroa that was given to Padre Cesáreo de Armellada and later adapted and published by David Thomas (1976:43). It depicts the Sun Father, Wei/Dios (God) in the upper radiant level. It also depicts a specific *Paraiso de los Piaches* (Heaven for the Shamans) on the terrestrial sphere as well as the neighboring Orekoton (Holy Ghost people) on the path past *Infierno* (Hell), through *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) and the *Puerta del Paraiso* (Heaven’s Door).



Map 3: San Miguel cosmogram

This cosmogram of the San Miguel universe is included as an example of how indigenous conceptual systems in the circum-Roraima landscape have maintained certain fundamental shamanic principles while also syncetizing with Christian teachings, much like Areruya. Chapter 7 building on the Areruya literature mentioned above and other literature on syncretism (Droogers 1989; Stewart and Shaw 1994; Kulick 1997), messianic and cargo cults (Lanternari 1963; Worsley 1957), millennialism (Keyes 1977; Baumgartner 2000), geographical imaginaries (Radcliffe 2010, 2012) and revitalization movements (Kehoe 1989), especially Wallace's concept developed from his work with the Iroquois in North America and their Old Way of Handsome Lake movement (1956, 1972, 2003). Using this body of literature as a reference, Chapter 7 frames Areruya as a shamanic highland revitalization movement, emphasizing the continuity and transformation of Amerindian concepts, much like those expressed in the San Miguel cosmogram.

Areruya ultimately serves as an example of how to address the fundamental need of our time: the integration of the moral and religious life with a new ecological worldview leading to a major social transformation (Rockefeller and Elder 1992:141). In other words, Areruya exemplifies how to replace the anthropocentric utilitarian view of nature with a biospiritual-centric perspective (Thornton 2011). As clearly understood by the Areruya Indians, the health and rights of humans is related to the health and rights of ancestors, other-than-human persons (Hallowell 2002[1960]), places and future generations because everything is interconnected and interdependent.

The circum-Roraima landscape constitutes an intricate, multi-centered spiritual ecological system (or set of SESs) which functions to maintain biological, cultural and spiritual diversity subject to both conservation and development frameworks. According to spiritual ecologist Mary Evelyn Tucker: "Religions play a central role in orienting human behavior toward the natural world. They also have institutional capacities to affect millions of people

around the world. The problems are so big that we need collaboration between individuals and religions, as well as science, economics and public policy” (2006:401). Future interventions are bound to do as much harm as good for communities in the circum-Roraima landscape; therefore an assessment of the field of political ecology is called for.

Political ecology

Even society as a whole, a nation, or all existing societies put together, are not owners of the Earth. They are merely its occupants, its users; and like good caretakers, they must hand it down improved to subsequent generations.

- Marx, Capital, Vol. 1

Marx may have referred to religion as ‘the opium of the people’, but he also recognized the importance of Earth’s ‘caretakers’ and their use of religion as a protest against the ruling class (Raines 2002:5-6). Peet and Watts begin *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development and Social Movements* (1996:1) with this Marxist critique of capitalist modes of production. Their book is a noble attempt at tackling complex issues related to the nature-culture binary, inequality, sustainability and social and environmental justice; however it fails to incorporate the spiritual dimension of human-environment relations into its analysis of political ecology. This section reviews the field of political ecology, enriching the discourse on resource exploitation, conflict and resistance with indigenous understandings of the spiritual ecological dimension of landscape.

Political ecology is a broad, interdisciplinary and contested field that includes diverse definitions and understandings of the political, economic and social factors affecting the environment. This body of scholarship links political economy (Marxist and otherwise) with ecology and earlier forms of cultural ecology (Steward 1955; Vayda and Rappaport 1968). It emerged in the 1970s and 80s with anthropological (Wolf 1972; Cole and Wolf 1974) and geographical work on development and the environment (Blaikie 1985; Hecht 1985; Blaikie and

Brookfield 1987; Krugman 1997), differentiating itself by seeking to understand the political dynamics surrounding material and social struggles over the environment, primarily in the ‘developing’ or ‘third world’ (Bryant 1998). These antiquated words, phrases and top-down approaches have also received a fair amount of criticism ‘against political ecology’ (Vayda and Walters 1999) from those who call this field ‘politics without ecology’ (Bassett and Zimmerer 2004:103), asking: where is the ecology in political ecology (Walker 2005)? In order to understand the historical, spiritual, ecological and social factors affecting Amerindian environments, this project follows these critiques by taking a bottom-up, grounded theory approach (Glaser 2001; Charmaz 2014; See Chapter 2).

According to Martinez-Alier, political ecology is primarily concerned with conflicts related to ecological distribution (2003). Resource management policies have their roots in the utilitarian and exploitative worldview that assumes that humans have dominion over nature, i.e. commoditized landscapes (Daly and Cobb 1989; Gadgil and Berkes 1991; McNeely 1991; Berkes et al. 2000:1). According to Berkes and Folke (2000:2), two streams of research on resource management have attempted to address and alter the traditional utilitarian approach to resource management. The first takes a systems approach (Holling 1978; Walters 1986; Jansson 1994), recognizing the social, economic and ecological networks associated with resource extraction and management; the second thread focuses on the resource user: ‘resource management is people management’ (Berkes et al. 2000:2). This project joins others focused on sustainability and resilience (Clark and Munn 1986; Berkes et al. 2000), institutions and collective action (Ostrom 1990) and community-based resource management (Berkes 1989; Balland and Platteau 1996) in filling the gap between the systems and the people-oriented approaches, but differs in its primary focus on the spiritual dimension of resource management.

Amerindians, particularly those in the circum-Roraima landscape, are subject to a *mélange* of spiritual, ecological and political frameworks causing regional imbalance,

communicative disjuncture (Blaikie 1985; Peet and Watts 1996; Blaser 2009), uncontrolled equivocation (Viveiros de Castro 2004) and ontological dissonance (Lupovici 2012) between and within local and external imaginaries (Peet and Watts 1996). Central to this dilemma is the complex nature of knowledge and the challenges in transferring, managing, optimizing and co-producing it (Polanyi 1966; Szulanski 1996; Von Hippel and Tyre 1996; Jasanoff 2004). Knowledge is both a source of power and innovation, and a boundary object (BO) shared by different communities but viewed or used in different ways (Star & Griesemer 1989). BOs serve as an interface between different communities but can often be the source of dissonance. Given the complex web of political ecologies within the circum-Roraima landscape and the complications of using BOs such as ‘knowledge’, ‘spirit’, ‘shamanism’, ‘religion’, ‘conservation’, ‘development’ and ‘sustainability’, this research draws on the field of development anthropology to analyze territories of difference (Escobar 2008).

‘Development’ broadly refers to the strategies that aim to transfer resources and assistance from the world's economically ‘richer’ nations to ‘poorer’ nations; however many of these projects are focused on building infrastructure that will ultimately enrich ‘richer’ countries and their extractive corporations. In the face of ongoing labor and resource exploitation, Blaser calls for reconfiguring how autonomy as resistance may take place, particularly with regard to underrepresented indigenous populations (Blaser et al. 2010). In *In the Way of Development*, Blaser advocates using the term ‘life projects’ when referring to individual ontologies embedded in local histories, rather than ‘development projects’: “Thus, life projects are premised on densely and uniquely woven ‘threads’ of landscapes, memories, expectations and desires” (2004:26).

Gray’s study of the Arakmbut in Peru echoes many of the ideas discussed by Blaser, reinforcing the importance of self-determination and self-development among a community whose legal system is legitimized through the spirit world (1997). In *Territories of Difference*,

Escobar (2008) analyzes an Afro-Colombian activist movement of Colombia's Pacific rainforest region (Proceso de Comunidades Negras) and their struggle to defend an abundant landscape from capitalist-extractive interests. Ultimately, he argues for the creation of a region-territory that emphasizes the value of place-based cultures as a key strategy for conserving the diversity of this strategically and ecologically important territory (2008:310). The works of Blaser, Gray and Escobar bridge the gap between academia and activism, serving as important models for this project and its search for indigenous alternatives to neoliberal development.

In *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, Taussig (1980) uses two case studies to examine how discourse surrounding the devil and the demonic corresponds to the colonial imposition of capitalism among plantation workers in Colombia and miners in Bolivia. According to June Nash: "The Bolivian paradox is the most extreme case in South America of nations incompletely integrated in a world market on which they have become completely dependent" (1979:1). What is perhaps most relevant for Under Mount Roraima is Nash's discussion of Pachamama, "the ancient space/time concept immanent in the earth.... Supay, the lord of the hills, sometimes referred to as Huari and as the Tío, was transmogrified by the Christians as the Devil, and Pachamama is sometimes identified with the Virgin" (1979:121-122). The discussion of *kanaimi* in Chapter 4 and the spiritual mapping in Chapter 5 bring Taussig's detailed analysis of the Devil and Nash's depiction of Supay and Pachamama to life within the circum-Roraima landscape, juxtaposing these tropes with those of the *piyai'san* (shaman), *pukena'* ('wisdom possessor'), *piyai'ma* (a giant) and Eki No'soto (Cassava Grandmother). The works of Taussig and Nash also provide an interesting comparative for the Areruya syncretism described in Chapter 7 and a haunting glimpse of what might happen if the mines eat the circum-Roraima landscape.

Amerindians, and the land they occupy, are powerful attractions, not only for extractive industries, but also for tourists. This attention provides both opportunities and threats. There is a

large body of literature on ecotourism that is relevant (Butler and Hench 2007; King and Stewart 1996; Fennell 2014), including a significant amount of work on Guyana (Ganga 1994; Dilly 2003; Selloff 2003; Funnel and Binue 2007). As astutely noted by Stevens: “From a development perspective, ecotourism ventures should only be considered ‘successful’ if local communities have some measure of control over them and if they share equitably in the benefits emerging from ecotourism activities” (1999:245). Amerindian communities in the circum-Roraima landscape, particularly those in the North Rupununi of Guyana, continue to scale-up their ecotourism infrastructure, bringing considerable social, environmental and economic impacts, which are evaluated further below.

The work of anthropologist Richard Reed with the Guarani in the border region between Paraguay and Brazil is a good benchmark for how rainforest conservation and development can be consistent with indigenous modes of sustainability (1996, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009). Reed believes that the best way for Guarani communities to avoid the threats of industrial agriculture is through sustainable commercial agroforestry projects that ensure environmental perpetuity, economic sovereignty and social justice. He argues that the key to maintaining power and cultural identity is to escape from debt-bondage and wage-slavery of the encroaching soya and livestock industries. Reed stresses the importance of maintaining a fertile environment rather than converting land for quick profits creating a metabolic rift between rural and urban centers. On the other hand, he also argues that disconnected indigenous communities need to integrate with socially and environmentally responsible companies like The Body Shop and Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream. Reed’s interest in finding a balance between development and conservation through indigenous models is consistent with the ethnodevelopment initiatives discussed in the conclusion, especially with regard to the Areruya Indians and others who struggle to engage with external markets while also maintaining the autonomy that Blaser advocates (2010).

Another inspiration for this project is the extensive body of work by ethnobiologist

Darrell Posey (1982, 1988a, 1988b, 1992, 1998, 2002, 2003a, 2003b). His research on the Kayapó of Brazil focuses on the value of situated ecological knowledge within tropical forest communities, especially as it relates to indigenous intellectual property rights. Nearly 20 years before the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), Posey organized the International Congress of Ethnobiology that culminated in the Declaration of Belém (1988a). This document articulates how indigenous populations perceive, utilize and manage natural resources, and encourages the development of programs that guarantee the preservation of vital biological and cultural diversity. According to Balée: “In his relatively short life, Posey became a pioneer in demonstrating the complexity, depth, and empiricism of indigenous knowledge of the environment and biota” (2013:2). This research is born of the same passion for the equitable empowerment of indigenous communities represented in the work of Reed, Posey and others, and seeks to add to it by analyzing the unique role of spiritual ecological dialectics in landscape morphology.

Many challenge the ideal of the ‘ecologically noble savage’ as nothing more than a romantic myth (Diamond 2005). They argue that indigenous populations are just as destructive as everyone else and that man’s behavior can best be understood as *homo devastans*, the archetype of ecological villainy (Hurley 1994). Sponsel disagrees: “If an indigenous society survives for centuries or millennia, then it has been sustainable, and that must be based on acute sensitivity to and intimate knowledge of the local environment” (2001:159). The key question is not whether indigenous people measure up to some Western notion of the ‘ecologically noble savage’, but under what circumstances and spiritual ontologies they conserve and enhance landscapes (Hunn et al. 2003). This thesis addresses the question empirically and adds to the ethnographic literature on the region as well as the theory of landscape and the fields of historical, spiritual and political ecology through methodologies carefully designed to analyze a shamanic landscape and practice.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In order to empirically investigate the spiritual ecological dimension of the circum-Roraima landscape and achieve the three objectives outlined in Chapter 1, this project uses decolonizing (Agrawal 1995; Escobar 2008; Blaser 2010; Smith 2012), ethnoecological (Johnson and Hunn 2010; Thornton 2011) and historical ecological (Swetnam et al. 1999; Balée 2006) approaches. Qualitative data in the form of narratives rooted in place are gathered through ethnographic fieldwork using grounded theory (Glaser 2001; Charmaz 2014). This chapter describes how these methodologies are integrated in a coherent research program, providing important logistics, a table detailing the multi-sited ethnogeographic fieldwork within the circum-Roraima landscape and a list of key informants.

Key data were derived from *panton* (stories), *taren* (magical invocations), botanical and zoological knowledge associated with *muran* (charms), place names, stone resources and various other material and supernatural aspects of landscape that hold significance for Amerindians. The most logical path to this data goes through the field of ethnoecology that provides a framework for gathering and understanding qualitative emic data associated with how Amerindians perceive and organize knowledge. Ethnoecology borrows methods from linguistics and cultural anthropology (Conklin 1954, 1955; Johnson and Hunn 2010), focusing primarily on indigenous plant and animal classifications (Berkes 1993; Brush 1996) rather than spiritual ecologies. However, Thornton's work on the biospiritual dimension of landscape (Thornton 2011) demonstrates its applicability to understanding spiritual ecological dialectics.

This thesis follows a historical ecology landscape approach and its key postulates: (1) practically all environments on Earth have been affected by humans; (2) human nature is not programmed genetically or otherwise to lessen or augment species diversity and other environmental parameters; (3) different societies impact landscapes in dissimilar ways; and (4)

human interactions with landscapes in a broad variety of historical and ecological contexts may be studied as a total (integrative) phenomenon (Balée 2006:76). Multiple, comparative spiritual histories from many places and times are used to evaluate the variability and morphology inherent within landscape (Swetnam et al. 1999; Sauer 1925). Under Mount Roraima builds on historical ecology, enriching its dynamic, dialectic and diachronic concept of landscape with a biospiritual dimension (Thornton 2011).

Before departing for fieldwork, I conducted a thorough risk and ethics assessment that was subsequently validated by the Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). Key risks were related to transportation, infectious diseases, political instability, alcohol-related incidents and violent assault sorcery.¹⁸ As an outcome of the CUREC process, I created a consent form outlining my research that was given to each informant. Data on the region's biospiritual components (Thornton 2011) and socioecological relationships were then collected during 15 months of multi-sited fieldwork among closely related Pemon (Makushi, Arekuna and Taurepan) and Ka'pon (Akawaio and Patamona) Amerindians, all members of the Carib linguistic family (see table below for a list of villages visited).

Fieldwork methods were qualitative, utilizing ethnography to collect oral histories, testimonials, narratives and folklore as the primary quarry using: (i) participant observation; (ii) semi-structured and informal interviews; and (iii) comparative conceptual mappings among groups that claim material, social, and spiritual ties to the landscape. Although ethnography is an underused methodology in geography often criticized for being unscientific, subjective, dependent on small sample sizes and difficult to replicate (Kvale 1994; Rengert 1997:469), it remains the best platform for understanding the processes and meanings that undergrid sociospatial life (Herbert 2000:550) and the life-worlds of other actors (Pfadenhauer 2005).

¹⁸ Transportation was by far the most expensive (due to high fuel costs) and dangerous aspect of this project. Accessing villages often required treacherous minibus, automobile, motorcycle, airplane and boat rides.

Primary data fills the spiritual ecological gaps in the secondary ethnographic material on the circum-Roraima landscape (Wavell et al. 1966; Colson 1971b, 1976, 1977, 1989, 1998; Thomas 1982; Colson and Armellada 1989; Staats 1996, 2009; Whitehead 2001, 2002, 2004). These two sources of data are syncretized and analyzed in Chapters 3-7 in order to articulate an integrated cosmology for the circum-Roraima landscape composed of many ‘story trails’ (Green 2013).

This research examines specific *panton* (stories) and other narrative (from primary and secondary sources) in order to understand wider spiritual ecological ontologies. In an oral tradition, knowledge is crystalized in a story that is often connected with a place; therefore, *panton* are presented throughout this thesis as integral articulations of Amerindian conceptualizations of being and place (Thornton 2008). This adaptability and groundedness of oral tradition enables groups to synthesize new historical realities as they interact with their world (Guss 1986; Cruikshank 2000). Thus both stories and places become not only grounds of being but also repositories for historical narratives of continuity and change (Thornton 2008).

In an effort to achieve and understand groundedness in everyday experiences, I used a systematic, yet flexible grounded theory approach whereby theory is constructed from qualitative emic data in the process of conducting research (Glaser 2001; Charmaz 2014). Acknowledging the subjective and political nature of all research, this thesis resists the hegemonic stance of objectivity by paying homage to indigenous ways of being and transmitting knowledge (Agrawal 1995; Escobar 2008; Blaser 2010; Smith 2012). These methods were especially helpful for fieldwork among the Areruya Indians at Amokokupai who had not collaborated in a significant research project since Audrey Butt’s visit in the 1950s (see Butt 1954a). Fieldwork in Amokokupai was also unique in the way that the entire community gathered together in the village pavilion each day (except Saturday and Sunday devoted to singing and dancing Areruya) to participate in extended discussions. In these situations and more, grounded theory helped

orient fieldwork and avoid asserting my ‘needs’ and particular queries, thereby serving local interests and helping to establish trust and access.

The cultivation of trust was initially of maximum import. For this reason, I began village visits by volunteering at local schools to teach maths and geography. In many instances, the children provided a natural entrée to parents and grandparents, important sources of traditional knowledge. Once access and trust were achieved, I began to move beyond participant observation to semi-structured interviews and comparative conceptual mappings. Linda McDowell’s *Interviews: Fear and liking in the field* (2010) served as a primary reference for navigating the complex power dynamics, linguistic hurdles and other nuances of conducting human geographical interviews.

Semi-structured methods were adapted from the natural and social sciences including freelisting and cognitive mapping within various cultural-ecological domains (Borgatti 1999; Emmel 2008; Puri 2010b).¹⁹ Freelisting was done to elicit the items of a domain including plants, animals, specialists and spirit forces (Puri and Vogl 2005). Cognitive mapping (Frake and Conklin 1962) was especially helpful at identifying sacred sites and conceptions of space and time that were ultimately incorporated into the cosmogram in Chapter 4. These exercises also created opportunities to observe and participate in discussions to determine how environmental and cultural knowledge is structured and valued across diverse domains (Borgatti 1999; Puri 2010a). The limited amount of quantitative data generated through these methods is not presented because it was deemed statistically insignificant.

As a guiding principle, I sought situations of socialization with Amerindians while continually analyzing my own role in any given community and situation (McDowell 2010). I also found it helpful to bring small gifts for villagers, especially children, including candy,

¹⁹ These methodologies were learned and practiced in Barcelona in February 2011 during an intensive two-week biocultural diversity workshop organized by Raj Puri from the University of Kent and other faculty from universities participating in the Erasmus programme.

books, toys, and souvenirs from my home. Similar methods were also successful for adults who appreciated gifts just as much as children. Reciprocity, trade and gifting are integral aspects of Amerindian culture. In addition to gifts, it was also helpful to bring books and papers on the topic of query. Relevant publications provided an opportunity to educate informants, stimulate dialogue and fact-check.

One common task that was an important gateway to understanding the role of space and place in the performance of gender and sexuality (McDowell 1996) was the processing of cassava. Amerindian labor was largely gendered such that men were primarily focused on hunting, fishing, cutting and/or burning the farm while women were closely linked to the preparation of food, drink and other chores associated with children and care-giving. Cassava is a fundamental unit of Amerindian culture in the circum-Roraima landscape and most women spend a majority of their time planting, harvesting, washing, scraping, grating, sifting, cooking and otherwise processing this sweet or bitter starchy tuberous root. Amerindians often plant more bitter cassava (because it generally deters pests, animals and thieves) that requires extra processing to extract its toxins, including cyanide. Cassava plays an integral role within Amerindian conceptual systems, especially with regard to Eki No'soto ('cassava grandmother' in Akawaio, aka *Akumawari*, 'the mistress of the manioc'; *Akwamari* in Pemon; Cassava Mama or Cassava Mother in Makushi Creole English; see Elias, Rival and McKey 2000 for an analysis of the Makushi perception and management of cassava; see Chapter 5 for a discussion of Eki No'soto). Processing cassava with women was an easy way to contribute, access their considerable knowledge and understand the perception and management of this prolific root vegetable.

Another successful method for establishing trust and access was to participate in 'a way of life' that includes community work (*etrakuasoman* in Akawaio; *mayu* in Makushi; *marshruman* in Arawak; 'self-help' in Creole English). Community work occurred about once

per week and often included clearing brush from someone's farm or the village square, or helping someone build his or her home, etc. These activities were fun, largely because labor was rewarded with ample fermented cassava drinks that lifted everyone's spirits and much more. The fermented drink also created challenges since it empowered certain individuals to express their suspicion and discontent with outsiders. On numerous occasions, intoxicated villagers vocalized antagonistic feelings. In these situations, it was always wise to stand firm, listen, be honest and respect all perspectives. Most often, these individuals merely wanted to be heard. Several who were initially belligerent became good friends with valuable knowledge and contacts. Ultimately, the best strategy was to become everyone's friend (McDowell 2010).

As part of my research toolkit, I brought a Nikon Coolpix P100 digital camera, a Sony AVCHD camcorder, a Tascam DR-05 audio recorder, a MacBook, an external hard drive, several small notebooks that fit in a pocket and consent forms. In some instances, the cameras helped penetrate issues more deeply and attract informants who were eager to participate in the study.²⁰ In isolated instances, technologies created tension and paranoia and were therefore used sparingly and always with consent. The video and audio recorders were especially helpful for recording dialogue and interviews in dialect so that they could be subsequently translated, transcribed and shared with others. Many villagers (and some government officials) thought that a person who brings an expensive camera and takes pictures would likely return home and make a lot of money from the images. It was vital to continually remind all that I was not extracting knowledge or images for profit and I was not associated with any unspoken institution or initiative. I also reciprocated by giving many of my notes and images to communities and individuals.

²⁰ The following short films were edited from 3TB of HD and AVCHD footage recorded during fieldwork: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RpdQm63ZZU ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U89fvtOpfu0>.

There were several limitations of these tools and methods. For example, due to a lack of expertise and methodological training, it was difficult to thoroughly identify many of the plants and animals discussed within the context of *muran* (charms). The multi-sited, ethnogeographical nature of the project also created limitations on depth, which it tries to make up for in breadth and a more holistic understanding of the landscape. Another deficiency in the methods relates to quantitative data. Due to the conceptual focus of the thesis and challenges of measuring and quantifying spiritual data, it is not included; though admittedly, some numbers would have reinforced the qualitative assessment. Training and access to geographic information system (GIS) data and map-making skills would have also been helpful in analyzing and presenting visual data. The thesis would have also benefited from presenting participatory maps; however, due to sensitivities among Village Councils related to revealing the specific location of sacred sites, these maps are not presented.

Logistics

Guyana's Ministry of Amerindian Affairs (MoAA, now known as The Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officially permitted fieldwork for this project from approximately September 2011 to May 2013. A lack of reliable transport and communication infrastructure made contact and entry to certain villages a significant challenge. Visits to Brazil, Venezuela and some villages in Guyana were touristic, never without the consent of immigration officials, informants, village Toshao (chiefs or captains) and Village Council members.

I initially intended to conduct all fieldwork in the most proximate villages to Mt. Roraima, particularly in the Upper Mazaruni of Guyana. However, delays in acquiring the necessary paperwork prevented me from immediately entering this remote area. As a result, I began my fieldwork in the geographically and administratively accessible lowland Makushi

areas of the North Rupununi where ecolodges facilitate the permit application process. Only after applying persistent pressure and forging alliances in Georgetown was I able to gain access to field sites in the Upper Mazaruni. Despite this frustration, I am grateful for the experiences I had in the North Rupununi and elsewhere as they proved to be valuable comparators to the untouristed and politically marginalized Upper Mazaruni.

Georgetown, Guyana was my primary port of entry and exit in the region. Bureaucratic hurdles required me to spend 1-4 weeks in Georgetown before and after visits to the interior. Time in Georgetown was largely spent at the library in the Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology. Fifteen months of fieldwork were spread over a 21-month period and split into four phases of 2-4 months, with 1-2 month breaks in the U.S. to revisit literature, process data and manage constant political and bureaucratic rigidities, primarily associated with Guyana's EPA, MoAA and the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development.²¹ Without the maintenance of support from these institutions, more remote communities remained bureaucratically inaccessible. I visited approximately 20 villages in the circum-Roraima landscape, sometimes periodically or touristically and for varying lengths of time. The following table lists these villages, their dominant dialectic associations and the length of my visit.

²¹ During fieldwork, the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP) controlled these institutions (see Chapter 3).

Country	Village	Primary dialect	Length of stay
Guyana	Kurupakari/Iwokrama	Makushi	1 month
	Surama	Makushi	1 month
	Rewa	Makushi	1 month
	Yupukari	Makushi	3 months
	Lethem/St. Ignatius	Makushi/Wapishana	3 weeks
	Kaieteur/Chenapau	Patamona	1 week
	Paruima	Arekuna	1 month
	Waramadong	Akawaio	1 week
	Kamarang	Akawaio/Arekuna	1 week
	Phillipai/Amokokupai	Akawaio	5 weeks
	Usari warapai (Jawalla)	Akawaio	1 week
	Georgetown	Mixed	2 months
	Total:		12 months
Brazil	Sorocaima	Taurepan	1 week
	Normandia/Jacaré	Makushi/Mixed	2 weeks
	Bonfim	Makushi/Wapishana	3 weeks
	Boa Vista	Mixed	2 weeks
	Total:		2 months
Venezuela	Santa Elena de Uairén	Mixed	2 weeks
	Paraitepui	Taurepan	1 week
	Mt. Roraima	Mixed	1 week
	Total:		1 month
Grand Total:			15 months

Translation was often necessary, especially in more remote areas and with elderly informants. This was a significant challenge because translators were not always proficient in English, Spanish or Portuguese (languages I speak) and/or not willing to work. In general, Amerindians are eager to please, which can be helpful, but this can also cause complications when interviewing informants. For example, when conducting interviews, it was best to ask open-ended questions. If a question suggested a particular answer, informants would often repeat what was said and/or answer in the affirmative in an attempt to please the researcher, even though it was clear they could neither confirm nor refute the statement.

Monetary rewards for informants and translators were a constant dilemma. Prices were never clearly established and often informants would demand payment for questionable data, *ex-ante* and *ex-poste*. In one village in particular, I had to wait one week before beginning research so that the Village Council could establish specific prices for stories, invocations and other forms of traditional knowledge. This village also tried to get me to promise to send a computer and printer before allowing me to begin my research. According to Guyana's EPA and MoAA, villages are not supposed to demand anything in return for welcoming researchers. Despite this policy, when you are deep in the interior, dependent on villagers for food, accommodation, transport and security, it can be difficult to say no.

One effective, indirect way to reward individuals was to commission works of art and crafts. Not only did this contribute to the local economy, but it also encouraged the use and value of traditional skills. To maximize the opportunity, it was especially rewarding to participate in the creation of the craft. This was also a valuable way to learn about the local culture, have fun, facilitate dialogue and friendship with the craftsman or woman and create a souvenir. This method also enabled access to another form of knowledge—tactile rather than intellectual.

Certain individuals and villages were aware of their intellectual property rights while others were not. Laws protecting these rights in Guyana are weak and in some cases nonexistent, especially with regard to detached Amerindians living in the interior. In many cases, it was hard to avoid paying for information since a goal of this research was to give more value to Amerindian knowledge. Indigenous knowledge, biological resources, intellectual property, compensation and equity are all ambiguous terms (Brush 1996:1). For the purposes of this project, intellectual property is both informal, held in an oral tradition, and, to a limited extent, formal. This latter form of knowledge was particularly relevant among the Areruya Indians who shared their written records of medicinal plants and animals. Given the sensitive nature of this knowledge and the potential for exploitation and biopiracy, much of it was not transcribed or

thoroughly analyzed (see discussion of the greenheart seed in Chapter 4 and Vidal 2000 for examples of how Amerindian intellectual property rights are handled in Guyana). Before departing communities, I was often given a list of items to send or bring back on my next trip including headlamps, knives, clothing, glasses, a megaphone, pens, calculators and more.

Informants

The primary domain of analysis for this research is the spiritual ecological dimension of the circum-Roraima landscape; therefore the shamanic practitioners who interact within this animated cosmos are the primary informants. All data is recorded in written, and in most cases, audio and video formats. Given the stigma placed upon the shamanic arts and the diversity of its expressions, some individuals wished to remain anonymous; therefore the identity and location of certain informants is not disclosed unless it was explicitly requested or condoned. A Makushi interviewed on the Rupununi Savannah expressed fear for his life because he believed that evangelicals recently killed one of his colleagues in the area suggesting a tension between spiritual institutions, at the very least. Some of these informants were highly trained and respected; others were retired or just learning the shamanic arts. The following is a list of informants mentioned in the thesis:

Isaac Rogers, Makushi, Yupukari	Clavel Jones, Akawaio, Amokokupai
Joel Samuel, Makushi, Yupukari	Dorene Williams, Akawaio, Amokokupai
Jose George, Wapishana, Yupukari	Glorette Williams, Akawaio, Amokokupai
Madeleine Francis, Makushi, Yupukari	Peter Williams, Akawaio, Amokokupai
Flora Francis, Makushi, Yupukari	Michele Joseph, Patamona, Amokokupai
Dunston Dorrick, Makushi, Yupukari	Daphne George, Akawaio, Phillipai
Russian Dorrick, Makushi, Yupukari	Wanda George, Akawaio, Phillipai
George Tancredo, Makushi, Nappi	Cliva Joseph, Akawaio, Phillipai
Ashley Holland, Yupukari	Quentin, Akawaio, Eimoyen
Dickie, Makushi, Rewa	Austin Charlie, Akawaio, Jawalla
Sean, Makushi, Rewa	Geronimo Thompson, Arekuna, Paruima
Rovin Alvin, Makushi, Rewa	Matthew Elliman, Arekuna, Paruima
Jean Allicock, Makushi, Surama	John Andrews, Arekuna, Paruima
Glen Allicock, Makushi, Surama	Marco William, Arekuna, Paruima
Roy Marcelo, Arawak, Kurupukari	Terrence Fox, Akawaio, Kamarang

Chapter 3: Historical ecology of a land of many waters

The Gods wanted to hide knowledge from humans. First, they thought they would put it in the oceans, but worried that people would swim underwater and easily find it. Then they considered hiding it in the earth, but decided that people would dig down and find it. Then they considered putting it in the air, but feared that people would fly up and catch it. In the end, they decided to hide it in the last place people would expect to find it: in the heart of mankind.

- Marco William, Arekuna, Paruima Village

The Guiana Shield is a 1.7-billion-year-old Precambrian craton of basement rock in the northwest portion of the South American Plate. This land was once connected to Africa in the super continent Gondwanaland that fused with Laurasia to form the Pangaea formation approximately 350 million years ago (Cattermole 2000). At the heart of the Guiana Shield are the Guiana Highlands²² and the Pakaraima Mountains, a massive hard crystalline sandstone plateau rich with mineral deposits of gold, diamonds, bauxite, semi-precious stones, laterite, manganese, kaolin, sand resources, radioactive materials, copper, molybdenum, tungsten, iron, and nickel among other rare earths (Roopnaraine 1995; see Map 1). Species endemism levels are extremely high in this area: an estimated 50% of vascular plant species and 25% of animals (Ellenbroek 1996). About 80% of the area is covered with tropical rainforests forming one of the largest intact forest areas in the world, storing vast amounts of carbon dioxide²³ and 10-15% of the world's fresh water reserves (EcoSecurities 2008). In addition to this abundance, the watershed of the Guiana Highlands drops off a shelf into lowland coastal and Amazon Basin regions, representing a high potential for the generation of hydroelectric power.

²² The Guiana Shield's highest point is not Mt. Roraima (2,810 m./9,220 ft.), but Pico da Neblina (2,994 m. /9,822 ft.) in Brazil near the southern tip of Venezuela.

²³ According to Yadvinder Malhi, Director of the Oxford Centre for Tropical Forests, the forests of The Guianas generally sink more carbon than Amazon Basin forests because the soils are especially poor and sandy in this elevated region making trees grow slower, thereby sequestering more carbon (personal communication, May 2013).

This region of the Amazon biome sits just north of the equator in the tropical zone of the Northern Hemisphere. Consequently, there are only two seasons: dry and rainy, with the latter occurring twice, roughly from May-August and December-January. Despite this general pattern, residents report more erratic climate fluctuations in recent years as the weather has become more unpredictable. This area is largely south of the typical hurricane and tropical storm paths so it is able to escape the devastation regularly experienced by Caribbean countries further north. Annual rainfall is around 80 - 100 inches. Temperatures vary between 70 and 90°F.

Nearly a quarter of a million Amerindians belonging to six major linguistic groups were estimated to live within the Guiana Shield (Hammond 2005). Many live in the Gran Sabana of Estado Bolívar in Venezuela (Santa Elena de Uairén), the northern part of the Estado de Roraima in Brazil (Boa Vista), and the Rupununi Savannah of Guyana (Lethem and Bonfim). According to oral histories, many of these Amerindians were forced into this territory as a last refuge when colonial forces pushed them out of coastland regions. There is also evidence of past human occupation throughout in the form of petroglyphs (Figure 1), petrograms (Figure 2), geoglyphs, earthworks, potsherds, stone tools, palm stands, large orchards of semi-domesticated fruit trees and areas of *terra preta*: incredibly fertile and enduring man-made soils enhanced with charcoal up to two meters deep (Rostain 2012). This evidence suggests that large-scale civilizations and modified landscapes have been present in the region for thousands of years



Figure 1: Petroglyphs at Kurupukari, North Rupununi, Guyana



Figure 2: Petrograms of the Rupununi Savannah

Compared to the advanced empires of the Huari and Inca in Peru, or the Aztec and Maya in Mesoamerica, until recently the pre-Columbian Amazon region was considered devoid of large settlements and ‘high culture’. Evidence now suggests that large societies existed in the rainforests and savannahs of the Amazon at least 12,000 years ago (Roosevelt 1994; Oyuela-Caycedo 2005; Mann 2005; Heckenberger 2013). The oldest ceramics in South America (5,080 BC) were found in Taperinha near Santarem in the Brazilian Amazon (Roosevelt et al. 1991). Archeologists and anthropologists have changed the narrative of history in the pre-Columbian Amazon with the discovery of vast man-made channels, raised fields, mounds, geoglyphs and forest islands connected by earthen causeways suggesting large agricultural projects and sedentary populations (Balée and Erickson 2006); further evidence suggests migration and trekking by nomadic bands affected by deep contradictory forces of a political, religious, and social character (Alexiades 2009; Rival 2006:S80).

Given the abundance of natural resources in the circum-Roraima landscape and the historical presence of Amerindians, there is clearly something to be learned from their management and stewardship capacities. However, the continued marginalization of these cultures, structural violence (Farmer 2003) and erosion of situated traditional knowledge continues to unravel the abundance of this world heritage site. In an attempt to maintain the sacred balance that has already been lost in other parts of the world, the next section focuses on one of the most important archetypes of the local Amerindian cosmology.

Tree of Life



Figure 3: Mount Roraima from Paraitepui, Venezuela

Mount Roraima is a majestic tabletop mountain composed of countless narrative trails (Green 2013) and co-evolutionary forces. Not only is it integral to those who live upon its flanks, but it is also the top of the watershed for three major Amazonian rivers and those who depend on their flows along the Orinoco in Venezuela, the Rio Negro that flows south into the Amazon in Brazil and the Essequibo in Guyana (see Map 2). As further evidence of this mountain's import to the wider region, Guyana, Venezuela and Brazil trisect Mt. Roraima creating a triple border on its apex. The rich landscape surrounding this colossus is a last refuge for Amerindians threatened by modern development and conservation initiatives driven by diverse spiritual ecological ethics.

Long before any European saw or wrote about Mt. Roraima, Pemon and Ka'pon communities lived in the shadow of this sacred *tepui* or 'house of the gods' creating many *panton* (stories) about the mountain. The co-evolution of the people and mountain is sustained through a reciprocal relationship where the people honor the spirit(s) of the mountain by not entering or 'troubling' it and the mountain in turn protects the animals, watersheds and resources

that the people depend upon. To this day, many Amerindians refuse to climb the mountain for fear of being attacked by evil spirits. According to myth, the Makunaima creation heroes once lived here. According to Marco William, in Taurepan, *rora* means ‘green’ and *imu* means ‘blue’; *rora-imu* therefore means ‘blue-green’ mountain. He said that the mountain was given this name for two reasons: (1) because it often looks blue-green from a distance; and (2) the direct descendants of the Makunaima who live in villages beneath the mountain have blue-green eyes. The latter suggests a part-whole relationship between the body social and the mountain, wherein the people have taken on the physical traits of the mountain over time.

According to the Makushi, Mt. Roraima is the stump of the Waiaka: the ancient Tree of Life that once held all the fruits and vegetables of the world. However, the more proximate Akawaio, Patamona, Arekuna and Taurepan specify that the Waiaka Piapi—a smaller mountain/pinnacle adjacent to Mt. Roraima in Venezuela—is the true stump of the Waiaka (see the Waiaka story in Armellada 1964:27-69; see Waiaka in Figure 4). An Akawaio informant offered another etymology for Mt. Roraima explaining that when the Waiaka was chopped down, a cashew branch (*eroi-imu*) fell from the great tree creating the mountain we see today. Many informants also note that the magical Waiaka was a giant silk cotton tree (*Ceiba pentandra* or kumaka, aka the ‘god tree’ or ‘devil tree’), the most sacred arboreal species in the circum-Roraima landscape.



Figure 4: A view of Waiaka Piapi from Paraitepui with Pemon homes in the foreground

Trees embody the four cardinal directions and what Eliade terms the *axis mundi*, connecting the roots of the Underworld with the canopy of the Above World (1964). The human spine is also thought to represent the tree or *axis mundi*, often symbolically depicted in the rattle (shak-shak) and staff used by a shaman (Coleman 2005). The *axis mundi* is also commonly represented as a ladder from earth to heaven. This motif was clearly depicted in the Bible as Jacob's Ladder that appeared to him in a dream where "the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28:10-19). Other representations of the *axis mundi* exist in folktales such as Jack and the Beanstock and Rapunzel. It has also been commonly associated with the Greek caduceus composed of a staff between two intertwined snakes with wings at the top. The staff is the *axis mundi* and the snakes are guardians or guides to the knowledge (Eliade 1964). Anthropologist Jeremy Narby takes the serpentine concept a step further by proposing that snakes are symbolic of the DNA double helix that shamans uniquely engage with (1998).



Figure 5: Roy Marcelo with a silk cotton tree near Kurupukari

According to Glen Allicock of Surama Village, before the missionaries came, people would pray beneath a specific silk cotton tree just outside the village. There is also a giant silk cotton tree outside of Fairview Village (see Figure 5) in the Iwokrama Forest that is considered sacred. The silk cotton tree is a suitable place to go through the initiation phase of becoming a *piyai'san* because it is thought to have many spirits living inside. For this reason, it is never 'troubled' or chopped down.

A silk cotton tree stands out from others in the forest. It is a rapidly growing deciduous tree that reaches heights of 200–230 feet (60–70 m.). The buttressed roots can grow ten feet tall and extend just as far from the trunk. Its trunk is thick, reaching a diameter of up to 10 feet, with shimmering silver skin/bark and a towering canopy of skeletal branches. From December to February the tree produces numerous whitish-pink flowers in dense clusters that bloom before the leaves appear. The tree then produces three-to-six-inch long elliptical fruits. These fruits

contain many seeds surrounded by a dense mat of cotton fibers that are light, buoyant, resilient, water resistant and flammable. The cotton is not optimal for spinning cotton; however it is a useful source of fiber for blowpipe darts.

Because of its great size, this tree is a favorite nesting site for birds including the Jabiru stork (*Jabiru mycteria*) and harpy eagle (*Harpia harpyja*), the largest raptor in South America and ‘King of the Sky’.²⁴ The tree is also a good place to establish a beehive, providing a valuable source of honey for Amerindians and other ecosystem services such as pollination (cf. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). The seeds, leaves, bark and resin from the silk cotton tree can be used for medicinal purposes, including to help alleviate dysentery, headaches, fevers, venereal diseases, asthma, menstrual bleeding, kidney diseases and type II diabetes (Ladeji 2003). Its bark can be used as a diuretic, aphrodisiac and additive to some versions of the hallucinogenic drink ayahuasca (McKenna et al. 1986).

The only people allowed to chop down a silk cotton tree are the Makunaima creation heroes. As told in Armellada’s version of the Makunaima creation myth (1964), at a time of great hunger, the youngest of the Makunaima brothers, Chiki decided to chop down the Waiaka that held all the fruits and vegetables of the world. The tree fell to the northeast,²⁵ causing a great flood of water to spew forth from the trunk creating all the rivers carrying fish, bananas, pineapples, sugar cane, manioc, sweet potatoes and all other foods to distant places. Among other things, this event and the remaining stump/mountain represents the advent of swidden agriculture, life’s inextricable link to water and the land and the dangerous/spoiled nature of the world that the Makunaima left behind.

In another creation myth, Makunaima climbs a large silk cotton tree with his stone axe and cuts off pieces of bark and throws them into the water (Armellada 1964). One by one, the

²⁴ The king vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*) is also sometimes considered the ‘King of the Sky.’

²⁵ The densely forested area of the upper Mazaruni River in Guyana extends from the northeast of Mt. Roraima.

pieces of bark turned into animals. In another, Makunaima is credited with making the different races of people out of clay. As explained by an Akawaio informant from the Upper Mazaruni, Makunaima sat in a huge silk cotton tree with a pile of clay and made a white man. The clay got a bit dirty and he made Amerindians then decided to take a break. When he returned, he continued molding other peoples from his now-darker colored clay and out walked black Indians and the Negro race.²⁶ Since the Makunaima chopped down the Waiaka, the silk cotton tree is sometimes called the Makunaima-tree and nobody else is supposed to chop it down. The ecological importance of the silk cotton tree and its central role in creation myths clearly demonstrate its importance to the circum-Roraima landscape.

Political ecology of Guyana

The etymology of the word Guyana (pronounced *Guyana*, not *Gheena*) is subject to debate. The most common narrative is that when Europeans arrived, Arawak residents referred to the region as Guaiana, meaning Land of Many Waters. Subsequently, the northeastern portion of South America along the Caribbean and Atlantic coast between the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers was known as Guaiana. Today, 'The Guianas' includes Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, an area largely unknown to the outside world. This region is truly a Land of Many Waters because it has a plethora of large rivers, creeks, ponds and lakes. This is especially the case for Guyana where the Essequibo,²⁷ Demerara,²⁸ Corentyne and Berbice Rivers meander through the landscape emptying their silty effluent into the Atlantic Ocean.

The origin of the Land of Many Waters moniker is not clear. According to Daphne

²⁶ The inclusion of white and black races—relatively recent arrivals to the region—demonstrates the syncretic nature of Amerindian oral traditions.

²⁷ The Essequibo River is the largest river in Guyana and the largest between the Orinoco and the Amazon. The original Akawaio name for the Essequibo River was Sipu.

²⁸ In Akawaio, the Demarara River was the Yumarari.

George from Phillipai, its palm trees (*Mauritia flexuosa*), a popular source of materials for Amerindian crafts, are called *kwai* and they are found throughout the Guianas. *Kwaiekwa* means ‘place of many its palm trees’. Amerindians could have referred to the area as *Kwaiana*, meaning ‘place of many its palm trees’. Another theory about the origin of the word ‘Guiana’ comes from an Amerindian group living on the borders of Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil known as the Wayana that many believe was distorted by the Spanish into ‘Juayana’ or ‘Guayana’ (Plotkin 2007).

Guyana is the only English-speaking country in South America and the third smallest after Suriname and Uruguay. At 83,000 sq. miles (215,000 sq. km.) it is roughly the size of the United Kingdom and is the largest country in the West Indies. It has four distinct geographical areas: the low coastal plain; the hilly sand and clay belt; the highland region; and the interior savannahs. Georgetown, the capital, is below sea level at high tide. To stave off the relentless onslaught of the Atlantic Ocean, sea walls (or dykes) and sluices (or kokers) line the coast. Despite these defenses, the city is often flooded, especially during the wet season and exceptionally high tides.

Christopher Columbus sighted the Guyanese coast in 1498 but the earliest European explorers to the region were Spaniards. Spain subsequently claimed (but largely avoided) the area between the Orinoco and Amazon deltas in 1593. To the French and English, the region was known as *Equinoctiale* or *Caribana Land of 21 Tribes* (Gimlette 2011). Despite Spain’s claim to the area, the Dutch, who referred to the area as the *Wilde Kust* (Wild Coast), were the first to begin settlement, setting up trading posts around 1580 and establishing the colony of Essequibo in 1616 (Vegamián 1968). In 1621, the Dutch West India Company received what is now Guyana and Suriname from the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (Daly 1974). During this period, Dutch settlers in the colonies of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice allied themselves with Amerindians to ensure safety and trade in the new colonies, just as neighboring Spanish

colonies were allied with the Lokono of the Orinoco (Menezes 1979; Whitehead 1988). By the late seventeenth century, the shift from a subsistence economy to one based on coffee, tobacco and cotton plantations stimulated the slave trade that would forever change the demographic landscape of the region.

The French and English also laid claim to various parts of the region and used slaves to work their plantations. Today, the influence of the Amerindian, Dutch, British and French presence is evident in place names, modified landscapes and infrastructure such as Dutch canals, British cattle trails and more. After years of colonial land grabs and warfare, the Treaty of Breda (1667) declared that the Dutch would receive Suriname from England in exchange for Nieuw Amsterdam (New York); the French were awarded French Guiana (Daly 1974). Following these political settlements, sugar became the major plantation crop and the use of slaves rose sharply.

Slavery was a major source of wealth for colonial powers. The West Indies sugar trade and cotton crop in North America were driven by the exploitation of labor and other violations of human rights. From 1710 to 1810, British ships carried about three million African slaves to a life of forced labor (Williams 1987). British rule in the three Dutch provinces of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice began in 1803 and was confirmed in 1814. In 1831 these colonies merged to become British Guiana. However, the British were disappointing partners for the Amerindians as they were much less trustworthy in their remuneration than the Dutch (Staats 1996). In 1834 slavery was abolished and British officials made a provision for lucrative reparations for slave-owners but nothing was given to the slaves. In 1838, 700,000 slaves in the West Indies, 40,000 in South Africa and 20,000 in Mauritius were finally liberated (Drescher 2002).

After slavery was abolished there was a dearth of labor to exploit on plantations and continued strong demand for sugar and other colonial commodities. Therefore the Indian indenture system was established as a form of debt bondage that brought over a million East Indians (mostly from Calcutta and Madras) to various European colonies until 1920 (Northrup

1995). Landowners paid for passage, food, clothes, shelter and training in exchange for a term of bondage (usually four to seven years). When completed, they became independent and were paid 'freedom dues' often given in the form of land (Ibid). As free individuals with land they soon became a political force that stood in opposition to rich plantation owners and a large, landless, urban Afro-Guyanese population.

According to the World Bank World Development Indicators Database, in 2014, the population of Guyana was 803,700. This population is roughly divided between: East Indian (43%), African (35%), mixed (10%), Amerindian (9%), Chinese (2%), Brazilian (1%), and other (1%). Almost everyone is concentrated on a 5-10 mile strip of the Atlantic coast. Conservative estimates of Guyanese living in other countries (especially the US, Canada and the UK) are close to 700,000 (Spencer 2007:10). The US Census Bureau (2000) estimated 200,000 across the US alone that provide an important network of remittances. The majority of East Indians are now landowners in rural areas while the Afro-Guyanese mainly live in more urban parts of Georgetown, Linden, Bartica and Lethem. However, these two groups are not rigidly segregated and are increasingly buffered by an increasing mestizo population. The ethnically heterogeneous population is loosely integrated by a Creole culture and language that has evolved during the last two hundred and fifty years. Despite the country's motto—'one nation, one people, one destiny'—ethnic cleavages erupt from time to time, often due to political manipulation.

Guyana gained independence from Great Britain on May 26, 1966. As recent declassified US State Department documents indicate (1996), this independence did not come easily or without the intervention of the US. During this period, within the context of the Cold War, the US was concerned with the spread of communism in the Hemisphere especially in light of the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). The US conducted covert actions in Guyana in order to

eliminate the communist threat in post-independence Guyana.²⁹ Guyana became a Republic within the British Commonwealth on February 23, 1970 when the full name of the country became The Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Guyana subsequently adopted its own constitution in 1980.

The political change leading to becoming a republic was accompanied by a change in economic philosophy to co-operative socialism. After helping to create Guyana's People's Progressive Party (PPP) in 1950 together with Indo-Guyanese politician Cheddi Jagan (1918-1997), Afro-Guyanese politician Forbes Burnham (1923 - 1985) split from the PPP (1955) and created the People's National Congress (PNC) in 1964. Burnham 'ruled' Guyana from 1964, first as Premier from 1964-1966, then as the Prime Minister from 1966-1980 and finally as President from 1980 until his death in 1985. During this period, many industries were nationalized and a recession persisted until about 1990. As a result, many Guyanese emigrated, mostly to New York and other US destinations, representing a significant brain drain for the country.

Since 1992, the majority East Indian PPP held power under several different leaders including: Cheddi Jagan, the Father of the Nation and president from 1992 until his death in 1997; Bharrat Jagdeo, the charismatic and controversial Champion of the Earth and president from 1999 to 2011; and his successor, President Donald Ramotar. Despite the move toward economic liberalization under the PPP, Guyana suffers from high levels of corruption, nepotism and violence. As explained by Kaieteur News: "Narco-trafficking has been driving this country's high rates of money-laundering, gun-running, execution-murders and armed robberies. Violent crime is scaring foreign investors, driving away the educated élite, undermining economic growth and impeding social development" (Feb. 2014). Acknowledging an increase in

²⁹ Operation Condor was a campaign of political repression and terror sponsored by the US government that supplied technical support and military aid to governments (mostly military dictatorships) throughout Latin America to marginalize leftist/communist 'threats' in the region (Dinges 2005).

corruption, Transparency International gave Guyana 27 out of 100 points in the 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). According to this metric of corruption, Guyana was worse (again) than every other country in the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) except Haiti that scored 19 out of 100 points.³⁰

The May 2015 presidential election revealed a loosening of the tyrannical grasp and democratic mandate of the PPP with the success of the coalition opposition party A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and election of President David Granger. Another important member of APNU is the current Vice President and Minister of Indigenous Affairs Sydney Allicock. Not only is he the most powerful Amerindian in Guyana, but he is also a Trustee and co-founder of the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB) and Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development. Allicock has great potential to give more political voice to Guyana's minority Amerindian constituency that, if consolidated, could function as a swing vote within a racially charged body politic.

Political ecology of Guyana's Amerindian landscape

According to Guyana's Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, the population of Amerindians in Guyana is approximately 70,000. This figure is difficult to verify because there are few reliable statistics and members of the various communities travel frequently between neighboring countries and create satellite communities. Guyanese Amerindians can be categorized linguistically into three main groups: Arawakan, Cariban and Warrauan. Within these groups, there are nine official Amerindian affiliations: Wai-Wai, Makushi, Patamona, Arawak, Akawaio, Carib, Wapishana, Arekuna and Warrau. There were many more Amerindian nations in the pre-colonial period including the Putsawa ko', Trio, Taruma, Miyonggong, Piyanogotto, Atorad, Taurepan and Kamarakoto, among others. Many groups became extinct or fled.

³⁰ The CARICOM Secretariat is based in Georgetown, Guyana.

A majority of Amerindians, particularly those in the interior, live semi-traditional lifestyles in communal settlements primarily sustaining themselves through subsistence farming. They are increasingly adopting a monetary economy; however, due to a lack of infrastructure and market access, they still depend on the land and its resources for their livelihoods. Their largest source of protein comes from fish that are increasingly threatened from mining impacts and over-fishing. Amerindians live in territories that are politically defined and, in many cases, on titled land that they own as a collective. In accordance with the Amerindian Act (2006), the National Toshias Council (NTC) was established as a forum for all leaders (known as Captains or Toshias) of Amerindian communities and their supporting Village Councilors, all elected to serve for five years.

Of all the Amerindian groups, the most numerous and politically connected are the Makushi with approximately 40,000, including 10,000 in Guyana and 30,000 in the neighboring Roraima State of Brazil (FUNAI 2010). The Makushi occupy savannah and mountainous areas in the far north of Roraima State and the north of Region 9 in the Guyanese district of the Rupununi River. The border between Guyana and Brazil is porous allowing Amerindians to cross without passports or visas (many have government ID cards) primarily to look for work and visit extended families and healthcare facilities in Lethem, Bonfim and Boa Vista. As the most populous and accessible Amerindian group in Guyana, they are the most politically consolidated and accessible.

In Guyana, the Makushi directly benefit from the increasing power and influence of Sydney Allicock and his brain children: The NRDDDB (established in 1996) and The Bina Hill Institute (2001) that provides training, research and other resources in the North Rupununi. The NRDDDB is an NGO intended to link Amerindians in the North Rupununi with Iwokrama, government agencies and other institutions on issues relating to community development. Since its formation, membership has increased from 12 to 16 communities. The institution focuses on

long-term sustainability and aims to boost individual capacities in resource management and tourism business development.

A fundamental part of the NRDDDB is the Makushi Research Unit (MRU) established in 1995 within a project sponsored by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF, part of the World Bank Group) and administered by Iwokrama. The MRU is dedicated to the promotion and maintenance of traditional knowledge, language, culture and gender empowerment. It also promotes awareness of social issues such as HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. The MRU has produced numerous cultural publications, including *Makusipe Komanto Iseru* (Sustaining the Makushi Way of Life) and many other booklets and educational and social awareness materials. Another successful program facilitated by the NRDDDB that has contributed to the conservation and development of traditional Amerindian knowledge and skills is the Junior Wildlife Club program. Each year, they get together for regional competitions in bow and arrow shooting, cassava grating, cotton spinning, sports and other traditional crafts.

While the NRDDDB has made significant progress in the North Rupununi, Amerindians in other parts of the country remain marginalized. However, efforts have been made to expand existing regional bodies and create new associations. Using the NRDDDB as a model, local authorities are now trying to institutionalize the Upper Mazaruni District Council (UMDC) and North Pakaraima Development Board (NPDB) and Area Council (AC) but still need to register and consolidate power among communities of Patamona, Akawaio and Arekuna Amerindians.

Conservation International (CI) has demonstrated an increasing recognition of the importance of supporting people and their intimate linkage to biodiversity. To this end, CI facilitated the creation of the Kanuku Mountain Community Representative Group (KMCRG), consisting of community leaders from 11 Amerindian villages and 7 satellite communities

around the proposed Kanuku Mountain Protected Area.³¹ This mountain range in the heart of Guyana is part of a vast and largely ‘pristine’ wilderness area that stretches across the Guiana Shield. According to CI, the Kanuku Mountains (approximately 5000 km² in area) are the most ecologically diverse area in Guyana (2007). Guyana is often called ‘The Land of Giants’ and the Kanukus are home to all of these famous (and in some cases endangered) residents including: the jaguar (*Panthera onca*), harpy eagle, black caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*), giant river otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*), arapaima fish (*Arapaima gigas*) and the giant anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*).

CI was also instrumental in the creation of the Upper Essequibo Conservation Concession (UECC) and Konashen, a Community Owned Conservation Area (COCA) managed by the Wai-Wai in the deep south of Guyana. CI hopes to ultimately foster the creation of a massive protected area/wildlife corridor that stretches from Mt. Roraima across the Rupununi Savannah to the Kanukus and further south to Konashen. These efforts and others are encouraging from a strict conservation point of view; however, many Amerindian communities, particularly those living in and around the Kanukus and Kaieteur National Park³² are concerned that expanding conservation areas and parks will ‘fence-in’ Amerindian communities and limit their access and use of ancestral land and resources.

In addition to the NTC, NRDDDB, NPDB, KMCRG and other fledgling representative bodies, the Amerindian People’s Association (APA) and the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP) also serve as important advocacy platforms and mobilization

³¹ The word ‘*kanuku*’ is derived from the Makushi word, *kanukuta*, which roughly translates to ‘jungle garden’ or ‘jungle farm’. Since much of the surrounding area is savannah, Makushi and Wapishana Amerindians who live in and around this mountainous area cut and burn forest here to use the land for their farms. For this reason, the creation of a protected area is a controversial initiative that is not universally supported.

³² With help and encouragement from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the biodiversity and mineral rich Kaieteur National Park has expanded three times forcing Patamona residents of Chenapou to feel corralled-in by the park. WWF built an ecolodge in Chenapou that has never been used and is now in a state of decay.

networks. Much like the NRDDDB, these NGOs focus on education and training, human rights, environmental justice, woman's issues and legal services.

Additional NGOs influencing Amerindian communities include the Rupununi Learners Foundation (RLF), a United States nonprofit founded in 2001 by Alice Layton and Rupununi Learners Incorporated (RLI), a Guyanese nonprofit. These institutions are dedicated to environmental conservation, research, education, economic development and cultural preservation. A centerpiece for these initiatives is the Caiman House Field Station in Yupukari Village in the North Rupununi. This facility includes an ecolodge, a public library as well as headquarters for RLI and Yupukari Crafters.

Another foreign nonprofit that has influenced Amerindian livelihoods in Guyana is Foster Parrots run by Marc Johnson and Karen Windsor. The primary focus of this institution is the protection and care of parrots and other exotic animals in captivity at The New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary in Hope Valley, Rhode Island, USA. Foster Parrots is also responsible for establishing Maipaima Eco-Lodge at the base of the Kanuku Mountains outside Nappi Village in the North Rupununi of Guyana. This facility compliments efforts to protect parrots in captivity by engaging Amerindians in conservation and ecotourism in one of the most diverse landscapes on Earth.

Ecotourism is a proven vehicle for both conservation and economic development of Amerindian communities in Guyana, particularly in the North Rupununi. Among the principle ecolodges in the interior (Iwokrama, Surama, Rewa, Rock View, Karanambo, Caiman House, Maipaima and Dadanawa) the best models are those that are solely community-run (Surama and Rewa). According to Kaieteur News (2010): "about 15 years after it [Surama] offered to take care of some college students from Iowa, USA, the village today has emerged as a model for community tourism in Guyana with its conservation efforts drawing considerable attention. And the credit goes to Sydney [Allicock]."

Study abroad programs are promising vehicles for the conservation and economic development of Amerindian lands. The following is a list of universities that have supported study abroad programs in Guyana: Lesley University, Wartburg College, Florida Gulf Coast University, University of Virginia, Miami University, The Open University, University of Mary Washington, Valencia College, The New School and the University of Missouri-St. Louis, among others.³³ These programs foster valuable knowledge exchanges with the additional benefit of bringing more income to Amerindian villages from fewer visitors.

Missionary influence: proselytism, prophetism and syncretism

The Guyanese often joke that everyone who comes to their country is a missionary, a mercenary or a misfit, and often a mix of all three. Beginning in the 1600s and continuing to this day, religious institutions have been active in the circum-Roraima landscape. Increased interactions between newly connected hemispheres caused a clash of biological and conceptual systems, violence, migration, and the development of syncretic movements. Missionaries were adept at using Christian narratives to replace endemic *panton* (stories), including depicting the Catholic saints as equivalent to the Amerindian animist spirit forces and replacing their mythologies with biblical narratives (e.g. flood, Tree of Life and good vs. evil). In an ironic historical feedback loop, Amerindians of the New World were drawn to Christian narratives that were originally influenced by pagan oral traditions of the Old World. Ultimately, all religions are syncretically derived from existing narratives thereby maintaining continuity and transformation, processes locally epitomized by the Makunaima creation heroes.

³³ None of these universities have reciprocal exchange programs that bring Amerindians to the US/UK/Canada. Tuskegee University in Alabama and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (First Nations University of Canada or University of Regina) had programs that accepted Amerindians in the early 1990s, including Carolyn Rodrigues, Guyanese Minister of Foreign Affairs from April 2008 to May 2015. Other non-university institutions that participated in cultural exchanges include Crossroads International and Ghost River Rediscovery, both from Canada. The latter used to bring Canadian First Nations youth to Guyana and Amerindian youth from Guyana to Canada for summer programs.

The Dutch were the first to bring Christianity to Guyana through the Dutch Reformed Church, the only religious institution granted permission to operate in their colonies (Goslinga 1971). Initially, this church only ministered to Dutch settlers and made no attempt to convert African slaves and Amerindians. Due to the remote and dangerous nature of the *Wilde Kust*, it was difficult to find clergymen to serve in their Essequibo and Berbice colonies. It was not until 1688 that the first clergyman, Rudolph Deynes arrived to minister to the settlers in Essequibo (Henry and Stone 1983).

During the colonial period, the Dutch, English, Spanish, French and Portuguese scrambled for control of territory in the circum-Roraima landscape. Some of the early missionaries recorded valuable ethnographic information and, in some cases, conducted truly noble humanitarian work; but they also have blood on their hands from the subordination and ethnocide perpetrated by colonial powers of the Old World.³⁴ By the 1800s, Christian dogma propagated by Spanish Catholic missions slowly erupted throughout the Orinoco Delta; the Dutch and English Anglican faiths moved up the Essequibo and Cuyuni rivers of Guyana; and the Portuguese Catholic flag was raised in what is now Roraima State, Brazil. The establishment of missions was critical to the colonial pursuit of command and control of the New World, leaving behind a largely Christianized landscape.

Mainstream religion in Guyana is broken down approximately into Christian (40%), Hindu (35%), Muslim (9%), and other (16%) (Spencer 2007:10). According to an International Religious Freedom Report for Guyana (2007), the composition of the Christian population is roughly: Pentecostal (17%), Roman Catholic (8%), Anglican (7%), Seventh-day Adventist (5%), and other Christian groups (20%). Among Amerindians, Christianity is the primary religion.

³⁴ The missionary situation was quite complex from the 18th century onwards. According to Joel Benjamin, the Moravian Brethren (Herrnhuters) from Germany worked primarily on the coast, making a significant early contribution to the study and documentation of the Arawak language, primarily by translating the bible (1991:18). They also had contact with Akawaio in the interior, but only to a limited extent.

Despite this Christian affiliation, many Amerindians also hold on to traditional animist beliefs making their faith a complicated matter.

In contrast to the coastal Amerindian groups largely displaced by European colonization, those in the interior tended to remain in specific geographical zones living rotational subsistence lifestyles until the mid-1800s. Settlements of extended family units, particularly those in the forested areas, were not permanent since soil fertility was poor and there was a constant need to move; therefore shifting cultivation was associated with shifting settlements. These patterns were significantly altered when Christian missionaries began to arrive in Guyana's interior in the mid-1800s. Since the interior was viewed by the colonial government as a source of natural resources³⁵ and land for livestock,³⁶ the only 'healthcare' or 'education' that reached Amerindian communities was left to Christian mission stations.

Religious leaders asserted themselves and undermined traditional authority structures by banning Amerindian dancing spree, rites and rituals including their use of tobacco, *muran* (charms) and *taren* (invocations) and all practices associated with the *piyai'san* (shaman). Traditional Amerindian foods were considered unacceptable and unhygienic. Fermented cassava drinks such as *paiwari*, *casiri*, *parakari*, *kasa'*, etc. were at one time considered to be the direct cause of the spread of tuberculosis among Amerindians in Guyana. For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Amerindians were eating 'unclean' meats in the eyes of God such as pork,

³⁵ Balata bleeding began in the late 19th century and continued up to the 1970s when the balata trade lost its economic viability. Apoteri, near the confluence on the Rupununi and Essequibo Rivers was the main center of the balata industry in Guyana (Iwokrama and Fairview Agreement 2006).

³⁶ During WWI, H.P.C. Melville built the Rupununi Cattle Trail from the Wapishana savannahs in the south through Makushi territory in the North Rupununi all the way to Georgetown. Amerindian cowboys known as *jacos* were instrumental in wrangling and managing herds. At the time it was one of the most ambitious private trails in the world constructed to meet a surge in demand for beef. However, according to oral histories, at the first attempt to use the trail, over 70% of the animals simply vanished in the forest. Prior to the completion of the Georgetown-Lethem Road in 1992, the only access from the coast to forests and savannahs in the interior was by boat up rivers such as the Essequibo or via the Cattle Trail.

tapir, agouti, skin fish, shrimp, crab, reptiles, duck, worms and turtles—all important sources of nourishment.

The presence of missions began a process of voluntary migration of Amerindian groups away from traditional territories to the Christian missions in search of modern tools, services and spiritual insights. This pattern of migration has continued to the present with the attractions of education, health services, jobs, religious institutions, fuel, shops and infrastructure including running water, Internet access, roads, cell phone service and more. An additional consequence is that the land has become more degraded as nomadic lifestyles have been abandoned, populations have increased and packaged goods (and trash) have become more prevalent and concentrated.³⁷

As explained by Clifton Lorendo, a devout Christian Makushi elder from Yupukari: “Before the missionaries, we would kill outsiders like you with an arrow or blowpipe dart in your back. Everyone used to live with their families in small savannah clearings in the bush [points to Kanuku Mountains] and come together to drink, sport-up [party] and do all sorts of wickedness.” When missionaries arrived, all of this changed. Amerindian communities that were formerly large transitory family units were encouraged to live in villages and attend church regularly; therefore they became more sedentary (Colson 1996:31). Wherever the missionaries went to evangelize, their first concern was to build a church and school. This process enabled colonial powers to control, convert, corral and materially coerce Amerindians into more ‘civilized’ Christian lifestyles and communities.

The 19th century was a time of missionary fervor where native peoples were seen as “fields ripe for the harvest” (Menezes 1979:215). Missionaries frowned upon those who practiced polygamy and cross-cousin marriage was outlawed and considered incestuous. However, some argue that the introduction of Christian marriages resulted in an increased

³⁷ According to local health workers, the change in diet has also led to an increase in cancer, diabetes, hypertension, alcoholism (particularly with the introduction of bottled spirits) and more.

number of extra-marital affairs by both men and women, leading to an increase in conflict, wife beating and divorce (Menezes 1979). In general, the Christianization and ‘civilization’ of Amerindians was seen as compensation for the loss of their lands (Schomburgk 1840). In other words: “Amerindians were offered heaven for their earth” (Menezes 1992:67).

Another consequence of missionary penetration, as well as the presence of African slaves and East Indian indentured servants, was the emergence of numerous syncretic movements including Areruya.³⁸ Ka’pon and Pemon peoples are known for unique syncretic practices developed through a process of selective adoption and adaptation of Christian knowledge and ritual synthesized with indigenous beliefs and practices (Colson 1996:4). Since missionaries stigmatized all-things-shamanic, these ‘cults’ functioned as arks for traditional culture as well as revitalization and resistance movements that carried traditional ways of being through floods of cultural intrusion.

International context

For over 500 years, the wealth of the Guiana Shield has attracted colonial, missionary, extractive, conservation, research, development and tourism operations of all shapes and sizes. Today, the region is subject to the diverse political frameworks of Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia and numerous NGOs, multinationals and multilaterals. The implementation of unprecedented Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) and Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) projects and the construction of roads, hydroelectric dams, mineral processing facilities, aqua- and agricultural projects may improve the lives of some, but they could also facilitate eco- and ethno-cide.

In 1993, the European Parliament launched the Guiana Shield Initiative (GSI) with funding from the Directorate General of International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Netherlands

³⁸ See Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion of Areruya and a list of the other lesser-known syncretic movements.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The objectives were to build capacity to deliver and maintain environmental goods and services and provide a tool for the alleviation of poverty. In Guyana, the centerpiece for this international initiative was Iwokrama. A second phase funded by the European Union, the Dutch government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)³⁹ and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Netherlands Committee lasted from June 2006 - 2010. In 2012, the GSI became the Guiana Shield Facility (GSF). According to their website: “The aim is to set up lasting arrangements within the context of the Multilateral Environment Agreements and international conventions (e.g. CBD [Convention on Biological Diversity], Kyoto Protocol), and based upon local and national ownership.”

Another initiative that fits into international frameworks and owes much to the bilateral support of Norway is Guyana’s Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) launched in 2009 by President Bharrat Jagdeo. This strategy outlines Guyana’s vision for promoting economic development while at the same time combating climate change. According to an LCDS REDD+ Enabling Activity Progress Report (2012):

Priority investments will be in: Amaila Falls equity [the first phase of a large hydroelectric project partially financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the China Development Bank, in cooperation with the Brazilian government and RUSAL [the world’s largest aluminum company from Russian]; the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF); Amerindian land titling; MSE [Micro and Small Enterprise] development for sustainable livelihoods of vulnerable groups; an International Centre for Biodiversity Research; Cunha Canal Rehabilitation and other support for the LCDS.

The World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA) was invited by Guyana and Norway to act as trustee of LCDS funds. Since the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2009, Norway has committed (but not disbursed) up to US\$250M by 2015 for avoided deforestation into the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) and the ADF. The ADF was

³⁹ As part of an ongoing commitment to Guyana and the empowerment of women, in 2003, UNDP funded sewing groups in villages in the North Rupununi specializing in school uniforms. This initiative was designed to give women a space to work together, earn income and provide uniforms for their children.

established to support the socio-economic development of roughly 180 Amerindian communities in Guyana through the implementation of their Community Development Plans (CDPs) that include initiatives in agriculture, village infrastructure, tourism, manufacturing, village business enterprise and transportation. The pilot phase of the LCDS began in 2012 by giving 5 million Guyanese dollars to 27 communities for CDPs, mostly (65%) in the agricultural sector.

In the northern part of the Estado de Roraima in Brazil, Amerindians benefit from financial and technical support from the Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) that provides research, legal counsel, infrastructure and assistance with land titling requests. Villages that fall under the jurisdiction of FUNAI tend to have electrification, running water and other public services such as schools and healthcare facilities. Amerindian land in Roraima State is divided into several territories: the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Territory (IT) and the São Marcos IT and eight small areas that surround isolated villages in the far north in the valleys of the Uraricoera, Amajari and Cauamé rivers. According to FUNAI, the Raposa Serra do Sol IT covers 1,678,800 ha and contains approximately 85 (mostly Makushi and Taurepan) villages. The São Marcos IT is contiguous to the Raposa Serra do Sol IT covering 654,110 ha, home to 24 Makushi villages and a total population of 1,934 Indians (FUNAI 2010). Villages within these territories are relatively well represented; other villages, especially those on or near the borders and significant mineral, water, and forest resources of the Pakaraima Mountains, remain unsupported and vulnerable.

Sorocaima is a Taurepan community in the northwestern portion of Roraima State near the border with Venezuela. In the 1960s, this community was approached by the Brazilian government as well as the Seventh-day Adventist Church missionaries and asked to choose between a government school and a new church in the village. They chose the church and now educate their children through the word of God without any government assistance. According to Sorocaima's vice-Toshao (captain/leader), the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable

Natural Resources (IBAMA) and FUNAI won't help them because "there is an abundance of valuable resources on our land that the government wants to control."

In 1989, Mount Roraima National Park (MRNP) was created overlapping several Ingarikó traditional lands now subject to the usage restrictions under IBAMA's Management Plan (Mlynarz 2008). The Ingarikó learned about the MRNP during a FUNAI mission in September 2000. After much conflict and a concerted effort by the Ingarikó, the territory received a dual status of National Park and Indigenous Territory. Despite this victory, the double allocation leaves a tension that is not isolated to the Ingarikó.

Due to increased energy demands, Brazil is embarking on an ambitious hydroelectric development strategy throughout its territory and in neighboring countries. In a recent report submitted to the IDB and published on Survival International's website, Colson explains how Guyana, in coordination with Brazil, China and Russia, intends to build a large multi-phase hydroelectric facility in the Upper Mazaruni that would have devastating and wide-reaching effects (2013:66). Another narrative that ties the landscape together is related to the Guri hydroelectric dam complex (the third-largest in the world) on the Caroní River in Venezuela. This is the nearest hydropower project to Guyana and serves as an important model. Brazil's hunger for energy led to the construction of a controversial transmission line from the Guri complex in 2001 across the Gran Sabana and down the Rio Branco valley toward growing populations and industry in Boa Vista and Manaus. In order to protect the watershed of the Caroní, the Venezuelan Government wisely created Canaima National Park in 1962. However, as explained by Colson: "Many years of extensive mining using dredges in the river and its tributary streams, the felling of trees and the removal and washing of earth along the banks, have been judged to have irretrievably altered the [Guri] hydrological system" (2013:39).

There are many political narratives that shape the circum-Roraima landscape and nothing can be understood in isolation. To this day, much of the region is still contested. The western

portion of Guyana up to the Essequibo River is claimed by Venezuela in La Zona en Reclamación. Guyana's southeastern border with Suriname is contested and its southern border with Brazil is also vague. The contentious nature of these porous borders is indicative of centuries-old colonial disputes and a lack of infrastructure that has created valuable envelopes of diversity.

Despite the political concessions of Guyanese, Brazilian and Venezuelan governments, and the successes of regional organizations, Amerindians remain vulnerable to increasingly globalized political and economic cycles. The Upper Mazaruni basin is perhaps the most significant endowment of water, mineral, biological, cultural and spiritual wealth in the circum-Roraima landscape and—relative to the Raposa Serra do Sol in Brazil and Canaima National Park in Venezuela—is subject to the least amount of protection and coherent management. Another massive multi-phase hydro project in this area already set in motion threatens irreversible cultural and environmental devastation among Amerindian populations. Sadly, the seed of their disempowerment was planted long ago.

After enduring a history of colonization, disease, forced labor, evangelism and displacement, Amerindians now live on a small portion of their ancestral land. Diverse beings and three primary shamanic practitioners spiritually sanction stewardship of this land: the *piyai'san* (shaman), *kanaimi/e'toto* (sorcerer) and the Areruya *pukena'* (wisdom-possessor). These individuals work in complementary ways to facilitate creative adaptation, syncretism, revitalization and resistance to ongoing environmental, social, religious, economic, and political change.

Chapter 4: Shamanism within a tripartite cosmos

At first there was only ewarupi, darkness. One day, he went to bathe in the river where there was a lot of foam. The foam ran down his body and some got stuck on his leg making him pregnant on his thigh. When darkness went hunting one day, a tiny baby dropped off of his leg so he picked it up and took it home. The baby grew and began to suck its finger where there was a little light that helped him grow. Then the child grew bigger and began walking about. He and his father shared one hammock and would always rest opposite each other, with their feet towards the other person's head. The child helped around the house by sweeping up the rubbish into a pile. One of these piles had a small twinkling light in it, but there was no heat, power or strength from the little light. Then the boy blew into the pile and smoke began to come out, but there was still no heat or brightness. The boy continued to blow and blow until finally heat and fire rose out of the pile. This is how light, heat and fire were born from the darkness.

– Peter Williams, Akawaio, Amokokupai

The three primary shamanic practitioners within the circum-Roraima landscape (the *kanaimi*, *pukena*’ and *piyai*’*san*) work in a complimentary form. The *kanaimi* is focused on the act of killing, harming, taking energy and instilling fear and jealousy in others; the *pukena*’ focuses his or her activities in the upper sphere and an increase in *akwa* (‘radiant light energy’); while the *piyai*’*san* is somewhere in-between, mediating with diverse beings in the astral, terrestrial and subterranean domains in order to divine knowledge like the *pukena*’, but also capable of inflicting harm on others like the *kanaimi*.

In an unpublished English translation of their collaborative paper, ‘The Economic Role of the Shaman and its conceptual basis among the North Kapon and North Pemon of the Guiana Highlands’, Colson and Armellada explain the etymology of the word *piyai*’*san* (1989:5):

Piai’chan is a word made up of the following components: p- is a particular meaning "one who is": iai (yai) meaning "spirit" has the possessive form iachi (or yachi) which is used to refer to the shaman's special spirit assistants and helpers (pl. yachiton), which are embodied in his tobacco, tree barks and his spirit stones, the latter being pebbles and, notably, quartz crystals: -chan, -san, -zan which appears to refer to a group of relations, past or present and might be glossed as "kin".

Using this derivation, the word *piyai*’*san* roughly means ‘one who is kin to the spirits’. According to Colson, among the Akawaio, the spirits refer to the *piyai*’*san* as *eneoge*, meaning ‘one who sees’ or ‘one who perceives’—much like a clairvoyant (1977:43). The word *eneoge* is

also commonly used in spirit songs (*moruwa*, ‘warming songs’ used to combat cold illnesses in Arekuna; *mari*’ are an Akawaio shaman’s introductory songs used to contact spirit helpers, *yachiton*); therefore *eneoge* is said to be the ‘real *piyai*’*san*’ or ‘true *piyai*’*san*’.

Another etymological association of the word *piyai*’*san* comes from creation mythology. According to legend, the first *piyai*’*san* was the Sun Father, Wei. His offspring, the Makunaima were powerful ‘kin to the spirits’, particularly the mythical twin brothers: Makunaima (Insikiran in Makushi) and Chiki/Pia (Anike in Makushi) who shaped the landscape at night. Pia once lived on the summit of Mt. Roraima and traveled around teaching useful things. Thus, when a learned man went about teaching, he was known as a *pia*’*san*.

The word *pia* is of fundamental importance in understanding the shamanic arts. According to Colson and Armellada (1989:7):

Pia is said to approximate the concept of a genetic code in Western scientific theory... They can, moreover, be invoked as active, individualized forces, in order that their essential characters and powers may be appropriated for social ends. In particular, *piatenan* are potential helpers in the service of those humans who know how to harness them being the vital forces in the invocations known as *taren*.

Pia is also used metaphorically, as for example in the phrase "mountain foot": *wök pia-po* (mountain beginning-at). Similarly, it is used to refer to a tree trunk and when the suffix *-pĩ* is added, making *pia-pĩ*, the stump of a felled tree is meant. Pemon regard tree trunks and stumps as the origin and beginning of a tree, whereas in European languages "root" is more likely to be used in this sense. However, Pemon consider the roots to be the means of gathering nourishment and giving stability whilst the trunk shows its real beginning and character and represents its continuity.

Thus we come to an understanding of the word *pia* that is associated with the stump/root/essence/genetic code of all things and an association with the Waiaka Piapi and Mt. Roraima—ancient stumps of the Tree of Life. This perspective suggests an overlap between the shamanic ontology and that of Western science. Evolutionary biologist Neil Shubin supports this proposition by demonstrating how the molecular history of the universe can be seen in our bodies and the landscape (2013).

In the Amerindian shamanic tradition, everything has a *pia* that can be invoked for certain ends. In order to manage these forces, the *piyai'san* holds the role of doctor/healer/medicine man, minister, economist, psychologist, hypnotist, magician, sorcerer, killer/hunter, military strategist, poet, musician, artist, dancer and more. Just like the twin Makunaima creation heroes, the *piyai'san* is responsible for maintaining a balance between a steady state and the forces of change and adaptation.

Amerindians believe that spirits permeate the animated world around us governing the fate of the landscape. According to Joel Samuel, a Makushi elder from Yupukari Village:

Everything is people. All plants live just like us and are capable of communicating, helping and harming humans and other animals. When a tree fruits or has flowers, it's telling you something—it communicates in its own language. The *piyai'san* talks to the plants, animals and trees and interprets these languages. Some believe that the Devil is talking back to the *piyai'san*.

This statement suggests a deep inter-relationship between all beings and the ability of the *piyai'san* to uniquely communicate with them. The fact that the informant mentioned the Devil reflects the profound missionary influence and the social stigma and ambivalence associated with traditional knowledge and the shamanic conceptual system.

According to a shamanic conceptual system, a person's spirit is not anchored firmly to the body and must be closely tended to particularly during travel, youth, illness, sleep and other liminal stages such as birth, death and the coming of age. People must utilize ritual acts to safeguard and ward off the influence of harmful forces since a person's spirit can wander or be taken far outside the body. These rituals generally include the burning or smudging of special tree gums and hardened saps to protect the spirit and/or bring it back to the body, or the use of *muran* (charms) and *taren* (invocations).⁴⁰ The *piyai'san* is the optimal individual to administer these treatments; however anyone can learn, 'own' and use an appropriate *taren* or *muran*.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of *muran*, *taren* and smudging.

Before missionaries arrived, every family lived under the influence of the *piyai'san*. The *piyai'san* had control over illnesses and consequently over the bodies of villagers. According to Colson and Armellada: “The *piyai'san* often chooses the names of newly born and he takes many wives from his tribe’s people utilizing his vast power. No one dares refuse him his daughter or even his wife if the *piyai'san* so desires. When he dies, he is buried on top of a hill or forested area, away from the regular burial ground” (1989:9). The *piyai'san* is well respected, but also feared and often seen as an outsider who commonly lives and is buried beyond the fray. Their liminal status and placement within the community is symbolic of their craft that takes them to the margins of life.

The *piyai'san* is most often a man. Medicine women or *piyai*-women will often tend to the female health-related issues in the village. For example, a girl who does not want to become pregnant would likely go to the *piyai*-woman and obtain an herbal contraceptive. One forest product used for contraception comes from the seed of a greenheart tree (*Chlorocardium rodiei*: family *Lauraceae*) that is processed into a white powder and mixed with water to drink. This potent and effective substance can also be ingested to abort pregnancy and as a topical powder to heal rashes and sores.⁴¹

Just as individuals, communities and geographies vary, the path to becoming a *piyai'san* and the spirit helpers, *taren* (invocations), *muran* (charms) and other instruments they employ are also diverse; however, similarities do exist, including the capacity to enter an ecstatic trance or soul journey and other fundamental aspects of the shamanic conceptual system.

⁴¹ Roy Marcelo from Kurupukari showed me how to process this forest product and asked me to take a sample to be analyzed at Oxford but Guyana’s EPA quickly denied my request and demanded that I submit samples to Iwokrama, though it was the intellectual property of Marcelo. The greenheart tree is a valuable hardwood that was being harvested within the Iwokrama Forest by Tigerwood Guyana Inc., a socially and environmentally suspect enterprise that recently lost its Forest Stewardship Council certification.

A shamanic conceptual system within the circum-Roraima landscape

The Amerindian shamanic world-view of the cosmos is composed of three fundamental planes superimposed in space that meet on the horizon in the intermediary plane. According to Akawaio anthropologist and trained *piyai 'san*, Desrey Fox, Ka'pon Pata, 'a place in the sky,' is the Akawaio equivalent of the upper, celestial or Sky World (2003:70). This domain is primarily associated with the male gender, the colors white and yellow, seminal qualities, heat, spice, bitterness and the daytime sky, among other things (Colson 1976). As explained by the Areruya Indians, this is the source of radiant light energy known as *akwa*. According to Fox, this 'Upper World' has two sub-categories: The first and furthest away is Penaro'kon, the home of the spiritual ancestors of the Akawaio including the Makunaima and Wei (the Sun Father) that energizes and rejuvenates all life on Earth (2003:70). The other sublevel of the Above World is the home of 'good' *imawariton* (disembodied spirits) that are often summoned during shamanic ceremonies to give guidance and assistance.

The Middle or terrestrial world is known as Nūnpon Pata, 'earthly place/home', the domain of humans, plants, animals and other material constituents, but also including 'bad' *imawari* (Fox 2003:70). This world is often depicted as a tree trunk, vine, ladder, staircase, staff, umbilical cord or *axis mundi* connecting the Middle World of physical reality with the celestial and subterranean worlds.

The third level of the Akawaio cosmos is Nūn O'nūn Pata, the 'place under the earth' (Fox 2003:70). This domain is generally associated with the power of darkness, cold, shadow, night, as well as the sweet and nurturing aspects of the female gender (Colson 1976). When looking up at the night sky, one is actually looking up at the Underworld; therefore our understanding of direction does not necessarily apply to the Ka'pon and Pemon conceptual systems. According to Fox, like the celestial world, this domain is also divided into two levels:

(1) *apai awon pata*, ‘shallow underworld’; and (2) *i’nawon pata* ‘deep underworld’ (2003:71):

The shallow underworld represents darkness where there is nothing, while the deep underworld is full of auric energy. This is the home of spirits of good persons who drowned and other helpful spirits. They function to aid new things that are coming into being such as new ideas, visions, and dreams of various kinds, and they give their aid to only selected souls in the terrestrial world.

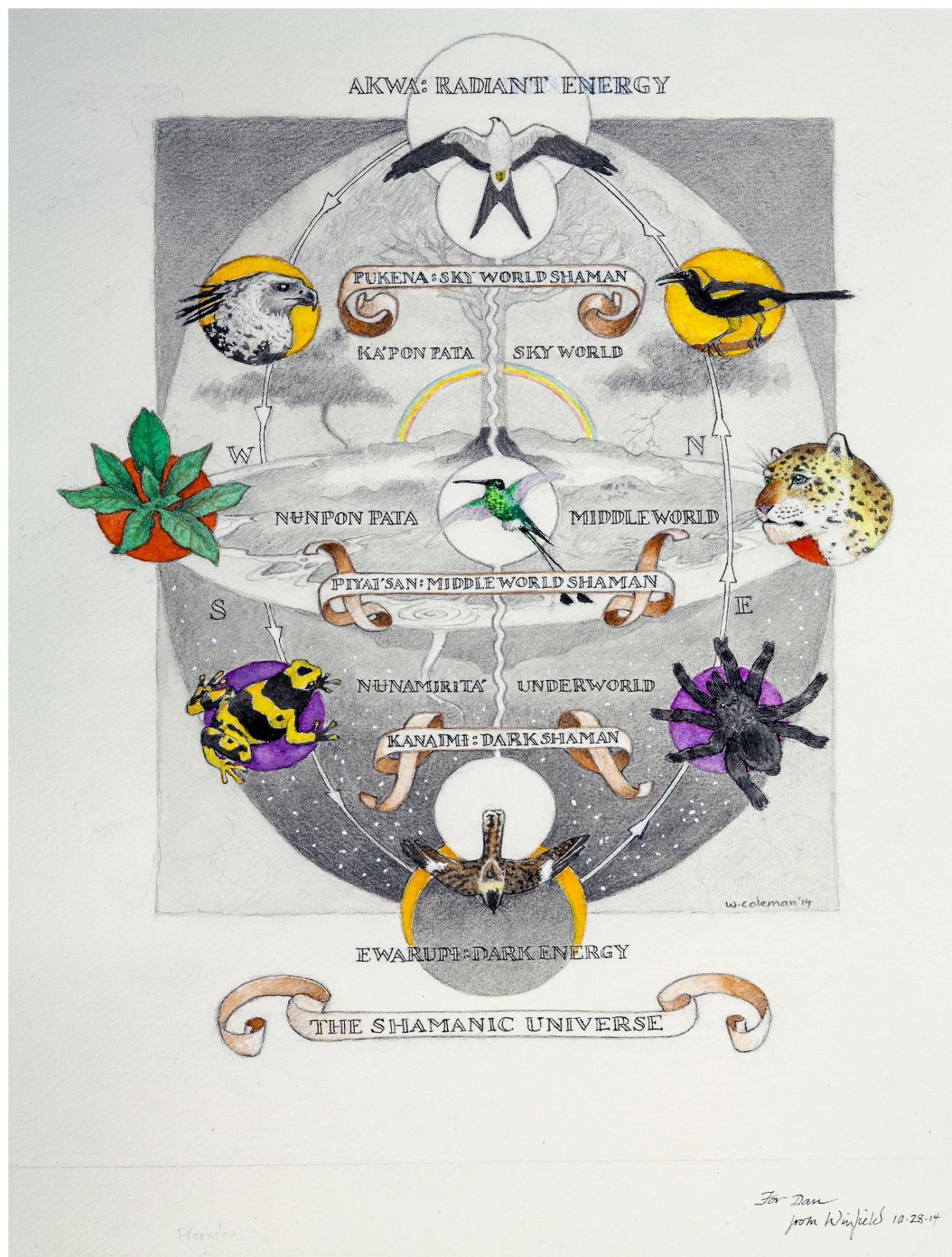
Akawaio informants were not aware of the word *Nun O’nun Pata*, but they did refer to *ewarupi*, ‘darkness’ and *Nunamirita*, ‘the Underworld.’⁴² There does not seem to be a universal word referring to the Underworld, but a significant amount of variance, even within dialectic affiliations.⁴³ Despite the different names used for the primary domains of the universe, there does seem to be a universal recognition of a tripartite cosmos.

The following cosmogram (Map 4)⁴⁴ depicts the Tree of Life at its center (Waiaka and its stump/*pia*/Mt. Roraima); the journey of the Sun Father (*Wei*, the first archetypal shaman who rises in the East and sets in the West before traveling through the Underworld to become reborn, enlightening a new day; Armellada 1964); and the three primary domains of the Akawaio shamanic universe (Ka’pon Pata, Sky World; Nunpn Pata, Middle World; and Nunamirita, Underworld). *Akwa* (radiant light energy) is at the apex while *ewarupi* (dark energy) sits at the nadir. Each of the three shamanic practitioners (*pukena’*, *piyai’san* and *kanaimi*) is placed in the dimension that they are most commonly associated with (Above, Middle and Underworlds, respectively).

⁴² According to Fox, *a’kwar i’pī* (not *ewarupi*) means ‘shadow’, ‘ghost’ or ‘past-person’: “The *a’kwar i’pī* reaps the reward or punishment for the good or the bad things a person has done while alive. Thus souls that were good go up to the sky and bad spirits remain disembodied on earth” (2003:80).

⁴³ Fox did her fieldwork among the Akawaio of her home village, Waramadong.

⁴⁴ See discussion of maps in Chapter 1 for more information on how this cosmogram was constructed.



Map 4: Cosmogram of the circum-Roraima shamanic universe

The *kumara* ' at the apex (the swallow-tailed kite: *Elanoides forficatus*; see cover page) is the primary shamanic spirit-helper and manifestation of *imawariton* (disembodied spirits; see Chapter 5). Other inhabitants of the Above World are the harpy eagle on the left (the 'King of the Sky', together with the king vulture) and the moriche oriole on the right (*Icterus chryscephalus*, *kadouri*). As explained in the next section, the oriole is admired for its skills of ventriloquism. The jaguar and hummingbird (racket-tailed coquette, *Discosura longicaudus*) in the Middle World are often associated with the transcendent qualities of the *piyai* 'san discussed below. On the left is a tobacco plant, the most important shamanic plant and 'master' or 'head spirit' for all plants. In the Underworld, the nightjar (aka goatsucker: *Caprimulgus*; *pakoora* in Makushi)—a bird often associated with the *kanaimi/e'toto*—is at the nadir, accompanied by other poisonous nocturnal inhabitants of the Underworld, including the Goliath bird-eating tarantula (*Theraphosa blondi*) and the poison dart frog (*Dendrobates leucomelas*).⁴⁵

The cosmogram also depicts a whirlwind (*kuranu*) representing a portal to the Above World, as well as a cave (*yen*) and a whirlpool (*wopaima*), both portals to the Underworld. The lightning and the squiggly line going down the center are symbolic of the interconnectivity and exchange of energy (*akwa* and *ewarupi*) between worlds. The rainbow, a popular (and dangerous) motif represents all the colors of the spectrum born of elements of water and light epitomized by the rainbow boa (*Epicrates cenchria*) and the story of *kuimu* (see Chapter 5).

It is best not to think of the three spheres as distinct domains in a vertical orientation separated by distance, but as dimensions of spiritual energy, or what Fox calls: "spiritual vibrational wavelength" (2003:71). These three worlds interpenetrate the material world that we perceive and don't correspond to our conceptions of space, place, time, gender and direction. There is a continuum from matter to spirit as all is interwoven like a circuit of energy. The

⁴⁵ Informants also commonly associated the snake and fish with the nocturnal, often poisonous and aquatic Underworld.

spheres closest to the surface of the Earth—the Middle World—are home to dangerous spirit forces, while those further out are generally associated with helpful sources of knowledge.

The tripartite cosmos is also replicated within the human body: the head and chest represent the celestial world; the abdomen down to the feet represents the terrestrial world; and everything below foot is the Underworld (Fox 2003:71). According to the Akawaio, the body itself is merely *pun*, ‘flesh/meat.’ The *mita* (mouth), *wase’ma* (anus), and *nakata* (crown of the head) are openings to the body that represent portals for the spirit and *akwa* (radiant light energy).

The *a’kwari* (‘soul’ in Ka’pon; *ekaton* in Pemon) controls the temperament, morale, sanity, health, happiness, intelligence and the general state of being (Colson and Armellada 1989:8). The soul is infused with *akwa* and is animated by *eruparu*, ‘breath’ and *senumin’kan yen*, ‘the thinking cave/container’ or ‘mind’ (Fox 2003: 73). The origin of the breath is the air and the wind that gives life. It is said to be located in the bloodstream and is assembled near the heart and lungs and assists the *a’kwari* (soul) in maintaining the life of a person. If a person becomes severely sick because of an attack by harmful *ene/omá:kon* (‘outsiders’ or ‘harmful nature spirits’ in Ka’pon/Pemon), or *makoi* (demons) and loses their *akwa* and dies, *eruparu* (breath) is the last thing to leave the body (Fox 2003: 73).

It is important to distinguish between the *imawari* (disembodied spirit) and the *a’kwari* (soul). The Akawaio term *a’kwari* (*ekaton* in Pemon) is often used to refer to the spirit, much like Western cultures where the spirit and soul are often used interchangeably. However, according to Quentin, an Akawaio *piyai’san*: “*Imawari* are spirits of the dead that exist all around us, all the time. They help when I beat leaf [perform séances].” Quentin also said that every living being has an *imawari* that is capable of traveling outside the body (particularly through breath and dreaming). For example, if you are thinking or dreaming about someone, your *imawari* will leave you and go to that person. The soul is connected with the material body

and is made up of spirit, mind, emotion, will and breath and is not capable of transcendence in the same way that the spirit is.

According to the Akawaio, the human body (*esa* ') is an analogue of the cosmos. Both are made up of two different forms of energy. The first is *akwa* (Ka'pon; *auka* in Pemon), the 'brightness of light' that derives 'from the sun's place' and provides the luminosity that is linked to the male gender as well as an individual's intelligence, life force, vitality or *merunti* (strength or energy of life).⁴⁶ The soul is therefore something infused with *akwa* (radiant light energy) plus the possessive suffix *-ru*, creating the word *a'kwari*. The other moiety of the Akawaio body/cosmos is made up of *ewarupɥ*, darkness, shadow or shade.⁴⁷ This energy is abundant in caves, mountain crevasses, cracks in trees and rocks and underwater—all entrances to the Underworld and its constituent beings and forms of knowledge.

Another important concept with regard to the body is the word *ewan*. Colson and Armellada refer to this phenomenon as a *yewan*, 'matrix': something within or from which something else originates (1989:16). Physiologically, the *ewan* refers to the abdomen where vital organs are held and food is metabolized into energy. In women, this is where babies develop in the womb. In Akawaio, *mure ewan yau* means 'child in the belly'. *Ewan* can also refer to the torso of the body minus the head and limbs. The heart organ, *ewan ena'pi*, 'torso seed', or *ewan tipu*, 'torso stone' is considered the central organ in the torso.⁴⁸

Every part of the body—eyes, ears, nose, elbow, foot, hand, calf etc.—has its own *ewan*

⁴⁶ *Akwa* is similar to the Chinese concept of *chi*, 'life force' or 'energy flow' and the Polynesian concept of *mana*, 'spiritual energy' (see Codrington 1981 and Keesing 1984 for discussions of *mana*).

⁴⁷ According to the latest astronomical research, the universe is composed of approximately 4.9% ordinary matter, 26.8% dark matter and 68.3% dark energy (Copeland et al. 2006). In other words, 95.1% of the universe is made up of dark matter and dark energy.

⁴⁸ In contrast to the heart and torso, the *pai* (head) is the seat of intelligence, *pu* (wisdom), knowledge and reasoning which is suggested by the Pemon phrase *ti-pai yaki-ke ichi*, which means 'he has brains [*yaki*] in his head', or literally: 'his-head with-brains is' (Colson and Armellada 1989:16).

or vital center that is animated by a sliver of *akwa*.⁴⁹ A hammock is also commonly referred to as an *ewan* since it is much like a womb that rejuvenates and gives *merunti* (strength or energy of life) to people when they take *seruma* (a period of restricted diet, isolation and rest, especially when sick). One of the most important roles of the *piyai'san* is to retrieve the *akwa* that has wandered off or been forcibly removed from a specific *ewan* conceived as a *yapon* (seat, stool or bench; Colson and Armellada 1989:18).

The Earth also has many *ewan*. Many Areruya songs and prayers plead for God to provide *pata ewan* (fertile land) and plentiful crops. Fertile ground (female principle) is pierced and impregnated by the seeds of radiant light energy of the sun (male principle) to generate new life in the form of plants. The world therefore springs forth from *pata ewan* in an eternal cycle of fertility between gendered spheres. In the Waiaka *panton* (story), the great silk cotton tree falls to the northeast—in the direction of the Upper Mazaruni basin of Guyana (Armellada 1964). According to an Akawaio *panton* recorded during fieldwork, just before the tree fell, each of the three main rivers in the region was asked if they wanted *pata ewan* (fertile land) from the Waiaka. First, Kukuiyame (a female name referring to the Kukui River) answered: “Yes, a little.” Then Kamurani (Kamarang River) was asked if she wanted *pata ewan* and she answered: “Yes, a lot!” Finally Masurime (Mazaruni River) was asked, but she didn’t answer. Consequently, the land along the Kukui has some fertile land while the Kamarang has a lot of *pata ewan* and the Mazaruni has the least fertile soil along her banks. The concept of *ewan* transcends the human body to the material culture (hammock) and the surrounding landscape as a universal ‘womb of life’.

⁴⁹ According to Coleman (personal communication, September 2013), much like the Akawaio conceptual system, the Cheyenne people of the Great Plains of North America also believe that individuals have multiple spirits within the body. Specifically, the breath, bones and hair all have their own spirit. Additionally, each joint is considered an eye or portal into the body. In the Great Plains and Amazonia, a ligature (known to the Akawaio as an *apota*) was traditionally worn above the calf or bicep to swell the muscle and make an individual stronger. Likewise, headbands were worn to confine power within the head.

Another form of womb (*mire yen*: Akawaio for ‘baby container’) or ‘increase site’ for the Earth is known as a *yen*, meaning ‘enclosure’, ‘cage’, ‘bag’, ‘container’ or ‘cave.’ A *yen* usually appears as a hole in a rock that is associated with a specific animal and usually has a *panton* that explains its significance. For example, according to an Akawaio *panton*, many years ago, enemies raided Chinowieng and a brave young man decided to hide in a *yen* that *sinau* (frogs) like to hang out in. When the enemy passed by, he made the sound of the *sinau* to fool his enemies. This is how the village of Chinowieng (*sinau yen*: frog cave) got its name. Other increase sites in the area include: *waiken yen* (savannah deer cave between Phillipai and Chinowieng); *pero yen* (dog cave), a hole in the ground near Wax Creek ‘where you take your dog to become pregnant’; *piinki yen* (hog cave) near Paruima; and *kari ’so yen* (rooster cave), an increase site near Amokokupai.⁵⁰

These potent *yen*/resource increase sites are generally kept secret and are not to be ‘troubled’.⁵¹ When there is an abundance of certain animals such as jaguars, peccary, laba or aguti that are threatening people or destroying farms, people will go to the *piyai*-man to ask for help. The *piyai ’san* will then use his powers to talk to the master-owner of the animals and ask them to lock-up the surplus in a *yen*. Likewise, if there is a dearth of certain game animals, the *piyai ’san* will ask the masters to release them. In order to activate a *yen* and release the animals, someone knowledgeable will poke a stick into it simulating a sexual act. The animals would not come out immediately—perhaps within a week—and they do not come directly to the *yen*, but to the general area. When the animals first come out, they are in *imawari* (disembodied spirit) form.

⁵⁰ In addition to the increase sites mentioned above, there are also several other caves of interest near Amokokupai, including: *kiisi ’yen* where swallows (*imawari* birds) come out; *mo ’kari yen*, which means ‘taking out cave’ where Akawaio used to ‘take enemies and eat them’; and *marupa ’yen* (bat) *yen* near the head of the Kukui River. Another form of *yen* is discussed in Chapter 7 in the context of the Areruya religion and the heavenly music that emanates from *liga*, a form of *yen* or container.

⁵¹ The same rules apply to *tipu*, charm or resource stones. The ownership and care of these stones and *yen* is a serious matter and young men (hunters) are carefully trained in the secrets of their fathers and grandfathers. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, *tipu* are used to release certain game animals from Nunamirita that enter the terrestrial world through *yen*.

One place that the animals may eventually manifest is in the *potawa*, a food and wilderness ‘reserve’. This part of the Akawaio ancestral land is generally located in a remote mountainous or highly forested area. In contrast to the hunting grounds, the *potawa* functions much like a wildlife reserve that is left undisturbed so that animals and their spirit masters can live freely. According to an Akawaio informant: “All these things belong to the Akawaio. If others come and take our land, *yen* and *potawa*, then *imawari* will come out and destroy them and the Earth.”

Caves are portals to Nunamirita (the Underworld) and symbolic of the female/uterine qualities of the universe. According Isaac Rogers, an elderly Makushi resident of Yupukari Village, there is a particular cave near Katoka known as *wurismoko 'yen* (*wuri* meaning ‘girl’; *smoko*, ‘tribe’; *yen*, ‘cave’) that used to be inhabited by women. According to Rogers, the women would take one man into the cave at a time for approximately 9 months or “until he impregnates many women and they give birth.” The women would tie a shak-shak (aka maracas or shakers) to each hammock so that everyone would know where the man was on a given night. When a woman gave birth, they would keep the female babies and send the boys off with the man along with a hammock as payment for his ‘services’. Rogers concluded the story by saying that the women eventually migrated to ‘somewhere in Brazil’—a destination often associated with Amerindian ancestry.

Caves were also important defensible shelters for Amerindians. Today, many of the caves in the circum-Roraima landscape still hold bones, clay pots and other artifacts, though scientists and profiteers have pilfered many. While many of these caves have been looted, there are still many that remain ‘unspoiled’. One reason many remain untouched is because there are many taboos associated with entering, touching or looking at them. Some villages keep them secret, while others plan to use them as tourist destinations, such as one near Maipaima (see Figure 6) and others near Surama and Paruima (*epi 'yen*: bone cave).



Figure 6: Clay pot in a cave near Maipaima Eco-Lodge, Nappi Village

In addition to a *yen* and mountaintop, a *wopaima* (whirlpool) and *kuranu* (whirlwind) are other portals to the Under- and Above Worlds, respectively. According to Rogers: “*kuranu* will give you a throbbing headache when you see one because it takes your spirit and spins it around and around.” People are especially susceptible to a *kuranu* when they are very young, tired, hungry or thirsty, especially in the mid-day heat of the savannah. Gusts of wind are also associated with encroaching spirit forces. For example, many Amerindians explain that when pepper (something that disturbs the spirits) is introduced to a body of water, the sky will become dark, winds will begin to blow and a giant *wopaima* (whirlpool) will develop where all sorts of dangerous beings will emerge to devour the perpetrator.

According to Colson and Armellada: “Kapon and Pemon realistically believe that everything on Earth has its good and its bad aspects, in different degrees, but overall values are attributed to the cosmic levels. The Good resides in the above, whilst the Bad, evil and sin, have their roots below” (1989:9-10). Christian missionaries have taken advantage of this dichotomy by locating God and heaven in the light (*akwa*) and the Devil in *ewarup* (darkness) of the Underworld. Certain people tend to be good while others are suffused with more dark energy and

tend to be bad. This is especially the case with regard to the *pukena*, an Areruya ‘wisdom possessor’ focused on maximizing *akwa* (radiant light energy) and the *kanaimi/e’toto*, a sorcerer working with the darker forces of the Underworld.

High-flying, high-dwelling and brightly colored (especially yellow and white) creatures have more luminosity than burrowing animals like the armadillo. Certain animals are also associated with transcendence, such as the jaguar. This animal has a yellow color reminiscent of the brightness of the sun; it also has spots that look like stars in the night sky and it is nocturnal—both elements of the Underworld. Therefore the jaguar is a common symbol of the shamanic arts because both are fierce, transcendent and nocturnal hunters (Whitehead 2002).

When someone dies, the material body decomposes while the disembodied spirit (*imawari*) leaves and the *a’kwari/ekaton* (soul) divides into two parts (Colson and Armellada 1989:12). One part, composed of *akwa*, rises into the upper cosmos joining good *imawari*. The darker part of the soul, *ewarupũ* remains on the earthly domain, dancing and feasting among dangerous spirit forces in the Underworld.

Since *akwa* (light energy) is most vital to existence, a primary purpose of life is to maximize this force in the body and maintain its balance with the darker energy. According to numerous Akawaio informants, those who practice *taren* (invocations) a lot and/or use *muran* (charms), such as any *piyai’san*, draw their powers from the Underworld, increasing the dark energy in their body. Therefore, after death, a larger proportion of their *a’kwari* (soul) will remain on the terrestrial and subterranean spheres as opposed to those who avoid these practices, maximize their *akwa* and rise to the celestial domain. The Areruya Indians believe that one way to maximize the light energy

in your body is to closely follow the *pukena*’ (prophet) by dancing and singing Areruya songs as much as possible.⁵²

The light/hot/bitter/male and dark/cool/sweet/female forces of the cosmos meet on the intermediate plane and the rest of the world springs forth from their union. These concepts are clearly corroborated in a creation myth recorded by Cesáreo de Armellada in a book of myths called *Tauron Panton* (1964). After a long day of working at the farm, the Sun Father, Wei went to the river to drink and bathe when he met a *tuwenkaron* who sent three women to potentially be his wife.⁵³ The first was made of white clay; however, when she went to the river she dissolved. Then the *tuwenkaron* sent another potential wife for Wei, this time made of black clay, but she got too close to a fire and melted like wax. The third woman was made of reddish clay that didn’t dissolve from the water or melt when close to fire so Wei took her as his wife.

Born of the union of the heavenly Sun Father and an earthly mother made of clay and water, their offspring were known as the Makunaima. According to Ka’pon and Pemon mythology, these demiurges were the first people that went about shaping the world as it is seen today. As explained by Armellada: “Some Indians say the name of the mother was Aromadapuén. And the names of the children were: Meriwarek, the first-born; then Chiwadapuén, a daughter; Arawadapuén, the second daughter; and Arukadarí, the youngest, who is very often called Chiké” (1964:28).⁵⁴ According to a different version of the same story published by Maria Manuela de Cora (1957): “In this land of mountains [Pakaraima Mtns.] lived five brothers: Makunaima, who was big and bad; Zigué, which means ‘chigger’; Wacalambé, a whirlwind; Anzikilán, a partridge; and Ma’nápe, which means melon seed.” Despite the different

⁵² See Chapter 7 for further explanations of the Areruya conceptual system and rituals.

⁵³ A *tuwenkaron* is a mermaid. See Chapter 5 for detailed information on *tuwenkaron* and other aquatic forces.

⁵⁴ Chiggers (*Trombiculidae*) are a family of mites that are common in the circum-Roraima landscape. They burrow into your feet, causing intense pain and irritation and must be extracted before they lay eggs under your skin. Chiki, the youngest Makunaima brother (also known as Anike or Pia) had many chiggers in his feet and was known as an agitator; therefore his name is associated with these parasites.

names attributed to the Makunaima, both versions suggest that there were five offspring of Wei and his wife. As the story continues, the Makunaima wandered in search of their father who had been captured by malevolent *imawari* living inside Mount Roraima. They eventually rediscovered their father who, once free of his captors, rose into the heavens leaving his children behind on Earth.

The adventures of the Makunaima are retold in countless *panton* that explain how the circum-Roraima landscape was shaped and how certain animals got their appearances and behavioral attributes. While the term Makunaima refers to all the children of Wei and Aromadapuén, it is commonly thought of as a singular creation hero or as twins that live and pursue adventures on Earth and become the ancestral model (*pia*) for humans. In each of the stories, the older Makunaima often represents stasis—a constant timeless given—and greed. The youngest of the children, Chiki/Anike is an unattractive agitator, meddler and trickster, curious about the world around him and wishing to alter things and help others.

The twin creation hero narrative is not isolated to the Pemon and Ka'pon. The Yanomami, neighbors to the southwest, live in a very similar world created by demiurge brothers Omama and Yoasi, the trickster whose exploits are reminiscent to those of the Makunaima (Kopenawa 2013:27). Many cultures, including Zoroastrian, Greek and other Amerindians have similar narratives. Twins in mythology often represent two halves of the same whole, the yin to the yang in a dualistic universe. They are often fierce rivals, with one sibling symbolizing the shadow or counterbalance of the other.

The events retold in the Makunaima *panton* take place in a time the Taurepan (Pemon) call *pia'atai*, a time of origin/once upon a time/a long time ago/*illud tempus*/in the beginning when everything was *ka'pon-pe/pemon-pe* (human or people) and all understood the same language. In the telling of myths, narrators often invoke *pia'atai* as a preamble to the story. For the Taurepan, *pia'atai* is a time when the earth, people and animals took on the shape they have

today. In contrast, a narrator's life and family are held to have happened *sereware* (now). A narrator will often transition from an account of the exploits of the Makunaima to another about a village situated in the same place when the narrator was young. There is a kind of compression of time as the narrative approaches the present, a time of greater detail and memories.⁵⁵

The Makunaima brothers remained wandering the landscape beneath Mount Roraima following animals in search of food. It was the agouti (genus *Dasyprocta*) that showed the heroes the Waiaka, Tree of Life that they chopped down. In the end of the Makunaima saga, the heroes depart eastward, leaving behind a world where several of their exploits remain crystallized principally in the rocky outcrops of the Taurepan territory in and around São Marcos in the north of Roraima State, Brazil but stretching far and wide across La Gran Sabana to the west in Venezuela and the Rupununi Savannah to the southeast where the creation heroes are known as Insikiran to the Makushi. The Makunaima never again interfered with mankind, leaving behind a sad legacy: the world no longer possessed the same unity that existed in the 'paradise' of *pia'atai* before the felling of the Waiaka and the great flood.

Before the deluge, all things were people: *pemon-pe* or *ka'pon-pe*. After the flood, the different characters that appear in the *panton* differentiated themselves from the children of Makunaima/mankind occupying different dimensions and begetting new relationships with humans of a primarily antagonistic nature. In other words, the world of *sereware* (now) is a very dangerous place with diverse and mysterious forces lurking in deep pools, rocks, trees, mountaintops and all around us that are capable of shapeshifting and inclined toward the predation of humans who break their taboos. In the face of such antagonistic forces Amerindians turn to the *piyai'san* for spiritual protection and mediation.

⁵⁵ According to Eliade: "the ritual recitation of the cosmogonic myth plays an important role in healing, when what is sought is the regeneration of the human being" (1959: 81-82). He goes on to explain how life can only be recreated through symbolic repetition of the cosmogony. This principle is discussed in further detail below within the context of *taren* (invocations).

Becoming *piyai'san*

The process of becoming a *piyai'san* is much like that of becoming a doctor in Western cultures: both take years of training and close supervision from a professional mentor. An esteemed *piyai'san* is said to be 'perfect', while others may be 'imperfect' lacking proper training, supervision or good intentions. As explained by an anonymous Makushi *piyai'san* interviewed during fieldwork on the Rupununi savannah: "Just recently, I went to train at a workshop with my master. I go all over to heal sick people. I take rocks out of people's bodies and heal their pains. I make sick people walk and get healthy—this is why they take me all over." This particular *piyai'san* was highly trained and had good intentions; others learn the craft solely to profit and/or cause harm. This latter type of sorcerer is broadly referred to as a *kanaimi* or *e'toto* (in Akawaio). However, a *piyai'san* may be just as adept at the 'dark arts' as they are at healing. For this reason, and due to their inherent association with dangerous spirit forces, some refer to any *piyai'san* as a *kanaimi*. Adding to the ambiguity of the shamanic arts, there don't seem to be institutionalized rituals for becoming a *kanaimi* or an Areruya *pukena'* in the same way that there are for becoming a *piyai'san*.

Each *piyai'san* is an individual, practicing his or her craft in a unique way. Some specialize in the use of *muran* (plant and animal charms) or *tipu* (rock charms), while others only conduct séances. Most *piyai*-people in the circum-Roraima landscape utilize tobacco—both smoked and imbibed—to honor and call down the spirits, but some also use alcohol and other substances. Quentin, an Akawaio '*piyai'san*' in the Upper Mazaruni would merely hold your hand and feel his bicep in order to diagnose your condition. A Makushi *piyai*-lady on the Takatu River included Christian idols, candles and rosaries in her process of treatment and diagnosis while another in the same region was particularly adept at utilizing *tipu* including lethal crystal projectiles. Much like Western doctors and healers, each *piyai'san* utilizes slightly different training, tools, methods and rituals, though there are many common narratives.

The path toward becoming a *piyai'san* is highly individualized but commonly includes the following stages, elements and rituals. Ideally, a *piyai'san* would begin their training at a very young age from a shaman teacher/guide (*latoi* in Akawaio).⁵⁶ An individual must first have a strong inclination, capacity or ancestral connection to the craft. Often the son, daughter, niece or nephew of a *piyai'san* would decide at a young age that they want to take up the shamanic arts. Likewise, a *piyai'san* may identify and encourage certain individuals to learn the craft. Two informants indicated that they only became interested in the craft later in life after experiencing the loss of a family member or another experience that inclined them toward the spiritual domain. For example, an anonymous Makushi *piyai'san* decided to become a shaman after his child died; he wanted to find the spirit of his child so he went to a mountaintop where he fasted and ultimately the child's spirit came and embraced him (a spiritual union as *seremupia*). Then the child's spirit gave him a *muran* (plant charm) with *wairarimu'pia* (a jaguar *taren*/invocation) on it. As soon as he drank it, all the *taren* were 'accepted into his body' and he was given the power to cure/harm. He subsequently went to several '*piyai*-people' to get training but due to the fact that he was not closely mentored and guided for an extended period of time, his peers did not deem him 'perfect'.

In Boa Vista, Brazil there is an elderly Makushi *piyai'san* named Dona Isabella who has a billboard in town and is willing to train anyone how to become a shaman. This type of instruction and mentorship has produced numerous 'imperfect' shamans in the circum-Roraima landscape. Unless an individual has a *piyai'san* as a close relative and/or the shaman has a personal interest in training, one would have to pay a *piyai'san* to get trained and receive their

⁵⁶ According to Colson, training could be done by a living or dead shaman. As she explains: "It was several months before I realized the significant fact that some of the present Akawaio shamans had learned their profession from ghost teachers—that is, from shamans who were already dead. I was also surprised to learn that it did not make much difference whether a teacher was dead or alive" (1977:47).

services.⁵⁷ With the introduction of a monetary economy, being a shamanic healer is now a viable profession. Unfortunately, this has also created many pseudo-shamans that rarely know many of the medicinal plants or rituals to use them properly.

There are no strict pre-requisites or rules about who can become a *piyai'san*. It does, however, require a strong will and character to endure the grueling training process. Many younger Amerindians are hesitant to begin the training because it is so physically and emotionally demanding. Most disliked the idea of drinking so much tobacco juice and having to vomit it out and drink it again—a common entheogenic ritual in the profession. Additionally, many elderly *piyai*-people are reluctant to encourage their children to pursue the craft because of the inherent dangers associated with disembodiment and interactions with spirit forces in the chthonic domain.

Becoming and being a *piyai'san* is indeed a dangerous endeavor. The process involves travel, isolation, privation and fasting that can potentially harm and kill. If the individual survives the initiation phase, then they begin to practice séances where they symbolically die to this world, become disembodied and travel to the spiritual domain where they interact and barter with malicious spirit forces. If not properly protected with guards, they could potentially be devoured or captured only to remain in the Underworld—dead to this world. The *piyai'san* must also battle with potentially belligerent neighbors and other competitive shamans.⁵⁸ Another threat that the *piyai'san* must deal with comes from outsiders that dislike or fear traditional Amerindian culture and seek to disempower, stigmatize and destroy it in order to usurp land and resources or simply to insure such counter spirituality does not undermine missionization efforts.

Depending on the age of the trainee, their intentions and the expertise and availability of

⁵⁷ Traditionally, the services of a *piyai'san* would be garnered through trade. A common gift for a *piyai'san* was a good hunting dog or some form of meat.

⁵⁸ Shamans will regularly inflict each other with sickness and ailments in order to test their strengths and weaknesses and ultimately prove who is more powerful.

the mentor, the process of becoming a *piyai'san* can be as short as a month or as long as 3 years or a lifetime. Many, especially the more skilled and ambitious, will continue to train and learn throughout their life in order to enhance their power and improve their skills. A more 'perfect' *piyai'san* would begin training by fasting that is intended to go on for a year in order to test their strengths and weaknesses. During this period, another *piyai'san* must watch-over the trainee because fasting makes the soul vulnerable to spiritual attack. The year of fasting is a test; to become a 'perfect' *piyai'san*, you must make it through the whole year without breaking the fast.

During this time of fasting, it is common for an initiate to experience a time of isolation most commonly near a waterfall, but this could also occur near a river or creek, on a mountain or under a sacred tree, such as a silk cotton tree. The location has to be far away from any village or people that may cause distractions. According to Jean Allicock of Surama Village:

Fasting and forgetting about the outside world is done in order to get strong from nature so that you can hear and see things. You must go into the forest to listen to the trees, water, birds and leaves. You go into the forest to record a song in your memory, or a waterfall where you meditate for days to learn its song.

As suggested by Jean, one of the primary goals of this period of fasting and isolation in nature is to learn and become sensitized to the diverse languages of the plants, animals (especially birds) and spiritual inhabitants of the forest. These skills not only enable the *piyai'san* to subsist but also to converse (like the *kadouri*, oriole) and negotiate with other beings and forces.

Fasting and dietary taboos are fundamental not only to the process of becoming a *piyai'san*, but also when preparing for a hunt or to maintain health. The Akawaio use the term *seruma* to refer to this period of restricted diet, isolation and rest. *Seruma* is an intermediary state in which either a balance is achieved (as when a state of illness has to be remedied), but also when an excess of something is desired. For example, a shaman may need to prepare his or her body by fasting before a séance where he may drink excessive amounts of tobacco juice. *Seruma*

may also be appropriate when preparing for a hunt, using *muran* (charms), after the death of a relative, curing illness or for rites of passage such as a girl's first menstruation and when a boy reaches puberty.

In the process of becoming a *piyai'san*, during this period of *seruma* in an isolated locale, it is important to follow strict food taboos and abstain from eating anything sweet, meaty or salty. The only food allowed is a small piece of *emukisa* (a Makushi word for starchy cassava bread) and, in some cases, a small piece of *tukui'* (hummingbird) meat.⁵⁹ According to Geronimo Thompson from Paruima Village who went through the process of becoming a *piyai'san*, this period of isolation and fasting is done so that other spirits can come in to the body to share their knowledge and capacities. He said that this period of fasting and intensive use of *muran* (charms) and emetics is called *wanaban* and it is done in order to 'wash away the human' and incorporate the spirits of the *muran* into the body.

Another requirement for the training to go smoothly is that all family members of the initiate must abstain from sexual intercourse during this time of isolation and fasting, even if they are far away. As explained by Flora Francis from Yupukari, if someone in the family has intercourse, then the *piyai'san*-in-training will vomit out the cassava bread and be unable to accomplish the exercise. This requirement is particularly challenging for trainees with large extended families and has proven to be a prohibitive constraint for many (including Flora) that would otherwise be willing and qualified to become a *piyai'san*. This shows that both menses and semen are considered pollutants, precisely because they are 'too much' of either the masculine or female elements (Coleman, personal communication September 2014).

⁵⁹ An important criterion for this ritual process of becoming a *piyai'san* is that all food and preparations must not be touched or 'troubled' by a menstruating woman or anyone else, otherwise the whole process would be in jeopardy. Usually the supervising *piyai'san* and/or a closely related, non-menstruating woman would prepare and handle the provisions for the process.

An anonymous Makushi informant explained how he traveled to a waterfall in order to become a *piyai'san*: “I stayed at the waterfall for a month of fasting and drinking certain plants and solutions each day from 6am to 6pm.” He was only allowed to eat a small amount of *emukisa* (baked cassava starch) and a small piece of *tukui'* (hummingbird) meat. Each day he would eat a different part of the bird; one day he would eat the wing and another he would eat the leg, etc.: “I would eat a small piece of one hummingbird each day, but the bird would grow in size until it was as big as a *powis* [black curassow, *Crax alector*]. The spirits changed it so it got bigger and bigger.” As explained by Mathew Elliman, an Arekuna from Paruima: “A hummingbird is like an angel or a little *piyai'san* because its plumage is often iridescent and changes colors like the *piyai'san* changes his spirit.” A hummingbird is also very quiet and capable of hovering in place, moving in all four directions and traveling great distances in a silent flash just like the *piyai'san* who travels widely and transcends domains; therefore, the hummingbird is an apt symbol for the shamanic arts (in addition to the transcendent qualities of the jaguar).

The most integral plant for the *piyai'san* is tobacco (*kawai*; *Nicotiana tabacum*), an entheogen endemic to the Americas that was brought back to England in 1594 and popularized by Sir Walter Raleigh (Billings 1875).⁶⁰ According to several informants, the more tobacco you drink and smoke, the more powerful you become because tobacco is the master of all other plants and it has an incredibly powerful spirit (*kawai akwalu* in Akawaio). According to Flora: “Without tobacco, you can’t use any other herb.” She went on to explain that *kawairimu* is the

⁶⁰ The term ‘tobacco’ came to us from a peculiar instrument used for inhaling its smoke by the Carib inhabitants of Hispaniola. The instrument described by Hernández de Oviedo in *Historia de las Indias Occidentales* (1535), consisted of a small hollow wooden tube shaped like a Y that was inserted into the nostrils of the smoker with the other end held into the smoke of burning tobacco. The Caribs called this apparatus the ‘*tabaco*’. Girolamo Benzoni, who traveled in America in 1541-1556, said that the indigenous people he encountered in Mexico called the herb ‘*tabacco*’ (Benzoni 1556). Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded in England in 1618. Shortly afterward, a small tobacco pouch was found in his cell that had the Latin inscription: *Comes meus fuit in illo miserrimo tempore*, ‘my companion at the most miserable time’ (Wallace Collection, Central London).

name of the black tobacco plant that “makes you a bit mad... You are supposed to drink tobacco through your nose and mouth to make you brave and so that you can learn easily. When you smoke or drink tobacco juice [*kawai ku*], all the spirits go inside you and it helps you fly away.”⁶¹ Tobacco is cultivated in home gardens and also found in the wild. It is believed that the wild varieties—particularly those that grow on mountains in proximity to the mountain spirit (*piyai'ma*)—are the most powerful.⁶²

Akawaio informants confirmed that men and women, young and old, used to suck and smoke tobacco. Just as tobacco is appealing to humans, it is also appealing to spirits. Some have argued that the name ‘Akawaio’ derives from the word *kawai*, meaning ‘tobacco’ (Migliazza 1985). Tobacco is also used as an integral part of *taren* (invocations). Amerindians believe that the breath and spirit are one; therefore, it is thought that the spirit of the blower goes with the breath and does the work. Since tobacco has such a powerful spirit, it reinforces the spirit/breath of the *taren esa'* (invocation owner) and is expelled in sharp little puffs from the mouth. Today, due to a social stigma attached to the use of tobacco—partly from the church and tobacco’s association with shamanism, but also due to its connection with cancer—few non-shaman Akawaios use tobacco in the same way they used to.

During the initiation phase at the waterfall, an initiate is supposed to boil tobacco and other *muran* (charm plants and tree barks) and drink them until they are full, then vomit (either in the same bowl or into the stream) and drink again until they collapse. This generally takes about an hour; if it takes too long, the master *piyai'san* will encourage and push the candidate.

⁶¹ According to psychological anthropologist Thomas Gregor who wrote extensively about the Mehinaku in the Xingu River Valley of Brazil, the supreme shaman is the *yetamá*, which means ‘a shaman who cures with tobacco smoke,’ or ‘smoker.’ Gregor also notes that tobacco smoke is considered ‘the spirit’s food’ and has the power to slip under the patient’s skin and destroy the intrusive object, thereby restoring health (Gregor 1977:334).

⁶² According to Colson, there are four different kinds of tobacco: “1) *Kawai*: a broad-leafed variety; also the name for tobacco in general. 2) *Tamu*: A narrow-leafed variety; the name for cigarette or cigar. 3) *Kumeli*: ‘Tiger tobacco,’ because it is named after a species of jaguar (‘the large one with spots’) and the leaf has tiger-like mottling on it. *Kumeli* tobacco is used when the shaman wants to summon this type of jaguar spirit to eat up and so destroy another evil spirit. 4) *Abasarawa*: Another type, unidentified by me” (1977:53).

According to a Makushi informant who went through this process with his mentor, once he drank enough tobacco and other *muran* and passed out, his master would sing to him: “Get up strong and start singing; become a *piyai’san* and start practicing.”

In addition to drinking tobacco juice, initiates also drink many *muran* (charm plants) including *emkusma* (a Makushi charm plant), maipaima wood skin/tree bark (*Lauraceae*), *rikua* (tree bark), *kumi* (a tall grass), *wilikawa* (tree bark; *Virola*) and *mraka* (?).⁶³ Among the Arekuna, *wilikawa* and *ayu’* tree barks (both trees are similar; *ayu’* has smaller leaves) are commonly used and said to have significant hallucinatory power.⁶⁴ The tree barks are scraped and boiled before being drunk and vomited out. These plants and tree barks function much like *latoi* (shaman teachers/helpers/partners). As explained by Joel Samuel, a Makushi elder from Yupukari: “The trees and plants are angels that talk to the *piyai’san*. They are like people who speak just like people.” This statement is a clear indication of the psychotropic qualities of many of these plants and trees. According to the Akawaio, these *muran*—especially the tree barks—are known as *kasamarawa* that enable the shaman to ‘rise into the sky easily’ (Colson 1977:51). *Kasamarawa* can therefore be understood as the spirit of these tree barks and plants that take care of the *piyai’san* when he drinks infusions and helps him enter the spirit world.

After drinking tobacco juice and other *muran*, the initiate will ‘change their spirit’ and vomit into the creek above the waterfall. According to an experienced Makushi informant: “You vomit to wash out the human being and become an *imawari*.” At this point, he said that hummingbirds (disembodied *imawari* spirits that shape-shift into birds and women and become somewhat like spiritual and sexual partners for the *piyai’san*, sometimes even bearing their

⁶³ Each informant mentioned slightly different *muran* that they would drink during this period. The *muran* mentioned above were the most common. Other informants mentioned drinking balata (*Manilkara bidentata*) and mora (*Mora gonggrijpii*) tree barks. *Virola*, a relative of nutmeg, and other plants extensively explored by Schultes in the northwest Amazon (1990).

⁶⁴ *Wilikawa* and *ayu’* were also traditionally very important when preparing for a hunt, a process discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. According to Colson, the spirit name for *ayu’* is *taiugu* [*taiuku*] (1977:51). Maipaima was also reported to have significant psychotropic qualities.

children) would come to collect and put the vomit into a calabash and bring it back to the initiate to drink again and continue to vomit. According to the informant, you have to vomit it out the first time otherwise it won't work: "Then hummingbirds come and drink the vomit and bring it back to you in your nose. Then you drink it again, but don't vomit the second time. This was when I took my clothes off and got diarrhea." The vomit/drink that is brought back to the initiate is called *kainainu*. According to Quentin, an Akawaio *piyai'san* who went through this process, a *tukui'* (hummingbird) brought its own tobacco and *muran* and gave it to him through the nose and mouth "to provide strength and courage and help me to fly to the mountains. Then my bird-ladies took me to the master of all *piyai*-people where there was a big tobacco plant that you are supposed to take and make a drink to take through the nose."

Informants report that both during the initiation phase and later during ritual séances, the spirit of the *piyai'san* joins Underworld celebrations inside or on top of mountains or underwater where they 'dance with bird-women wearing skirts.' A Makushi *piyai*-lady said that she dances and cavorts with male spirits—sexual attraction being an integral factor in contact with the spirit world. Not only is sexual attraction and symbolic fertilization fundamental to the shamanic arts, but shamans may also embody androgynous qualities.⁶⁵ Sexual ambiguity is necessary because, as explained by Quentin: "The *piyai'san* straddles the above [male] and below [female] worlds and works to maintain fertility between the two. If the *piyai'san* stays in the spirit world, they will be lost forever; therefore they must come and go freely between worlds." Androgyny is therefore an important quality of the *piyai'san* that corresponds to the undifferentiated potential of the universe and the cosmogony that unfolded from the unified *pia'atai* (time of origin).

⁶⁵ Among the Warao of northeastern Venezuela, transgender people are known as *tida wena* or 'twisted women' (Naughton 2014). The Warao believe that these individuals possess two spirits, enabling them to transcend dimensions, commune with ancestor spirits and perform shamanic activities. According to Will Roscoe, this dual-spirit identity of transgender people is common and often highly respected in indigenous communities (1998).

Several *piyai*-people reported that when they ingest *muran* they experience ‘things that are upside-down’ such as spirits that fly inverted and ‘feed’ them up through the nostrils. This perception of inversion is another common element of shamanism.⁶⁶ Much like the journey of the Sun Father—the first shaman who ‘dies’ and travels through the Earth each night only to be reborn each morning—in order to heal, harm and maintain balance, the *piyai’san* must also symbolically die to this world and travel through the Underworld to obtain knowledge and arise enlightened, like the morning sun upon the Earth. As discussed above, the *piyai’san* will also embody an inversion of sexuality by embodying androgynous characteristics. Testimonials of those who have ingested entheogens such as ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*, also known as *yajé*), magic mushrooms or peyote commonly express similar perceptive experiences of inversion; therefore references to an inversion are suggestive of the use of entheogens and an interaction with the Underworld (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975).

Several shamans also mentioned that they would drink *mtai rete* (‘spider web’ in Makushi; *mtai*: spider; *rete*: hammock) or *moiyoi*’ (spider web in Akawaio).⁶⁷ Drinking a spider web enables the *piyai’san* to travel broadly, increase sensory capacities and maintain distant connections, much like a spider on its web. The web also empowers the *piyai’san* to shapeshift into a spider in order to walk across water. According to Colson, a trainee may also consume and wear cicada/‘sun bee’ or *sakiliwa* (*Euchroma gigantea*) beetle charms (1977:53). These insects make a loud noise in the morning and evening. The shaman will crush and eat them so that his voice will achieve a similar resonance; they will also collect their shiny iridescent shards and string them onto their ceremonial armbands (*mari*’, the same word used for introductory spirit songs), which are worn during their first public séance.

⁶⁶ As mentioned above, the world inverts at night so that when you look up at the stars, you are actually looking up at the Underworld.

⁶⁷ The particular kind of spider whose web was drunk was called *spasparimu* in Makushi. According to the informant: “It is a large spider with a small body and long legs; their webs are found throughout the forest.”

An Akawaio *piyai* 'san said that when he was at the waterfall, he boiled and drank a special bush rope (vine/liana) called *siliana*. Shortly after, he felt a vine come down and connect to his body through the crown of his head and come out of his anus. A Makushi *piyai* 'san had a similar experience when he drank different *muran* at the waterfall, fell down and thought he was going to die. He then felt a vine/bush rope (*kraore*) coming down and attaching itself to his head. Each informant said that at this point they would start to sing a song that would just come to them, and they would start to travel great distances with *imawari*/hummingbird/swallow-tailed kite/hawk/female companions. Both the spider web and the vine enable transcendence. According to an Akawaio informant, the name of the rope/line/ladder he travels on is *karawari*: "If a rival *piyai* 'san wants to harm you, they try to cut your *karawari* and you won't be able to come back."

An Arekuna informant said that part of his experience at the waterfall included walking behind the waterfall into the protected area behind the curtain of falling water (a *yen*, cave) while singing and chanting songs. This act was called *warewatan*. During this time of isolation and intoxication, the initiate will learn many *moruwa* ('warming songs' used to combat cold illnesses in Arekuna; *mari* ' are an Akawaio shaman's introductory songs used when making contact with spirit helpers, *yachiton*) from the plants, trees, animals (especially birds) and natural phenomena.⁶⁸ In other words, each entity communicates its *pia*/essence/genetic code through a rhythmic vibration or song. Everything, including people, rocks and other 'inanimate' objects, has a *pia* and associated frequency or song that it emits. These songs, particularly those of plants, can be learned and sung to bring about the same medicinal effects as is gained by ingestion. These sacred songs are remembered and internalized so that they belong to the individual to use in future healing rituals. As explained by a Makushi *piyai* 'san: "After fasting, when you drink

⁶⁸ In the shamanic tradition of the Peruvian Amazon, these songs are known as *icaros*. The word *icaro* is derived from the Quechua verb *ikaray*, which means "to blow smoke in order to heal" (Haule 2011).

muran, you vomit it all out, then the *muran* becomes part of you and your spirit goes away and others come down... When I sing, they go inside my body. Once they are in me, I can start to beat leaf.”

After a period of rehabilitation, the trainee must enter into a residency phase where he follows his mentor on his rounds. When the master feels that the time is right, the trainee will begin to heal patients under close supervision. If the trainee harms or fails to help a patient, then they will stop the training and never become a ‘perfect’ *piyai’san*. If they succeed, then the training continues and the *piyai’san* can begin to treat patients more independently by using *muran* (charms), *taren* (invocations) and ritual séances popularly known as ‘beating leaf’ (discussed in Chapter 6). On the other hand, if the individual is inclined toward the dark arts of violent assault sorcery, they may decide to become a *kanaimi/e’toto*.

Kanaimi: the cult of fear

A few years ago, around Christmas, there was a man who was alone at home when some e’toto amu’ [multiple kanaimis, sorcerers] came by after a hunt. The man offered the hunters some kasa’ [fermented drink]. They tried to get him to join them for a hunt, but he said: ‘No, it is late; I’m tired’. Then the hunters offered the man kumi [a charm plant] to chew and swallow, and they told him: ‘Take this and it will give you energy, make you strong, let you fly away, help you change into different things and disappear in a second’. The man was eating cassava bread for dinner and he smarted [tricked] e’toto amu’ by putting the kumi under the table and making them think that he was eating it, but he was only eating his bread.

When the men left, he put the kumi on the table. Then another man came by, saw the bina [charm plant] on the table, asked where he got it and said: ‘Don’t use this—it’s used to kill people. Give it to me’. The man said no and the visitor left. The man was curious about the plant so he ate a little piece and then threw it away. That night he couldn’t sleep and the heat of the fire was bothering him so he went outside but his mother told him not to go outside at night because ‘e’toto will kill you’.

A few days later, on his way to go fishing, the man met e’toto amu’, but they looked like children wearing school uniforms. When he saw them, he dropped his bag, ran home and then fell down. Then they blew him with taren and he got better. Another time, when the man was cutting a banana tree he heard a whistle then he returned home and became sick. E’toto is not something you have to be trained for. If you use it, it will harm you.

- Daphne George, Akawaio, Phillipai Village

Every plant has a capacity to cure and to harm, and sometimes both. Likewise, animals, spirits in the forest, and people in general, can be both helpful and malicious. Additionally, every being is composed of both *akwa* (light) and *ewarupi* (dark) energy. This duality and ambiguity is especially evident in the *piyai'san* who holds both the powers to heal and to harm. The popular imaginary of a shaman generally focuses on his healing powers as a 'medicine man' that holds valuable traditional knowledge of medicinal plants. This is true; however, what many people don't realize is that every shaman also has the capacity, and sometimes obligation, to harm others and cavort with dangerous spirit forces. Ultimately, a *piyai'san* does not live a life that is representative of a personal ethic to be emulated.

Every *piyai'san* has a capacity to kill. In order to heal and protect the community, they must fight and kill dangerous spirit forces as well as neighboring Amerindians and other *piyai*-men, both 'dead' and alive. Shamans are also known to compete, intentionally making people sick to see if their nemesis can prove their powers by curing the ailment. When the Akawaio *piyai'san* travels through Nunamirita (the Underworld), they interact, celebrate, cavort and barter with dangerous spirits for the souls of game animals and other resources, exchanging the souls of men after they die. In order to be accepted and respected in the spiritual domain, they must become kin to the spirits. These two aspects of the shamanic arts make the *piyai'san* both respected and feared.

Many of the Pemon and Ka'pon do not believe that illness and death are natural phenomena. Rather, they occur because some malicious spirit force, *piyai'san* or *kanaimi* has attacked them. If sent by someone else, the spirit force that attacks you, or the person who sent it, are both known as a *kanaimi* or *e'toto* (in Akawaio, pronounced with a silent 'e').⁶⁹ Nearly every Amerindian in the circum-Roraima landscape dreads this faceless, shape- and place-shifting

⁶⁹ For a remainder of the thesis I use the more widely known, *kanaimi* instead of *e'toto*.

villain who operates principally at night—when the world inverts and becomes dominated by the forces of *Nūnamirita*—‘doing all sorts of evil’.

A *kanaimi* can be thought of as a sorcerer or dark shaman who uses black magic, violent assault sorcery and other shamanic powers to harm, kill and take energy from others. In its purest form, the *kanaimi* is a person dedicated to killing others in order to gain power; the more people they kill, the more powerful and addicted to killing they become until they are capable of flying great distances in the blink of an eye and shapeshifting into anything. The *kanaimi* loses power if they are known; therefore, they generally live in isolation. There is a fine line between the *piyai’san* and *kanaimi* and a great deal of overlap. An individual may start by doing good and healing then become cruel and abuse their power. According to Clifton Lorendo of Yupukari: “After interacting with the harmful spirits for a long time, a *piyai’san* becomes part of the spirit tribe, which always leads to evil.” Amerindians also believe that you will become a *kanaimi* if you overuse hunting *bina/muran* (charms) and *taren* (invocations), especially if you don’t use them to hunt animals or you use them improperly and without the necessary taboos. According to Lorendo: “They [*kanaimis*] use *muran* to fly far away, disappear and change into different things. They have their own *muran* for this. There is a *muran* for hunting every kind of animal. If you use these *muran* on people, then you become a *kanaimi*.”

A *kanaimi* is many things in Amerindian culture: It can be a person, a spirit, an outsider, an intruder, an avenger, a murderer who strikes at night, a real or imaginary group or enemy, a ghost against whom there is no defense, an expression of hyper-traditionalism, a social control on violence and hoarding and much more. Additionally, as a highly skilled shape-shifter, the *kanaimi* has the power to possess the body of any animal he pleases—jaguar, spider, frog, snake, caiman, bird, etc.—and use these forms as ‘masks.’ Children (and adults) are often told not to go alone into the forest at night because this is when and where the *kanaimi* attacks. Therefore if someone is attacked at night in the forest by a jaguar or snake, *kanaimi* is the culprit. According

to a personal communication with Audrey Colson (July 2015), among the Akawaio, a lingering death is from ‘bad *taren*’ while a quick death (3 days or less) is due to *e-toto*.

Likely a result of centuries of fierce competition for resources and warfare, Amerindians often refer to someone from a neighboring group as a *kanaimi*. For example, the Makushi often call their Patamona neighbors to the north and the Wapishana to the south, *kanaimis*. Therefore, whenever there is death or sickness in a certain village and there is an outsider visiting or living in the village, these individuals will often be suspected and accused. Christmas is the ‘hungry time’ for forest animals because fruits are in low supply; it is also the time of year when *kanaimi* attacks are most common. Traditionally, this was when the *imawari* dance was performed (*aiyan* in Pemon; see song and dance sprees discussed in Chapter 6). Contemporarily, many Amerindians like to drink, fight, chase women and wander around at night during this holiday. This is also a season when many outsiders are in the village to visit friends and family. According to *The Constitution of the Alleluia Church* (1985:8): “We believe that during the Christmas season the devil is ever so close, trying to deceive all Christians. We should, therefore, be very careful not to be tempted by the wicked spirit.”

The *kanaimi* is commonly associated with a particular whistling sound. It is also associated with the goatsucker (*Caprimulgus*), locally known as a nightjar (*pakoora* in Makushi; see nightjar at the nadir of the cosmogram in Map 4).⁷⁰ According to Schomburgk (quoted in Roth 1915:274):

The Indians have the greatest superstition with regard to this bird, and would not kill it for any price. They say it keeps communication with the dead, and brings messages to their conjurers... Its nocturnal habitats, the swiftness and peculiarity of its flight, and its note, which breaks the silence of the night, have no doubt contributed to the fear...

⁷⁰ Makushi informants also mentioned that the *kanaimi* is often associated with the distinctive call of the undulated tinamou (*Crypturellus undulatus*) as well as the pavonine cuckoo (*Dromococcyx pavoninus*).

As discussed above, in order to become a *piyai'san*, an individual must spend an extended amount of time alone in the forest learning different birdcalls and the art of ventriloquism. As explained by Terrence Fox (son of Desrey Fox):

Kanaimis always attack in groups. They were originally used as special forces, like ninja warriors or secret assassins. If the ordinary warriors weren't successful in fighting a neighboring tribe or village, they would send the *kanaimis* at night to get the job done. Whistling was how they communicated between themselves when doing their wickedness at night. They would hide in trees waiting for people to be alone and then communicate with each other with a whistle in order to signal an attack.

Informants also related numerous stories about how, many years ago, neighboring groups would occasionally invite each other to their village for a large feast under the pretense that it was to be a peaceful celebration. They would come together and drink plenty of fermented cassava drink, then one of the groups would attack and kill the other while they were all drunk. Many years of warfare, and other common threats associated with the forest beyond the village, clearly had a significant impact on the conceptual system of Amerindians.

Anthropologist Neil Whitehead is well known for his comprehensive study of *kanaimi* (2002, 2004, 2005). While dedicating much of his research to this particular culture of violence, he also believed he was a victim of a *kanaimi* attack after he was poisoned in retaliation for moving and taking a bone fragment from a sacred *tumi* (offering bowl) in *kuyali'yen* (Macaw cave) near Paramakatoi in the Pakaraima Mountains during his fieldwork in 1992 (2002:17-19). Local Patamona residents believe Whitehead removed the sacred objects and are still angered by the way he conducted research in the area. Nonetheless, his research is a valuable record of *kanaimi* in the circum-Roraima landscape.

When a *piyai'san* kills someone, he may occasionally take the soul of their victim and put it into a stone or crystal and gain power in the same way a *kanaimi* gains power by killing people, drinking and getting 'high' on their putrid remains and taking a piece of their bone and skin (see Whitehead 2002:14-15). This concept of taking someone's body and spirit as a way of

gaining power was also practiced among North American Amerindians, especially through the practice of scalping and taking someone's hair. Of course this phenomenon, related to the concept of cannibalism, is not isolated to Native American practices, but is something that is symbolically practiced in a variety of ritual traditions including the Catholic tradition of the Holy Eucharist where the faithful consume the transubstantiated 'body and blood' of Christ as a way of gaining spiritual power. According to animist Amerindians, 'everything is people.' If this is true, then one might argue that we are all cannibals because we eat other animals and plants—that all have souls—in order to gain energy and power.

Violence and cannibalism in Amazonia have been key conceptual issues for Western anthropology and part of a wider colonial discourse on the 'savage' over the last 500 years (Barker et al. 1988). In the early European imagination, there were two types of Indians who lived in the 'wilderness' of the New World: one was exemplified by the gentle Arawaks who were depicted as 'noble savages,' dwellers in earthly paradise; while the Caribs were depicted as savages and the source of the word 'cannibal' (Tenenbaum 1996). Such stories were often exaggerated for effect, invented for a gullible audience or told to besmirch the reputation of a neighboring group or peoples that stood in the way of 'civilization', 'progress', exploitation or perhaps merely hunting and farming land.

Europeans embellished a great deal of rhetoric surrounding cannibalism as a rationale for evangelism and subjugation; however, according to informants, this practice was indeed common and highly ritualized among Amerindians. The Makushi village of Surama in the North Rupununi derived its name from the word *suramata*, which means 'barbecued meat'. According to legend, invading Caribs forced many Makushi villagers to flee to caves in the Pakaraima Mountains. Those who were not lucky enough to escape were captured, barbecued and eaten. Similar stories were also recorded in and around the Makushi village of Rewa, also in the North Rupununi. For example, there is a particular rock that looks like a giant urn on top of Awarmi

Mountain (next to Makarapan Mtn.), above an old village site. According to oral histories, the Caribs and Makushi fought for this territory for many years and ritually sacrificed and cannibalized each other on top of this particular rock. Until recently, this mountain and rock were considered too dangerous to visit, look at or touch. However, several years ago (approximately 2005), a brave villager named Dickie (the current manager of the Rewa's ecolodge) decided to test the taboo by venturing up the mountain alone. When he returned without becoming sick or dying, the village decided to turn this sacred mountain and rock into an extraordinary tourist attraction.

As articulated by Whitehead (2004), reciprocity implied by acts of violence and cannibalism is a necessary expression of personal, economic or political disagreement and imbalance. These practices are often done with purpose, for ritual reasons (an understanding that life springs forth from death) or part of cultural self-preservation, hyper-traditionalism and, importantly, done in a limited way: limited by the temporary insanity of bereavement, or limited by small-scale warfare. In other words, the world is composed of a finite amount of matter and energy; therefore, violence and warfare represent a dialogue and form of material, cultural, and genetic exchange, much like the deeper socio-ecological interrelationship between man and nature.⁷¹

Whitehead further illustrates the concept of reciprocity when he explains that the *kanaimi* is the shaman of *Makunaima* (the mythological ancestral family who chopped down the Waiaka, Tree of Life) who is the creator of all animals and plants (2001:14):

In return for the bounty he provides for humans, and in order to ensure his continuing benevolence, the shaman makes a human sacrifice where the victim is food for lord jaguar and the garden spirit. Thus the killing creates life; the dark shaman contributes to the ongoing cycles of fertility and death without which humans could not live.

⁷¹ According to Akawaio linguist, Rita Hunter, the word 'nature' translates into Akawaio as *i'naino*.

Given the inherent syncretic and non-static nature of any culture, the *kanaimi* trope has continually evolved and taken on new meaning. According to Whitehead, *kanaimi* was first depicted by Europeans as “a defensive magico-military technique to ward off the new and overwhelming gun violence and slave trading of the nineteenth century” (2001:12). Whitehead argues that this form of dialogue with and about modernity continues to serve a variety of cultural purposes that have adapted to diverse frontiers of colonization, evangelism, mining, research and other forms of unwanted intrusion.⁷²

Colson (2001) sees *kanaimi* (*e'toto*) in a slightly different way. She views it primarily as a category of accusation—that is, something that is not practiced, but rather something of which people are accused. Whitehead views *kanaimi* as a method of ritual sacrifice and assassination that continues to be practiced while Colson argues that it is magical, invisible, and symbolic but never regarded as legitimate. The narratives and insights gathered for this research project during fieldwork support the symbolic depiction of *kanaimi* offered by Colson, rather than the more-imaginative and dramatic characterization portrayed by Whitehead.

Violence, greed and laziness are the enemies of the polity. Society cannot function when these qualities proliferate. The *kanaimi* functions to balance and control these forces that lead to divided, unequal and unproductive communities where sharing declines and resources accumulate in the hands of the few. Within the context of warfare, Amerindian communities maintained an imperative duty of retaliation (Kenswil 1946; Edwards 1986:59). If an enemy killed someone and the wrongdoer could not be found, then something was done to his family. This principle is akin to ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ As explained by Kenswil (1946:11): “The word Zek-ma means to revenge. The Aboriginal Indian is a primitive being, and it is

⁷² See the work of June Nash (1979) and Michael Taussig (1980) for further details on the notion of the devil as an expression of resistance to capitalism.

well-known that the motto of all primitive peoples is ‘an eye for an eye’; so this ancient trait, called revenge, could not be missing among them...”

The following statement from a female Akawaio informant illustrates how the concept of *kanaimi* can be used to shame, criticize and reinforce social norms: “*E’toto pasi* [*kanaimi* ladies] are ladies that sleep around. They say they are more beautiful, but they just can’t refuse sex because their father sexually abused them.” The woman who made this statement was accusing someone else in the village of being *e’toto* because she was sleeping around with married men and hoarding sexual/reproductive resources. This statement is also interesting because she uses the concept of *e’toto* to shame the woman, as well as men and acts of incest and pedophilia. Further evidence of the necessary social function of *kanaimi* and its association with an active and productive community is the fact that the specific charm plants used by the *kanaimi* function as stimulants that make you ‘more willing’. People that are ‘more willing’ are more likely to work and fight hard, therefore they are more likely to protect and provide for their communities.

Given the clear impact and legacy of warfare on Amerindian communities in the circum-Roraima landscape, there is reason to believe that the ritual assassinations explained by Whitehead did indeed occur, but likely more as an effective and symbolic way of inflicting fear in enemies. Given the close association of the *piyai’san* with a *kanaimi* and the fact that both are capable and inclined toward violence, the discourse surrounding the *kanaimi* is more of a discourse on shamanic violence and power rather than an agent that is discrete from the *piyai’san*. Additionally, an over-emphasis on the darker, violent aspects of any society (see Chagnon 1968) reinforces the colonial discourse on savagery and cannibalism when what is needed are de-colonizing motifs that empower indigenous societies by emphasizing their highly sophisticated knowledge and healing capacities.

The fact that Whitehead suffered a stomach ailment soon after arriving in Paramakatoi where he moved a sacred object and ate some dried shrimp (Whitehead 2002) does not mean that

he was targeted by a *kanaimi*. It does provide an engaging narrative for his book. Whitehead references numerous informants who had detailed accounts of *kanaimi* attacks; however, many forms of death and sickness could be attributed to a *kanaimi*. Whitehead also argues that *kanaimi* has come to be used as a form of hyper-traditionalism in the face of increasing threats of modernity (2001:12). *Kanaimi* is indeed an expression of hyper-traditionalism between and within Amerindian groups against outside forces. However, during fieldwork, most Amerindians limited *kanaimi* accusations to fellow Amerindians. Additionally, (as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5) white people, who are associated with modernity, were generally accused of being a manifestation of *rato* (the water spirit), not *kanaimi*.⁷³ On the other hand, Guyanese coastlanders often express fear of the interior because of the magical powers of Amerindians and their associate *jumbies* (Creole English for ‘malevolent spirit forces’), suggesting the power of the *kanaimi* archetype.

One of the most salient metaphors for a tropical forest environment is the cycle of death and rebirth. When walking in the forest one observes plants and animals in a constant struggle for light, subsistence, life, security and continuity. With potentially dangerous spirits, humans, venomous snakes, jaguars and pathogens, not to mention the absence of infrastructure and access to critical medical care, there is a tangible sense of vulnerability in the jungle. The forest is the supermarket, hardware store, pharmacy and much more; however it is also a potentially hostile environment demanding a keen sensitivity and awareness of potential threats and opportunities. The forest is also a contested area where Amerindians used to violently compete for fertile ground, hunting territory and reproductive resources, often resorting to raiding parties and groups of secret assassins. Born of these realities, the *piyai’san*, *kanaimi* and the cult of fear play

⁷³ During fieldwork in the Upper Mazaruni, particularly in the more remote villages of Phillipai and Amokokupai, I would bathe in the river each evening causing locals, especially children, to watch in anticipation that I would turn into a camoudi [anaconda] and slither into the water for the night. Some children were fearful of my white skin and would cry out every time I came close. Grown individuals would also ask me, in all seriousness, if I was a manifestation of *rato* and if I turned into a snake at night in my hammock.

important roles in limiting violence within and between communities of beings where a finite amount of life-energy is closely managed through a complex spiritual ecology of reciprocity.

Chapter 5: Spiritual ecology of an animated landscape

A young man who had just trimmed his hair very short went hunting with his blowpipe. Piyai'ma [a giant] saw the man in the forest and asked him how he cut his hair so short. The young man responded by saying that he used wato, a flint stone that gets real sharp. Then he told piyai'ma that in order to get such a nice haircut, they had to cut his scalp, peel his skin off and put pepper inside. Piyai'ma admired the man's haircut so much that he said he wanted it done to him. The man said: "OK, but you can't complain." Then he cut piyai'ma, peeled off his scalp and rubbed pepper on his head. It hurt piyai'ma so much that he ran away. Some time later, pepper began to grow on his head. He wanted to get revenge but he couldn't move. Now you can find this particular kind of wild piyai'ma pepper growing all over the land.

-Geronimo Thompson, Arekuna, Paruima Village

This story is a clear example of how Amerindians perceive and articulate the animated landscape that surrounds them; it also suggests a creative way to torture an enemy. Despite the endurance of this story and the animist conceptual system that it suggests, these stories and ontologies are endangered. When Europeans arrived in the 'New World', their efforts to 'conquer' the land and its peoples were driven by Christian dogma that divorced humans from the larger Earth community. According to the Bible (Genesis 1:28): "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." With God's blessing, Europeans flocked to the Western Hemisphere in search of gold and other resources to 'subdue'. They marginalized the 'savage' and 'uncivilized' inhabitants of the land, using missions, foreign capital and technologies to coerce, enslave and proselytize animist aboriginals. Consequently, indigenous spiritual beliefs and healers were associated with the Devil and subordinated in every way (Berger 1991).

Europeans assumed the Americas were uninhabited because its ecosystems were largely intact when they were accustomed to the deforestation and environmental degradation that proliferated the Old World. The landscape also appeared largely empty and unused because many Amerindians had already died from diseases (measles, small pox, influenza, etc.) that

outpaced their European couriers (Mann 2005). What appeared ‘wild’ was actually highly maintained by Amerindians who had a sophisticated scientific understanding and reverence for the natural environment. This intimate sensitivity to the environment was held together by an animist tradition and relationship with the spiritual inhabitants of the landscape that enforce a strict socio-ecological ethic. Sadly, the ontologies of the Amerindians were grossly misunderstood and devalued by its invaders.

Amerindian beliefs concerning the animated nature of the world articulate highly sophisticated knowledge that enables an optimal form of environmental stewardship. Such paradigms demonstrate an appreciation of intricate interdependencies between minerals, soils, water, plants, animals, and climatic and astronomical phenomena. We can therefore assert that Amerindians are competent custodians and well-informed natural scientists with an awareness of a universe of countless interactions. Only recently have Western scientists begun to appreciate the extraordinary balance and interdependence of humans, plants, animals and soils in the South American tropical forests and elsewhere (Balée 1998).

Akin to other Amerindians in the Western Hemisphere, a basic premise in the conceptual system of the Ka’pon and Pemon is that of an animated spiritual universe. As explained by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the tragedy of societies that kill to eat is that people have to eat beings with souls (1963). Monotheism marginalized this dilemma by postulating that although animals have life they do not possess souls and therefore salvation does not exist for them. Rather than disassociating themselves from nature and its spirits, Amerindians recognize the interdependence of life within a larger continuity of energy between Earth’s diverse past, present and future inhabitants.

Western scholars have largely misunderstood the spiritual ecological dimension of the circum-Roraima landscape. Colson and Aremellada (1989) are responsible for the most comprehensive study; however they didn’t fully articulate the differentiation between spirit

forces. They subsumed everything under ‘The Imawari Classification’. According to this framework, the dead and anthropomorphic ‘nature spirits’ of the thick bush, mountains and water, were considered sub-categories of *imawari*. However, fieldwork for this project reveals a more precise understanding of *imawari* as disembodied spirits that don’t adhere to strict forms or spatio-temporal domains.

Imawariton

Imawariton (singular: *imawari*) are disembodied spirits of humans, plants, animals and other phenomena, both living and deceased. Everything and everyone has an *imawari* that is capable of transcendence of embodiment, time and space, especially during dreaming and other liminal states of consciousness.

According to Frederick W. Kenswil (1946:8):

Every Aboriginal Indian with whom I have come in contact, and they have been many, believes that every human being has a being from the spirit world who is his predestined servant, and who can assist him to secure many other spirits as his servants. This spirit being is called in their language “Wi-Iladwi” meaning my other self. The Medicine-man professes to have found his spirit servant, hence he is much feared by his fellowmen.

This statement supports the Amerindian belief that everyone has a spirit form that transcends embodiment. None of the informants interviewed during fieldwork were aware of the word *Wi-Iladwi*, but most (especially in the Upper Mazaruni) were familiar with *imawariton*, which sounds similar to *Wi-Iladwi* and is likely to be closely related.

Imawariton permeate each of the three levels of the Ka’pon universe: Ka’pon Pata (Above World), Nūnpon pata (Middle World) and Nūnamirita (Underworld). According to numerous Akawaio and Arekuna informants in the Upper Mazaruni, *imawariton* are all around us, everywhere, all the time. Those that were ‘good’ during their embodied life generally inhabit the upper levels of the universe while the spirits of those who were considered ‘bad’—because they interacted with and drew energy from other *imawariton* (as the *piyai’san* does) by using

tobacco, *muran* (charms), and *taren* (invocations)—are generally more abundant in the terrestrial and subterranean worlds.

Imawariton are also closely associated with certain species of birds, either manifesting as birds or having close relations with them. Specific *imawari*-birds include the *tukui*’ (hummingbird), *kukui* (‘a large black and white hawk’, perhaps the black-faced hawk: *Leucopternis melanops*), *waituru* (‘a black bird that lives on the mountains’), a *sia sia* (pronounced ‘chia-chia’, meaning ‘further, further’ in Arekuna) and most importantly, the *kumara*’ (a high-flying swallow-tailed kite [*Elanoides forficatus*] with a white breast and head and grey/black back; see cover page and apex of Map 4). As explained by Colson (1977:57):

The characteristic flight of the scissor-tailed bird [*kumara*’], powerful yet effortlessly graceful, explains why it, above all others, has appealed to Akawaio imagination. It is seen hovering around the mountaintops, occasionally swooping down past the forest canopy to glide a few inches above the surface of the rivers, then soaring once more into the sky. The spirit of the bird, which communicates so easily with all the main cosmic regions (of sky, water, forest, and mountains), is the shaman’s most appropriate spirit conveyor and guide when he seeks other spirits from all those regions. When the *kumalak* bird is seen skimming the surface of the river like a swallow and then rising above the forest and over the mountaintops again, the Akawaio say that it is taking up water from the river into the sky to put in its tobacco juice.

All birds that have a mountain habitat are closely associated with shamanic practices, for the mountains are the places where the spirits dance and feast. The shaman’s songs refer to these birds time and time again and describe their dancing. In contrast, the birds of the forest have little value as shaman helpers, although their possession of wings and the power of flight occasionally allow them to assist him in his attempt to perform a spirit flight. For this reason, while the *kumalak* bird is the primary helper, the shaman occasionally sings that he is getting wings like the *kukoi*, a species of hawk. He also sings sometimes that *lamolamo*, one of the hummingbirds, is dancing with him, and that the *cadouri* (*waiowra*) is teaching him shaman lore (the *cadouri*, or moriche oriole [*Icterus chryscephalus*], is valued for its singing and its power to mimic other birds).

Whenever one of these *imawari*-birds is spotted, it can be assumed that they are transcendent spirit forces. *Imawariton*, and birds in general, can also be thought of as helpers and

messengers for the shaman.⁷⁴ In some cases they may be the spirits of deceased ancestors that watch over and protect you. According to Quentin (Akawaio, Eimoyen), spirits travel in groups (much like *e'toto amu* /multiple *kanaimi*/hunters) through time; therefore certain pets, birds and newborns are thought to be the reincarnation of deceased ancestors, friends, pets, etc.

While *imawariton* are not necessarily dangerous, Amerindians generally fear them because they are unseen and ubiquitous and people have a tendency to fear that which they cannot see or directly communicate with. The only person who can freely communicate with the *imawariton* is the *piyai'san*, 'one who is kin to the spirits.' This association also suggests why the shaman is generally feared. As an adept shapeshifter, the *piyai*-man can travel outside the body and possess others in order to intermingle with *imawariton* and barter for the souls of humans and animals. According to Matthew Elliman, an Arekuna from Paruima: "The *moruwa* [spirit invitation songs] that the *piyai'san* sings when he beats leaf [conducts séances] are not his songs—they belong to the *imawariton*. If he wants to learn their songs and powers, he must become an *imawari* by leaving his body."

In addition to *imawariton*, there are many other-than-human beings in the circum-Roraima landscape that, according to knowledgeable informants, are very real, not to be confused with *imawariton*—though each has an *imawari*. Like everything in the universe, these beings can be both helpful and harmful; however, they are mostly antagonistic. In Akawaio, these other-than-human beings (and their *imawariton*) are known as *ene* (plural: *ene amu*).⁷⁵ The word *ene* is used to refer to outsiders who look and speak different and are generally considered dangerous. For example, a white man is often considered to be *ene*. *Ene* also refers to harmful or dangerous animals such as poisonous snakes and biting ants. Since other-than-human forces are

⁷⁴ A bird was famously used as a messenger in the Bible (Genesis 8:8): "Also he [Noah] sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground."

⁷⁵ The Makushi refer to these forces as *omá:kon*. Many individuals also refer to them as *makoi* ('demons' or 'devils'; jumbies in Creole English).

markedly ‘wild’ or anti-social, and they speak incoherently, they are all considered *ene*. As explained in the next section, these masters of the landscape enforce an integral social and environmental ethic.

Masters and mistresses of places and resources

In Reichel-Dolmatoff’s analysis of the Desana of the Colombian Vaupés River, he refers to a single ‘Master of Animals’: *Vai-mahsë* (1971:80; 1976:312); whereas the Ka’pon and Pemon believe that there are multiple masters and mistresses that oversee different geographic domains, resources, plants and animals. Numerous masters also exist among the Karinya in Venezuela (Schwerin 1985:32-35), the Sanema from the Yanomam language group in Venezuela and Brazil (Colchester 1982:157-159; see also Kopinawa 2013) and the Piaroa in the Orinoco Basin (Overing 1983-84:341). Comparative research of the indigenous conceptual systems of South America is lacking, however sufficient evidence supports the idea that the Ka’pon and Pemon are not alone in their perceptions and relations with multiple masters.

Every feature of the circum-Roraima landscape has a master and myriad spiritual inhabitants that enforce a strict ethic. If someone enters or disturbs their property without performing the appropriate rituals, that person will be punished. The enforcers have families and participate in many of the same subsistence activities as Amerindians, such as raising families, fishing, hunting and cultivation. Average people cannot see them, except on isolated occasions such as crepuscular times of day or liminal states of consciousness. A majority of these beings are anthropomorphic, generally manifesting as exceptionally large or small humanoids. If an ordinary person sees one, he or she is at risk; however, the degree of danger depends on who spotted whom first. If you see one without being seen, then you are relatively safe, but you should immediately vacate the area. On the other hand, if they spot you first, then you are in

grave danger. The *piyai 'san* is the only individual who can 'see everything' and is responsible for befriending, mediating and/or attempting to control or 'lock up' these forces.

The forests, savannahs and mountains of the circum-Roraima landscape have two primary masters: The first group is small in stature and primarily known as *pta 'mna/patamona/tamna* (Makushi), *adopi* (Arawak), and *amaiyko 'maiko ' or poito 'ma* (Akawaio and Arekuna).⁷⁶ *Pata* means 'place'; *patawonton* are 'people from the forest'. It is impossible to ignore the reference to the Patamona (Ka'pon), neighbors and historical enemies of the Makushi (Pemon). When asked about this association, the Makushi said that the *pta 'mna* look like Patamona people—short, stocky and strong. The Patamona, along with other highland Amerindians such as the Akawaio and Arekuna, refer to these spiritual beings as *amaiko ' or poito 'ma*. Therefore, there is not a Pemon/Ka'pon differentiation, but a geographical association. and Arekuna call these forest spirits *piyai 'ma*. Once again, these names do not adhere to Ka'pon and Pemon ethnic divisions. Despite this differentiation, the term *atai-tai* seems to be more ubiquitous.⁷⁷ Each animal, tree, rock, resource and place is overseen by one of these master-protectors. They must be acknowledged and honored, especially when traveling, hunting and harvesting forest products. In addition to their capacities for violent revenge, they also have knowledge and healing powers that can be invoked and utilized during séances; therefore it is essential for a *piyai 'san* to associate and maintain a discourse with these beings.

Little people

The archetype of small people exists in many cultures and landscapes around the world including Ireland (*leipreacháns*), Scandinavia (*dvergar*, Norse dwarves), Indonesia (*Ebu Gogo*), and nearly every Native American culture in the Americas. For example, the Cherokee Nation in

⁷⁶ One Makushi *piyai 'san* also referred to little people known as *si-si pan*.

⁷⁷ During fieldwork, the Arekuna and Akawaio generally used the term *piyai 'ma*, but were aware of and occasionally used the term *atai-tai*; the lowland Makushi generally only knew and used the term *atai-tai*.

the Southeastern United States share their landscape with short people they call *Yuñwi Tsunsi* who are about 3 feet tall and have long hair that reaches the ground (Lossiah 1998). Like individuals and cultures, each group has unique dispositions and geographic domains. However, in most narratives, these creatures are playful, gentle and mischievous, but also potentially deadly, especially if they are disturbed or their property is taken without asking. They generally inhabit caves, rocky areas, mountainous landscapes, canyons, trees, forests, bushy areas, underground dens and elsewhere. They are often heard at night and are associated with remote and otherwise ‘wild’ or potentially dangerous geographies. According to Reichel-Dolmatoff, in the Desana conceptual system, *Vai-mahsë* “is described as a small man, a dwarf with his body painted red...Being the Master of Animals, he is also the master of the hunt and, consequently, the owner and protector of magical herbs that bring luck to the hunter” (1971:80).

In the North Rupununi savannah of Guyana, the Makushi say that the *pta'mna* (also known as *patamona* or *tamna*) are the masters of animals and hunting. Like *Vai-mahsë*, they are described as being short, stout, strong and red-faced.⁷⁸ According to a Makushi informant: “They are strange little people with pointed ears that speak an unintelligible language.” This informant also said that they often appear with bones through their noses that allow them to shapeshift into animals (such as a tapir or jaguar) and stalk their prey. “They are wild bush Indians that use lots of powerful bina [*muran*/plant charms]. They escaped during tribal wars; they are mostly naked like wild animals that fear outsiders.” Several Makushi informants mentioned that they had seen or heard a *pta'mna*, or at least heard of others seeing them. However, for the most part, they are ‘invisible’, except to the *piyai'san*, and tend to come out in groups and make noise at night.

The association of *pta'mna* with ‘wild and naked bush Indians’ suggests a fine line between myth and reality, as well as the past and present. According to the Nage people of

⁷⁸ One Makushi *piyai'san* living near the Takatu River said that he interacted with *pta'mna* whose faces were black on one side and *suere* (red) on the other.

Flores Island in Indonesia, *Ebu Gogo* are dwarves that speak an unintelligible language, walk fast and are capable of parroting what is said to them (Forth 1998; 2009). In 2003, the remains of a small human were discovered on the island of Flores in Indonesia known as *Homo floresiensis* or ‘the hobbit’. The skeleton has been the subject of much research and debate as to whether or not it could be a different species of humans that lived until at least 12,000 years ago (Morwood 2005). To the Ka’pon and Pemon, *pta’ma* are very real and, as they say in Creole English, ‘a dangerous something’. Given the amount of forest in the Guianas and the confirmed existence of ‘uncontacted’ Amerindians to the south of Guyana, across the Acarai Mountains in the northern part of the Brazilian state of Pará, it is within the realm of possibility that small ‘wild bush Indians’ do indeed exist in this vast densely forested area. According to Makushi informants, Amerindians in southern Guyana, particularly the Wai-Wai, often talk about seeing fish scales on rocks along the river and other evidence of ‘uncontacted’ human inhabitants that likely choose to remain in paradise, away from modernization. Whether *pta’ma* are material or immaterial seems insignificant. The fact that they exist in the minds, languages and narratives of Amerindians means that they are perceived as real.

According to a Makushi *piyai’san*: “*Pta’ma* live underneath the silk cotton tree with their families. You know if they live there because the area around the tree is swept clean, just like we humans do in front of our homes. When you trouble the tree, they kill you.” This individual also noted that if you step on their tracks in the forest, you would get sick. Whenever traveling in a new or unknown place, you have to inform them when you enter their area by blowing a horn and/or announcing yourself by speaking to them and asking them to ‘tie-up their pets’ (especially jaguars, snakes, etc.). If you hear their distinctive whistle, or children laughing, crying and chopping wood, you must stop and not go any further, otherwise they will kill you. They often hear knock large mora trees (‘telephone trees’) as a warning that you should not enter their territory. When you cut a new farm, you must always ask their permission (even better if

you can get a *piyai'san* to mediate) and leave something for them—tobacco being a preferred offering. The Makushi *piyai'san* said that when you leave tobacco, you are supposed to say: “This tobacco is for you, grandfather [or brother-in-law]; come and smoke.”

The little people are the masters of the forest and all the plants and animals in the forest, especially jaguars and the bushmaster snake; therefore you must be especially careful if you kill anything or take any resources without asking their permission or leaving something in exchange. If a Makushi saw a jaguar, he would kindly say: “*Akompi* [brother-in-law] *taramaku* [move your jaguar].” According to Isaac Rogers, a Makushi elder from Yupukari: “*Nepi* [used to make *matapi*, *warisi*, cassava sifters and other woven items] is their property. You must ask them before you cut it. Everything in the forest is theirs. You must ask them first.” This ritual should be performed every time you harvest something from the forest, especially when you’re in unknown territory.

According to the Akawaio, the little people, known as *amaiko'* (or *poito'ma*) are the owners of places, plants, trees, animals and stones, including minerals such as gold and diamonds.⁷⁹ *Amaiko'* will attack you if you move a stone without asking their permission. According to an Akawaio informant: “Years ago there was not much mining. Now there is a lot of mining and this upsets *amaiko'*. As a result, many people are getting sick [malaria] and dying because they do not respect *amaiko'* and their property.” On the other hand, many devout ‘Christian’ Amerindians who believe in *amaiko'* say that these beings don’t bother people so much anymore because the local *piyai'san* ‘locked them up’ a while ago. Statements such as these suggest complex syncretic belief systems that transcend both Christian and animist dogma.

For the Arekuna, *poito'ma* (or *amaiko'*) impose a strict environmental ethic. If you kill an animal or harvest a forest product without asking their permission or offering something in

⁷⁹ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the intimate connection between little people and hunting *tipu* (charm stones).

return, they will take revenge by stealing a piece of your *akwa* (spirit energy), making you sick or killing you. According to Geronimo Thompson from Paruima Village:

They can just look at you, pick up a stick, talk to it and say, ‘This is you and I am going to kill you.’ Then they break the stick and you die soon after. Or, he blows toward you, points the stick at you or throws it in your direction and this makes you sick. They don’t kill you immediately. You will go home and bathe, then die, unless you see the *piyai*-man who will beat leaf, find them and beat them.

Geronimo went on to say that regardless of how they kill you: “They are faster killers than *kanaimis* and use their own *bina* [plant charms] to fly through the air.” He also said that *amaiko*’ are known to carry a poison under their armpit in a powder form that is made from different plants. This poison is a liquid that turns to powder and can be stored in bird feathers or under fingernails.⁸⁰ If they target you, they will shape-shift into a dangerous animal or turn a ‘bush rope’ (vine) into a snake. As Explained by Geronimo: “If you kill a jaguar or bushmaster snake, they will kill you the same day since these are their pets.” If they can’t kill you, they will kill your wife, child or any other member of the family that may be vulnerable. The informant concluded his remarks by saying: “If a dead person looks very white, then you will know that *amaiko*’ killed them.”

Despite their vicious tendencies, there are ways to avoid their retribution. As explained above, the best way to placate these little people is by making an offering (tobacco or fermented cassava drink such as *parakari* [Makushi] or *kasa*’ [Akawaio]), carrying a protective *muran* (charm), or applying a ritual *taren* (invocation) as a guard. There are also ways of outsmarting these creatures. As explained by Joel Samuel, a Makushi elder from Yupukari: “If you kill an animal while hunting, you can trick the *tamna* by putting a big log on its head as if it was crushed by a branch.” The ultimate lesson with regard to little people is that they own and

⁸⁰ The reference to carrying poison in bird feathers and under the fingernails suggests a historical familiarity with poison, primarily derived from plant, tree bark, liana and frog extracts used for fishing, hunting and warfare. *Urari* (curare, poison) is endemic to this area, traditionally used on arrows and blowpipe darts. *Urari* has made immeasurable contributions to modern medicine, especially within the context of anesthesia (Foldes 1993).

manage resources and places—especially remote, forested/bushy and rocky areas—and impose a strict social and environmental ethic on Amerindian communities, thereby maintaining a balanced and fecund landscape.

Giants

Another master of places and resources, potentially dangerous other-than-human person and popular folkloric protagonist in lowland Makushi forests and savannahs is *atai-tai* or bush *tai-tai*. To the Akawaio (Ka'pon) and Arekuna (Pemon) in the Pakaraima highlands of the Upper Mazaruni basin, this peculiar creature is known as *piyai'ma*. As with the *pta'mna/amaiko'poito'ma*, there is not a clear Pemon/Ka'pon linguistic differentiation, but rather a geographic association where more-proximate groups use the same term. This correlation is supported by the fact that some Makushi informants who lived closer to the Pakaraima Mountains (e.g. Karasabai) referred to these beings by their highland moniker, *piyai'ma*. According to a personal communication with Colson (June 2013), *atai-tai* is the 'spirit name' of *piyai'ma*.⁸¹

This popular character is much like Bigfoot or Sasquatch in the Pacific Northwest of North America (cf. Suttles [1972] on indigenous perspectives of Sasquatch and Mergler [1996] for Richard Nelson's 'The Woodsman') or the Yeti/Abominable Snowman in the Himalayas. A comparison could also be made with Supay, the lord of the hills, sometimes known as Huari and as the Tío in Quechua, Aymara and Spanish-speaking communities in the Andes (Nash 1979:121-122). But perhaps the best reference comes from the Tucano and Desana along the

⁸¹ Each *piyai'san* often speaks in obscure dialect, locally known as 'deep Makushi' or 'deep Akawaio,' etc. This speech includes certain archaic words that are only known to a select few and often come from the spiritual domain where all the spirit beings speak different languages. For example, according to the Akawaio, the spirit word for *piyai'san* is *eneoge*. Mysterious 'deep' dialect is also an important aspect of *taren* (invocations) explained in Chapter 6. Spirit names are also common among the Areruya *pukena'*, 'prophet leader' who is adept at the shamanic art of dreaming to divine knowledge, songs and names from the spiritual realm. See Chapter 7 for further details on *pukena'* names.

Vaupés River in Colombia that share their landscape with the fearsome *boráro* (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:86):

The *boráro* is described as a tall naked man with a hairy chest, short hair cut horizontally, and a huge penis. His eyes are red and glowing, and he has large curved fangs like those of a jaguar...His feet are large, the length of a human forearm, but they have only four toes, the little one being missing. Moreover, they are twisted in such a way that the toes face backward and the heels forward. He does not have joints in his knees; when he falls he has great difficulty in getting up again. The *boráro* lives with *Vai-mahsë* inside the hills but passes the greater part of his time in the forest or on the headwaters of the streams where he gathers crabs, which are his favorite food.

Much like the *boráro*, *piyai'ma/atai-tai* is typically described as being tall, hairy, smelly (known for regular and especially pungent flatulence) and (if male) having exceptionally large genitalia and a large sexual appetite. Another defining characteristic in common with the *boráro* is that *piyai'ma's* feet are backwards so that when you see its footprints in the forest, you think it's walking in one direction, but it's actually going the opposite way. Like the *boráro* and *Vai-mahsë*, *piyai'ma* lives 'inside the hills' in Nunamirita (the Underworld) with *pta'mna/amaiko'* and all their animals/pets.⁸² One significant difference between the Desana and the Ka'pon and Pemon conceptual systems is that both *piyai'ma* and *pta'mna/amaiko'* are masters of the forest and all the animals; whereas Reichel-Dolmatoff explains that *Vai-mahsë* is the sole Master of Animals (1971:87):

Although the *boráro* is sometimes called a "chief of the animals," with the exception of fish and birds, his functions are very different from those of *Vai-mahsë*. One does not ask permission from the *boráro* to hunt, nor does he aid the hunter or punish him if he does not observe the rules of the hunt. Nevertheless, the *boráro* is closely associated with the animals and sometimes changes himself into a peccary or a deer (not a tapir), which might make a hunter hesitate to kill these animals for fear of wounding the *boráro*.

The differentiation between the two classes of beings in the circum-Roraima landscape seems to be more geographical than functional. The small *pta'mna/amaiko'* are

⁸² According to a personal communication with Audrey Colson (June 2013): "Not only are the animals his pets, but household items, such as combs, appear as domestic animals of *Piai'ma* (according to shaman lore)."

generally associated with thick forest and bush in remote areas where game animals proliferate. On the other hand, according to Colson and Armellada (1989:11):

Piai'ma is the perfect anthropomorphic version of a mountain, being very tall with hairy legs (high ground with bush-covered flanks): bald head (bare, rocky summit): splayed-out feet turned backwards (foot-hills fanning out). If female, Piai'ma has streams of milk pouring from her breasts (foaming, creamy water, gushing over the breast of the mountain).

This description supports the Bigfoot/Sasquatch and Yeti/Abominable Snowman archetypes and their almost universal association with mountains. While Reichel-Dolmatoff does not overtly associate the *boráro* with mountains, he does suggest this domain by referring to his tendency to inhabit 'the headwaters of streams' that invariably suggests elevated, mountainous landscapes.

In the circum-Roraima landscape, *piyai'ma/atai-tai* is almost universally associated with mountains, more specifically, *yen* (caves/entrances to Nūnamirita, the Underworld) and the tops of mountains. This is especially evident in the popular *panton* (stories) about *piyai'ma* where he kidnaps children and takes them to the tops of mountains and caves to devour them. In one story, Piyai'ma and The Armadillo, an Amerindian man chases an armadillo into a hole and tries to pull him out from the tail when *piyai'ma* appears and says: "Ouch! Please stop. The armadillo is my leg hair and it hurts when you pull it out." Colson and Armellada were correct in their depiction of *piyai'ma* as an anthropomorphic *wik a'kwari* (mountain spirit in Ka'pon; *wik ekaton* in Pemon); however, this story and the one at the beginning of the chapter are clear evidence that *piyai'ma* is not merely a manifestation of a mountain, but also of all of the land and the plants and animals within it.⁸³

⁸³ Despite this geographical association of *piyai'ma/atai-tai* with mountains, they may also inhabit other places, like migrants or expatriates. According to an anonymous Makushi *piyai'san* interviewed during fieldwork, there was an individual *atai-tai* living in a nearby lake, a place that is not generally associated with these 'anthropomorphized mountains,' but is indeed part of the Underworld.

In Akawaio folklore, *piyai'ma* is often depicted carrying a special basket that opens and closes on command, a war club, *empukui* (a magical stick that can kill by just pointing it at prey) or a pointed palm stem. The wounds created from this stick look just like wounds from the claws and teeth of a jaguar, an association that conveniently explains victims found butchered in the forest. According to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975:86-87), the *boráro* often has a stone hoe hanging over his shoulder: “and when he carries this weapon people know that he is on the lookout for someone to devour.” Attacks from the *boráro* are also commonly associated with jaguar attacks, especially because he has big curved cat-like fangs.

In the Makushi oral tradition, *atai'tai* is often responsible for kidnapping and eating children and raping women. He always carries his prey in a distinctive way: upside down on his back, holding the ankles behind his head.⁸⁴ In one particular Makushi *panton* (story) recorded during fieldwork, *atai-tai* kidnaps an Amerindian boy, but instead of eating him, he teaches him how to hunt and make a *warisi* (backpack; *akai* in Arekuna) to carry the animals/meat he has killed.⁸⁵ Therefore *piyai'ma*, like others including the *piyai'san*, is an ambiguous force that can be both dangerous and helpful. He is known to kidnap, eat and rape Amerindians; but he is also a master weaver, hunter and healer responsible for teaching Amerindians these skills.

Much like mountain weather, mountain spirits are unpredictable: sometimes they cool and heal illnesses,⁸⁶ teach skills and otherwise help Amerindians; in other instances they are tricksters who show up uninvited at celebrations, get intoxicated or mischievously make things disappear and reappear. There are two general types of *piyai'ma*: the kind that live in the mountains that are the most dangerous and powerful, and the others that inhabit the lowland forests, live in hollowed out trees/logs and are more playful. This latter *piyai'ma* is known to

⁸⁴ This is another clear example of an inversion associated with *nunamirita*, the Underworld.

⁸⁵ In Arekuna, an *akai* full of different kinds of meat is called a *kampu*.

⁸⁶ See Chapter 6 for a description of shamanic séances where the *piyai'san* seeks the healing powers of *piyai'ma* and others.

make you lose your way in the forest by charming you. If you are lost, it is likely a result of *piyai'ma*. According to Joel Samuel, in such situations, the only way to get the bush *tai-tai* off your trail is to quickly weave a special design called a *prakai* (eye) and leave it on the path:

“*Atai-tai* is a master weaver but he does not know how to plot this particular design. When he comes across the *prakai*, he cannot follow after you because he is obsessed with learning how to plot this pattern.” While *atai-tai* is focused on the *prakai*, his charms stop working and you can find your way out of the forest. Many informants and *panton* (stories) explain that another way to get *atai'tai*/a predator off your track is to put a *muran* (charm) on its footprint.

Joel Samuel also noted that when you come close to *atai-tai's* territory, the sky suddenly becomes dark. Since *atai-tai* is more active at night and causes the sky to get dark, he is generally associated with the darkness of the Underworld. Additionally, in stories, *atai-tai* will often say ‘it’s getting late’ just before dawn, suggesting an inverse lifestyle to humans. *Atai-tai* stories are also commonly used as a threat to children, much like the bogeyman in European and American cultures. Amerindian parents often tell their children that they better wake up early before *atai-tai* passes by in the pre-dawn on his way home crying out ‘heee, heee, heee...’

While *atai-ta* can be thought of as a singular character, much like the *boráro* or Bigfoot, according to a respected Makushi *piyai'san*, there are many different kinds of *atai-tai*, just like there are different races of people. There is a white one called *anikrimupia* and a brown-skinned *atai-tai* called *tetapiuren*. *Tapsu* is black and can connect people together physically (much like conjoined twins). *Spokai* is brown and has pointed feet and hands like spikes that he kills and climbs trees with. *Spokai* can also ‘spoil’ people and make your feet pointed and straight. *Kusanksraimu* is white and *eehaha* looks just like an Amerindian. According to the *piyai'san*, there are many stories about these different types of *atai-tai*, but few people know them anymore; most stories that remain are only concerned with the standard *atai-tai*. It would appear from the descriptions above that many, if not all, medical conditions have an associated spirit

that caused them. Since many of these conditions are rare, the culprits also seem to be less common.

Some giants are friendly while others are not, just like people. Amerindians have co-evolved with these manifestations of the landscape and benefited from their healing, weaving and hunting expertise. As explained in greater detail in Chapter 6, these figures are also important in the ritual healing practices of the *piyai'san*. They are generally feared, respected and honored by avoiding their territory and the disturbance of their property without taking the proper precautions. They also serve an important security function by making people avoid the forest at night where potentially dangerous nocturnal creatures (especially snakes and jaguars) lurk and prey upon hapless Amerindians. Consequently, *piyai'ma/atai-tai*, as well as *pta'mna/amaiyko'/poito'ma*, as masters of the forests, mountains, and watersheds and all that they contain, are largely responsible for the protection and continuity of humans, animals, plants and trees within a complex inter-connected and inter-dependent spiritual ecology. By recognizing the animated and transcendent nature of landscapes and the fact that every *thing* and *place* is someone else's domain, Amerindians honor, protect and co-manage resources to the collective benefit of past, present and future generations.

Sacred water

*One day, two Amerindian boys went fishing in the deep pools of the river with a net made of milkweed thread. The net became tangled with the rocks at the bottom of a pool so one of the boys dove down to loosen it. As he swam down, a *tūwenkaron* [mermaid] darted out from its hiding place under the rocks and tied the threads of the net to the boy's toes, holding him underwater until he drowned. The *tūwenkaron* carried the boy away to its city beneath the river, and neither he nor the *tūwenkaron* have ever been seen since.*

-Sean, Makushi, Rewa Village

Rato (pronounced 'lado' in Akawaio) is the name given to the water spirit force (*tuna a'kwari* in Ka'pon; *tuna ekaton* in Pemon), also known as the *moro'esa'* (fish owner/master in

Akawaio). This force oversees all resources in lakes, rivers and creeks.⁸⁷ Unlike *pta'mna/amaiyko* and *piyai'ma/atai-tai*, *rato* is less commonly depicted as an anthropomorphic figure and can be thought of as more of a force that manifests in different forms. That being said, *rato* can manifest as a person, especially white people who come from far away with gifts. Informants said that you could tell when a person is *rato* because they speak in a strange way (much like a foreigner would). Most often, *rato* appears as a caiman, porpoise, *tuwenkaron* (mermaid or 'watermama' in Creole English), *casli* (half porpoise-half human), 'water dog' (river otter), stingray, anaconda, or any number of forms of water serpent/dragon.⁸⁸ Like the masters of the highlands and forests, *rato* is very dangerous, known for luring people to the water to inflict harm or illness, kidnap, rape, adopt, marry and/or eat. According to an Arekuna informant, when a dead body is found in the river in a different place than where the person disappeared and their skin is white—with the fingers, ears, and eyes eaten out—this means that *rato* devoured them.

Many of the same rules that apply to the forest and its resources apply to the water. If you play with fish, mock them, or take them without giving thanks to *rato*, this force will get angry and make you sick or kill you. For example, you cannot call the names of fish when you are fishing or *rato* will come after you. *Rato*, as master of all that is in the water, enforces a strict ethic that must be respected and obeyed. The water is especially dangerous for menstruating women who should not go near, bathe in or wash clothes in or near a body of water at this time of the month. According to informants, blood pollutes the water system and attracts predators. If menstruating women go near the water, evil water spirits will 'do nasty things to them' and/or appear in their dreams and make them skinny or impregnate them. *Rato* can also cause a flood. The safest way to appease *rato* is by getting the *piyai'san* to mediate.

⁸⁷ No data collected for this research supported the idea that *rato* was also associated with the ocean and its inhabitants, although this very well could be the case.

⁸⁸ According to an Akawaio *piyai'san*: "*Rato* is everything with webbed feet; *tuwenkaron* has the tail of a fish."

According to many informants, everything that is on land is also found underwater. In addition to land animals like sheep, horses, tigers, deer, etc. there are also combinations of these animals living underwater, including horned tigers and serpents with wings.⁸⁹ Most of these creatures remain underwater in ponds, caves and deep pools, but they do surface at times, usually at night.⁹⁰ Informants also say that if you listen closely, you can hear these creatures when you pass over deep pools in a boat.⁹¹ Most people don't see these creatures; only the *piyai'san* can see them when he travels underwater during séances to subdue and negotiate with *rato* and all the creatures of the Underworld.

As explained by Sean from Rewa Village: "There are cities underwater—just like we have above water—with cars, buses, houses, bars and so on. The only difference is that underwater, caiman are the vehicles, stingrays are baking pans, lukanani [*Cichla ocellaris*, a.k.a. Peacock Bass] are cows and anacondas are their *matapis*." These cities are usually located in deep pools, bends in the river and dangerous confluences where there tend to be a lot of eddies and whirlpools. An example of such a place is the confluence of the Rupununi and Rewa Rivers just below Rewa Village. This is a very dangerous section of the river that has capsized many boats and drowned numerous Amerindians. In another section of the Rupununi that was notorious for dangerous water spirits that would suck down boats and people, Amerindians diverted the river just to avoid *rato's* wrath.

According to legend, there is a particular bend in the Rewa River called The Seawall where there is a large underwater city. This is an especially dangerous part of the river when the water is high. This bend in the river is also a favorite hangout for caiman that can often be seen

⁸⁹ In Guyana, jaguars are called 'tigers' even though there are no tigers in South America.

⁹⁰ This association with the night is suggestive of *nunamirita*, the Underworld. It is also worth noting that the river is an especially dangerous place to be at night because of the inherent dangers of water, especially because of the low visibility and higher likelihood of encountering dangerous nocturnal caiman, snakes and jaguars.

⁹¹ There is a particular fish in Guyana called basha (family: *Sciaenidae*) also known as drums, croakers or hardheads because they make a repetitive drumming/croaking sound that can be heard from above the water.

cruising about. According to a *panton* (story), there was once a big party on the banks of this part of the river and they ran out of alcohol so the *piyai'san* went into the city below the water to get something to drink and returned shortly with a few bottles wrapped nicely in dry newspaper.

The most common manifestation of *rato* is the mermaid (and, to a lesser extent, the merman) known as *tɬwenkaron*, having the tails of a fish and the upper body of a human. Like exceptionally large (*piyai'ma/atai-tai*/Bigfoot/ Sasquatch/Yeti) and small (*pta'mna/amaiyko* '/elves/trolls/dwarves) people, the mermaid is a universal archetype. From archaic Pagan beliefs and the sirens of ancient Greece that appeared in Homer's *Odyssey*, to African, Asia and Amerindian folklore, the mermaid has appeared in countless forms of art, literature and oral tradition.⁹² Mermaids are most commonly depicted as beautiful longhaired women that sing, play music and lure ships and men to water-related disasters and death.

Like the spirit forces discussed above (and plants, animals and people in general), *tɬwenkaron* can be both good/helpful and evil/dangerous; however they are most often harmful and generally not to be trusted. They can take you under and drown you or provide fish and other resources from the river. Either way, you must respect and honor them. In the lowland areas, the Makushi believe that wherever there are *tɬwenkaron*, you will also find many piranhas, locally known as *pirai*. As a general rule, female *tɬwenkaron* appear to men and male *tɬwenkaron* appear to women, using sexual attraction to lure people to their domain.⁹³ As a general rule, *tɬwenkaron* are generally more active and visible at night and during the wet season (May – September) when the water is high. During the day and dry season (October – April) they sleep more and are less likely to be seen.

⁹² According to Kopenawa, the Yanomami share their rivers with *T^huëyoma* (aka *Paonakare*), a fish-woman associated with the image of a mermaid (2013:29).

⁹³ This is another example of how interactions with the Underworld are sexualized in much the same way that an incubus spirit would appear to a female victim and a succubus would prey upon men.

There are several ways to attract and communicate with a *tuwenkaron*. For example, according to Sean, if you get a grip of their hair, they will come to you in your dreams and you will get rich. However, if they like you or someone has recently died in your family, they will try to carry you away. As he explained:

If you want to attract the water spirits, you take a few eggs from any type of fowl and a calabash. Put the eggs under the calabash in shallow water and they will come to you. If they want to communicate with you, they will tie some hair onto your hook when you go fishing. If you keep the hair then you will see the water spirit when you are in a trance or a dream. If you want to communicate with the water spirit, you put some of your hair onto a comb and leave it on a rock by the river. They will take it and then you can communicate with them. You should not call to them unless you need their help. Sometimes, to get their help and whatever it is that you are looking for, you may have to sacrifice someone to the water spirits. You also cannot eat unscaled fish, garlic, onion or limes if you wish to communicate with these spirits because they will be put off.⁹⁴

As mentioned previously, there are many stories about *rato* appearing as a white man. *Rato* and other spirit forces are also commonly associated with heavy winds and are known to appear in dreams. The following *panton* (story) from an Akawaio informant illustrates these three associations:

An Amerindian man from the middle Mazaruni went to Georgetown where he met a white man who bought things for him, including a gun. Before the Amerindian man returned home, the white man said he would come and visit him in the interior. So the Amerindian man went home and kept dreaming about the white man and wondering when he would visit. Then one day the Amerindian felt a giant breeze engulf him and he knew that this was the white man/*rato* coming back to visit.

Another *panton* about an encounter with *rato* comes from an Arekuna informant:

A man went diving in the river to look for gold when a giant fish came by and tried to drown him. Then a mermaid came and helped him by guiding him away to safety. That night, in his dream, the same *tuwenkaron* appeared and gave him money. When he woke up, he found a pile of money next to his bed. But the money was only there to entice him back into the river where he would be attacked and devoured by *rato*.

⁹⁴ The fact that the informant mentioned unscaled fish could suggest syncretism in the way that he incorporates the Christian taboo of eating unscaled fish into an animist conceptual system.

In order to respect and honor *rato*, there are various rules that must be followed, especially when traveling on the water or fishing. These taboos are particularly important to follow during fish poisoning expeditions.⁹⁵ In and around Paruima Village on the Upper Kamarang River, the Arekuna annually poison fish during *ewu* (fish-poisoning season; *tumun* in Akawaio).⁹⁶ During this time of year (April - May), at the start of the wet season when the rivers are going from low to high and fish are spawning, villagers poison selected creeks and ponds with haiari (genus *Lonchocarpus*, in the legume family) to harvest small sardine fish.⁹⁷ Besides being used as a poison, haiari is also thought to be able to cure HIV.⁹⁸ There are several species of haiari, including the white, yellow, and dark/black. There is also a similar plant that the Makushi call 'home haiari' which can also be used as a poison. The white haiari is a vine that is apparently the strongest and most preferred of the bunch. In order to extract the toxins, the vine is cut (the roots of the vine allegedly contain the highest concentration of the toxin) then beaten with a stick or club and soaked in water that turns yellowish-white from the poison.

According to the Arekuna, the following taboos must be strictly adhered to when fishing (especially when using haiari), otherwise the harvest will not be successful: 1) Menstruating

⁹⁵ For more information on fish poisoning, see the short film I made on YouTube called *Paruima Village Fishing*.

⁹⁶ Paruima Village is also known as Paruima Mission, a Seventh-day Adventist Church reservation. The village is approximately 20 miles from the Venezuelan border and, according to Venezuelans, is part of the contested *Zona en Reclamación*. The quasi-dual citizenship of Paruima residents allows for easy travel and transportation of goods (especially cheap fuel) between Venezuela and Guyana.

⁹⁷ There are only small fish on the Kamarang River and its tributaries (the largest fish, *yarau*, *Hoploerythrinus unitaeniatus*, is only about 8 inches long) compared to the lowland rivers such as the Rupununi and Essequibo that support many larger species like the giant arapaima.

⁹⁸ According to Roy Marcelo, an Arawak informant from Kurupukari, several years ago, two men who had HIV decided that they wanted to commit suicide so they harvested some of the white haiari, extracted the juice and each drank a large cup of it, thinking it would kill them. They went to sleep but subsequently woke up. A few weeks later, they were tested again for HIV only to find that the virus was gone from their body. The only other side effect that they experienced was impotence. Some time later, a woman who was a prostitute in a mining camp contracted HIV. Her father decided to medicate her with the same haiari vine. Only this time, it was taken in small doses over a longer period of time, instead of one large dose like the men did. Her father smoked the vine to preserve it. He shaved off a little piece each day, soaked it in water and gave it to his daughter. Every three months she was tested and each time the virus had been depleted. After taking the haiari for a total of 9 months, the virus was no longer present in her system.

women are not supposed to participate; 2) If someone in your family recently died, you cannot go; 3) If you recently ate something that was shot by a gun that has a pellet (something that sinks fast) the fish poisoning will not work and the fish will not float to the surface; 4) There must be a screening process so that all these details of the participants are known; 5) The haiari fish poison must be reinforced with an appropriate *taren* (invocation) that invokes the *pia* of *kurakai* (small red ants that have a very strong sting) to make the poison very strong; 6) Poisoning must be done while moving up the river in a boat and then floating down backwards instead of turning the boat around, otherwise the fish will turn around; 7) You cannot dip your net into the water until the command is given; 8) You must have an empty stomach and be hungry, otherwise the fish will not be hungry; 9) During conventional bait fishing, you should use *logo-logo*—a very stinky fish—as bait, but you can't say that it's stinky or scorn the bait in any way otherwise you will offend *rato*; and 10) You must not pass gas, which would also offend *rato*. According to informants, people don't follow these taboos anymore and therefore (according to more-traditional elders) they offend *rato*, no longer catch as many fish and experience sickness more often.

Certain taboos also exist in lowland areas where fish are much larger.⁹⁹ According to Rovin Alvin, a Makushi informant in Rewa Village, there is an old belief about the giant arapaima fish: “Nobody should ever eat these fish, otherwise you will swell up, just like the big fish, and burst.” There is also a belief that if you eat arapaima when you have a baby, it will scare your baby and make it cry every time an arapaima (an air-breathing fish) floats to the surface to breathe. The only way to cure the baby is to go to the *piyai'san*. These taboos seem to have a clear ecological rationale. According to Ashley Holland, an ecologist and wildlife guide

⁹⁹ In both lowland and highland areas of Guyana's interior, fish is the primary source of protein in the Amerindian diet.

in Yupukari Village, Guyana: “The arapaima is an important keystone species that plays a unique and crucial role in the way the ecosystem functions.” As explained by Joel Samuel, the arapaima (a manifestation of *rato*) must be respected and conserved because: “They are the owners of the river and you don’t want to kill the owner or they will take revenge on you.”

Arapaima are especially bountiful in the oxbow lakes and ponds around Rewa Village. These lakes (and just about every other lake and pond in the North Rupununi) have many stories and taboos associated with them. One lake in particular near Rewa called Grass Pond, where there is an abundance of arapaima, caiman and many other species of fish, has many stories about it. According to legend, this lake is a very dangerous place that should be avoided. It is especially dangerous if you get pepper in or near the water. If you throw or accidentally drop pepper in the pond, the water-spirit force (*rato*) will become vexed with you. As explained by Rovin Alvin:

If you get pepper in or near the water, first there will be a big windstorm [wind and breathe are manifestations of spirit forces] and you will hear all kinds of frightening sounds like thunder coming from underwater. Then all kinds of dangerous animals like water tigers, giant anteaters, anacondas and caiman will come out of the pond and attack you. If you are in a boat in the middle of the pond, there will be a big whirlpool that spins and sucks you down where you get eaten. The *piyai*-man can stop this by beating leaf. His spirit will fight with the water spirit in his house at night. He will talk to this master and cool it down by tying up the monsters with big chains.

In addition to arapaima, caiman and anaconda, there are many other dangerous creatures/pets of *rato* that lurk below the surface of the water. According to a Makushi *piyai*’san who sees and interacts with these creatures: there is a half-porpoise/half-human known as *kasli*; a giant turtle called *opym*; a giant water anteater known as *sipth*; big snakes called *pritni* and *kiarara* that are especially dangerous for women who are menstruating; a water dragon named *okrim*; *kamaiw*, ‘a shooting monster, like a swordfish’; a big monster called *krekre* in the shape of a stingray that has a head that sticks up with horns; *kiyakrim* whose tail is a snake and head is a bird; and a large winged serpent/dragon the color of the rainbow called *kuim* that will

‘bite you on the foot without you seeing it.’ If you remove *kuimɯ* from a pond, the water will dry up. According to Matthew Elliman from Paruima Village, there are also man-eating ‘waterdogs’ (giant river otters) called *uruturu* that come out when you put pepper in the water. There are also black, brown and white water tigers that have webbed feet like river otters that live in caves underwater, especially in dangerous parts of the river. The most notorious water tiger is called *wairarimɯ* (Akawaio) or *totraimɯ* (Makushi), a black jaguar, also known as the bush cow or *maipuri* (tapir) tiger because of its dark skin color. All these creatures are especially active and dangerous during the wet season, at night, when pepper gets into the water, or whenever they or their masters are disturbed by loud noises.

In order to protect yourself from these dangerous creatures—especially before going on a journey on the river—you must see the *piyai*’san who will give you a *taren* (invocation) and/or a *muran* (charm) to protect against danger. One *taren* in particular that is helpful invokes the power/*pia* of the sun to shine brightly in the eyes and blind harmful creatures. If the *piyai*’san were to use this *taren*, he or she would begin by chanting and calling to all the *pia* of the dangerous creatures that may be encountered: *kaslimɯ*’*pia*, *siptumɯ*’*pia*, *kuimɯ*’*pia*, *kamaiwɯ*’*pia*, *okrimɯ*’*pia*, etc. Then the *piyai*’san would call to the *pia* of the sun, and finally blow on the travelers, their boat, seats, paddles and belongings. Another protective *taren* that would be helpful when disembarking on a river trip invokes the *pia* of giant river otters, *trara*.¹⁰⁰ The *pia* invoked in the *trara taren* allows passengers to pass through the river and any obstacles skillfully, like the giant river otter.

When the *piyai*’san is tasked with controlling the water spirits, he or she will enter into a trance at night in order to travel underwater. When underwater, they will ‘tie-up’ the water tigers and all the other dangerous creatures that live in tunnels and caves underwater. According to a

¹⁰⁰ Giant river otters are locally referred to in Creole English as ‘waterdogs.’ There is also a plant *muran* (charm) called *trara* that can be carried and/or invoked to harness the *pia* of the giant river otter. See Chapter 6 for a more complete analysis of *muran* and *taren*.

Makushi informant from Rewa, the *piyai*'san will also take the clothes of the water tigers so that they cannot leave their homes: "Since everything is like people, the water tiger wears clothes. Like us, they don't come out without their clothes on so the *piyai*-man goes into their caves and takes their clothes so that they can't come out." Many of the most dangerous ponds and sections of the river are now considered safe because the *piyai*'san 'locked-up' and stole the clothes of the water creatures long ago so that they stay in their caves underwater.

For many reasons, the river is a very dangerous place. Rivers are the roads of the tropical forest landscape and a necessary part of everyday life, especially because Amerindians receive a bulk of their protein from fish. Most children learn to swim at a young age; however drowning is a common cause of death when the water is low and boats are more likely to strike exposed rocks, or during the wet season when rivers swell and turn into raging torrents. *Rato*, and its diverse manifestations, is an especially fearsome *tuna a'kwari* (water spirit) that imposes a socio-environmental ethic by forcing Amerindians to respect the rivers, lakes and ponds and the resources they provide. This aspect of the conceptual system also protects people from very real and dangerous creatures and hazards associated with water.

Subcategories of masters and mistresses

In addition to the spirit forces that inhabit and broadly govern the forests, mountains, waters, animals and resources of the circum-Roraima landscape, there are also sub-categories of masters that oversee the production and reproduction of individual resources, animals and activities that sustain Amerindian livelihoods. These sub-categories of masters/guardians/fertility spirits are known as *siwoniton* (Akawaio) and are conceived of as the 'heart spirit' or central life force for a given species or resource. *Siwoniton* live in Nunamirita (the Underworld) with their 'children'—the species or resources they oversee—as well as the other spirit masters such as *amaiyko*' and *piyai*'ma. They enter into the terrestrial world—along with the resources they

protect—through *yen* (caves), cracks, holes and recesses, particularly on mountains or remote and thick bushy areas. They are also known to congregate underwater near rocks, ledges, deep pools and whirlpools. As explained by Joel Samuel: “All plants and animals have their own spirit leaders that have to be treated with respect. Before you hunt a particular animal or pick a plant it is necessary to consult and honor the relevant spirit master.”

A related Akawaio concept to the *siwin* is that of the *i'terpotiri* (*topotru* in Makushi), an authoritative elder/leader/master in Amerindian communities such as a *pukena'* (prophet), *piyai'san*, father, grandfather, toshao or village councilor. Similarly, the word *poitiri* means helper, servant or nephew (Akawaio).¹⁰¹ Therefore, the *siwin* can also be thought of as an *i'terpotiri*. This figure could be a large or elderly version of the group being represented, but it could also be significantly smaller or perhaps even a completely different species or phenomenon (like a constellation) that is somehow ecologically linked, complementary, proximate or contemporaneous to the species or resource.

Ka'pon and Pemon productive activities are totally dependent on the use of their physical environment. In addition to hunting, fishing, foraging and trading, Amerindians spend a great deal of time cultivating farms. However, due to the poverty of the soils, much of the land in the circum-Roraima landscape is unsuited to intensive and permanent cultivation. Therefore, Amerindians generally have several farms at different stages of production. Most plots of land can only yield 2-3 crop cycles before the nutrients are leached out and depleted, necessitating shifting cultivation after approximately 3 years. Slashing forest and burning it are necessary to fix nutrients into the soil in order to make the poor soils fertile.¹⁰² Plots of land are

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 7 for a discussion of *poitiri* within the context of Areruya.

¹⁰² Slash and burn agriculture generally has a negative connotation because of the large-scale agricultural projects driving deforestation in Brazil and elsewhere. However, the small-scale rotational deforestation and burning practiced by Amerindians for millennia serves to enhance forest ecosystems. This type of forest management and controlled burning may actually account for the abundance of plant and animal life that now exists in the Amazon biome. According to informants, when farms are left fallow to return to forest, this creates different levels of re-

usually small and large trees and/or their stumps are generally left in the ground, which limits the amount of erosion and facilitates the rapid return of the forest after cultivation. Within the cleared area, inter-cropping is generally done according to variations in the soil and the degree of slope and dampness (Colson 2009:295). The staple Amerindian crop is bitter manioc, also known as cassava, and is used to make a variety of products including bread, farine (meal), cassareep (a thick, dark, semi-sweet liquid/syrup commonly used in pepperpot, also known as *tuma*) tapioca and a variety of fermented drinks. Additional crops include corn, yams (edo), sweet potatoes, taro, bora, bananas, pineapples, chili peppers, sugar cane, watermelons, pumpkin and more.

Due to the importance of cultivation (especially cassava) to the Amerindian diet, the poor soils in the region and the intensive work required to maintain a farm, it is vitally important to maintain the favor of the associated spirits. There are *siwoniton* of wild foods and also of domesticated crops. In the case of garden cultivation, the most important *siwin* is that of Eki No'soto ('Cassava Grandmother' in Akawaio, also known as the Mistress of the Manioc, *Akumawari*; *Akwamari* in Pemon; Cassava Mama or Cassava Mother in Makushi Creole English; see Elias et al. 2000).¹⁰³ Eki No'soto watches after her 'children' (cultivated food, most significantly, cassava) and ensures a bountiful harvest. Wherever there is an abundance of flourishing cassava or other crops it can be assumed that Eki No'soto is present. Conversely, a decline or absence of crops suggests her departure.

growth and habitat that is particularly important for certain animals that only live in low brush, such as birds. Without human intervention, this type of brush does not generally exist in abundance in forested areas where the canopy blocks sunlight from reaching the forest floor and competition crowds out bushes. Therefore traditional Amerindian slash and burn agricultural practices can serve to enhance rather than degrade landscapes.

¹⁰³ *Puleli* (Akawaio) is the lesser-known cassava stick spirit. Cassava grows very well in poor soils and requires very little attention. Amerindians generally plant this essential crop by sticking 2-3-foot-long cassava sticks several inches into the ground, usually in clusters of approximately 5 sticks to ensure that at least one takes root.

Eki No'soto is known to manifest in many different forms. For the Akawaio, she can be a tall reed known as *kumi*.¹⁰⁴ To the Taurepan, she manifests as arrowroot plant (*puwa*), a 'famine food' that 'hunger' is scared of (see Armellada 1964:269-271). She can also manifest as a dove, *eriwo* that frequently cleanses gardens by eating insects, especially ants (Colson and Armellada 1989:17). There is also a specific wild cassava vine known as Eki No'soto *ye'* (*ye'* means 'tree' or 'large bush'); the Makushi call this vine *serayunkun*. According to Jose George, a Wapishana from Yupukari: "It provides fertility by bringing music to the garden." Many informants also refer to certain *tipu* (charm stones) that appear or are placed in gardens as manifestations of Eki No'soto that can help crops grow.

The Akawaio refer to Eki No'soto as the Mother of Food or *patawon*, meaning 'original inhabitant'.¹⁰⁵ In addition to her own children, she also has a husband and a mother. Her husband is *mauraimu* (armadillo in Pemon) who frequently makes its burrows in gardens and, projecting partly out of the ground, looks like a giant manioc root. Its claws, which are large and strong, are also likened to the roots. When burning the new gardens, Taurepan Pemon take one of these claws and make a whistle with it to call to Eki No'soto (Colson and Armellada 1989:17). She also has a grandmother (*koko*) known as *kuaka* (a giant yam-like plant from the genus *Dioscorea*). This plant is also known as *yuan kiari*, 'famine food,' or *yuan esa'*, 'famine owner' because it can be eaten in times of hunger (*yuan peki*: 'I am hungry'). The large root of this plant is rarely eaten but is commonly used to make a drink known as *kwakai ku* (*ku* is pronounced 'goo', meaning 'drink'). *Kuaka* is therefore often planted in the farm/garden as a helpful member of the family.

¹⁰⁴ *Kumi* is also a common *muran* (charm plant) used for hunting. According to informants, the *kumi* reed used for hunting is a smaller version of the one planted in the garden. See Chapter 6 for a complete discussion of *muran*.

¹⁰⁵ Quechua- and Aymara-speaking cultures have a similar spirit force known as Pachamama: "a space/time concept immanent in the earth" (Nash 1979:121-122) or fertility goddess who presides over planting and harvesting (Merlino 1992). Others may refer to this female spirit force as Mother Earth or Mother Nature.

As one of the most important spirit forces in the circum-Roraima landscape, there are many rituals to honor Eki No'soto and ensure a productive and bountiful harvest. According to an Akawaio informant: "When you go to the farm, you talk to her. You also take strong *kasiri* [fermented cassava drink] or [masticated] *kuarotna* [ginger, a *muran*/charm] and *a'pa* [spit] it or pour and rub some onto your *tipu* and ask Eki No'soto to make your cassava grow plenty big." One can and should also *a'pa* when you come home from a trip or if you otherwise want to give an offering or protect yourself from potentially dangerous spirit forces. For example, one informant demonstrated how to *a'pa* by masticating *empukuit*, a particular *kuarotna* (ginger) and spitting it onto the doorframe of her house. She said that this was how she protected her home and family from *kanaimi* attacks.

Due to the importance of cassava and other cultivated foods for Ka'pon and Pemon communities, Eki No'soto is perhaps the most important *siwin* in the circum-Roraima landscape; however, she is by no means the only one. Another important *siwin* for the Akawaio is Arimi (Yarimi in Arekuna), the leader of the *piinki*, the white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu pecari*).¹⁰⁶ According to the Gran Sabana Pemon, there are three separate *siwoniton* for the *piinki*: Pukamai, Akuwaipu and Marakaipu. *Kaikusi tipu* (jaguar stone) is a well-known rock and story in Phillipai that explains how an ocelot (*Felis pardalis*) is the *siwin* of all 'tigers' (jaguars). If you kill an ocelot or 'trouble' the stone, its jaguar constituents will take revenge (see Chapter 6).

The concept of *siwin* also manifests between animals and physical phenomena. For example, a *wopaima* ('whirlpool' in Akawaio shaped like a *wopa*, 'round basket' that swirls in a powerful *ima*, 'vortex') is not only a portal into the Underworld, but it is also a *siwin* of the

¹⁰⁶ *Arimi* is often depicted as a human who carries a *tekesemui* (walking stick) with *kewei* (hog hooves). When a *piyai'san* or other competent, generally elder, man wants to bring out the hogs to be hunted, they will shake their *tekesemui* with *kewei* to call to *Arimi*. Jonathan Chin, an elderly Akawaio informant showed me his *tekesemui* with *kewei* and said that it was customary for old men to hold such a staff when they tell stories.

fish. An Akawaio story explains how the harpy eagle (*mosima* in Akawaio; *kuanu* in Makushi) is the master of blowpipes. In this particular *panton*, the reeds used to make blowpipes grow from fallen feathers of the harpy eagle whose very large quills are similar to the inside casement of the blowpipe. According to Colson and Armellada, these reeds are a major trade item for the Cariban-speaking Ye'kuana in Bolivar and Amazonas States in Venezuela and the northeast of Roraima State, Brazil (1989:25; see also Butt Colson 1973:19-24). Akawaio informants also speak of Masalani, a small bird and *siwin* of pot clay, known as Anakoi' among the Kamarakoto (Armellada & Gutierrez Salazar 1981:11). A popular *panton* explains how a powerful shaman, Chirikavai found life on Earth disagreeable and left it behind to enter the celestial regions as a constellation that corresponds to the Western constellations of Orion and the Pleiades (Armellada 1964:70-81; Colson and Armellada 1989:28-29). The appearance of Chirikavai in the night sky heralds the beginning of *tumin* (Akawaio) in May-June when the rains come, frogs mate, akushi ants take flight and fish swim up the creeks to spawn. This is an optimal time for fish poisoning, as well as frog and akushi ant hunting, making Chirikavai a powerful master of fish and association with abundance. Another *panton* from the Pemon explains how a powerful *piyai*'san turned into Pausuma who became *siwin* of the aimara fish and swam up the Paikupi River to settle into a particular deep pool (Armellada 1973: 213-216).

Every animal has a *panton* that explains its origin, behavior and likeness. The following story comes from Marco William, an Arekuna who explains the origin of the *masa*' (mosquito):

There was a family living in the savannah with several children. The father and mother told the children to stay home while they went to the farm. When the parents were away, a stranger arrived and asked where the parents were. The children responded by saying that they had gone to the farm. The stranger then asked the children to sing songs and dance with him in their home, but warned the children to look out for their parents because they would not like him being there. They danced the whole day until the stranger left before the parents returned home. The next day, the parents went to the farm and the stranger came again and they danced. On the third day, the children told their parents about the stranger so the parents decided to pretend to go to the farm and hide out near their home to catch the stranger. When the stranger arrived, the kids lied and said that their parents went to the farm and they began to dance. The parents suddenly appeared, catching the stranger dancing-up with the kids and causing him to panic and hide in the bushes

near the house. Then the parents decided to burn the grass and bushes around their house and eventually burn the stranger, making all the ashes scatter and fly up into the air. Ever since then, there have been plenty mosquitos because the parents burned the mosquito master.

This fantastic *panton* not only explains the origin of mosquitos and the potential wrath that may follow the killing of a master, but it also holds important knowledge about how to eradicate mosquitos from around the house by burning. The story also serves as a warning for parents not to leave their children alone at home because mosquitoes and/or strangers may come and bother or act inappropriately with them.

The spiritual ecology discussed in this chapter suggests Pemon and Ka'pon sensitivities to complex interdependent relationships and hierarchies that exist within landscapes. A similar awareness has been noted by Marcus Colchester who published information from the Sanema, the Yanomami group nearest to the Pemon, using the concept of *héã* to refer to animals that “are perceived as being in a special relationship to another specific species or aspect of the environment” (1982:157-168). For example, Colchester explains how the Sanema consider the singing of the marbled ground-quail (*Odontophorus guianensis*) as a signal for the presence of peccary (1982:158). The exact nature of these relationships has yet to be investigated in detail; nonetheless, these examples suggest yet another articulation of the highly sophisticated and ‘scientific’ awareness and respect that Amerindians have for the wider community of life.

As explained in various creation myths, during *pia'atai* (ancestral time), everything was people and all spoke the same language and understood each other. Through a series of events explained in *panton* (creation myths), certain beings converted into the masters of various species, resources and phenomena. Many of the creation *panton* explain this metamorphosis and depict a specific human, usually an exceptionally powerful shaman, who transforms into another species or entity which oversees a certain species or resource (Colson and Armellada 1989:31). These transformations also support the idea that *akwa* (the light energy or universal vital force) is capable of transmigration from different *esa'* (material bodies) of the universe

with their stable and continuous character, *pia*. Therefore an individual being has spirit vitality within itself and its various *ewan*, but similarly a specific group of animals or resources also has a specific ‘heart spirit’ manifested in the *siwin*, *i’terpotiri* or leader, linked spiritually and symbolically to the collective body.

Chapter 6: Medicine, magic and charms of the *piyai'san*

A 10-year-old boy was at the farm with his family when he mysteriously disappeared. Years passed and the boy's brothers grew up and became good hunters. One day, one of the brothers was out hunting near a mountain where he saw a large bush-cow [tapir] and shot it with an arrow. The bush cow was unharmed by the arrow so it ran away into the bushes. The young man returned to the village and told his brothers what had happened, but they didn't believe him.

Early the next morning, they all went out looking for the bush cow but couldn't find any footprints. They returned home disappointed but decided to go out again the following day. This time they saw the cow and shot it with arrows dipped in urari [poison], but it disappeared into the bush again without leaving any footprints.

While camping in the bush that night, the wind began to blow hard, suggesting that the spirits were angry. Suddenly there was a strange sound in the bushes and a half-human, half-dragon came out and said: "Don't be afraid, I am your brother who was lost years ago." He explained how Urupere, a huge dragon that has a hollowed-out back where it carries its meat, took him from the farm.

The boy explained how he had grown-up with the big dragon and his daughter. He wanted to marry her, but first he had to prove that he could hunt. The dragon instructed the boy and told him to go down a certain path and turn left when it forks. The boy followed the instructions but when he came to the fork in the path, he turned right and shot a deer. He brought the meat back to the cave to show Urupere. However, the big dragon said it was not enough meat and ordered the boy to eat it all. "Look at me, see how much I can kill and eat. You are useless as a son-in-law."

The dragon was so angry that he chopped-up the boy into pieces. Then he took parts of his own flesh and mixed it with the boy's so that the boy was part dragon. Then Urupere sent the boy out hunting again. This time, the boy-dragon turned left at the fork in the path, killed a lot of animals and brought them back to the cave. Urupere was finally pleased with the boy. They both got to eat plenty of meat and the dragon let the boy marry his daughter.

Some years later, many people were missing from the village and everyone knew that Urupere had been taking them. The brothers gathered together 50 strong hunters to go to the mountain to kill the dragon. After hiking for several days into the bush, they finally found him. One man went ahead to attract the dragon as a decoy. The dragon smelled the brave hunter and angrily started to shoot fire and lightning. The hunters responded by shooting their arrows tipped with urari, bombarding the dragon until he finally became weak and died. Fearing his own death, the young boy-dragon ran away with his wife to the mountains.

Several months later, the hunters returned to the spot where they had killed Urupere and found many bina [charm] plants in the area, especially ginger. These were the first bina plants. Their leaves looked like specific animals, including various species of deer, fish, birds, etc. There was even one bina that had a lightning bolt on it that makes you very fierce so you can kill a person. Bina comes from the dragon. Men use it so they can hunt like the dragon, but if you don't use them in the right way, you may become a kanaimi and kill people.

- Marco William, Arekuna, Paruima Village

This story expresses a wealth of traditional knowledge, especially within the context of hunting. The story also shares much in common with other creation narratives. Several stories collected during fieldwork begin with a visit to the farm and the abduction and adoption of a child by animals or spirit forces. Many stories also contain marriage and sexual encounters between humans and animals that have part human/part animal offspring. Dismemberment and reconstruction into a different form is another common theme (see the Gold Fish story below). Dragons, giant serpents and winged beasts are also often counterpoised by brave, hunter/warrior-like Amerindians who ultimately slay or become devoured by the monsters. The story above also illustrates the association between heavy winds and vengeful spirit forces (*imawariton*) that enforce a certain socio-ecological ethic of reciprocity. Another norm expressed in the story is related to the uxorilocal marriage system practiced in the region and the relationship between the father and son-in-law. Most significant to this chapter, the narrative explains the origin of charm plants, widely known as *muran* or *bina*.¹⁰⁷

Hunting, warfare and courtship are all closely linked in Amerindian traditions. Each of these practices involves the use of specific plant and animal charms that function to attract prey and repel/guard against threats. They are often used in connection with *taren* (invocations). There many different rituals and taboos associated with the application of *muran* and *taren* combining to produce highly sophisticated psycho-physiological, material and spiritual ends. Traditionally, these magical tools and practices were used by both genders in just about every aspect of life, especially within the context of hunting and cultivation—modes of production mediated by diverse networks of masters and mistresses. Knowledge of these tools and practices can be held or ‘owned’ by anyone; however, the *piyai ’san*, a spiritual warrior, is the primary expert in this domain.

¹⁰⁷ The word *bina* is derived form the Arawak phrase *bia-bina*, meaning ‘to entice or attract.’

Preparing for a hunt, warfare, courtship or a long journey includes complex ritual exchanges and strict social and dietary taboos. In order to control the forces and risks associated with the seen and unseen requires the use of *muran*, *taren* and complex ceremonial events and dances often accompanied by singing and/or music in order to honor, empower and celebrate. The *piyai 'san* is responsible for managing a finite amount of energy dispersed among plant, animal, stone and other forms. With a wealth of knowledge, he/she uses each of these elemental forms of energy in combination with complex rituals to maintain individual, communal and environmental health within a gendered, interconnected and carefully managed cosmic cycle of fertility.

There are six primary ways that the Ka'pon and Pemon ritually attract, repel and otherwise engage with unseen spirit forces within an animated cosmos:

1. Plant and animal charms (*muran*)
2. Resource stones (*tipu*)
3. Invocations (*taren*)
4. Smudging
5. Séances ('beating leaf')
6. The ceremonial performance of song and dance

This chapter discusses each of these shamanic tools, their origins and ritual applications. Others have documented the use of charms (Roth 1915:221-246; Butt 1961:152-154; Colson 2009:291), invocations (Butt 1956; Armellada 1972) and ritual performance (Colson and Armellada 1989), but never within a consolidated cosmology of the circum-Roraima landscape.

***Muran*: charms**

Muran are charms that are most commonly plants, but can also be animals or certain parts of animals that attract or repel particular objects or entities, including animals, mates, victims, or other resources and threats. As explained by Joel Samuel, a Makushi from Yupukari: "All

animals have masters. In some ways, you can think of the plants as their masters. Certain plants have powers over certain animals.” In other words, every animal has a corresponding plant that it likes or can be used to attract it.¹⁰⁸ According to an Akawaio informant, “If you want to kill a deer, take a leaf of its plant, boil it, drink it and then vomit so the deer can’t smell you.”

Charm plants can be found in nearly every Amerindian village. As explained by Joel: “Plants are like people; some of them can help while others will harm you; they all need to be respected; you should never trouble a plant unless you have a specific reason because you never know what they are used for.” He went on to explain how plants could take revenge on you. Since plants are like people, they must also be fed and taken care of: “Some plants need lots of tobacco to fertilize them like food. They ask for tobacco. Some don’t need anything—you just water them. Other binas may have been blessed-up years ago and don’t need much attention.” If the owner of any given charm plant believes in their powers and uses them regularly, they will also likely take good care of them by feeding them tobacco, banana, alcohol, fish, etc. However, as noted by the informant: “You don’t want to give them too much tobacco otherwise they will get too strong and want to kill, or they will turn on you. If you want to use a bina, you are supposed to talk to it when you pick it.”

Certain charm plants can be used as guards that are commonly planted near the home or in the garden or farm. Informants said that these particular plants would whistle if a stranger came near. Similarly, an individual traveling on a long and potentially dangerous journey may decide to take a piece of a *muran* to protect from harm. Other plants can be used as helpers that are sent out like sentries to do your work. These particular plants are especially important for hunter-warriors like the *piyai’san* and *kanaimi/e’toto*.

¹⁰⁸ Another way to attract animals is by carrying a bone from the particular animal you’re looking for.

Despite the presence of charm plants in most Amerindian villages, some individuals abstain from using, cultivating or associating with *muran* because they are ‘evil’. As suggested at the end of the story above, if you use bina in the wrong way or you use them to harm people, then you will turn into a *kanaimi*. According to most church leaders, the use of such charms (as well as invocations and other shamanic rituals) is a sin that will lead you to Hell after Judgment Day. A clear indication of this connection manifests itself in Paruima Village/Mission where few charm plants are seen and used and the wildness of nature is controlled and literally weed-whacked regularly. In more-traditional villages, plants are left to grow so that communal and transitory spaces are left ‘wild’, harboring small galleries of charm plants that persist for generations even if many of these plants are no longer used and their specific powers are unknown.

Informants who had or were known to use such plants were initially reluctant to admit or reveal any connection with such practices. In general, bina plants are not generally applied or revealed in public because they are potentially dangerous, valuable assets whose use needs to accompany other rituals and strict dietary and social taboos. As traditional culture and practices erode and new technologies such as guns and large fishing nets are introduced, the use and presence of charm plants has gradually declined. However, despite these new technologies, as explained by Geronimo Thompson of Paruima: “People don’t get as much meat these days because they don’t use the *muran* properly, or at all.”

While it is not uncommon to find charm plants in the more-traditional/less-Christianized villages, the knowledge and use of these *muran* is deteriorating. Their value becomes clear in the following statement by Joel Samuel: “Just like people and animals, every plant is a medicine that can either help or harm you.” When addressing the ethno-botanical significance of these particular plants, it’s important to remember that there is often a fine line (or none at all) between what is a medicine, a charm or a poison. The differentiation is primarily determined by the

quantity, the intention/faith/belief/context of the recipient/donor and the ritual application techniques. In Akawaio, the word *ipi* 'roughly translates as 'remedy', which is used both within the context of *muran* (charms) and medicine.

The creation myth at the beginning of this section took place during *pia'atai* (a 'time of origin' in Taurepan), when bina plants grew from the earth, below Urubere, the great dragon and master hunter killed by brave Amerindians. While most charm plants are inherited, bought, traded, forgotten or left to propagate themselves, there are also sacred ways an individual can awaken the spirit of Urubere *sereware* ('now' in Taurepan) by cultivating and discovering new *muran*. If a hunter wants to cultivate new charm plants, there are two ways to achieve this end. The crucial ingredient in both approaches is a dangerous animal of prey: one is the boa constrictor and the other is the *tanuaka* bird, also known as the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) or 'fish-hawk'.¹⁰⁹ Both of these expert hunters are admired for their prowess. Here are two descriptions from two different anonymous informants in Yupukari that explain how to cultivate *muran*:

- 1) Find a *tanuaka* bird, shoot it and watch it fall to the ground. Go to the spot where it fell and do not move it from the exact spot that it landed. Talk to it and tell it what kind of bina you want. This bird has every kind of bina: deer, caiman, fish, waterdog, etc. When the bird dies, its 'basket' of hunting charms falls to the side so you can take whatever you want. Burn the bird exactly where it lays then leave it for 1-2 months. When you return, you will see many different kinds of plants growing in that same spot. Pick each plant one by one and sleep with each under your pillow. In your dreams it will tell you what it's for. You should also carry each plant in your pocket, one at a time, and see what comes to you when you walk through the forest. If you see a powis, then that plant is for powis; if you see a jaguar, then it is a jaguar bina.
- 2) You can also grow new binas by finding and killing a boa constrictor. Once you have killed it, you must take it to a safe place that is far away from the village where nobody

¹⁰⁹ There is also a specific *tanuaka* bina plant (unidentified, with an orange flower). According to a Makushi informant: "This bina is used to make you shoot accurately. You rub this plant on your hands in the morning before you go hunting or fishing, then you crack your fingers with it and talk to it. You can also put it in the back of your arrow to make it go straight and kill your prey. Nobody else can hold your bow and arrow, only you. You shouldn't use it for fighting other people otherwise it will make you a bad man."

will find it. When you find a good place, stretch it out from east to west, talk to it and tell it what you want. You should do this on a special day like Good Friday at midnight and ask the snake for what you want.¹¹⁰ Then you chop off its head,¹¹¹ burn its body and leave it there to see what plants grow. After a couple months, pick the plants and sleep with each one in your pocket, under your pillow or somewhere close to you. You could also take it to a *piyai*-man to ask what the bina is good for. In your dreams, the plant will talk to you and tell you what it is for. It could be for hunting, running or to become a *kanaimi*. If you want to keep a specific plant, take it to your home and transplant it in your garden so that you can take care of it and use it.

Some of the most easily identified charm plants in the circum-Roraima landscape are caladiums, also known as ‘elephant ear,’ ‘heart of Jesus’ or ‘angel wings.’ To the Akawaio, these colorful plants are known as *kupita*.



Figure 7: A caladium charm plant/*muran*

Galleries of *muran* can be seen in most Amerindian villages; they can also be found in the forest and along riverbanks. The most common binas are used for hunting tapir, wild hogs, deer, laba, turtle, and various kinds of fish. The leaves of these plants generally bear a

¹¹⁰ Here is yet another example of the tendency of Amerindians to syncretize Christian ideas and holidays into their existing Amerindian beliefs and practices.

¹¹¹ The head of a boa constrictor is a powerful charm that can protect your home and/or bring you riches if you carry it in your pocket without letting anyone know.

resemblance to the animal that they are reputed to attract: the bush-hog bina has a leaf easily recognizable by the small secondary leaf on its under surface, representing the animal's scent gland or the tip of its nostril; the leaf of the deer bina looks like the head of a deer with horns sticking up; the armadillo bina typifies the shape of this animal's small projecting ear; the lukanani bina bears a variety of colors resembling those around the fish's gills; the laba (*Cuniculus paca*) bina has the typical white markings; the powis bina bears the identical shape of that bird's wing feather – and so on. As explained by an Akawaio hunter: “If you want something, you find the plant or animal that has that quality and use it as a bina. There is a fruit called a *parupa* that has plenty oil in it. If you eat this or rub it on your skin or arrows, it will enable you to kill an oily animal, such as a tapir or peccary.”¹¹² Another less-common bina plant is known as *aware* (opossum or *yawari* in Makushi). According to an Akawaio informant, when you use this plant you will find any kind of meat.

Among the Akawaio, the main types of hunting muran include *kumi* (unidentified reed/tall grass), *kuarotna* (ginger; *kuaronai* in Makushi), *kupita* (caladium), *aso'* (unidentified) and *kui'* (unidentified). According to an Akawaio informant, *kui'*, *kupita*, *kuarotna* and *aso'* can also be used on dogs but not *kumi* or *karuwara*. Among those mentioned above, the most common bina plants are diverse kinds of *kuarotna*, ginger. Ginger is good for almost everything, including hunting, bearing large loads, walking long distances, running fast, as well as curing headaches and colds. The diversity of uses suggests a fine line between the medicinal and magical powers of this plant. According to an Akawaio informant: “In order to cure a headache, grate *kuarotna*, boil it and put it through the nose and your headache will be gone. You can also use it to cure ‘bad blood’ by chewing it or drinking its juice.”

¹¹² In *The Golden Bough*, Sir James George Frazer refers to this as ‘sympathetic magic’ based on imitation and correspondence (1890).

Ginger and other binas can also be used as guards. An Akawaio woman demonstrated how she protected her home from *kanaimis* by masticating and *a'pa*-ing (spitting) *empukuit*, a particular kind of ginger, onto the doorframe of her house.¹¹³ Among the Makushi, one of the most powerful guards is known as *emkusma*, an unidentified plant that has long narrow leaves like the leaves of a lily plant.¹¹⁴ According to informants, *emkusma* is helpful because it keeps *kanaimis* and other potentially dangerous forces away from your house. If planted near your home, it will act as a guard and whistle, knock on your window, hammock or bed frame, or warn you in your dream when a malicious force comes near. You can also carry it or rub it on your arms/hands before going in the forest for a journey. Pregnant or menstruating women, individuals who are traveling alone, or others who are especially vulnerable to attack commonly use *emkusma*. If cared for properly, *emkusma* will take good care of you and clear away any harmful threats. If not taken care of or used, *emkusma* will get angry and may take revenge on its owner. *Emkusma* is commonly known and is considered a very serious bina plant that can potentially harm people.

In addition to ginger, hot peppers are also commonly used as charms, as well as in cooking. Amerindians love hot peppers and cultivate a wide variety that they put in almost everything they cook, especially the Guyanese national dish: pepperpot, also known as *tuma* pot, composed of stewed meat or fish with cassareep (a cassava syrup) and other basic ingredients.

¹¹³ It would also be helpful to apply a *taren* (invocation) to the *empukuit* before its application. According to an Akawaio informant, there is a particular *taren* associated with *empukuit* that invokes the power of the sun and makes you invisible to a *kanaimi*, as if he is looking into the sun. Another *taren* that could be applied is known as *wakaneku* (a small unidentified bird that makes the sound 'wa-ka-ne-ku') that you often hear but can never see. According to a *panton* (story), a man went to the farm and saw an agouti run into a log. He wanted to kill and eat the agouti so he called to his wife: *waka* (axe) *neku* (bring) because he wanted to cut into the log and get the agouti. He kept calling to his wife, "*waka neku, waka neku*," but she didn't hear him and never came. The man was calling so much that he finally turned into the *wakaneku* bird.

¹¹⁴ In addition to caladiums and various kinds of ginger, a wide variety of other bina plants have long narrow leaves. Superficially, all of these plants look the same; however, informants are capable of differentiating them, either because they have used them and know their capacities, or because they were inherited, bought or gifted from someone else who was knowledgeable of their properties.

Before going on a journey or a hunt, Amerindians are known to put ginger or pepper in their eyes in order to enter and look at new areas—especially rocky hillsides or mountaintops—where evil spirits (and rival Amerindians) are known to live and hide. As mentioned in the previous chapter, pepper can also anger the spirits, especially if it gets into the water. According to English anthropologist and physician, Walter Roth, Amerindians used to use pepper in warfare to stifle enemies (1924:586). They would make a circle of fire around the village and put peppers into the fire making it impossible for the enemy to fight since they would be overcome with sneezing and burning eyes.

There are many plant guards including *kaksi muran* (jaguar bina; unidentified) that you can carry in your pocket when you are out in the bush and it will protect you from jaguars. According to Jean Allicock, a Makushi from Surama: “*pnapna* [a cactus] fights the evil spirits that are in the sick person.” *Pnapna* is commonly seen around Amerindian homes as a guard and is especially known for its ability to whistle when danger approaches. Jean also mentioned that: “*pnapna* is a serious bina that the *piyai*-man talks to and uses. Sometimes he will mix it with tobacco, smoke it and ask it to go and harm someone.” Another common guard is known as *trara* (waterdog, a.k.a. giant river otter). River otters are expert swimmers that skillfully escape predators and navigate dangerous parts of a river with ease; therefore their capacities are invoked in this bina. Women commonly use *trara*, especially when they are menstruating and want to go near the water or embark on a long and potentially dangerous journey on the river. Amerindians also commonly use garlic to ward off evil spirits. It can be carried in the pocket, rubbed on the skin or burned in the home and rubbed around the doors or posts of a bed. According to a Makushi informant, if you carry garlic in your pocket when you are walking in the bush and an evil spirit tries to attack you, then the garlic will protect you and turn black. Another way to protect from predators is by carrying a capybara bone (especially the leg). According to a Makushi informant, “This is especially helpful when you go to meet a blow-man [*piyai’san*]. The

capibara is a very dangerous animal often found in ponds and watery areas. It has a powerful spirit that can protect you.”

Another category of *muran* is used for strength, stamina and speed. *Praoyan* (an unidentified thin grass) is one of the most common binas in this category used by the Makushi. Individuals who want to run far and fast without getting tired use this bina. According to one informant, “There are two types of *praoyan*: a long one and a short one. The short one is for short distances and the long one is for long distances. You can’t eat *pirai* [piranha] when you use it.” According to legend, the *Praoyan* were Amerindians that lived near Bina Hill (a small community in the North Rupununi near Annai) that could run really fast. This bina comes from this area and the *Praoyan* men who used it could allegedly run so fast that they could catch a deer.

Sometimes a bina is made up of a combination of things. A Makushi informant explained how he wanted to run faster so he mixed together a deer hoof, wind grass and a parakeet feather. He ground them up, burnt the resulting mixture, made cuts in his legs and rubbed the bina in, causing him to run fast. He said that before using the bina he was in a race and finished 15th; after using it, he raced again and finished 2nd. He also noted that when you use this particular bina, you can’t eat *pirai* or *mangi* (two kinds of fish) or the bina would stop working.

Other binas that make you ‘more willing’ and energetic includes *rikue*, an unidentified plant that you have to bathe with or rub into your legs. Another bina in this category is known as *hopia*. According to a Makushi informant: “This bina will help you do hard work like cutting the farm; if you use it, you will never get tired. However, if you use these binas that make you more energetic to fight others, then you will just want to fight.” Another Makushi bina that will give you strength and energy is known as *wrara* (an unidentified plant whose name is shared by a particular species of giant river turtle). According to an informant, “If you are paralyzed, this will

help you get up. You have to burn it, cut your legs and rub it in. Then it will take 3 weeks to work.”

As expressed by Joel: “Every plant is a medicine and a poison. They can all be used for good, bad or both.” Bina plants are often depicted as ‘people’ that can help you, which may mean harming your enemy. These plants are said to ‘travel off’ in spirit form and do your work for you. These particular plants are especially helpful for the *piyai*’san and the *kanaimi* who are known to regularly harm others. Due to the sensitive nature of this particular topic, informants were hesitant to divulge detailed information regarding the use of *muran* and *taren* to harm others. This is also not a primary concern for this project, so this information is not included.

Another category of *muran* is used for learning. In a region where people commonly speak many different languages and dialects, these charms tend to be very popular and useful. According to a Makushi *piyai*’san, there is a plant called *saupipu*, an unidentified plant and “small yellow bird that makes nests near the river” that is especially helpful for learning new languages. In order to apply this specific bina, you must touch it to your tongue and ears or squeeze a bit of its juice into your eyes each day if you want to read fast.

How to harvest and apply *muran*

When harvesting a portion of a plant or tree bark for use as a *muran* or medicine, it should be removed from the eastern side, in the morning, because this side of the plant/tree that faces the rising sun is the most potent, and the early morning is the most important time of day when the world becomes enlightened. When harvesting, you should recite a phrase/say a prayer that activates the plant for a certain purpose. Another way to optimize the effectiveness of a *muran* (especially if it is a plant) is to use the root/bulb/ginger of the plant—widely considered the most potent part—instead of just a leaf.

There are a number of ways to apply plant charms: 1) Bina can be carried in the pocket while the hunter is out in the bush in search of prey. 2) They can be applied topically by rubbing them onto the skin, particularly the arms, hands and joints. In some cases, the plant will be burned and its ashes applied to the body or pigments of paint, such as annatto, that is then applied to the body. The hunter may also cut himself with a razor or sharp implement before rubbing the plant onto the disturbed area of skin, thereby getting the plant into the bloodstream. If the plant were burned and rubbed into cuts, this would leave a tattoo. The cuts could be simple lines on the hands, arms or chest, or perhaps a more elaborate design of a scorpion or other empowering symbol. 3) *Muran* can also be applied by soaking them in water and bathing with the solution. 4) Another way of applying a bina is by grating it up, mixing it with a bit of water and ingesting it through the nose. 5) Certain *muran* can also be ingested by being eaten or mixed with water and drunk. In some cases (such as with *kumi*) ingesting bina would cause the hunter to vomit. 6) The last way of incorporating a charm into the body is by grating it up and putting it in the anus for an extended period of time.

Each of the application procedures would generally cause moderate to severe pain for the hunter; the more pain and suffering endured—the more effective the charm. *Muran* can be applied individually or mixed together with others. After all, a hunter would be pleased to attract and kill a variety of animals on a given expedition. The bina will last for a few months or even years, particularly if it was tattooed into the flesh. If you stop getting meat, then this means that the bina is spoiled and done. In Akawaio, someone applying a *muran* on his or her body would say *enmuran pa* (I'm applying a muran upon myself) or *enmuran pasa'* (I put a muran upon myself).

The application of a hunting bina must be done away from others, especially women. According to Geronimo Thompson, an Arekuna from Paruima:

In order to be a good hunter, you must drink bina through the nose early in the morning, then vomit – this makes the animals freeze in their tracks when you see them. You must also get up at 4:30am to bathe before the women then sit by the fire and rub bina plants on your hands and bow and arrow and talk to them. This will make you a good hunter.

Once the bina is applied, the hunter should rest for a few days in isolation (*seruma*) and avoid fighting with other men or any sort of interaction with women. If you don't use bina to hunt animals, it will start to work by attracting women. Bina are also known to get jealous and exact revenge if they are not respected or used properly. As explained by a female Akawaio informant: "If my husband applies a bina and I give him a lot of attention, then the bina will get jealous and make me sick." It is also important that the hunter follows strict dietary taboos and avoids eating meat. It's important that the hunter is hungry while hunting or fishing so that the game is also hungry.

After the hunter applies his *muran* and ventures off to find meat, there are certain taboos that must be followed. For example, it is important that the hunter avoid eating the first, second and sometimes even the third kill.¹¹⁵ These first few kills are for the bina. Sometimes the meat will be left in the forest or brought back to the village, but only given to elderly people. Sometimes the hunters will only try to kill small birds/animals the first few times for the bina, then focus their attention on larger animals that can be brought home. It is especially important that these first few kills are not given to menstruating or pregnant women, young children, people who are sick or anyone related to someone who has recently died because each of these categories of individuals are vulnerable to attack from the spirits of dead animals. As a general rule, nobody in the family can eat meat for three months after a death in the family or a baby is born. If these rules are disobeyed, the family will be vulnerable to attack, the bina will be spoiled and/or closely related women will bleed a lot during menstruation.

¹¹⁵ When fishing, if you use a new *saura* (fish trap), the first batch of fish that are caught must be returned to the river since these belong to the trap, which is similarly perceived as a charm.

In addition to the taboos mentioned above, Geronimo said that there are several animals that you are not supposed to kill when hunting with *muran*. As he explained, you are not supposed to kill a specific kind of (unidentified) deer, a *maam* (aka *maru* ' in Akawaio, the great tinamou [*Tinamus major*]), or a grey-winged trumpeter (*Psophia crepitans*). If you kill these animals, they will do harm to your *muran*. According to an Akawaio informant, if you are hunting with *muran*, you must avoid shooting animals with white meat first (such as *maru* ' or *kariaku*, a small grey bush deer) and try to shoot animals with brown meat first (*waiken*, a large grey savannah deer; *suari*, a large brown bush deer; aguti; marudi; and powis), otherwise your bina will spoil.

It is also important that if you kill something and bring it back to the village, you don't show it off to people. If you expose it, brag and humiliate the animal, then the *muran* will go away. You are supposed to bring any meat back humbly and leave it for the women to prepare. Once it has entered the home/kitchen, it no longer belongs to the man who killed it—it belongs to the women of the house who will prepare it to be eaten.

Another way that Amerindian men would prepare for a hunt is by using *eunakoit* (Arekuna), commonly known as 'nose bina' (Roth 1915). According to Geronimo, men would mix different *muran*, then take a soft reed and dip it into the mixture before pushing it in the nose and out through the mouth. As explained by Geronimo: "*Kumere* is the drink that the *piyai*-man would drink out of a curial, then vomit it out and push the reeds through the nose." The informant also noted that this procedure is very painful and would often make you sneeze. Once this reed has passed through the nose, the hunter would tie it up and display it in the house so that visitors can see the used reeds and know that the owner of the house is a serious hunt-man.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ The same informant said that brave hunters would pass ants through the nasal passage in a similar manner to clear out 'bad blood' before each expedition. See section on ant charms below.

Wilikawa and *ayu*’ are different kinds of (unidentified) tree barks that are important for Arekuna hunters. According to Geronimo, *wilikawa* was the most powerful and commonly used by hunters. It could either be mixed in with other binas and rubbed into the skin, or, even better, burnt underneath a hunter so that he would be bathed in its smoke. Ideally, the hunter would smoke himself over *wilikawa* for three days, while resting, fasting and avoiding women. By doing this, the hunter would guard himself from harmful spirit forces such as *imawari* and *amaiko*’ because they dislike the smell of *wilikawa*. As explained by Geronimo: “When mixed together, *ayu*’ would calm down the *wilikawa*. These binas will be like a small child that accompanies the hunter in the bush.” The informant emphasized the fact that you are not supposed to cut the skin/bark of these trees unless you intend to use them; otherwise they will harm you.

As mentioned above, one of the most important taboos associated with the use of hunting *muran* is to avoid women after application because the bina will work on them instead of the game you hope to kill. However, if a woman is your intended target, then bina can be useful in this regard. According to the Arekuna, when you use a *muran* to attract a woman it’s called a *posanka*. Among the Makushi, the most common plant used to attract mates is *sepanu*, an unidentified plant with a thin leaf like that of an onion. This particular bina can be used to attract the opposite sex by putting it under your tongue before you touch or shake the hand of the intended target. This particular plant can also be used to tame animals. If this is the objective, then you merely pass the leaf of the plant through the nose of a ‘wild’ animal—such as a horse or cow—to make them tame. However, the plant can only be used for an animal or a partner, but not both. Whichever is the target, you must only concentrate your thoughts on that goal in order for the charm to work.

Among the Makushi, one of the most well known binas for attracting a mate is *kinuya*, commonly known as the ‘sweetheart plant’ that leaves its heart-shaped seeds on your legs when

you walk through the bush. These seeds can be ground up and mixed with hair gel or crab oil and rubbed onto the hair or skin. As a general rule, if you want to attract someone/thing, you rub the charm up on the arms towards the body; likewise, if you want to repel someone/thing, you apply the appropriate charm by rubbing it on in a downward motion, away from the body.

Ants

All birds have a particular season when they crow and mate. March and April are the mating months for the powis. A man heard a powis crowing early in the morning near a small creek. He went up the creek looking for the bird and when he found it, he saw that it was the biggest powis he had ever seen. He shot it with his blowpipe, but it wouldn't die. Then some other hunters came and shot it, but it still wouldn't die. The hunters didn't know what to do so they decided to ask for help from the best hunters in the forest: the ants.

The hunters talked to the ants and told them all about the powis and how they wanted to kill it. The ants were friends with the hunters and said they would try to help. First ira' climbed up the tree onto the feet of the powis but as soon as the powis felt it on his feet he shook it off. Then mapa tried but was also shaken off. Finally, kurakai, a very small red ant attempted to attack the powis. It climbed up the tree and onto the feet of the powis but the giant bird couldn't feel it because it was so small. The ant continued to climb all the way up until it entered the nose of the powis and began to bite, making him sneeze and giving him a great deal of pain and suffering. The powis couldn't bare the pain anymore so he fell to the ground and died. This is how the powis got such big nostrils and how this particular creek was named Powis Keunasi Lapu, 'powis sneezes creek.'

- Geronimo Thompson, Arekuna, Paruima Village

This *panton* discusses the intimate relationship between Amerindian hunters and ants, the most efficient hunters in the forest. Much like bina plants, ants also function as effective charms and in some cases medicine. The story also suggests how ants can be used to sting inside the nose—a painful and effective way to prepare for a hunt. The Amerindian use of ants has been mentioned in the literature on the region (Roth 1915:232; Schomburgk 1922:362-3) but has not been discussed in great detail.

The most powerful ant used for hunting in the circum-Roraima landscape is the bullet ant (*Paraponera clavata*) known as the *monori* (Makushi), *ira'* (Akawaio) or 24-hour-ant

because its sting can last for up to 24 hours. If stung by multiple bullet ants, they can give you a fever, make you vomit and even lose consciousness. These black ants vary in size but can be as large as 1.2 inches long. According to an Akawaio informant, the bullet ant is known to carry water in its mouth; therefore this species of ant brings more luck to the hunter. The venom from these ants is a neurotoxin that can cause paralysis in its victims; therefore the Amerindians believe that by stinging yourself with ants (only certain kinds of ants are used), this will somehow make their prey become paralyzed when seen in the forest.¹¹⁷ Informants also noted that the fiercest ants make you a fierce hunter and also prevent fierce predators such as jaguars from following you.

Other ants commonly used by Akawaio hunters whose stings are a bit less severe include *uyu'*, *kuru'*, *opara* (a grey ant), *mapa* (a large brown ant also known as *ikan* or marabunta), *kurakai* (a small red ant), *kankapan*, *aruka* and others. Each of these ants can be used to help you become a good 'shoot-man' and 'hunt-man.' These ants will also make you 'more willing' and energetic. Most ants become more active when the weather is cool, such as early in the morning; therefore if you sting yourself with them, you will also become more active in the early morning when game is about.

In order to apply the ant charms, they must be captured and pressed against the skin, ideally between the fingers to make you shoot your arrows accurately, or on the joints, knees, chest and shoulders to make you strong like an ant that can carry heavy loads. You can also use stinging ants to make someone 'more willing.' Women are known to sting their hands and palms (and those of their daughters and granddaughters) to 'make them more busy,' especially if they are going to weave cotton or grate cassava. Mothers would also commonly sting the buttocks of their children to make them get off it and do work.

¹¹⁷ In addition to ants, other stinging and poisonous creatures such as certain caterpillars, wasps, scorpions and frogs can also be used to make you stronger and a better hunter.

According to an Akawaio informant, another way to make yourself a good ‘hunt-man’ is by detaching the stinging part of several ants and putting them on your tongue. He explained: “You should sting the tongue before you go hunting so that you can make a deer call. When you make that call, the deer will come. But if a jaguar is around, it will come and attack you so you have to be very careful. Tapir will also come and can harm you.” Informants also noted that some people put ants in their armpits, nose and even the anus. Another way to use ants (particularly bullet ants) is by catching them and burning them into a black powder and rubbing the ashes into small cuts on the hands and arms making a *kansu*’ (tattoo) that would empower the hunter to kill animals effectively.

A common way of applying stinging ants to the body is by using a *saura*, an ant-stinging shield made from strips of *mocro* into a 5-8 inch square or rectangular mat of parallel strips that look like miniature venetian blinds. After capturing the ants, they are inserted between the strips so they cannot escape.¹¹⁸ Once the *saura* has been loaded with ants, a *taren* (invocation) may be recited and blown upon the ants to reinforce their power before being applied to the body. This technique was commonly used at important rites of passage such as when a boy becomes a man or before getting married.¹¹⁹ Traditionally, when a boy becomes a man, he is expected to go into the forest for an extended period of time where he is taught the secrets of the hunters and is expected to endure stinging ants and other forms of body mutilation and pain. Additionally, before a young man would get married, he would be expected to spend time with his father-in-law-to-be at the farm to demonstrate his strength. In addition to doing manual labor, the young man would be subjected to extensive and painful ant stinging that would likely include the use of

¹¹⁸ Sometimes the ants are submerged in water infused with an unidentified plant that stuns the ants and makes them easier to insert into the *saura*.

¹¹⁹ The Sateré-Mawé in the northern portion of Amazonas, Brazil, are known to conduct similar initiation rites using large gloves filled with bullet ants that brave young men would have to wear for up to 10 minutes, as many as 20 times, before being deemed a man (Bosmia et al. 2015).

a *saura*. If the young man was strong enough and could demonstrate his courage, he would be deemed worthy to marry the young woman.

Much like when a hunter applies a bina plant to his body, if a man stings himself with ants, he must avoid women, taking special care not to make them smile or laugh, otherwise the charm would be lost. Additionally, according to an Arekuna informant, it's important to avoid eating anything sweet if you use ant charms. Another similarity to bina plants is that if you use ants, but you don't go out hunting for animals, you might get mad easily and want to start fights. This can be very dangerous because you might want to hurt and kill people instead of animals. According to a Makushi informant, "If you use ants then hit someone, it will knock them out quickly." For this reason, young people are advised not to use ants because it may cause them to hurt others.

Ants are also commonly used for medicinal purposes. If you have a fever, a headache or aches and pains, ants can be applied to the temples or the crown of the head or any other part of the body that may hurt. In order to get the ant to bite a certain spot, it would be held in a slit at the end of a short stick and pressed against a particular spot on the skin to make it sting several times. Another way to sting yourself is by lying down and rolling on an ant nest or standing over it and letting the ants climb up your body. Some Amerindians would do this even if they were healthy because they believed that ant toxins cleansed the blood and fought off infection and disease. Several informants also mentioned that ants could also be used to combat sexually transmitted infections.

According to Jean Allicock of Surama, the Makushi would traditionally use ants to stunt the growth of a young woman's breasts. As explained by Jean, mothers and grandmothers would do this because "the first growth was not good and the second one was more desirable." She went on to speculate that using ants in this manner may have had medicinal purposes that prevented women from developing breast cancer later in life.

The most notorious ants for Amerindians are leaf-cutters, locally known as akushi ants. These ants devour cassava and other crops but in an interesting cycle of retribution, Amerindians also enjoy eating akushi ants, particularly when they take flight in *tumun* (an Akawaio word for April-May, just before rainy season). In addition to directly consuming these ants, Amerindians also welcome assistance from giant anteaters that eat nothing but ants. If akushi ants are threatening your farm, a Makushi informant said that you could kill an anteater and put his bones by the akushi ant nest to function as a charm against these pests. He said that you could also combat akushi ants by eating anteaters so that when you plant something, it will grow very large and no ants will come. Another Makushi informant said that you could kill a tortoise and put its meat in the akushi ant nest. This would cause the ants to fall off the cassava plant when they try to climb it, much like a tortoise that tries to climb a tree. Another Makushi informant mentioned an innovative way to protect fruit trees from akushi ants by putting *huku* ant (unidentified) nests on the trees because they will not harm the tree and will keep akushi ants away. The diversity of ant species and the ways that Amerindians use them suggests an ancient dialectic and a wealth of knowledge that has yet to be fully understood. Further research in this area could lead to valuable medicinal insights.

Tipu: resource stones

An old man and his wife lived near the water. One day the old man caught a golden fish but threw it back thinking it was too small. The next day he caught the same fish but threw it back again. The third day, he caught the gold fish again and decided to take it home. His wife cooked it separate from the other fish, ate it and got pregnant, giving birth to twin goldfish boys. They grew up and the bigger brother decided to go travel the world. His mother and father told him to be careful because the world is a dangerous place. When he left, he said: "If anything happens to me, the big tree next to the house will wither and die and you will know that I'm in trouble."

The goldfish-boy set off and met a monkey, an aguti and many other animals that followed him as his friends. Then he met an old man in a house who asked him where he was going. "I'm just traveling the world," the boy said. The old man replied: "OK, be careful; there is a dragon further up the road and he'll try to eat you. He has already

eaten several daughters of the king. There is one daughter left and he plans to eat her as well."

The boy was not afraid so he continued up the road and soon met the princess who told him to go away. "I don't want you to be eaten," she said. But the young man was not afraid, so he waited for the dragon. All of his animal friends were scared so they ran away. The young man had a sword and when the dragon came, it stretched its tongue out through the door and the young man chopped it off. The dragon had 6 heads and they fought and fought and fought. One by one, the boy knocked off their heads. Then the princess said she was going to go home. The goldfish-boy said he was tired, so he fell asleep under a tree.

The princess went home and told the king what happened. The king said he wanted to meet the young man who killed the dragon so he sent his servant to find him. He eventually found the boy asleep under a tree next to the dead dragon. The servant then decided to chop off part of the dragon's tongue and the boy's head too. The servant brought the piece of tongue back to the king to say that he had killed the dragon. But the princess said: "No! He didn't kill the dragon; it was someone else."

Then the monkey came and found the decapitated boy and decided to put his head back on. First he put his head on backwards then fixed it by turning it around in the right direction. The princess finally came and told the boy that the king wanted to meet him so they returned to the castle.

The young man bathed and the king gave him everything. Then he slept with the princess and early the next morning saw a big deer outside the window. He told the princess that he wanted to kill the deer so he jumped out the window and chased after it. He soon came to a building in the forest and heard a voice say: "Come inside and touch the rock in the middle of the house." So he went in the house and touched the rock and immediately he and all his animal friends turned to stone. Then the tree at his parent's house withered and died. His family knew that something was wrong with the boy so his twin brother decided to head out to find him.

The brother traveled very far and finally found the castle where the king and the princess lived. The princess thought the visitor was her lover who went to find the deer and cried: "What took you so long!?" He said he was lost in the forest. Then the twin brother slept next to the princess but didn't touch her. He put a sword in the middle of the bed to separate them and it cut the princess in the night. The next morning, the twin brother saw a deer outside the window and decided to follow it. The princess tried to stop him, but he went anyway. Eventually he came to the same old building in the woods and saw stones everywhere around it. Then he heard a voice say: "Come inside and touch the stone in the middle of the house." But he said: "No, I'm going to kill you for killing my brother." Then the voice told him that if he wants his brother back, he must pour water on the stones. So he went around pouring water on all the stones bringing his brother and all the animals back to life. Then the brother who was turned to stone said: "Thank you brother for bringing me back to life, lets go home now." But before going home, they went to the castle and the princess saw them both and couldn't tell them apart. "I thought he was you and he cut me with his sword," she said. Then the two brothers fought and the brother who had killed the dragon killed his twin brother.

-Clifton Lorendo, Makushi, Yupukari Village, Guyana

This fantastic story articulates several important lessons, particularly with regard to hunting and stones. First, the goldfish-boy becomes friends with all the animals and is capable of killing the dragon and winning the affections of the princess. This suggests the importance of befriending animals in order to become a good hunter and achieve prestige. The story also includes dismemberment and reconstruction, a common narrative in creation myths. It also illustrates the connection between Amerindians, stones and game animals and their capacities to shapeshift by pouring water over stones. The fact that the brother sleeps next to the princess but puts the sword between them is a reminder of the importance of abstinence within the context of hunting. The *panton* also includes swords that were likely adapted into the story after the Colombian Exchange.

This section on resource stones is intended to expand upon existing literature on the topic that includes details with regard to the retrieval, categories, care and use of resource stones (Butt 1966-1967:69-81; Colson and Armellada 1989). Stones have been mentioned in other literature on the region (Schomburgk 1840; im Thurn 1885; Roth 1915; Thomas 1982) but only superficially. This section includes new insights and examples collected during fieldwork that fill the knowledge-gaps in the literature and helps to present a more complete understanding of the human-stone dynamic, particularly with respect to the wider shamanic conceptual system and practice.

Paleolithic cave paintings are some of the earliest expressions of the human fascination with stone as a medium for communication with the spiritual domain (Whitley 2008). Similarly, aboriginal Australians and Native Americans also commonly created stone fetishes, pictographs and petroglyphs as mediums and manifestations of ritual communication with the spirits. North American Indians also commonly used stones as charms. For example, the Blackfoot Indians used *iniskim*, ‘buffalo calling stones’ to attract game (Kehoe and Kehoe 1977). Many

Amerindians also believed that stones were manifestations of their oldest ancestors and commonly referred to them as ‘grandfather rocks.’ Even the Bible—which denounces the animated nature of the world and the use of such magic charms—suggests the symbolic power of stones (Genesis 28:10-19):

And Jacob...went toward Haraan. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of the place, and put them for his pillows and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el.

In this biblical context, much like in the Amerindian conceptual system, stone is a mediator between worlds that helps Jacob communicate with God. The tale also suggests the power of applying liquid to stone in order to activate its powers. Since all religions are syncretic, this narrative was likely adapted from existing beliefs and practices, including the mystical conceptualization and use of stones.

Much like people, plants, animals, and natural phenomena such as wind and lightning, stones are vessels for spirit forces. As explained by the Akawaio linguist, Desrey Fox: “There is power in plants, rocks, stones, and streams and this is an extension of the soul, *a’kwari* in humans and animals” (2003:76). These stones are generally referred to by the name of the species or resource they are associated with in addition to the word *tipu*, the possessive form of *tik*, meaning ‘rock’ or ‘stone.’¹²⁰ Among the Akawaio, a stone used in the garden to ensure a bountiful harvest is known as the *kiari tipu* (‘food stone’; see Figure 8); *piinki tipu* is a white-

¹²⁰ The word ‘*tipu*’ should not be confused with ‘*tupu*’ meaning ‘mountain.’

lipped peccary stone; and the *moro' tipu* is a stone used to attract fish (Colson and Armellada 1989:35).



Figure 8: An Akawaio *kiari tipu* (food stone) in Phillipai Village

Akin to *muran*, individual stones can be utilized as charms to attract (particularly in the context of hunting) and guard against certain animals, spirit forces or other entities. The word *tipu* can also be used to refer to the heart organ in Akawaio: *ewan tipu*, ‘torso stone’ or *ewan ena’pi*, ‘torso seed.’ Conversely, a *tipu* can be thought of as a heart spirit, seed or central life force for a given species or resource, much like a *siwon* (master or mistress) that lives in Nunamirita (the Underworld) with their ‘children’—the species or resources they oversee—as well as the other spirit masters such as *piyai’ma/atai-tai*, *poito’ma/pta’mna/amaiyko*, etc. The *siwon* is also sometimes referred to as an *imawari* (the over-arching classification of disembodied spirits) or *imawari-pe* (‘in the manner of’ or ‘like’ *imawari*) of which the *siwoniton* are a subdivision (Colson and Armellada 1989:35). A *tipu* could also be referred to as *tik esa*, master or mistress of the stones. Regardless of the name, they clearly function as mediums to

communicate with the spirit masters and mistresses of the Underworld that control the supply of animals and resources.

Every animal has a corresponding plant and stone. Much like *muran*, a *tipu* often has physical characteristics associated with a particular animal. For example, a *moro' tipu* will often look like a fish or perhaps its scales; while a *piinki tipu* may look like a peccary's heart or stomach (Colson and Armellada 1989:35). A *tipu* may also be identified because of its proximity to a good fishing hole, hunting area or nest. For example, if deer are known to sleep in a certain place and there is a peculiar stone in the area that is not surrounded by other stones, then this may be a deer *tipu*. Certain charm stones can also be found while in the process of hunting. As explained by Matthew Elliman, an Arekuna hunter from Paruima: "Sometimes, you go hunting and you shoot a deer, then go to find it but instead of finding the deer, you find a stone. This means that the deer turned into a *tipu*." Similarly, a fisherman may pull in a net that is filled with fish and also a stone. This stone is therefore thought to be a fish *tipu*. A hunter may also cut open a fish or any other animal and find a stone in its belly. This stone will then be considered a *tipu* for that particular animal. Sometimes a *tipu* is identified because of both its physical appearance and the circumstances surrounding its discovery. An Akawaio fisherman explained how he was out fishing and saw a big crab between two logs. When he went to fetch the crab he reached down and pulled up what he thought was a crab, but it was merely a *tipu* that looked like a crab. Another way to identify a *tipu* is by putting it under your pillow or in your pocket while you sleep and waiting to see what comes to you in your dreams. The last and most effective way of determining the special powers of a stone is to utilize the services of a *piyai'san* who (if they are well-trained) will be able to divine the properties of a given stone; after all, not all stones can be used as a *tipu*.

These mystical stones are not to be taken lightly and cannot be used by just anyone. The owner of a *tipu* must take great care to use it in the right way otherwise it could cause harm. For

example, you must be spiritually and physically strong to touch the stone, otherwise you will get sick. As explained by Elliman: “A *tipu* is similar to a mine: it could blow up and hurt you.” Additionally, if you neglect or misuse a *tipu*, it may disappear. The possession and location of charm stones is normally kept secret so that people who do not possess the knowledge for their proper use do not ‘trouble’ them. When a boy becomes a man, his father or grandfather will teach him the secrets regarding the proper care and use of these stones. Much like with the use of *muran*, it’s important to abide by strict social and dietary taboos that include no flirting with women and no sweet or salty foods. Elliman noted that if you don’t adhere to the taboos, other harmful spirits may come out of the *yen* (cave) and the deer and hogs will turn into stone. The informant also noted that if you use a *tipu* too much, it could make your children sick. He hypothesized that this may be because properly using a *tipu* requires being away from the family for long periods of time to tend to the stone and hunt.

If a hunter finds a *tipu* or inherits one, it must be properly taken care of. If not left where it was found, a *tipu* may be brought back to the home and stored in a safe place, put in the home garden or at the farm (a farm is usually located away from the home and can be as much as a day or two away). Regardless of where a *tipu* is placed, it should be put in an isolated area. The stone must be kept clean and uncovered. The surrounding area must also be kept clear of debris. According to Elliman, you need to put little pebbles around the *tipu*: “These little pebbles are like the children of the stone; they represent the animals that it will attract.” He said that the small stones around the *tipu* also act as a wall: “If it’s a deer stone, the little pebbles around the *tipu* will block deer from coming and swallowing it up.”

In order to activate a *tipu* and call out the animals that it represents, you need to talk to the *tipu* and pour, *a’pa* (spit) and/or rub strong fermented cassava drink (*kasa’*, *kasiri*, *parakari*, etc.) or alcohol onto the stone and all around it. You could also blow tobacco smoke onto the rock or rub tobacco directly onto it. Another way to activate the stone is by rubbing a favored

food of the particular animal you intend to hunt onto it. For example, if it's a *piinki tipu* (peccary stone), then one might rub *mae'eperu* (a particular unidentified seed commonly eaten by hogs) or the juice of the orange-brown fruits of the *awara* palm (*Astrocaryum tucumoides*) onto the stone and call to *Arimi*, the master of the hogs. With an aguti stone, one would boil, grate and rub conta seeds onto it. With a fish stone, you would rub whatever a fish eats onto the stone, such as small fish.

Once the stone has been activated it will take some time (perhaps a couple weeks) for the animals to come out. The animals live in Nunamirita (the Underworld) with their spirit masters and mistresses. When they come out, they spring forth from a particular *yen* (cave or increase site). As explained by Elliman, the animals won't necessarily come to the stone, but to the general area: "Young animals come first, but you are not supposed to shoot them; you must wait until the larger ones appear otherwise they will be frightened away." If there are too many animals and they start to get out of control, you must talk to the *tipu* and cover it up to make it stop doing its work. "If bush hogs, labas or agutis are destroying your farm, then you must go to the *piyai*-man to ask for help. He will beat leaf [conduct a séance], use his *tipu* and talk to the master of the bush hogs and ask him to lock-up his pets in the mountain."

Elliman explained how to use a *moro' tipu* (fish stone): "First you must wash the stone with water and place it next to the river; then dig a small canal coming off the river so that some water goes around the *tipu*, but you don't want to overflow the canal with water, just divert a little bit." If you allow the water to overflow the canal and the *tipu*, then heavy rains will come and the river will rise too high, which is bad for fishing. He also mentioned that in order to get fish to come to a creek, you can wash an appropriate *tipu* at the head of the creek and the fish will come.

A *tipu* can be any size. Most are small and can be carried around while others are immobile. For example, there is a large stone that has scales on it like an arapaima fish in a pond

near Kaikumbay in the North Rupununi. According Isaac Rogers, a local Makushi resident, “When you are short of arapaima, you can go to this rock and wash it with local drink, banana drink or pineapple wine. You mix all the drinks together, blow on it and wash the stone, then talk to it. The rock is the master of the fish. This will make you catch arapaima.” Another example of a large immovable *tipu* exists on the Kukui River where local Akawaio hunters pour strong fermented drinks onto a stone and talk to it in order to ask the *maipuri* (tapir) master to release the highly valued ‘bush cows.’ In both instances, informants warn that you cannot touch or look too closely at these rocks or they will make you sick. *Mono’tipu* (pregnant stone) is another large sacred rock near the Akawaio village of Kwaimalu on the Kukui River. According to legend, a man went to Isseneru for work and left his wife at home. When he came back, his wife was pregnant, but since he was gone for so long he knew that she had cheated on him. He was so angry that he tried to shoot her, but when he aimed at her she turned to stone. The remaining stone looks like a pregnant woman and is a sacred site where women go if they want to become pregnant, or to gain strength if they are already pregnant.

Some shamans use stones in order to heal and harm. According to a highly trained and experienced Makushi *piyai’san*, stones used for hunting are called *wrari*, while crystals used to fight enemies are known as *warwu’*. He explained: “A *warwu’* is like an arrow that can kill someone. You talk to it to send it off. I have one that another *piyai*-man gave me.” When asked to reveal this stone, he sternly said: “No. If I show you, it could make you sick or kill you.” He did, however, reveal two other stones that he had. He explained that one of the stones was a *makoi* (demon/monster) from the river (Figure 9). He said that inside the stone was a trapped/dead water dragon that was killing people. He found the stone in a nearby creek, dipped it in a mixture of alcool (a particular kind of very strong alcohol) and *emkusma* (a common and potentially lethal *muran*) that killed the dragon.



Figure 9: A Makushi informant with a water dragon trapped inside a *tipu*

He explained that the second stone—that looked like a cloudy white-colored hockey puck—was causing malaria in the area so he dipped it in the same mixture to neutralize it:

People asked me to come and stop the malaria so I found this rock at the top of a mountain between two other rocks. It was peeing out the malaria and the people would drink the water from a small creek and get sick. The other *piyai*-men were frightened of this rock, but I wasn't because I am very experienced with these things.

Perhaps the most sacred stones in the circum-Roraima landscape are gold and diamonds. As an increasingly tantalizing mineral, Amerindians often negotiate with the masters of these resources. As a general rule, the master of gold or diamonds generally depends on where it is. For example, if it's found in a river, then its master and protector is a *tɯwenkaron* (mermaid) or *rato* (unspecified water spirit force). Likewise, if the minerals are found in the forest, the master would likely be *pta'mna/amaiyko'/poito'ma*; if it's found on a mountain, the master would be *piyai'ma/a'tai-tai*. According to a story told by Elliman, there was a man who was friends with a *tɯwenkaron*; therefore he was able to get lots of gold. However, his wife became jealous of her husband's new mermaid friend. Then the *tɯwenkaron* went away and the man didn't get gold anymore.

Given the tendency of these precious minerals to drive people to develop dangerous obsessions and ‘gold fever,’ there are many fantastical beliefs and superstitions surrounding these precious stones. According to an Arekuna miner: “If the gold is deep, then the master is greedy. If it is shallow, then they are not so greedy. The master of gold can also release tigers and diseases that will kill you. If you’re getting plenty gold and you have a small child, then they will get sick or someone will die.” He went on to explain that the master of diamonds was lightening and when you play with crystals or diamonds, you will call the thunder. According to a different Arekuna miner: “Men were mining when they saw a white light, like a diamond. It came toward them, which meant someone would die. This is a diamond *tipu*. It is very strong and powerful. If you talk about it a lot, you will die and others will get diamonds. The *tipu* takes life and releases the diamonds.”

As occurred in the *panton* at the beginning of this section, animals and people are occasionally known to transform into stones and vice versa. As explained by an Arekuna informant, in the Waiaka (Tree of Life) *panton*, when a great flood of water sprang forth from the stump, all the animals ran away and Makunaima stopped them in their tracks by turning them into stone. Similarly, numerous informants mentioned how animals would often turn into stone while being pursued or at the moment of being shot. Another example of animals turning to stone comes from an Akawaio *panton*. In the savannah between Phillipai and Chinowieng, there is a large rock known as *kaikusi tipu* (jaguar stone) and an adjacent creek known as *kaikusi* creek that has reddish water that looks like blood. According to the *panton*, this is the site where a pile of dead tigers turned to stone.

Not only can people and animals transform into stone, but they can also pass through it. Large stones, particularly those on the tops or sides of mountains are thought to house entire communities of spirits and worlds that can be transcended, particularly by the *piyai’san*. Near the village of Karasabai (*karasa* in Makushi means ‘canister’) there is a large rock on top of a

mountain that looks like a canister with a white ribbon of stone that goes all the way around.

According to a local Makushi resident: “If you have a strong spirit and you go to the rock on a full moon or Good Friday, it will open up and you can go inside and find anything you want.”¹²¹

To this day, many Amerindians still believe that it is dangerous to look at and touch certain rocks and climb to the top of mountains, such as Roraima. Certain rocks are considered especially treacherous. For example, there is a large rock on the top of a hill above Awarmi, near Makarapan Mtn. and Rewa Village in the North Rupununi. The rock looks like a giant cauldron and according to a Makushi guide: “This rock was previously used to cook people and eat them. We used to fight the Caribs in this area. When they caught each other, they would boil their enemies and eat them. Now, if you look at, touch or think about the stone, you will become sick.”

Not only is it dangerous to climb mountains (a liminal area associated with dangerous spirit forces), it is also unwise to move any rock without properly asking permission or leaving an offering. This taboo is also associated with plants, animals and everything else in the forest. Honoring the place of these beings is an example of how Amerindians respect and manage their environment. Western, monotheistic cultures have a tendency to perceive nature as dangerous, threatening and chaotic, and will not hesitate to change, control, re-arrange and subdue it. This disposition toward non-human life often leads to the disturbance, degradation and exploitation of ecosystems that many believe has led to a de-stabilization of the climate.

¹²¹ This is yet another example of the Amerindian tendency to syncretize Christian and traditional beliefs. The ability of a *piyai'san* to enter into the rock is not isolated to this village/stone, as there were many other accounts of shamans traveling into stones, mountains and underwater where there were entire cities with streets, cars, stores, etc.

***Taren*: invocations**

A *taren* is an invocation that can also be thought of as a prayer or magic spell to heal, empower, protect or harm. In Guyana, a *taren* is colloquially known as a ‘blow’; someone who possesses these capacities is known as a ‘blow-man.’ As explained by Isaac Rogers: “A blow-man blows onto plants, ants, rocks and other charms to give them their special qualities. They call this *taren* in Makushi. A blow-man can do good and bad.” There are innumerable *taren* used to affect every aspect of life. For example, a hunter may ‘blow’ on his weapons for good luck before embarking on an expedition, just as a woman may apply a *taren* to her hands before she plants vegetables in the farm to ensure a bountiful harvest. An individual may seek the protection of a ‘blow’ before embarking on a journey, or perhaps in order to cleanse the body of unwanted spirit-passengers upon returning from a long trip. Other commonly used *taren* heal diarrhea, snakebites, cuts and aid in childbirth. As explained by Rogers: “Different problems have different solutions. Even a sick person suffering for a long time can be cured by a *taren*, if it’s the right one. This is how people survived long ago, because they used *taren*. It helped people to be alive and healthy. If we use *taren* it will help us.”

A *taren* can be held or ‘owned’ by anyone, however the *piyai ’san* is the primary expert in this domain.¹²² A *taren* is generally inherited, bought, traded or stolen. One could also pay a *taren esa*’ (‘invocation owner’ in Akawaio) for their services. Each extended family or community would generally have someone—often elderly—who could perform certain *taren*. Different individuals may know how to cure certain ailments, such as diarrhea, using a *taren*, but the specifics of the *taren* and the spirits invoked may vary. A *taren* generally makes use of archaic and obscure words and dialects that cloak the spell making it difficult for others to learn or steal. This individuation of *taren* also makes it possible to make it your own. If others learn

¹²² As discussed below within the context of séances, humans are not the only ones to know and use *taren*.

your *taren*, then it will lose its power. A *taren* will also lose power if it's used too much.

According to Rogers: "If you tell someone your *taren*, you can bite your tongue or blow on your arms so that they won't be able to learn it."

Pia is a fundamental concept in the practice of *taren*. As discussed in Chapter 4, every resource and being has its *pia*, its identity, genetic code or ancestral form originating from a *piatenin*, its 'original ancestor' (Colson and Armellada 1989:7). These personified forces determine the physical characteristics and behaviors of all things and can be invoked and harnessed in the practice of *taren* to achieve a desired end. By invoking the ancestral forms of different animals, plants and entities, an individual can heal, harm, protect and much more. In order to invoke these powers, the 'owner' of a *taren* will recite a story in poetic form. After reciting the story/prayer, the invocation will be applied to the patient or delivery mechanism with several short puffs of breath.

A *taren* generally has two simple parts. The first part explains the problem and the second part presents the solution. The solution is often the *pia* of an animal or element that has the power to alleviate the given problem. It is always important to specify the gender of the patient at the beginning of the invocation. The following *taren* used to heal a sick man is translated from Arekuna:

You are like a male mountain with clouds all over you. The mountain is not supposed to be this way; therefore you are unhappy because the *torokon* [birds] are not singing in the trees and the sun is not shining.

I am a forceful *asetun pia* [wind essence/ancestor] and I will blow away the clouds to restore your health so that the birds can return to the mountain, the sun can shine again and you can feel alive. [Blow, blow...]

An Akawaio informant from Phillipai delivered a different invocation to heal a sick woman. After explaining how the sickness had been sent to her by distant Amerindians and malicious spirit forces, he invoked *tururu* (a breeze or wind to cool and refresh, an invocation

likely connected to *piyai'ma*). Therefore the wind can be both a harbinger of danger, as discussed earlier within the context of whirlwinds, or a cleansing force.

Taren are also commonly used within the context of food, whether it's before a hunt, at the farm while planting crops or before a meal. This is especially the case for meat that often requires a special *taren* to protect from the spirit of the dead animal. The tapir is especially dangerous because it has a powerful spirit. Children, young girls at first menstruation, pregnant women and individuals in mourning are especially susceptible to attack from the spirits of animals; therefore their food will often be blessed with an appropriate *taren* before being eaten. As explained by Isaac Rogers: "The animals all used to be humans, so their spirits can harm you. If you want to make your food safe to eat, you can use a *taren* that invokes the spirit of *kuanu* [harpy eagle] or the tiger [jaguar] because these animals are at the top of the food chain and are therefore feared by other animals." He also explained that if you don't know the appropriate *taren*, then you could pass your child over the pot while it's cooking and ask the spirit of the animal not to punish or attack the child. A *taren* is also commonly used when someone is sick and won't eat. A Makushi *piyai'san* called this practice of 'feeding' a *taren* to someone in order to revive his or her appetite, *repkri maptota*.

Much like accusations of *kanaimi*, neighboring Amerindians and outsiders are often suspected of being powerful 'blow-men.' For example, to the Makushi, the Patamona to the north and the Wapishana to the south were thought to be extremely dangerous and malicious. Likewise, the Wapishana and Patamona were suspicious of the Makushi. Not only was this the case between different Amerindian dialects, but this also tended to be the case between different communities that spoke the same dialect. Before visiting the highlands of the Upper Mazaruni, lowland communities warned that the Amerindians in this area were very dangerous. After arriving at Kamarang, residents warned that people up the river at Jawalla were very dangerous

and not to be trusted. Likewise, for the Akawaio residents of Jawalla, the Akawaio individuals living further up the Kukui River at Phillipai were thought to be extremely dangerous.

Amerindian suspicion of outsiders is often exaggerated; however certain people are known to use harmful *taren*. For obvious reasons, harmful ‘blows’ are highly stigmatized and informants were hesitant to discuss their knowledge of these spells for fear of being blamed for any subsequent sickness in the village. Despite the secrecy surrounding these invocations, a Makushi *piyai’san* explained his experience with one. He said that one of his first patients was suffering from sharp pains in her body whenever she moved. This was a telltale sign that someone had attacked her with a *taren*. He explained that someone had shot the girl with an *aru* (porcupine) *taren* and the pain she was feeling was from the porcupines’ *warwu’* (spines). In order to heal the girl, the *piyai’san* explained how he ‘beat leaf’ (performed a séance), and with the help of another *piyai’san* who appeared in spirit form, he identified who had given her this ‘blow’ and then healed her by removing the painful spines from her body.

The practice of *taren* is based on events that took place in *pia’atai* (a time of origin) when everything was people (*ka’pon-pe: pemon-pe*) and all understood the same language. According to Mircea Eliade (1959:81-82): “the ritual recitation of the cosmogonic myth plays an important role in healing, when what is sought is the regeneration of the human being.” He goes on to explain how life can only be recreated through symbolic repetition of the cosmogony in the ‘time of origins.’ In much the same way, *taren* are commonly introduced by a mythical tale, focusing primarily on Pia, the younger Makunaima. Since many may question the magical powers of reciting a cosmogonic myth, a Makushi *piyai’san* helps clarify the role of *taren*: “What’s important is how you accept the idea in distress.” This quote suggests another significant aspect of *taren* (and *muran*) that relates to the idea of faith and is consistent with the placebo effect. In other words, if someone believes that a particular medicine/poison will help or harm, then it probably will.

Smudging

Another common Amerindian shamanic practice is smudging, colloquially known as ‘smoking out’ in Guyana. Smudging is a way to physically and spiritually cleanse a space or person, bless an occasion or bring back the spirit of a sick person. Practitioners call on the spirits of sacred plants, trees and other substances to drive away negative energies and restore balance. The act of smudging a sick child is known as *jukuama* or *sukua* (Akawaio). Smudging is not isolated to Amerindians, is also a common practice among many religions.

In North America, smudge sticks often contain bundled sage, cedar, sweetgrass or tobacco. In the circum-Roraima landscape, the most common items come from the dried sap/pitch/gum/resin of certain trees, including what the Makushi call *hiowa* (known as *warua* to the Akawaio and *warwawo*’ to the Arekuna), *mrepa* (from a locust tree), *krukai* (allegedly only found in the Kanuku Mountains), *shpure* and *karamani*.¹²³ Informants also burned sheep fat, garlic and white cotton seeds to cleanse and call spirits back. According to Madeleine Francis, a Makushi informant from Yupukari: “You burn the cotton seeds, sing and say ‘I am the cotton; *siku si’manon* [come back little girl] or *siku si’mine* [little boy] from the evil spirits.’ Then the next morning, the child will be healthy.” An Arekuna informant said that—in addition to burning the ‘tree skin’/bark of *wilikawa* and *ayu*’ to smoke hunters and reinforce their spirit before a hunt—you could also burn the wax of *kampa*, ‘a little honey bee that lives in the savannah,’ to bring back the spirit of a sick child.

Of all the substances mentioned above, *hiowa/warua/warwawo*’ is the most common. This sap comes out of trees with holes made from burrowing bugs. After a few months, the resin builds up on the outside of the tree and becomes hard and brittle. At this point you can break it

¹²³ Some informants referred to these aromatic resins as frankincense, a reference to one of the three gifts given to baby Jesus by the wise men. Due to limitations on time and a lack of expertise in identification, most of these trees are unidentified.

off and begin to burn it. Alternatively, you could take it off the tree when it's fresh and malleable and wrap it to keep it from drying out so it will burn better. This particular gum can also be used as incense, an adhesive/glue that is especially good for making arrows and sealing boats, a fuel for lanterns made from the round semicircular shell of a large nut called a 'monkey cup' and a torch made from a forked piece of wood. According to Geronimo (Arekuna):

"If it makes a sound when the torch drips, it is warning about evil spirits nearby. It can be dangerous because bushmaster is attracted to it." He also said that *warwawo* mixed with water is good for diabetes; and it can be mixed with crabwood (*Carapa guianensis*) oil and rubbed on joints to ease the pain of arthritis. The Akawaio said that they use *warua* to attract akushi ants at night by burning the sap outside of an akushi ant nest to attract the flying ants to the light so they can collect and eat them. For all these reasons and more, this tree gum is a common Amerindian household item.

Each Amerindian group, community and individual does the ritual practice of smudging differently; however, there are certain commonalities. In North America, a smudging ceremony would generally begin by burning a particular substance and acknowledging the four cardinal directions, followed by a spoken prayer or invocation recited with great care and intention (Winfield Coleman, personal communication Aug. 2014). Carrying the smudge or waving a fan or bird feathers over the smoldering substance in the desired direction spreads smoke. Much like blood is the life force of material cells; oxygen, breath, steam, clouds and smoke are the life force of the immaterial. Smoke is also symbolic of the conversion of material into the immaterial. Tree sap is the blood of the tree and its ritual burning is a way of reaching out from the material world to the spiritual domain. There is also significance in the smell generated by the incense that awakens the senses and stimulates the spiritual aspect of space. The smoke is thought to attach itself to negative energy. As the smoke clears it takes those negative energies with it and releases them into another space where it will be regenerated into positive energy.

Similarly, the smoke serves to protect the ill patient from evil spirits by shielding the spirit in a veil of smoke.

Smudging is also appropriate when someone dies. According Madeleine:

If someone in the family dies, we burn *iskopa* or *mrepa* on coals from the fire and pass it around the house and smoke the whole house and tell the spirit that we don't want to see them anymore. Then the next night you won't hear the spirit coming to trouble you anymore. We used to bury them in the house and move away because the land belongs to the dead spirits. Nowadays, we don't do that anymore. We may break down a wall and let the spirits out then build it up again.

If an individual's *imawari* cannot be brought back or protected by smudging and they die, the best way to communicate with them is to utilize the most fundamental transcendent service of the *piyai'san*.

Séances

For many Amerindians, all illness and death results from the predation of a malicious spirit force.¹²⁴ These entities lurk everywhere and people must constantly be on guard. They are especially keen to attack the young and infirm, a predilection counteracted by constant vigilance over young babies and a vast array of social and dietary taboos that must be observed. As explained by a Makushi *piyai'san*:

Evil spirits will take your soul like it's an egg and put it in a nest like it's a pet that they want to own. If this happens, I drink tobacco juice and start singing so the spirit angels come down from upstairs. Then I go to look for another *piyai'san* for help. I do this during the night; I can hear the spirits talking. These spirits can only be seen by me and I fight and negotiate with them to bring back the spirit of the sick person.

In the event of a serious illness, Amerindians may seek the services of a *piyai'san*; however, shamans are increasingly expensive and elusive. Informants said that they often hedge their bets by visiting a *piyai'san* if they can, but also consulting church leaders and community health workers. Ideally, the *piyai'san* should be well versed in the preparation and administration

¹²⁴ According to an Arekuna informant, *etuwaretan* is "when a spirit makes you sick or does something against your will to 'shock' you."

of *muran*, *tipu*, *taren*, smudging, song and dance festivals and séances. Treatment could consist of limited ritual and medication, or days, weeks and years of intense therapy. Not every village has a practicing *piyai* 'san, although there is generally someone within a day's journey.

Traditionally, payment may have included meat or a hunting dog. These ritual specialists wielded great power over people, often doubling as a community leader. Today, payment is increasingly monetary and technological. A typical treatment would ideally last for a few days. The *piyai* 'san, the patient and often his or her family would follow strict dietary taboos during this period of healing. During the day, the *piyai* 'san may prescribe and administer different *muran* and *taren* to heal the patient. At night, the *piyai* 'san would 'beat leaf.'

The *piyai* 'san is perhaps best known for these ritual séances, colloquially known as 'beating leaf' or 'beating bush.' These healing ceremonies are performed over the sick person with the aim of driving out the evil spirit manifested in the illness by using various tools, supernatural powers and spiritual alliances. During the ritual, the *piyai* 'san is able to diagnose the source of evil and combat it through soul flight, visions, and dreams. As explained by Isaac Rogers:

The *piyai* 'san is like a scientist who can detect many things. He knows where gold and diamonds and evil things are. He works in the dark, sings and uses tobacco. He takes it in the nose, drinks the juice and gets high. Then he travels into the mountains and rivers, spiritually. Physically, he stays with the sick person, but his body is empty. Other spirits come to help. He dreams a lot and interprets different plants and works with many blows.

Dreams are an important part of the *piyai* 'san's work. Geronimo Thompson from Paruima was training to become a *piyai* 'san in Venezuela but decided to quit because he had a haunting dream about a giant talking fish. Flora Francis, a Makushi from Yupukari was training to become a *piyai* 'san in Brazil then returned home and had a dream where her mentor came to her and started beating her with leaves to wake her up and tell her that someone in her village was sick. Dreams are a very important part of reality discussed openly in Amerindian

communities. Not only would dreams be interpreted, but the day's activities would be adjusted according to any premonitions. If a significant event was planned, such as a hunt, and someone had a foreboding dream, the hunt would be called off.

In the dream state, the *piyai'san* has the ability to travel to the astral plane, across great distances where he or she can visit with other spirits, including those of plants, stones, animals, as well as those who are far away or 'dead.' According to Isaac: "The *piyai'san* is like Superman in the US or the Old Higue for the Afro-Guyanese that flies through the air." The *piyai'san* speaks to the spirits and learns about medicines, the future, distant places and much more. He or she could also travel around to harm, kill or lock up people and spirits in rocks, mountains, underground caves and deep pools. In order to alter his or her consciousness, the *piyai'san* drinks or ingests tobacco juice and other *muran* into the nose to induce an ecstatic, drunken, trance-like state.

Séances must be conducted in complete darkness (a manifestation of the Underworld); therefore the *piyai'san* will often 'beat leaf' in his home or, more commonly, in the home of the patient. According to an Arekuna informant: "The light scares away the spirits. If there is a sudden light that shines while the *piyai'san* is traveling outside his body it can kill him." After smoking and ingesting copious amounts of tobacco juice (*kawai*) and perhaps some other *muran* or alcohol, the *piyai'san* will prepare and offer a small bowl of tobacco juice, alcohol and/or *muran* to attract the spirits to the séance. The *piyai'san* will then begin to smoke many tobacco cheroots and *a'pa* ('spit' in Akawaio) tobacco juice and blow smoke onto two bundles of branches with leaves from certain types of trees including *hiowa*, *wurukon*, *marwarei*, *krukaiyei*, *waitee* and most commonly *shipu/shpure*.¹²⁵ The tobacco juice and smoke are intended to wake

¹²⁵ These are the tree branches/leaves most commonly used by the Makushi shamans. In addition to some of these same trees, Arekuna informants also mentioned using *woparle'* and *wopararai*.

Further research is needed to identify and differentiate these tree species. These specific leaves may also be utilized for their shape and auditory effect when shaking.

up the bundles of leaves that will call down the spirits. Once the *piyai'san* has made all the proper preparations which vary by individual, they begin to beat the bundles of leaves onto the ground and shake them in the air while chanting, singing, talking or otherwise addressing the spiritual domain and the patient. Shaking and beating the bundles of leaves creates a rhythmic and hypnotic sound. According to an Arekuna informant, the practice of beating the bundles of leaves on the ground in the dark is called *tumaiya*. In one ceremony witnessed during fieldwork, the *piyai'san* began by asking the person who 'spoiled' the sick person to take back the 'blow' (*taren*), or prepare to be harmed in return.

A healer can also sing 'spirit songs' (*moruwa*, warming songs' in Arekuna; *mari*', invitation songs in Akawaio) to bring back the spirit of a sick person without going through the ritual of beating leaves. Certain songs are used for young children while others are used for older patients; some songs are used to cool down, while others are used for warmth. According to Geronimo, each plant, animal, rock, person/entity/spirit has a particular frequency/song that is their essence, *pia* or continuity/genetic code. The lyrics of these songs are usually incomplete sentences of calling verse, much like *taren*. As explained by Geronimo: "When *imawari* take your spirit, you lose your appetite. When you hear these songs, you start to eat again."

Partly due to ingesting copious amounts of tobacco juice and other *muran*, combined with the hypnotic sounds of the beating leaves or shak-shak (a rattle), the *piyai'san* enters into a trance, ascends out of his or her body and travels great distances to search for the *imawari* of the sick person. The *piyai'san* has the ability to travel to different dimensions with the aid and guidance of hummingbird-spirit-helpers and their *muran*, as well as his or her *muran* to contact wandering spirits. While traveling outside the body, the *imawari* of the *piyai'san* may encounter *kuimu*, *rato*, *poito'ma*, *piyai'ma* or any other countless *imawariton* (disembodied spirits). These diverse spirits, therianthropes and otherwise liminal beings can be both helpful and harmful, much like plants, animals and humans. Sometimes they provide helpful advice, services,

medicine, skills and knowledge in the form of *muran* and *taren*; in most instances, however, they are dangerous forces that prey on humans, especially those with vulnerable spirits.

According to Austin Charlie, an Akawaio from Jawalla, the highland *piyai* 'ma has the most powerful *muran* and *taren* compared to the lowland *piyai* 'ma and *poito* 'ma who also have their own medicine. "The mountain one has more power; he knows everything: how to plot things, fish, binas... This one can cure too. When I beat leaf, this one advises me and helps me cure the sick. The one on the flatlands is mischievous, but not as smart or powerful." He also explained that the highland *piyai* 'ma is especially good at cooling down fevers, presumably by wielding cool mountain air/*taren*.

An anonymous Makushi *piyai* 'san draws a circle on the ground when he conducts séances. He explained that he brings spirits to him to get their help or to fight them, but they are not allowed to come inside the circle:

Whenever I drink tobacco and beat leaf, my *tukui* ' [hummingbird lady] friend comes and sits next to me and helps me by putting *kainainu* [the hummingbird-lady's special *muran*] in my nose. She sings all kinds of songs I don't know and then she disappears. Other spirits and *piyai*-men come too, from all over. Many come and give different advice. Then finally one comes and has the right medicine for the sick person.

Nearby, distant or deceased spirits and shamans can be helpful, but others can be unwanted rivals who enter the scene during a séance. This would often create a battle that is part of an ongoing spiritual war. Shamans are also known to compete to demonstrate who is more powerful at healing and harming. Sometimes, a *piyai* 'san will put an evil entity into a patient as a challenge to see if the other can heal it. One retired Makushi *piyai* 'san from Quatata near Yupukari named Dunston Dorrick said that another *piyai* 'san envied his powers and attacked him with bad 'blows' (*taren*) and made his arms hurt so he can't 'beat leaf' anymore.

While the spirit of the *piyai* 'san is in flight, other spirits may come to possess the body left behind causing the *piyai* 'san to speak with a strange voice that sounds like speaking in

tongues. According to Austin Charlie: “When I beat leaf, I see myself as transparent and I sing songs and the spirits come into my body.” He also said that a girl would come upside down and give him her special tobacco juice (*kawai*) to drink through the nose in order to induce deeper hallucinations.¹²⁶ He referred to this spirit as *kumara’si* or *kumara’* and said that it was a large swallow-tailed kite that lives high on the mountains, nests in the rocks, and shape-shifts into a person.¹²⁷ These spirit helpers are responsible for giving the shaman wings for flight. Normal people see them as scissor-tailed birds, but to him they appear as women. He stressed that these are helpful spirits, not harmful: “They help me and tell me what’s wrong with the patient.”

Both hawks and hummingbirds are diurnal; therefore they are helpful to the shaman who performs séances at night in order to reconcile different domains (above/day and below/night) to maintain balance and equilibrium. According to Roth, the forked tail of the kite suggests a woman’s legs during coitus (1915). Much like the ambiguous and transcendent power of the black and white swallow-tailed kite, the Akawaio shaman harnesses the powers of the above (male) and below (female) domains by wearing a *mari’* (ceremonial armbands with iridescent shards from a cicada/sun bee’ worn during a shaman’s first public séance) and applying white down to the body (1977:53).

According to the Arekuna, all the spirit-helpers that the *piyai’san* uses in séances are called *iasi* (*yaki* in Akawaio; plural: *yakiton*). When someone is sick, the *piyai’san* sings a song (*moruwa*, a ‘warming song’ to combat cold illnesses in Arekuna; *mari’*, songs to attract spirit helpers in Akawaio). As explained by Geronimo, the *iasi* are like angels or spirit helpers: “The *piyai’san* will call to them before leaving his body to search for the spirit of the sick person. One *iasi* comes down to guard and protect the *mure* [seat or stool] of the *piyai’san*; another stays with the bowl of *muran* offered to the spirits.” The *iasi* will also help by talking to the spirit of the

¹²⁶ An inversion is a clear indication of the use of entheogens and a reference to the Underworld.

¹²⁷ The informant mentioned that these spirit forces also manifest in the form of a hummingbird.

sick person and telling it not to drink the *muran*, eat the food or accept any kind of offerings from the malicious spirit forces because this would make reunification of the body and spirit impossible. As explained by Geronimo: “In song, the *piyai ’san* and the *iasí* tell the spirit of the sick person to come back and drink the *muran* prepared by the *piyai ’san*. If the spirit does not return, then the *piyai ’san* will use *wilikawa* and *ayu’* [*muran*/tree barks] which the *imawari* dislike.”

According to Quentin, an Akawaio from Phillipai, another type of *iasí* manifests as a ‘bush rope’ or ‘monkey ladder’ (*karawari*) that helps the spirit of the *piyai ’san* ascend to the mountaintops and lower sky and come back. Much like Jacob’s biblical ladder, Quentin mentioned that the *karawari* appears during ecstatic trances and enables *iasí* and the *piyai ’san* to ascend and descend. The bush rope also appears during the initiation phase at the waterfall and is symbolic of a connection to different dimensions of the cosmos/sources of knowledge.

Iasí are also known to live in stones or crystals known as *tipu* (charm stones). The *piyai ’san* may carry around a bag of stones that have spirits trapped inside them. These spirits can be helpful and harmful. When a *piyai ’san* kills someone or something, they can trap their victims in stone and then release them by smoking tobacco and blowing it onto the stones or applying tobacco juice or other *muran*. All of the *iasí* (*yakiton* in Akawaio) spirit helpers discussed above, in each of their manifestations, can all be subsumed under the *imawari* category of disembodied spirits.

Each *piyai ’san* works in his or her own way. Some will drink alcohol before a séance while others drink only tobacco juice. Some may use stones, crystals and different medicinal plants, while others are less familiar with these tools. One female Makushi *piyai ’san* named Olaria who lives in Bonfim uses a knotted rosary that the patient would untie; if untangled quickly, they would recover soon. She would also use candles that help to isolate the location of the illness in the body. As a devout Christian (as many claim to be), this *piyai ’san* also made use

of a statue of the Virgin Mary that she said was a very powerful idol. As suggested in Chapter 4 and explained in Chapter 7, many shamanic healers have a tendency to syncretize animist beliefs with invasive conceptual systems (Stern 2012). It is this innate capacity of shamans to adapt and incorporate introduced concepts that enables this ancient human practice to proliferate and persist.

Song and dance festivals

Another way that Ka'pon and Pemon individuals and communities engage with the spirits is through song and dance celebrations. Largely the result of European contact, modernization and the proliferation of Christian dogma, these expositions are no longer commonplace. Therefore a bulk of the data for this section comes from secondary sources (im Thurn 1883; Schomburgk 1840; Roth 1924; Bienvenido 1977; Armellada 1964; 1973; Colson 2009), most significantly (Colson and Armellada 1989). The *sprees* discussed below are another tool for the *piyai'san* and segue to the contemporary beliefs and practices associated with Areruya conducted by the *pukena* ('wisdom possessor' and 'prophet leader') described in the next chapter.

The role of the *piyai'san* within the context of these traditional song-dance festivals is much like the conductor of a symphony. He or she is in charge of leading the performance with the intention of luring the *siwonoton* (spirit masters and mistresses) in order to maintain the health of the community. All members of the community are involved in these activities. As discussed above within the context of *muran*, every animal has an associated plant that can be used to attract or repel it. Likewise, every animal and plant has its own song. All animals—especially birds—are known to convey knowledge through song. These songs can be sung collectively with an accompanying dance that mimics a particular animal behavior or individually without dancing. For example, “Pemon sing *peyinkī eremu*, the songs of the white-lipped peccary, a day or two before going out to hunt this animal” (Colson and Armellada

1989:44, footnote 52). Songs may also be sung within the context of gardening activities associated with sedentary plants (Colson and Armellada 1989:45). Songs of this nature are generally directed toward Eki No'soto (the garden spirit, 'Cassava Mama') as a petition to ask her to come (often through a *kiari tipu*, 'food stone' or *muran* such as *kumi*) and dwell in the garden to make it flourish.

Attracting and calling are vital to the Amerindian system of production and reproduction (Butt 1961:152-154). Most hunting and fishing techniques (as well as *kanaimi* attacks) involve two or three individuals. One hunter may call a certain animal (using a male call to attract a female and vice versa) while another will hide in order to ambush the prey.¹²⁸ Plants, animals, stones and music can all be used as charms that adhere to the same underlying forces of courtship and repellent. These tools can be helpful aids for hunting, attaining resources or sexual partners, as well as health and prosperity. Just as the *piyai'san* functions as the *siwon* (master-leader) responsible for maintaining the health of an individual patient, he or she also strives to maintain the health of the communal body. In both circumstances, songs are used to call on *siwonoton* (spirit masters and mistresses) to give *merunti* ('strength' or 'energy of life' in Akawaio) when someone is sick, crops are weak, meat supplies are low, or the community needs an increase in *akwa* (Akawaio for 'spirit strength' or 'vitality') in order to flourish and multiply. Some of the traditional songs are still known and sung in the circum-Roraima landscape; however, most have now been replaced with Christian and Areruya songs. Singing was traditionally complemented with various musical instruments including, but not limited to: flutes, panpipes, drums, clay or bone whistles, rattles, dance sticks and trumpets made of bark, bamboo, wood or basketry covered with pitch (Roth 1924:450-69).

During fieldwork, some elderly informants were aware of traditional songs and

¹²⁸ This type of gendered courtship can be compared to the ceremonial playing of clarinets by the Wayana, Carib speakers of Suriname and French Guiana who play 'male' and 'female' instruments alternately to imitate the voices of the animals (Colson and Armellada 1989:52).

associated dances and regalia, particularly with regard to the two most popularly known song-dances, Tukui' and Parishara, though few had actually participated in such festivals. According to Colson (2009: 253-254):

In pre-Alleluia days (before the 1880s) a large, central settlement maintained a festival house. In it, song dance and feasts were held and an overflow of guests might be accommodated. It served as a meeting place and, in inclement weather, was used by families of the settlement for communal meals and drinking parties. Partly because of its round shape, it was often referred to as tugushi bing, 'hummingbird's nest'. In it, the traditional dance of tuuguik, the green hummingbird, took place, notably in relation to the primary fishing season of the year (April and May), and the dancing of the people around the building was likened to the circling of the hummingbird around its nest [and fish that circle in pools].

As suggested above, Tukui' songs and dances are especially associated with fish and the time of the first rains when spawning occurs (*ewu* in Arekuna; *tumun* in Akawaio), with the intention of attracting fish and the forest fruits that humans and fish feed upon. The hummingbird, unlike other birds, does not eat fruits, seeds or insects, but instead 'drinks water' (nectar from flowers) like a hovering fish sucking in water. This movement is imitated in the Tukui' dance where performers sway backwards and forwards, circling around and swinging from side to side, movements that are also common among fish. According to Isaac Rogers, Makushi Tukui' dancers would decorate themselves like the green hummingbird by painting a band of white clay (kaolin) around the neck, shoulders and chest in imitation of the bird's white collar. They may also paint fish patterns on themselves. While dancing in a circle, they would make shrill noises on panpipes made from short lengths of hollow reeds bound together in different lengths.

Parishara, on the other hand, is associated with the ripening of the palm fruits at the end of the long intensive rains (September - October) and is sung and danced in order to attract animals, especially peccary (Colson and Aremellada 1989:49-51). Everything in these dances (Parishara and Tukui'), sometimes performed separately and sometimes conjoined, suggests the

opposition of two seasons, the characteristic ecological relationships within each and their link to the movement of the constellation known as *tamuekan* (including parts of Orion and the Pleiades) described in a popular *panton* about Chirikavai (Armellada 1964:70-81). Thus, in September - October *tamuekan* rises in the East when the dry season is beginning and it is time to dance Parishara; In April - May, when the rains are approaching, *tamuekan* is low in the sky and falling to the West, an appropriate time to perform Tukui’.

Tukui’, the green humming bird, is a symbol of domesticity. It is associated with the central communal festival house and *tumun* (April/May): when the streams fill with water, the fish spawn and the frogs and insects begin to sing and mate. In general, animal life and newly planted crops begin to grow and multiply. This is also a time of year when improvements are made to the home (especially thatched roofs) before the onset of heavy wet season rains and rumbling thunder. According to Colson and Armellada (1983:1235; 1989:29):

The blowing of Chirikavai's trumpet seems to represent these sounds: of wind, thunder and the respiration of new life... The ‘breathing’ or ‘blowing’ noise, multiplied many times, is also likened to the *tukuik* dance when heard afar off. Not only is there the hissing noise made by the fish as they rub against the water, but the frogs too make loud croaking noises - which are likened to the chewing of cassava bread for making *kasiri* (a fermented manioc drink) for the fish [See Armellada and Sifontes 1979, the final tale “El Tigre Inferior a la Rana”, note 1].

This elaborate analogy between the social life of Amerindians and aquatic inhabitants is supported by the assumption that during this time the fish can be seen jumping and circling in the cascades as they ascend the river to feast and dance, much like the humans dancing Tukui’ on land. The fish are led by their *potoriton* (elder leaders) or *siwonoton* (masters) such as Chirikavai and Pausuma, archetypal shamans (Armellada 1964:243-244; 1973:213-216; Bienvenido 1977:166-167), while the humans sing and dance Tukui’, led by their *piyai’san* who mediates with the *siwonoton* to bring fish and subsistence to his or her community.

In a traditional context, the *piyai’san* would also mediate between villages by conducting his or her respective community in concert with a neighboring community. Before the arrival of

another community, the host *piyai'san* would often 'beat leaf' (conduct séances) for a couple nights before the main event in order to communicate and mediate with the *siwonoton* (masters and mistresses of resources) and *imawariton* (disembodied spirits). Then the visiting community would arrive and everyone would begin to drink, feast, sing and dance as long as supplies last. Sometimes these festivals would last for several days and nights.¹²⁹

Tukui', as a representation of domesticity, is an appropriate dance for the host community to perform. The guests would dance and sing Parishara as they enter the host village singing about how they have 'come trampling through the forest trails stirring up mud like the peccary herds' (Colson and Armellada 1989:51).¹³⁰ Tukui' dancers, on the other hand would identify with the hummingbird, fish and forest fruits, especially those that fall into the river and become food for the fish. The male dancers would often bear staffs (known as *tukusi marika*) with pieces of smoked meat and fish attached at the end to show the women and their guests that they, the men, are great hunters (Colson and Armellada 1989:48). The guests dancing Parishara would then come and try to wrench the food away.

Inter-community celebrations also commonly included cross-country races (*kaka*) by male guests striving to be the first to arrive at the host community to receive the first drink from the filled corials (dugout canoes) and become the dance leader (im Thurn 1883:325; Colson and Armellada 1989:48). Ceremonial wrestling was also common as host men tried to tackle the racers at the perimeter of their settlement.¹³¹ Not only would guests receive food and drink at the festival, but they would also receive it at their homes while they are away. If one village visits another during *tumun* (May/April) for a Tukui' festival, the fish will not come to the place where the dance festival is being held but to the settlement area of the guests of the festival, in their

¹²⁹ These drinking and dancing sprees still occur, but only within the context of Areruya.

¹³⁰ If there are no outside guests, an internal division may be made.

¹³¹ According to Colson and Armellada: "Wrestling is also a traditional form of settling a grievance between those who are closely allied (brothers-in-law for example) and who should not use weapons against each other" (1989:48).

absence. Conversely, those who were formerly hosts would be invited back by their guests and an exchange of roles would occur. Former hosts, now in the role of guests, may expect fish in the streams near their temporarily vacant settlement. Therefore, complimentary dances, animal associations, seasons and constellations not only represent the interchange between communities, but also a spatial differentiation in resource use and conservation.¹³²

As described by Colson and Armellada (1989:48): “Among the Akawaio, ‘snow ball’ festivals occur in a similar context. This is when a set of guests, after feasting with their hosts, go off with the latter as one unit, to be entertained as guests in a third settlement...” The visiting party would grow bigger and bigger until finally, a large feast, often with dancing, would be held in the settlement of those who first started the ball rolling.¹³³ During fieldwork, this type of behavior was abundantly apparent within the Amerindian ‘way of life’ known as *etrakuasoman* in Akawaio; *mayu*’ in Makushi; *marshruman* in Arawak; ‘self-help’ in Creole English. During these occasions of community work, laborers would be ‘paid’ with fermented drinks and/or any food that a host had on hand. This disposition also manifested when Amerindians traveled within or between communities freely taking food or drink at hand.

In addition to Tukui’ and Parishara, there were many other traditional songs and dances that have nearly vanished. For example, there are several songs and dances known to the Akawaio as *warepan* where individuals dance and sing in the manner of *ware*, a frog that sings all night during *tumun* (Armellada and Sifontes 1979). Another set of songs and dances are known as *aiyan* (Gran Sabana Pemon) or *imawari* (Akawaio). These dances were performed to obtain forest fruits during the ‘hungry time’ (December/January), when food was in short supply. A popular *panton* explains how the *siwon* (master) of the forest tree fruits, the tree-

¹³² These principles of conservation are reinforced in the story of Chirikavai (Armellada 1964:70-81) who advised people not to kill small fish but to let them grow big. Similarly, the dangers of over-fishing and interference with fish runs are expressed in a separate *panton* (Armellada 1973: 213-216).

¹³³ A comparison could be made Christmas carolers in Europe and North America who go from house to house singing songs, picking up more participants, eating, drinking and sharing with the wider community.

hunting boa constrictor, Aramari, first sang and taught these songs to Amerindians (Armellada 1964:101-103). Matthew Elliman from Paruima demonstrated a song and dance known as *marapa* (a rattle made from a gooby/calabash/gourd) and another known as *mari*, 'a love song of invitation and dance.' *Amanawĩ* is an Akawaio dance performed during the day to bring peccary.

With the exception of Amerindian Heritage Month celebrations in Guyana every September, these celebrations are not widely practiced and known. If arranged, they would principally be for spectacle, not for the original additional function of maintaining a discourse and balance between plant, animal, human, spiritual and celestial forces. Despite the endangered status of these arts, some in the circum-Roraima landscape still regularly participate in highly sophisticated festivals where everyone sings and dances in circles through the night to commune as their ancestors did; they call themselves the Areruya Indians.

Chapter 7: Areruya! A revitalized shamanic landscape and practice

A mother took her baby boy to the farm and he started to cry. She left the baby in her warisi [basket/backpack] on the ground and went to pick cassava. The baby was getting hot and continued to cry so his mother came back and gave him a cassava leaf to play with. The baby put the leaf all over its body and then Eki No'soto [Cassava Grandmother] turned the baby into a kukui hawk and flew away. The mother called to the baby-bird to come back but it kept flying higher and higher. Then she returned home and told granny to get a big gubi [gourd] and fill it with kasa' [fermented cassava drink]. The grandmother filled the gubi and called to the bird telling him to come back and drink. The bird flew to a nearby tree and they chopped it down. Then the bird flew to different mountains and villages in the region. The boy's mother and grandmother followed the bird until it finally settled at the head of the Kukui River. Grandma ultimately got so cross that she broke the gubi, spilling the kasa' and creating the Kukui River.

— Wanda George, Akawaio, Phillipai Village, Guyana

The headwaters of the Kukui River flow from Mt. Morakapan (Kukui Mt.) adjacent and to the east of Mt. Roraima in the Pakaraima Range. Near the foot of Kukui Mt., in Phillipai Village territory, is a small settlement known as Amokokupai. In Akawaio, *amoko* means 'old man' and *kupai* means 'inlet' or 'pool'. According to oral tradition, an old man (Abel's grandfather) allegedly drank a lot of *kasa'* at a celebration then went to bathe in Putukwai Creek (a tributary of the Kukui River at the foot of Amokokupai hill) and drowned in a deep pool. The Amokokupai hill is known as *woita* (*woi*, round; *-ta*, place) or *oynakapu* (*oy*, turn back; *nakapu*, top) because those who come and don't believe will visit quickly and turn back; those who believe will stay. According to legend, the hill is filled with gold and the Areruya church sits on top where the faithful sing and dance in circles to protect it.¹³⁴ Gold is thought to be the *a'kwari* (soul) of Earth. According Wanda George: "If the gold is dug out, the spirits will get angry and cause lightning [a *siwon* of minerals] to strike."

¹³⁴ This syncretic religion, or what some fundamentalists may call a 'cult', is pronounced and variously spelled 'Hallelujah' or 'Alleluia'. Since the church headquarters is in Amokokupai—an Akawaio territory within Phillipai Village lands of Region 7, Guyana—I use their spelling, 'Areruya' where the closest approximation of the 'l' sound is written with an 'r' and pronounced 'rl'. According to *The Constitution of the Alleluia Church* (Areruya Leaders 1985), Alleluia means: 'the holy word of God.'

As discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, in the shamanic tradition of the circum-Roraima landscape, the *kukui* hawk (among other birds) is the physical manifestation of *imawariton* (disembodied spirit forces) that are important *iasil/yachiton/poitiri-ton* (spirit helpers/assistants) of the *piyai'san*. According to Quentin, an Akawaio from Eimoyen: “When you are alone, this bird is a spirit that flies above you and grieves with you and keeps you company when you are sick. They can also carry messages for you. It could be your dead ancestor.” In the narrative above, the *kukui* bird finally comes to rest in the mountains above Amokokupai. Residents of Amokokupai also noted that there is a *yen* (cave) at the head of the Kukui River known as Marupa' yen (bat cave), an entrance to Nunamirita (the Underworld) and home to ‘*imawari* bats’. Desrey Fox, an Akawaio anthropologist and trained *piyai'san* makes an interesting linguistic comparison between the concept of a cave and that of the mind (1997:74-75):

Zenuminggang yeng literally means ‘thinking cave/container’ or ‘mind’... It controls wisdom and understanding, and maintains a person’s mental stability. It is located in the head closer to the forehead. Only a few persons are said to be wise and intelligent, mostly the shaman, tribal elders and their ancestors known as pu'kena'tong ‘wise ones’. They are understood as having more shamanic and other spiritual powers, which makes them suitable arbitrators of their society.

The narratives surrounding the *kukui* are steeped in shamanic wisdom. The shapeshifting hawk/spirit guide flies to the headwaters of the Kukui River (that flows with fermented cassava drink) where there is a distinctive *yen* (cave/opening) to Nunamirita (the Underworld). Amokokupai is the closest village to this area and also the headquarters or *senumin'kan yen* (thinking-cave) for the Areruya Church. It is therefore logical that this is the resting place of the *kukui* hawk as it holds geographic and conceptual significance for past, present and future Amerindian shamanic identity and power.

This chapter offers new narratives of the Areruya cosmogony and an assessment of its institutional integrity informed by fieldwork in March and April 2013.¹³⁵ The oral history is woven together with shamanic data presented in previous chapters in order to systematically analyze the movement and compare it to Anthony F.C. Wallace's concept of a revitalization movement (RM) derived from his work with the Iroquois in North America and their Old Way of Handsome Lake movement (1972). Ultimately, Areruya is classified as a highland RM because of the unique role that geography plays in its history and the fact that it includes the following key components outlined by Wallace: 1) prophet leaders; 2) a syncretic code adapted to material and conceptual intrusion to reduce stress; and 3) institutionalization.

When I went to Amokokupai, I worked closely with the Areruya Church Leaders to review and update their personal records, including *The Constitution of the Alleluia Church* (1985), a *List of Alleluia Church Branches*, as well as two notebooks with additional information and narratives.¹³⁶ The notebooks were difficult to translate and collectively interpret but were thoroughly examined and evaluated nonetheless. I photographed most of the Constitution and some of the other records including a catalogue of *muran* (charms).¹³⁷ I only had access to these materials for limited, and always supervised, periods of time. The village also had copies of two of Colson's books (1998; 2009). The pictures in these books were of particular interest to the community, but few seemed to have read them. Each day of my visit, I worked closely with the Church Secretaries, Glorette and sister Dorene Williams, a few translators and several Areruya elders to corroborate details from the documents mentioned above with contemporary oral

¹³⁵ Intensive formal fieldwork was conducted during this period in Phillipai and Amokokupai with informal data gathered in transit with Areruya pilgrims and leaders to and from Jawalla for the opening of a new Areruya church and 3-day celebration. During this festival, I gathered together all the leaders of the Areruya branches several times to collectively discuss all-things-Areruya.

¹³⁶ The Constitution was written for the first time in 1985 by Daphne George (it was oral under Aibilibing), a former Areruya Secretary who worked closely with Areruya leaders and Father Dorman, an Anglican priest from Kamarang.

¹³⁷ Included in their records was a catalogue of medicinal plants that I abstained from documenting because I did not want to appear over-zealous to extract valuable ethno-botanical knowledge.

histories.¹³⁸ Saturdays and Sundays were reserved for Areruya services and normal subsistence activities such as frog hunting, akushi ant collection, as well as cutting, burning and planting the farm and treks to local points of interest.

Areruya: a brief history

With the introduction of the Christian gospel to the circum-Roraima landscape beginning in the 1800s, many indigenous individuals and communities ostensibly converted to Christianity while others started new prophetic and syncretic movements with gospels of their own. Some of these movements include: Chochiman (from the English ‘churchman’), San Miguel (adopted from Spanish; see Thomas 1976 and Map 3), Krichin (from ‘Christian’), Chimitin (from the English phrase ‘church meeting’), and the most institutionalized and widely documented movement, Areruya. Each has its own particular set of songs, prayers and rituals. Little to no information is available regarding the current state of the lesser-known syncretic movements. Areruya, on the other hand, has been documented and analyzed most thoroughly by Audrey Butt Colson (1954a, 1954b, 1960, 1971, 1985 and 1996) and, to a limited extent, by others (Kenswil 1946; Swan 1958; Henfrey 1964; Pereira 1967; Thomas 1976; Bridges 1985; Santilli 1987; Abreu 1995; Staats 1996, 2009; Whitehead 2002).

The first literary reference to Areruya comes from December 25, 1884 when Sir Everard im Thurn successfully climbed Mount Roraima and encountered a group of Taurepan (Pemon) living at the foot of Mt. Roraima. According to im Thurn (1885:266, quoted in Butt Colson 1985:107):

The Indians around us, under the influence of a most remarkable ecclesiastical mania which had just then spread in a wonderful way into those distant parts raised – as they kept Christmas with much drinking, without intermission from sunset to the next dawn – an absolutely incessant shout of ‘Halleluja, Halleluja!’

¹³⁸ I slept in a hammock in Glorette’s ‘kitchen’ beside her house for the entirety of my stay in Amokokupai. At the end, in an act of reciprocity, I lent her my notebooks for transcription into village records.

While im Thurn seems to suggest that Areruya was a recent arrival to the area when he visited in 1884, Henfrey suggests its origin dates further back to the 1840s (1964:128). Colson, on the other hand, believes that Areruya was likely first conceptualized in the early 1870s and widely disseminated by the 1880s (1998:55). Despite the clear evidence of syncretism witnessed by im Thurn, it's impossible to know whether this was an early form of the Areruya performance or whether it was one of the many other forms of worship that preceded or competed with Areruya.

The most significant early account of Areruya comes from Fr. Cuthbert Cary-Elwes, a Jesuit missionary who traveled extensively throughout the region to evangelize and establish churches in Amerindian territories between 1911 and 1923. Some of the most interesting early ethnographic insights on the circum-Roraima landscape come from his six journeys in 1911-12, 1916, 1917, 1919-20, 1921 and 1922 (Colson 1998:3). During these expeditions, he encountered numerous villages and Amerindian groups in the wider region. Most significant (for this research) were his visits in 1917 and 1921 to the Areruya Indians in Amokokupai in the Kukui valley of the Upper Mazaruni basin in the North Pakaraima Mountains of what was then British Guiana.¹³⁹

During his first visit to Amokokupai on May 28, 1917 Cary-Elwes witnessed an Areruya performance/service and recorded the following (Colson 1998:69):

This morning, at 2:15 a.m., a horn was blown. 'Come and pray,' I heard a man call out. I knew what was coming: they were going to go through their 'Alleluia', as they call it, of which I had heard so much...A quarter of an hour or so later, the performance began...

The leader rose. After singing for some time, he began bending the knees and rising again, in time with the music. All imitated him, keeping perfect time. The bending

¹³⁹ When asked how Areruya church members feel about being called 'Areruya Indians' instead of 'Akawaio' or 'Amerindian' they said they liked the name, but wouldn't use it all the time because they also identified as Akawaio, Patamona and so on. Since the Areruya religion has created new words and a new conceptual system, and they often call themselves 'Areruya Indians,' the moniker seems appropriate.

of the knees became more and more pronounced, til at last they began stepping forwards and backwards. There was by this time a crowd of about sixty or seventy men and women and a few of the bigger children, drawn up in a circle, all the time dancing, two steps forward towards the center and one step backwards for about three minutes, the leader led them round and round in a circle, all the time dancing, two steps forward toward the center of the circle and one step back, chanting all the time...

Today, Areruya is practiced in much the same way that Cary-Elwes described his experiences with a few important exceptions. When Cary-Elwes visited Amokokupai in 1917, there didn't seem to be a noticeable schedule for Areruya worship. Sometimes they would begin their 'service' in the middle of the night; other times it would begin in the morning, afternoon or evening (Colson 1998:68-82). Today, Areruya is primarily done on Saturdays and Sundays. The Areruya Leaders at Amokokupai didn't know when services were restricted to Saturdays and Sundays and there remains no clear answer to this question.¹⁴⁰

What is abundantly clear is that Areruya has been heavily influenced by the presence of other Christian conceptual systems, particularly from Anglican and Wesleyan congregations that hold services on Sundays, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church that has service on Saturdays. Since there was disagreement within the wider community as to the proper day for worship, some argue that the Areruya Indians hedge their bets by worshipping on both days. During my visit, the current interim President (Simian Edwin) proposed holding services on one day of the week in order to attract more people but the majority opinion was that worshipping on Saturday and Sunday was an important Areruya tenet based on I'siwon's two visions: one of the creation of the world (represented by Saturday), and the other of the resurrection of Christ (Sunday).

The following is a list of important Areruya holidays and times of celebration that generally include services that last throughout the night and often go on for several days (Areruya Church Leaders 1985):

¹⁴⁰ Some informants suggested that the reason why Cary-Elwes witnessed Areruya almost every day, at varying hours of the day, was because it was a special occasion since they were hosting visitors.

- Young Cassava Festival (First weekend in June)
- Harvest Festival (October)¹⁴¹
- Festive Season: Christmas
- Old Year's Down/New Year's Eve
- Good Friday and Easter

Participants dance through the night during these celebrations in order to emerge from the darkness (of night and the church building) and travel to the Putukwai Creek (or any other body of water) to clean off the dust from hours of dancing and become baptized by water and *akwa*, the radiant light energy that is strongest at dawn.¹⁴² These are the largest 'holidays' of the year, but the Areruya conceptual system and practice is something that extends far beyond what happens inside the Areruya church and pavilion.

During my stay in Amokokupai, I often awoke in the middle of the night hearing individuals singing Areruya songs for different reasons at odd hours. I also witnessed people singing during the day while processing cassava, journeying through the forest, relaxing in a hammock, etc. *The Constitution of the Alleluia Church* (Areruya Church Leaders 1985) states that singing is particularly appropriate when cutting farms, doing self-help (community work), when people are sick, and at weddings, funerals and baptisms.¹⁴³ Among the Areruya, singing is a form of prayer that helps focus attention and intention.

There are literally thousands of Areruya songs that are shared by everyone. New songs are continually being added by a select few *pukena' ton* (prophets) who dream and introduce new knowledge into the community in the form of songs. Every song I heard during my stay was

¹⁴¹ This event often coincides with The Amokokupai Church construction (October 21, 1970). The church was later re-built in 1991. October 22, 2013 was the inauguration of Linton John, the most recent President of the Areruya Church at Amokokupai who subsequently passed away in 2014.

¹⁴² Clavel Jones, an Areruya *pukena'* at Amokokupai was known for leading services through the night.

¹⁴³ According to *The Constitution* (1985:11): "The baptism activities commence at about mid-night or thereabout. The Church Leader leads the candidates in Alleluia dance that will last until dawn. At dawn all candidates are led out on their way to be baptized in the creek – Perdequai [Putukwai] at Amokokupai. At the creek, water is blessed by a leader. Immediately after blessing water for baptism these persons are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. N.B.: All baptism must be at Amokokupai – Headquarters of Alleluia Church in Guyana."

in Akawaio dialect. There are songs for cane juice, *kasa'* (fermented cassava drink), corn, gourds, cassava, smoked meat/fish and all other foods. These songs generally function as a prayer to God to bless the foods. There are also songs for sunrise and sunset, as well as certain seasons of the year such as *tumun* (fish poisoning season, May-June).¹⁴⁴ As succinctly explained by Clavel Jones: “There are special songs for birth, marriage and when a leader dies. We have the same Ten Commandments as the bible, but they are not written. We preach and pray, but mainly through songs.” As evidence of the importance of singing Areruya songs, *The Constitution* clearly states: “It must be noted that it is compulsory for persons getting married to render a few Alleluia songs and lead the dance” (1985:10).

According to Areruya elders, most songs (prayers) come from Abel (Erepe'ki or Iperu), an Akawaio *piyai'san* who became one of the most important *pukena'* (prophet) leaders of the Areruya Church. As testament to the importance of Abel's songs, *The Constitution* outlines the following procedures for conducting an Areruya service (1985:8):

- (a) Begin Church Service by singing one or two songs of Abel – the co-founder of the religion and followed by any of the prophet songs.
- (b) Say a prayer by a Church Leader or by a member appointed at that service
- (c) Sermon by a church leader
- (d) Verse Speaking appointed for the day – may be omitted
- (e) Close service by singing song(s) of Abel followed by a General Prayer led by a Church Leader

Much like Handsome Lake—a Seneca Indian in North America and charismatic prophet leader of The Old Way of Handsome Lake movement (Wallace 1972: 3)—Abel and his disciples envisioned for themselves and their people a new way to live and brought about a renaissance.¹⁴⁵ The songs and prayers introduced by Abel included in the procedures outlined above resonate

¹⁴⁴ When the group of seven stars (The Pleiades or Seven Sisters) is near the horizon in the evening, *tumun* is near. *Torokan* is from February - March when it's sunny and the birds mate.

¹⁴⁵ There are two main prophet leaders responsible for Areruya: I'siwon, a Makushi, the first Areruya prophet, and Abel, the second prophet leader who revitalized Areruya among the Akawaio at Amokokupai. Both prophets are discussed in greater detail below.

with Wallace's concept of a revitalization code. "The Code itself is many things: a narrative of Handsome Lake's vision and travels as a prophet, a catalogue of sins and their punishments, a description of heaven and hell, a definition of the good way of life, a prescription for the proper ceremonies to be performed in the longhouse..." (Wallace 1972: 7). Abel's Areruya songs and prayers function in much the same way.

According to Areruya elders, the next largest collection of songs came from William and Aipiripin (see list of Areruya prophets at Amokokupai below). I'siwon is only credited with introducing a few songs while Kiyapun introduced at least 50 and Kareta introduced some too. John Charlie from Katuimi near Kayupanan is also credited with introducing some songs that are often sung in Jawalla. As noted by Clavel, Henry Grant was the last to introduce 'a lot of songs' in Amokokupai.¹⁴⁶

According to Areruya Leaders at Amokokupai, Marco Jacobs, an Ingarikó (Brazilian Akawaio) from Serra do Sol, Roraima State is the only 'true *pukena*' who is actively dreaming and introducing new songs.¹⁴⁷ I met Marco Jacobs and traveled with him from Phillipai to Jawalla and stayed for a weekend with him as an Areruya guest at the festival for the opening of the new Areruya church in Jawalla at the end of April 2013. He was an intriguing and charismatic leader who wore mysterious dark glasses and led vigorous dances late into the night, suggesting an inclination and familiarity with the dark and transcendent realm of Nunamirita (the Underworld).

Another difference between what Cary-Elwes witnessed and what is practiced today is the form of dancing. Cary-Elwes witnessed a dance with "two steps forward towards the center of the circle and one step back" (Colson 1998:69). Today, instead of taking two steps forward

¹⁴⁶ Henry Grant lived in Warumo on the way to Kraimalu and was very well liked. He was known for coming to church early and for leading the Young Cassava Festival. He died at Tasrin on the lower Mazaruni. Some said that Henry Grant was the last real *pukena* in Amokokupai. Henry Grant's son is Rupert Grant.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Benjamin from the Ireng River (Patamona, Region 8) was also reported to be introducing new songs.

and one back, they take four steps forward and two steps back. All dances are a ‘way/path to get to heaven.’ Certain songs go with certain dance steps. There are 5 dance steps and no intention of introducing new ones: 1) Esekumpanu; 2) Umanunni (the most common dance witnessed during my visit) known as the ‘long way’ to get to heaven where you take 4 steps forward and 2 steps back; 3) Esanun ni, also known as ‘the jumping dance’ (*esanun pi’ni* means ‘we are jumping’); 4) Utamoko’man, a dance that signifies making a circle to separate Christians—who will go to heaven—from others; and 5) Asa’ri’ne, where two people (ideally a man and a woman) link arms and dance in a circle in pairs.

During his visit in 1917, Cary-Elwes also observed: “the right hand of each dancer resting on the left shoulder of the person immediately to the right” (Colson 1998:69). Today, the congregation links arms while dancing in a circle instead of placing the hand on the next person’s shoulder. The only exception is when the person in front is a woman holding a baby in her left arm in which case a hand would be placed on her shoulder. In old footage of Amerindians dancing Parishara recorded by Koch-Grünberg in 1911, the right hand used to go on the shoulder of the person in front, just as Cary-Elwes witnessed.¹⁴⁸ Koch-Grünberg also witnessed Areruya dancing in Kaulianalemong Village near Roraima in 1911, which he explained as “boring, and as having almost completely displaced the nice old songs and dances in that village...a sad caricature of ‘paricherá’ [Koch-Grünberg 1979: I, 112, 114, 118]” (Colson 1998:28). From these early accounts, it becomes clear that pre-existing round dance forms, exemplified by Parishara, largely inspired Areruya.

As explained by Colson (1998:36): “Amokokupai grew into a village and became the center of Alleluia activity and creativity with Abel and his son Moses, the latter being credited with having introduced Alleluia dancing to accompany the sung prayers.” According to Areruya

¹⁴⁸ Koch-Grünberg made several some short films and some of the earliest recordings of Makushi songs (at that time on wax cylinders).

elders interviewed for this research, dancing was not introduced by Abel's son Mosi' (Moses), but I'siwon, the first prophet.¹⁴⁹ Colson acknowledges (Colson 1998:129-130):

Round dances were indigenous to the Akawaio and their neighbors [Butt Colson 1990: 60-72]... It was predictable that another set of songs, those of Alleluia, should also become associated with a similar round dance. This introduction at Amokokupai was, as already noted, achieved by Abel's eldest son Moses, who predeceased his father.

Contemporary Areruya Leaders challenge this assertion. It is however possible that Mosi' creatively adapted the Parishara round dance form inherited from I'siwon and Abel to a new Areruya form where the hand hooks around the elbow instead of resting on the shoulder and the primary dance step became 4-forward and 2-back instead of 2-forward and 1-back.

Young Cassava Festival

The Young Cassava Festival is a signature holiday for the Areruya Church. According to Amokokupai elders, this festival was included in the holiday calendar put together by I'siwon 'to thank God for his gifts of food and drink.' As explained in *The Constitution* (Areruya Leaders 1985):

Young Cassava – Harvest Thanksgiving is celebrated once a year in the first week of the month of June. Before celebration of Young Cassava, all members of the church are asked to gather young crops from their farms on the day fixed by the Church leader. These crops gathered from the farms need not necessarily be cassava, but other farm produce such as yam, corn, sugar cane, etc. and should not be in abundance.

These gathered crops are then made into drinks which are stored in small calabashes or bottles. Some are made into small cakes and cassava bread. On the day the harvest is received, all members are assembled in the church. There in church, a Church leader who is responsible for receiving the harvest, conducts the harvesting service. At this service the appointed leader blesses the offerings of drinks and cassava bread described above, and they are served to young and old alike.

The serving is done counter clock-wise to all members seated in a circle or oblong.

¹⁴⁹ According to Areruya elders, Mosi' had a sister named 'Edlis' (daughter of Abel) who was a leader with Mosi'. Abel also had another son named Parawena, whose son was Uyemurusi or Joseph Grant, Henry Grant's father.

The procedures of conducting the service for harvest thanksgiving is done systematically as follows:

- (a) Singing of Alleluia songs
- (b) Blessing of young cassava before taken
- (c) Verse Speaking – at this time a leader starts sharing drinks first, followed by the sharing of cassava bread
- (d) Singing of closing Alleluia songs by leader
- (e) Saying of closing prayers by a leader

During this festival, people bring young crops and other items to the church as offerings to be blessed therefore ensuring a bountiful harvest. In addition to agricultural products, informants also mentioned that people would bring soil and water from local creeks to be blessed. As noted by an Areruya elder: “Queen Mure used to bring water from Irawa creek on the lower Mazaruni to be blessed so the creek will have plenty fish.”¹⁵⁰ The Young Cassava Festival therefore represents an important time of year when offerings of young crops are made to reinforce the deep reciprocal relationship between the people and the land.

The Areruya cosmogony

Akawaio oral tradition describes the origin of Areruya from a Makushi prophet named I’siwon (Pichiwöng or Bichwöng in Makushi; Chiwöng in Brazil) from ‘Kanuku’ (presumably somewhere near the current Makushi village of Nappi in the Kanuku Mountain region of the North Rupununi, Guyana)¹⁵¹ dating back to the 1870s but probably having still earlier roots (Butt 1960; Colson 1985:103-149). I’siwon was a *piyai’san* before becoming an Areruya *pukena*’ (prophet leader). I’siwon means: ‘one who is *siwon*’ (master). He was given this name by spirit forces because as a *piyai’san*-turned-*pukena*’ he had the shamanic powers of dreaming and was

¹⁵⁰ Queen Mure was a man from the upper Kukui who married into Chinowieng (see Butt 1960).

¹⁵¹ According to Lewis Daly who conducted fieldwork in this area between July 2012 and September 2013, a small village near Nappi called Haiawa is where the last Areruya priest in the region lived and died. His children (Hendrick family) still live there.

able to lead his community by bringing down wisdom and *akwa* (radiant light energy) from *Papa* (God) who resides in *hepun* (heaven).¹⁵²

Colson recorded the following oral history in the 1950s (1998:25):

It is recounted that Pichiwōng was taken by two parsons to “somewhere behind Georgetown.” It is sometimes maintained that he was taken to England (*Engiran*, *Engilan*). He was taught about God and baptized, his Christian name being Idam (Eden). His patrons departed and he felt very lonely. Moreover, he was distrustful as to the truth of their teachings and the nature of his baptism. He began to think about God and wanted to see Him for himself. He Dreamt, and in his dreams his soul (vital force, *akwahu*), soared up into the sky and he saw many beings. Eventually, he arrived at the door of heaven, at God’s place, and he heard God’s voice. He received messages (*maimu-ton*: words), prayers and songs and also a bottle of white medicine, and paper (*kareta*, *kaleda*) which was the Indian bible. Then “Pichiwōng was given Alleluia by God in heaven.” It was specifically for Amerindians and he was told that on his return he should teach his relatives.

Returning home after many years, he brought with him a wealth of material goods and his new knowledge. “He left off what the white man had told him and he stopped reading the book. Instead, he took Hallelujah, which he got on his own from God.” – that is, by personal revelation. He continued to have long dreams and to speak to God, and he sang, prayed and taught. Although some did not believe him, others became converted to his message and many came from far away to hear and learn from him. Eventually sorcerers (*kanaimi*: *itoto*) killed him and he went to live in heaven. His assistants (*poitolu-ton*) continued his word, but then they lost it, forgetting and then reverting to the traditional song and dance festivals, which they mixed with Alleluia. Then came Abel, the founder of Akawaio Alleluia who, according to the Akawaio version, found the right words and gave people “good Alleluia”.

According to the oral history collectively discussed and recounted by the Areruya

Leaders and congregation in Amokokupai and Jawalla in March and April 2013:

I’siwon worked with the Anglican Church as a schoolboy. They tried to change him to their religion but he refused it. He didn’t want to accept communion because it was man-made. Then they told him that they would take him to England and promised to baptize him there. In order to get to England, he rode on a steamship for many nights. Before the boat could leave, they had to throw a black man overboard so the boat could move. The boat went through a dangerous place in the ocean where he had to stay awake and was given white medicine. After a few weeks or a month, he arrived in England and the priests left him with a bible and told him to ‘stay right there.’ While he was waiting around, he overheard the priests saying that when they baptize him they won’t bless him with the Holy Spirit, but with normal water. Another person also told him that the priests were fooling him. Nothing was happening so he got bored and restless, put the bible

¹⁵² Hell is known as *epotan parase*’.

away and moved. This is when his first vision occurred. In his vision, ‘someone like an angel or God’ gave him a letter with instructions not to open it until he returned home to Guyana. On the paper were the instructions for Areruya.

When I’siwon returned home to the Rupununi, he brought back the letter and some perfume. One day, when his wife was out at the farm, he was in the bedroom with his daughter and the letter and perfume when they both dropped to sleep. When his wife returned, she wondered why they were sleeping together and the door was locked. She thought he was crazy. When he woke up, he said he had a vision and that he had Areruya. This is when he got the first song that talks about going to England. He had three visions: one when he was in England and received Areruya, then two more back in the Rupununi: the first was of the creation of the universe and the second was about the resurrection of Christ. The proof is in the songs. This is why they worship two days: Saturday is the creation of the universe and Sunday is the resurrection of Christ. He started to practice Areruya immediately after the visions.

When the Areruya Leaders were asked to reconcile the difference between the narrative collected by Colson and the one I collected, they said: “When Audrey came to visit us, we didn’t speak English very well so her interpreters weren’t as good as they are now.” These informants also insisted that I’siwon did indeed travel to England based on the narrative of a weeks-long steamship ride ‘through a dangerous place in the ocean’ and the lyrics of the first Areruya song.¹⁵³ During the earliest periods of contact it was common for indigenous people to be taken back to the Old World as New World curiosities. However, some doubt that I’siwon actually went to England. According to Colson (1998: 26):

It is very likely that the mission “behind Georgetown” was on the Demerara River, which runs North into the sea and has this capital city located at its mouth. As already described, there were several Anglican stations on the Demerara in the 1860s and 70s, each with an Amerindian population from the distant hinterland which had flocked there for employment by logging firms... Anglican clergy, visiting the Rupununi after the failure of the Pirara Mission, sometimes attracted potential converts to missions nearer the coast and Pichiwöng appears to have been one of these...

I have found no record of a Makushi who might correspond to Pichiwöng being brought to England by a clergyman, but it is perhaps pertinent to note that Amerindians of the Venezuelan and Brazilian borderlands sometimes refer to the coastal areas of Guyana, in the region of Demerara, as “*Engiran*”, or “*Engilan*”. There is also the possibility that Pichiwöng claimed that he had seen England in his dreams, when on his way to heaven.

¹⁵³ According to Areruya elder, Ronny Donny of Jawalla, and confirmed by other church members, the lyrics of the first Areruya song mention I’siwon’s journey to England.

We may never know if I'siwon actually went to England. Since there is no definitive evidence that he did not go to England and the oral history (and the first Areruya song) holds that he did, then it is best to assume that I'siwon went to England, at the very least in spirit form. What is clear is that the Anglican Church largely influenced Areruya. As explained by Colson (1998: 26-27):

In Alleluia hymns and prayers there are innumerable references to Amerindianized terms such as *Oli Go* (Holy Ghost): *hebön* (heaven): *aibilibing* ("I believe in"): *awa pada* ("Our Father") and *Kuin* (Queen). *Kuin*, described as "an English woman", is a reference to Queen Victoria, (Queen of England, 1837-1901). The use of "*Alleluia*" to refer to the new beliefs and rituals appears to have derived from Anglican hymns and usages.

After his 'trip' to England and subsequent visions, I'siwon began to practice Areruya incorporating certain Christian concepts into traditional forms of celebration through dance and song. During this time of political collapse, economic restructuring and colonial and missionary intrusion, Amerindians in the circum-Roraima landscape struggled to maintain their land, culture and identity. As noted by Staats (1996:168): "What is clear, in spite of these ambiguous beginnings, is that the emergence of Alleluia was a response to drastically changing interethnic relations in the early post-Emancipation period." Consequently, there was a great deal of interest in the new conceptual system as a refuge and source of power for Amerindians who sought to revitalize their identity and sense of community within a changing landscape.

According to Amokokupai's contemporary oral tradition, I'siwon attracted several Makushi disciples, including his brother Preka, his neighbor Puraikoman, as well as Morokoi, Purataru, Sise' and Piripe. Not only were I'siwon's Makushi peers drawn to the new religion, but other Amerindians were too, including the following Akawaio who were later described as false prophets: Akonowai, Amu', Ensiman and Kurapitin. These individuals traveled down from the Pakaraima highlands along the Ireng River toward the Rupununi Savannah to learn Areruya from I'siwon and his disciples and bring it back home to the Guiana Highlands. At this time (late

1800s), Amokokupai was not yet a village but merely an abode for Abel and his elder brother Idono's grandfather who drowned.¹⁵⁴

Before Amokokupai and Phillipai, there was a village called Putukwai near the mouth of the Putukwai Creek that merges with the Kukui River just below the current village of Phillipai. The following oral history (recorded during fieldwork in March-April 2013) explains how Putukwai received Areruya from false prophets then lost it:

After traveling to I'siwon to learn Areruya, Kurupitin thought of himself as a prophet and tried to bring Areruya to Putukwai. The Akawaio loved Areruya and they started to dance, drink-up, have sex and do all sorts of evil things. They were dancing and sporting [partying] so much that their crops failed and they soon became very hungry and had to go hunting all the way down near Kako. At this time, Amu' and Ensiman asked Kurupitin to build a farm at Putukwai because they were hungry from dancing so much. Kurapitin agreed to the plan and planted plenty of crops, but they were doomed to fail.

I'siwon got word that the people of Putukwai weren't practicing Areruya properly so he sent Sise', one of his most trusted disciples, to check on them. Before Sise' became a follower of I'siwon, he was not interested in Areruya and preferred to go fishing. One day when Sise' was out fishing, he looked at his reflection in the water and it told him to go back and dance Areruya. He went home and told his wife he would dedicate himself to Areruya.

Once Sise' gained the trust of I'siwon, he was sent to Putukwai to find out if the Akawaio people had strayed from the proper Areruya teachings like Judas. Sise' only visited Putukwai for a day and quickly discovered that it was true that they had strayed and lost God's word and the Areruya songs and dances. Soon the people of Putukwai were starving and began to eat each other. As punishment for all this evil, God sent *kairawaimi* [big locusts] and other plagues to punish the people of Putukwai.

At this point, the historical narrative becomes a bit murky. According to a statement by Peter Williams in 1985 (Colson 1998:35):

Wayamaekua people [Ataro River area] used to go to Plega [Plegaman] to get more knowledge from him. Also Putukwai people, who were Akawaio from Kwatin, and one of these used to go with them. At that time Abel got interested. If you hear something the first time, you do not always take it. Idono asked Abel [his younger brother] if he got the story – so the two brothers went again [to Plega], along with Putukwai people. Another person came into this conversation, a first cousin called Nawai-Nawai, and he came back to Putukwai with them.

¹⁵⁴ The neighboring village of Phillipai also didn't exist at this time. Phillipai is currently the largest sedentary community in this portion of the Upper Kukui River with several small satellite communities, including Amokokupai, a 45-minute walk from Phillipai.

The contemporary oral history is consistent with this narrative of the people of Putukwai receiving Areruya the second time from Nawai-Nawai who learned it from Pureka—a spirit name received through dreaming that was derived from the English words ‘Pray God’.¹⁵⁵ Before receiving this name, Pureka’s Makushi name was Enewari. Pureka is a prominent figure in Areruya lore and is credited with spreading Areruya from its birthplace near the Kanuku Mountains up the Contigo and Ireng Rivers toward Akawaio territory.

Since the demise of Putukwai, Areruya Indians have learned their lesson about dancing and singing Areruya too much to the detriment of regular subsistence activities.

As explained in *The Constitution* (1985:9):

Water for use on Christmas Day and wood for fuel are gathered the day before Christmas. This gathering of water and wood must be at midday and are kept in homes or individual family homes. The reason for gathering water and wood on Christmas Eve Day is because there will be special Christmas services which will last for days and nights. There will be no time to do these domestic tasks.

The Constitution also includes the following details about land ownership and the provision of food (1985:12):

The Alleluia church also owns farms which are cleared, planted and reaped by the church members. The purpose of the church farms are as follows:

- (a) To provide food for the church members in communities
- (b) To supply food for strangers visiting their communities
- (c) To raise funds

Due to the initial success of Areruya, I’siwon received many death threats. He knew that he was going to be killed so he told his brother Pureka (a trained *piyai’san*) that if he was killed, he should rub crab oil on him, pray for him and it would bring him back to life. This allegedly worked the first two times he was ‘killed’ by *e’toto ami*’ (multiple *kanaimis*). However, the third time he was chopped up and his body parts scattered so Pureka couldn’t bring him back to life.

¹⁵⁵ As discussed in Chapter 4, the *piyai’san*’s spirit name is *eneoge*, and *piyai’ma*’s spirit name is *atai-tai* (Chapter 5). Areruya prophets, and Amerindians in general, are known to have multiple names and to change them regularly, particularly as a result of colonial linguistic intrusion and migration for work.

There was also a Makushi named Puraikoman who is often confused with Pureka.

According to the oral history collectively recounted by Areruya elders:

Puraikoman was the neighbor of I'siwon and Pureka. Oral history holds that he was an unattractive man with many sores on his skin and chiggers [mites] in his feet and nobody loved him. He prayed all the time and was a devout follower of Areruya. He maintained a huge garden that everyone was jealous of. One day, he went to cut his farm and the Devil asked him what he would plant and he said 'calaloo' and continued to his farm. He eventually got God's word and went to heaven in a chariot. But when he died, he took his farm with him and only his skin with chiggers was left.

After losing Areruya at Putukwai, the 'proper Areruya' returned to the area thanks to Pureka (not Puraikoman) who taught Nawai-Nawai. It is unclear where Pureka taught Nawai-Nawai. Most likely this occurred in the upper Ireng River or Contigo valley area. Despite this uncertainty, residents of Amokokupai recounted the following story (from village records and collective oral histories) of how the people of Putukwai were saved and the proper Areruya came to the Kukui valley:

Pureka taught Areruya to Nawai-Nawai. Since everyone in Putukwai was doing evil things and God was punishing them, Nawai-Nawai went to look for helpers in nearby villages. Eventually, he and his wife found a man named Nascimento at Ka'ka'e'kwa, the hilltop at Kuraimaru [a small settlement down the Kukui River near the old village of Putukwai] where he had his farm. Abel later changed Nascimento's name to Kiyapun, meaning 'captain', because he had earned the title as an Areruya leader [Kiyapun also used the names Intokomari, Maikuwan and Tunamaren].

Earlier in his life, Nascimento went to Berbice then to Boa Vista, Brazil where he was known as Ashbel Perera. When Nawai-Nawai and his wife found Kiyapun, he was suffering from a snake bite so Nawai-Nawai rubbed him with crab oil and healed him with his words and said "Get up. Let's go save the people in Putukwai." Then they started to walk toward Putukwai and sing Areruya songs to remove the *kairawaimi* [locusts]. They danced and swung their hands outward in a chopping motion, forcing away the big locusts that started to disappear from the fetid village of Putukwai. Then the people of Putukwai joined them in dancing and there was heavy rain, wind and thunder that cleared away all the filth and sin.

When Nawai-Nawai and Kiyapun went home, they met Abel [Uraya' was Abel's birth name. He also used the names Wena'pa and Erepe'ki] making a *moroi* [fish trap]. He asked what happened at Putukwai and they told him about the plague. Then Nawai-Nawai and Kiyapun taught Abel Areruya because they thought he would be a good leader. At the time, Abel was a *piyai'san*. They told him that he shouldn't use *kawai* [tobacco] and do *piyai'san* work anymore. First Nawai-Nawai said these things, then Kiyapun.

At this time, Abel had two ‘wives’: Apirana and Wamonakū, who was not his sister as reported by others. Before becoming prophet, Abel was told to keep just one wife so he left Apirana and stayed with Wamonakū. Soon after, she became pregnant. When the baby was born it was *ikwadai pe* [like a ball], with no arms or legs. Abel knew that this had happened because he had done evil things and that God wanted him to repent his sins. Idono [Abel’s older brother] also told him to repent. They told Abel not to punish the baby because it was God’s child, and God would punish Abel if he killed the baby. Then Abel became an Areruya *pukena*’ [prophet] and Kiyapun was his *poitiri* [helper/servant/nephew; *I’terpotiri* is an elder leader/master] and he stood at the end of the line when they danced Areruya.

Abel learned Areruya and began to lead services in Putukwai, but a conflict arose so he and his brother Idono returned to their family settlement in Amokokupai (see Colson 1998:36). Their retreat was partly due to the fact that people would bring Abel food as an offering to be blessed but Abel refused to eat because ‘he wanted to find out more.’ This offended the people giving him offerings so he decided to retreat to Amokokupai and set up a church there (Colson 1998:36). This narrative illustrates how Areruya prophets would fast in order to obtain revelation, much like the process of becoming a *piyai’san*, or preparing for a séance or hunt; fasting is a way to ‘bring spirits into your body.’

According to Areruya elders interviewed collectively in March and April 2013:

Abel slept and dreamt for six days. On the seventh day, he awoke with a revelation. During his dreaming, he went to heaven but God said he couldn’t enter because he was a sinner and sent him back to teach the people about Areruya. In Abel’s dream, he passed by lions, a big sea, a marabunta ant nest, a ‘big wood’ [tree] and *imawari* with *liga* and their own Areruya. These *imawari* were false prophets. Abel brought the message from God, not Noah. Areruya people won’t meet lions, a great sea, marabunta ants or the ‘big wood’ when judgment comes. He saw these things because he was not Christian. He learned more and became a true Christian. Sinners and non-Christians can’t pass these things. These are their punishments. Abel preached not to practice *muran*, *taren* and *piyai’san* who sings *imawari* Areruya which is false. Abel was a *piyai’san* before finding God. This was the devil’s Areruya. All the people will rise when Jesus comes. At the sound of the first horn, Areruya Christians will go to heaven. At the second horn, non-Christians will rise for judgment. The third horn is for the pure evil ones.

The fact that Abel was dreaming and had these fantastic visions is evidence that the Areruya *pukena*’ (prophet) is capable of disembodiment through fasting, much like the *piyai’san*.

I'siwon, Pūreka and Abel were trained as *piyai*-men and were ultimately capable of reaching ecstasy without the assistance of tobacco—the primary mode of disembodiment for a *piyai* 'san—and successfully divining and incorporating new knowledge into the existing indigenous socio-environmental system.

When Fr. Cary-Elwes first visited Amokokupai for 15 days in 1917, he recorded the following (Colson 1998:72-73):

I am told that a certain Indian called Ipéru was killed by Kanaimas (evil spirits), but being a clever piaiman (witch doctor), he brought himself to life again. He was again killed by Kanaimas and again came to life. Then all the Kanaimas of the district assembled together and killed him so thoroughly that even he, great piaiman though he was, could not succeed in coming to life again.

According to the Areruya elders interviewed during fieldwork, the narrative above explains I'siwon's death, not Abel's (Ipéru): "Abel was killed [once] by a man named Pipi' from Kako who was *e'toto* [*kanaimi*]. He was jealous of Abel because he received God's word and was spreading it around." Pipi' allegedly broke both of Abel's legs causing him to get a fever and die. After attacking Abel, Pipi' returned to Kako but Abel's followers drowned him at the Arubaru, a branch of the Kako River.¹⁵⁶

Before dying, Abel asked his people not to bury him because he wanted to go straight to heaven.¹⁵⁷ As explained by the current residents of Amokokupai: "When he died, the people put him in his house on the top of the hill and made a small enclosure made of leaves and clay around the body." Some also suggest he was placed in a curial. "When Abel died, everyone left Amokokupai and people stopped dancing Areruya here. Kiyapun went to see the body several

¹⁵⁶ Abel, I'siwon and Handsome Lake were all allegedly killed from violent assault sorcery. According to Wallace: "Some tell the story of Handsome Lake's death—He was murdered by witchcraft—in awesome details; others pass over it lightly out of consideration for the Onondaga tribe, on whose reservation he met his end" (1972:7).

¹⁵⁷ In Kuraimaru, a small village near Phillipai where there used to be an Areruya church that burned down, there is an unburied human skeleton in the rocks above the small savannah. Local residents didn't know why it was there, but hypothesized that it was unburied because people believed that he, like I'siwon, could be brought back to life, or go straight to heaven, like Abel.

times and it took a long time for it to decompose. Five years later, they moved his bones to the side and began to dance Areruya again with Kiyapūn as the new Areruya leader.”

Some years later, Abel’s remains were finally buried in a shallow grave near today’s church pavilion. According to one source: “Leonard Robert accidentally dug up the bones while he was building a house on that spot and reburied them further down the hill by the big mango tree.” Abel’s daughter Edlis (Ellis) is buried in the same place. Her daughter, Josephine was buried on the other side of the hill behind the church building. Other Areruya Leaders including John William, William, Kiyapūn and Ibelebing were buried on top of the hill in various places but none have identifiable graves.¹⁵⁸

According to *The Constitution*, after a funeral service in the church: “The body must be buried in the morning hours, with the dead lying to face the morning sun” (Areruya Church Leaders 1985:12). As discussed in Chapter 6, the morning is the most scared time of day when harvesting or using *muran*. Additionally, the most potent part of the plant/tree is the side that faces the morning sun. Similarly, in the Areruya conceptual system, the morning is the best time to emerge from the darkness of an all-night service in the church and become baptized in the *akwa* (radiant light energy) of the morning sun.

In her book, Colson lists the following prophet leaders in Amokokupai (1998:42):

1. Abel (?-1911)
2. John William (c. 1911 - ?)
3. William
4. Kiabong (before 1929 – 1952/1953)
5. Aibilibing (1953 – 1970)
6. Peter Williams (1970-

¹⁵⁸ Much to the chagrin of Amokokupai residents, the Phillipai Village Council does not allow people to be buried in Amokokupai anymore; everyone must now be buried in Phillipai’s designated graveyard beside the airstrip, a one-hour walk from Amokokupai.

During my visit to Amokokupai, I worked closely with the Areruya Leaders and other community members to compile the following updated list of the succession of prophets at Amokokupai:

- 1) Nawai-Nawai
- 2) Kiyapun
- 3) Abel (?-1911)
- 4) Mosi' (son of Abel)
- 5) Akaman (the son-in-law of Abel from Awopiya'ta; a hunter for the church who brought meat to be blessed)
- 6) John William (Wana'siki' ma)
- 7) William (Tanpara 'John Paul')
- 8) Aipiripin (Kareta, Kurasi', Kuwin Mure and Edmund worked together under Aipiripin)
- 9) Kareta (from Amisu'ka, between Amokokupai and Kuraimaru; taught John Charlie)
- 10) Kurasi'
- 11) Kuwin Mure
- 12) Edmund
- 13) Peter Williams (1970 - ?)
- 14) Clavel Jones
- 15) Shedrack Leman
- 16) Henry Grant
- 17) Josephine Grant
- 18) President Clement Joseph (1996 - October 2012)
- 19) President Simian Edwin (January 2013 - October 2013)
- 20) President Linton John (November 2013 – Spring 2014)

In 1996, the Areruya Church adopted the title of President to distinguish a designated leader posted in Amokokupai as a primary representative for all Areruya branches. Before this change, the different congregations were more loosely affiliated. The addition of this title represents a consolidation of power in Amokokupai as headquarters for Areruya. Despite this new title and the list above, there is not always a clear hierarchy among Areruya Leaders. For example, during my visit, the current president was Simian Edwin who held the position in Amokokupai in the wake of Clement Joseph's death in October 2012. However, Clement Joseph appointed two vice presidents (Simian Edwin and Linton John) so there was some confusion as to who should be appointed the next president in October 2013. As further evidence of the diversification of Areruya leadership, during my visit to Amokokupai, Peter Williams was the

wisest existent *pukena*’, but he had limited physical capacities to dance, sing and lead services.¹⁵⁹ Ultimately, Areruya individuals demonstrate their leadership capacities in different ways in order to collaboratively navigate the community and creatively adapt to fluid landscapes of change.

The Areruya cosmogony and conceptual system is consistent with Wallace’s (1972) classification of a revitalization movement that includes charismatic prophet leadership, a syncretic code and other measures of institutionalization. What makes the Areruya creation narrative unique is the role of geography. Due to intensive missionary intrusion, Areruya is no longer practiced in the lowland Rupununi Savannah where it originated with I’siwon and the Makushi. The fact that it took root, after a false start, in the Guiana Highlands with the help of another charismatic prophet leader (Abel) is what ultimately enabled Areruya to survive, institutionalize and adapt to continual floods of cultural penetration. Wallace argues that revitalization movements often fail due to a lack of institutionalization after an initial charismatic leader’s thrust, and also due to the failure of the code to meet the ‘objective conditions’ of the environment where people dwell. As a multi-generational, multi-charismatic leader, and multi-geographical movement, Areruya continues to adapt and remain vital within a shared cosmogony and Roraima landscape that helps align it with a more viable (than a single community) social-ecological system.

Areruya as shamanic revitalization movement

There are three main specialists who operate within the realm of the supernatural in the circum-Roraima landscape: the *kanaimi*, *piyai’san* and *pukena*’. The *kanaimi* is a violent assault sorcerer who draws energy from the dark energy of the Underworld; the *piyai’san* is also capable

¹⁵⁹ Peter Williams was given the name Pa’rin (meaning ‘grandson’) as a birth name. He was also affectionately known as *papa* (father). This patriarch had the final word on all matters of history. Unfortunately, during my visit, he suffered from malaria and couldn’t always actively participate in discussions. He passed away in the Spring of 2014.

of the dark arts, but is generally inclined toward healing. The *pukena*’ on the other hand, is focused solely on healing through the maximization of *akwa* (radiant light energy). This section focuses on the role of the *pukena*’ and compares it to that of the *piyai*’*san* and the *kanaimi* in order to demonstrate how the Areruya Indians were capable of resisting and creatively adapting to external pressures to ultimately revitalize their shamanic conceptual landscape and practice.

According to Colson (1996:5-6): “All organized syncretic religions among the Ka’pon and Pemon peoples of the circum-Roraima landscape stems from the dream visions and experiences of a series of prophets, the *ipu kenaton*, the ‘wisdom possessors’ (*i*:- his/her; *pu*: wisdom; *kena*’: possessor; *-ton*: group plural suffix).” The male or female *pukena*’ systematically incorporates new knowledge into the indigenous system, adapting both and thereby creating a new distinctive set of concepts and rituals (Colson 1989:80-88). However, not every leader of an Areruya congregation is technically a *pukena*’ or ‘dreamer’ since not all leaders have successfully incorporated new songs.

It is no coincidence that the most important early Areruya prophets were *piyai*’*san* (I’siwon, Pureka and Abel) before becoming *pukena*’.¹⁶⁰ Much like the *piyai*’*san*, these individuals introduced and incorporated new knowledge into the indigenous system with new conceptual and ritual revelations divined through shamanic dreaming, fasting, praying, singing and dancing. Largely the result of missionary taboos, traditional shamanic practices are widely stigmatized, especially the intensive use of tobacco, *taren*, *muran* and especially all forms of assault sorcery. Areruya therefore functions as a shamanic revitalization movement and ark that has carried traditional forms of healing and non-violent resistance through floods of colonial intrusion. Areruya is not strictly in opposition to missionary teachings, but syncretic in the way

¹⁶⁰ According to Santilli, toward the end of the 19th century, Pureka went to Brazil for approximately four years. During this time, he was a young man without a wife learning to become a *piyai*’*san*. “He underwent his first public séance to become an officially recognized shaman, but then began to sing Alleluia and changed his name from Preka to Magalhães” (1987:13; cited by Colson 1998:32). Abel’s shamanic past has been more widely acknowledged (Colson 1998) and confirmed by oral tradition circa March/April 2013.

that it incorporates new Christian knowledge into its traditional animist conceptual system.

Both the *piyai'san* and the *pukena'* are capable of divining knowledge and bringing it back to their communities. Much of this knowledge is encapsulated in songs. The *pukena'* accesses these songs by dieting and engaging in extended periods of contemplation, prayer and dreaming. As explained by Colson: "When they wake up they describe what they saw and heard as they passed upwards through the different levels of the cosmos, in their search for enlightenment and the word of God" (1998:127).

When a *pukena'* successfully travels to the upper levels of the cosmos to divine knowledge, he or she hears songs coming from something they call a *liga*, aka a *liga-liga*. When asked what this is, an Areruya elder said: "*Liga* is like *wai*, a heavenly instrument. *Wai* is a mouth organ or harmonica from heaven that is only used by Areruya Indians, not other Akawaios." Another informant described this mysterious 'instrument' as "something like a radio, a trumpet or orchestra. It's a source of God's music that the prophets receive like a line or *tarikiran* [telegram] from God. There is a song that refers to *liga* as a telephone. This is how God told Noah about the flood." The *liga-liga* was also sometimes referred to as a *yen* (container/cave/portal) for heavenly music.

In Portuguese, *ligar* means 'to call or connect.' Given the proximity of Amokokupai to Brazil, it is likely that this word was derived from Portuguese. A *liga* therefore seems to represent some form of connection between earthly and heavenly domains, much like a telephone. As explained in detail in Chapter 4, the *piyai'san* travels to upper and lower levels of the cosmos but remains connected to his material body by *karawari*, a rope/string/line/vine that they travel on. The same shamanic phenomenon seems to exist with the *pukena'* (wisdom possessor) who divines knowledge through/by/from *liga* which functions much like a telephone connection to the upper levels of the cosmos, the source of knowledge, songs and ultimately pure *akwa*, radiant light energy.

One of the reasons that Christianity has found traction in the circum-Roraima landscape is because of its narrative parallels with the Makunaima creation myths. As discussed in Chapter 3, the ‘original sin’ that occurred when the Makunaima chopped down the Waiaka (Tree of Life) left the world in a spoiled and dangerous state, much like what occurred when Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Before the felling of the Waiaka, all things were people—*pemon-pe* or *ka’pon-pe*—existing in paradise. After it was chopped down, dangerous spirit forces (*piyai’ma*, *poito’ma*, etc.) differentiated themselves from mankind and began a new relationship with humans of a primarily antagonistic nature. For this reason, the Christian dogma of heavenly salvation found fertile ground in the circum-Roraima landscape.

The role of the Areruya *pukena’* complimented the *piyai’san* and in many ways legitimized certain aspects of the ecstatic tradition, but it did not entirely replace it. Colson’s work in the 1950s indicates that Akawaio followers of Areruya did not abstain from shamanic ritual. According to her observations: “all present shamans are believers [in Areruya], and many are enthusiastic adherents, taking part in church activities and feasts” (1977:45). Susan Staats also observed the same thing in her work with the Patamona: “Alleluia leaders generally did not aim to curtail the practice of indigenous curing...Among the Patamona, Alleluia dances partially replaced shamanic performances, but piaimen still practiced and attended to the local condition of the community along with Alleluia leaders...” (1996:166).

In Amokokupai, the Areruya *pukena’* has largely taken the place of the *piyai’san*, but many individuals still practice *taren* (invocations) and other traditional shamanic arts. Unlike other congregations such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church who would not allow a *piyai’san* to participate in their services, nobody is excluded from an Areruya service. Despite this acceptance, the traditional shamanic arts remain stigmatized. According to one Areruya elder, “*Piyai’san* sings *imawari* Areruya, which is false. This is the devil’s Areruya.” Areruya Indians

still believe in (and fear) the *piyai'san* and *taren*, but to a lesser extent than their faith in the *pukena'* and the evocative power of Areruya songs.

Much like the traditional practice of *taren*, Areruya has different songs for everything, including cutting the farm, blessing food, sunrise, travel, etc. As further evidence of the continuity between *taren* and Areruya songs, Colson states: “even the traditional invocations (*taremurū*) were sometimes sung and danced throughout the night” (1998:130). Another similarity between Areruya songs and *taren* is related to gender differentiation. When people of the opposite gender link arms and dance Areruya, the female sings to the male and vice versa, much like *taren* that always depend on the gender of the recipient. Both *taren* and Areruya songs also repeat the same verses numerous times and use cryptic words (e.g. *liga*). These techniques were clearly derived from the traditional use of *taren* that were often repeated and cloaked in secret language.¹⁶¹

The Areruya Indians were capable of successfully adapting *taren* to take the form of Areruya songs while maintaining a primary function of vocalized prayer. “Instead of an altar with people praying and singing in front of it, Alleluia Indians engage in sung and danced prayers, both inside and out-side their churches” (Colson 1998:130). Prayer is highlighted on the first page of *The Constitution*: “God gave this Church to the people of the Pakaraimas long ago through Ichiwung and Abel, and it is here to continue among them the works of Prayer, and the teaching of the Faith, which the founders received from God” (Areruya Church Leaders 1985:1).

According to a popular Areruya joke recorded during fieldwork: “A group of Adventist members were confronted by *akamisarai* [a large group of ‘tigers’/jaguars] so they prayed to God to keep them away, but it didn’t work. Then they used *taren* and the tigers went away. Their prayer didn’t work because they didn’t have the true faith so they had to resort to ‘evil’ *taren*.”

¹⁶¹ A similar phenomenon exists among the Handsome Lake movement, particularly when they recite the *Gaiwiio*, the ‘good word’ code or gospel. As noted by Wallace: “Some of the preachers rattle off the *Gaiwiio* in a language so archaic that many of the words are meaningless to their own and their listeners’ ears” (1972:7).

This narrative suggests a relational accommodation—i.e. of light vs. dark, standard vs. alternative, etc. It also expresses the contemporary cleavages and tensions between the Areruya, Adventist and shamanic conceptual systems by criticizing Adventism and both affirming and condemning the traditional shamanic powers of *taren*.

In the past, the *piyai'san* endeavored to maintain spiritual and material balance within and between diverse communities in a complex interconnected cosmos. Areruya, largely inspired by Christian narratives, also functions as a vehicle for spiritual and material benefit. One of the reasons that Christian dogma was appealing in the circum-Roraima landscape is because it was the religion of the white man who was blessed with advanced technologies and material wealth. As explained by Colson (1998:110):

At Amokokupai Fr. Cary-Elwes was told that their first great prophet leader 'Ipéru' (T'ebelī, or Abel) had been taught Alleluia by Noah, who promised that if the Akawaio performed Alleluia he would come down from heaven to earth in his boat, bringing the Akawaio an abundant supply of the trade goods they longed for.

This narrative is consistent with the phenomenon of cargo cults. A cargo cult entails the belief that by performing a certain ritual or ceremonial act (e.g. danced and sung prayers) a reward will be achieved in the form of more material goods, prosperity and spiritual salvation (Worsley 1957). As explained by Colson (1996:6):

...[Hallelujah] was inspired by an intensive search for a new truth and understanding of life and being, and for the material benefits which were expected to stem from these philosophical and spiritual ones. Thus present day Hallelujah and its attendant cults are the culmination of a long history of enthusiasm – a search for the revelation of “the good life.”

This aspiration accords with what Wallace refers to among the Handsome Lake movement as a desire for a “new and more satisfying culture,” but he stresses the additional psychological desires for new cognitive paradigms or ‘mazeways’ as much as material wealth (1972; see also Grumet 2003; Harkin 2004).

Areruya remains a vehicle for the attainment of ‘the good life’ and material wealth, particularly with regard to agricultural abundance. Whereas before, the *piyai’san* had a relative monopoly on access to the spiritual domain, now the entire community can access divine knowledge and healing through a shared ecstatic experience where everyone links arms ‘so nobody loses their way to heaven.’ In some instances, ecstasy is achieved individually: According to Colson, among some of the Gran Sabana Pemon: “Individuals break the dance line and begin to hop, jump and sway until they fall, in a moment of ecstasy followed by exhaustion. They say that in this experience they have ‘seen heaven’ ” (1998:173). This type of experience could be compared to Pentecostal movements and also to the Ghost Dance of the Siox Indians (Mooney 1896), and their non-hierarchical forms of empowerment.

Much like Pentecostalism (Wilkinson 2009), Areruya has a non-hierarchical structure in the sense that all members are capable and encouraged to dream and seek ecstasy independently. This format can indeed foster empowerment, but too much independence can also make the institution vulnerable to disintegration. Likewise, too much bureaucratic authority often fails to keep the membership united (Wallace 1972). This is why it is important to have at least one official charismatic leader or *pukena’* to hold the community together and guide the institution as if leading a column of dancing people like the head of a snake.

Another form of creative adaptation from the traditional shamanic ontology to the Areruya conceptual system is represented in the role of special spirit helpers. As discussed in Chapter 4, the *piyai’san* is known to have spirit helpers called *iachi* (or *yachi*; plural, *yachiton*). These spirit forces help the *piyai’san* by protecting his/her bench, the patient, as well as guarding the *piyai’san* during spirit flight. These *yachiton* are often conceptualized as birds or beautiful women in skirts. The *piyai’san* often remarks how he will enter a trance, dance and travel off with a bird-lady on each arm. In Areruya, the *pukena’* is assisted by *engel-ton* (angels) or, more commonly, *poitiriton* (helpers, servants, or nephews; *I’terpotiri* is the elder leader/master or

pukena’) who are sometimes perceived as winged spirits acting as intermediaries between heaven and Earth in much the same way as *yachiton*. Similarly, the proper form of the most common Areruya dance (Umanunni: 4 steps forward, 2 steps back) is to link arms man-woman-man-woman so that the effect is much like a male *piyai*’*san* dancing with a woman on each arm.



Figure 10: An Areruya circle dance at the new church in Jawalla (April 2013)

The fact that significant Areruya festivals include services that last through the night is another example of the revitalization of the shamanic conceptual system. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Sun Father dies each day and travels through the Earth each night, much like a *piyai*’*san* conducting a *séance*. Therefore it is no surprise that the Areruya dance through the night in order to return enlightened, like the morning sun upon the Earth.

Further evidence of the ancestral importance of traveling through the night to divine knowledge comes from the Makunaima, the children of the Sun Father who ‘shaped the world at night.’ Though there was much debate and confusion surrounding this question, most Areruya

faithful believe: “God created the sun and the Makunaima are children of the sun. We [Akawaio/Areruya] are descendants of the Makunaima, but they were bad minded, doing evil things. They put rocks and rapids in the rivers that block big fish from coming up the Mazaruni River.” While the Areruya may condemn the Makunaima as demiurges that prevented them from eating big fish, they ultimately pay homage to their ancestors by singing and dancing through the night and praising *u-wi* (‘elder brother’ or Jesus Christ, brother of mankind; also a central concept surrounding Makunaima and his little brother Chiki) thereby maintaining continuity and divining new knowledge in order to re-shape and renew the world through an Areruya conceptual system and practice.

Much like the *piyai’san*, each Areruya *pukena’* has a different style, pace and emphasis. Services are announced with the blow of a horn. Despite the horn, Areruya services tend to begin and end when the time feels right. Amerindians have a particular conception of time that has a loose definition and does not adhere to strict form: If one feels tired, it’s time to sleep; If one is hungry or food is offered or available, it’s time to eat. Likewise, if one feels like dancing, they dance; and if they get tired, they take a seat around the perimeter of the Church or outside.

When dancing (particularly the Umanunni: 4 steps forward and 2 steps back), the aesthetic and existential effect of the hypnotic singing and marching in concentric circles is akin to a pulsing serpent, slithering and vibrating in ecstatic communal rhythm. The *pukena’* functions as the head of the body, guiding the column with his or her *poitiri* (assistant) at the tail. During the Asa’ri’ne dance (man and woman link arms and dance in pairs), the *pukena’* and his or her partner will periodically turn and face the column behind them to push the snake backwards. This particular aspect of the dance is done to stall the forward march and walk backwards to wait for others to join the Areruya community on its meandering journey through the river of life.

Areruya: a status update

During fieldwork, the Areruya Leaders helped me compile a list of Areruya churches in the circum-Roraima landscape. Researchers Virginia Amaral and Iokiñe Rodríguez, who recently conducted fieldwork in Brazil and Venezuela, later corroborated that list, resulting in the following Table of Areruya Churches.

Village	River/Region	Dialect	Country
1. Amokokupai	Putukwai, Upper Kukui, Upper Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
2. Phillipai (under construction)	Kukui, Upper Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
3. Wayalayin	Ataro, Kukui, Upper Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
4. Chinowieng	Haieka, Upper Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
5. Jawalla	Confluence of Kukui and Maz.	Akawaio	Guyana
6. Kamarang	Confluence of Kamarang and Maz.	Akawaio	Guyana
7. Warawata	Kamarang, Upper Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
8. Tassarene	Middle Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
9. Isseneru	Middle Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
10. Kanawapai	Ireng, Region 8	Patamona	Guyana
11. Kankarumi	Middle Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
12. Sarwo	Region 8	Patamona	Guyana
13. Wuinaun	Ataro, Kukui, Upper Mazaruni	Akawaio	Guyana
14. Serra do Sol (Wii Tîpî)	Aknaren, Upper Contigo (Kwatin)	Ingarikó	Brazil
15. Mapaé	Upper Contigo (near Mt. Roraima)	Ingarikó	Brazil
16. Manalai	Panari, Upper Contigo	Ingarikó	Brazil
17. Awendei	Upper Contigo (close to Manalai)	Ingarikó	Brazil
18. Kumaipa	Upper Contigo	Ingarikó	Brazil
19. Andorinha	Ailán (a tributary of the Ireng)	Makushi	Brazil
20. Campo Grande	Ailán	Makushi	Brazil
21. Macuquém	Ailán	Makushi	Brazil
22. San Rafael	Canaima National Park	Arekuna	Venezuela
23. Kavanayen	Río Caroní	Arekuna	Venezuela
24. Kamarata	Río Akanán	Arekuna	Venezuela
25. Uriman	Río Caroní	Arekuna	Venezuela
26. Sam Camilo	?	Taurepan	Venezuela

Two branches (Paramakatoi and Mokepai) are not included because they recently stopped holding Areruya services. According to Dorene: “Paramakatoi had an Areruya Church but lost it because of the Wesleyan Church. Now they are asking for a new Areruya Church.” There is also demand for a new Areruya Church in Waramadong. The church in Phillipai is partially

completed with plans to open in the near future. There used to be a church in Kuraimaru but it burnt down. Seventh-day Adventist churches allegedly pushed out branches at Wax Creek and Karakana. Sarawo and Kankarumi are the newest Areruya branches. According to Rodriguez, the syncretic movement known as Chochiman is also being practiced in Kavanayen, Venezuela.

Toward the end of fieldwork, there was a large weekend-long gathering of Areruya pilgrims for the opening of a new Areruya church in Jawalla.¹⁶² Upon arriving in Jawalla, hosts unloaded the boats and welcomed the travelers who lined up ceremonially in coupled pairs at the perimeter of the Areruya church grounds. With linked arms, they began to rock back and forth and sing an arrival song before dancing into the church grounds like a marching, serpentine parade. After years of colonial and missionary intrusion and conversion in the circum-Roraima landscape, the Areruya Indians are the only ones that still enter villages in this ritualized manner, much like their ancestors did when gathering for Tukui' or Parishara festivals (Colson and Armellada 1989).

As evidenced by the hundreds of Akawaio, Ingarikó, Arekuna, Patamona and Taurepan pilgrims—including some that traveled for weeks from Brazil—who turned up in Jawalla and danced through the night and weekend, the Areruya Church remains vital. According to one estimate by the Areruya Secretary, the church had 460 members at inception (1985?) and had more than 4,000 members as of April 2013. Other churches are fortunate to have wealthy benefactors abroad that contribute resources for ongoing missionary activities and youth outreach. Areruya is not going to disappear anytime soon, but it faces significant challenges to remain relevant in the complex and competitive circum-Roraima spiritual landscape.

¹⁶²Due to distance and a lack of transport infrastructure to travel around Mt. Roraima, there were no Areruya congregations from Venezuela, suggesting a geographic cleavage in the institution.

Rethinking revitalization in an ethnogeographic context

According to Staats (1996:171): “Despite internal disagreements, false starts, and the eventual adoption of a European signifier for the supreme deity, Alleluia followers have consistently presented the religion to travelers, missionaries, and ethnographers as a means of resisting coastal spiritual influence.” Areruya is not only a form of resistance; it is also a revitalization movement consistent with Wallace’s model that includes prophet leaders, a special code and institutionalization (1972). Areruya differs in the way that its narrative includes migration to an isolated highland geography where it was revitalized by a succession of *pukena’ton* (prophet leaders). An intriguing aspect of the Areruya movement is that it needed a geographic space to develop and flourish, away from the strong missionary hand. Given the role of environmental stress in revitalization movements, they needed a habitat (environmental, spiritual, social, etc.) in which to develop. This type of refuge is impossible to achieve in situations of extreme control or repression, where social movements can turn violent, millennial, or reversionist.

During my visit to Amokokupai, a delegation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC) in Phillipai came to the Areruya Church one Saturday. Like everyone else, they were welcomed and given space and time to perform a number of songs and even to preach. The Areruya congregation listened attentively to their English songs and encouragement to stop drinking *kasa*’ (fermented cassava drink), worshipping on Sunday and participating in other ‘un-Godly things’ for fear of Judgment. When the SDAC completed their ‘service’, the Areruya congregation remained seated around the perimeter of the dance hall while the Areruya Leaders had a brief discussion. First, a man with a bucket of fermented cane juice was sent around the interior of the church (always counter-clockwise, the opposite direction of dancing) to dole out bowls of the sweet alcoholic drink while everyone sang a particular Areruya song in Akawaio

praising cane juice (and taunting the non-alcoholic SDAC). When the bucket came around to the SDAC members, all but one had conveniently vanished. Knowing alcohol was taboo in the SDAC conceptual system, the remaining individual reluctantly accepted a bowl, smiled and drank. Once everyone was re-charged, they stood up and the Areruya Leaders led several more hours of especially vigorous singing and dancing. Towards the end, several of the SDAC members joined in the enchanting Areruya singing and dancing rituals. I think it would be safe to say that the Areruya Church converted at least one SDAC member that day.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: A shamanic land ethic

The abundance of the circum-Roraima landscape shaped and historically occupied by the Makunaima creation heroes and their Amerindian descendants—evidenced by rich archeological and narrative data—is indicative of an integrated indigenous cultural model of landscape that is multi-layered and constituted by the sum total of historical ecological and spiritual relations that define the circum-Roraima social-cosmological system. This model is resilient and in constant evolution through revitalization efforts originating in various locales which spread and are adapted selectively by communities elsewhere in human geographical networks. The research questions presented in the introduction are mainly addressed in the ethnographic chapters; other key research findings are discussed below. This chapter reviews the ethnographic and theoretical contributions of the thesis and articulates a shamanic land ethic for the circum-Roraima landscape and its implications for local communities. It concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the project and questions for further research.

Contribution to the literature

The key literature on the region provides divergent interpretations of a highly dynamic landscape that is increasingly threatened by external pressures. This thesis presents a comprehensive cosmology and spiritual ecology of the circum-Roraima landscape that builds on literature from Audrey Colson (1977; 1998; Colson and Armellada 1989; Wavell et al. 1966) and others (Staats 1996, 2009; Whitehead 2002, 2004; Fox 2003) revealing a nuanced understanding of the role of the *piyai'san*, *kanaimi* and *pukena'*; the *imawariton* (disembodied spirits); *piyai'ma/atai-tai*, *poito'ma/patamona*, etc.; ant and stone charms; and details surrounding the Areruya cosmogony and current status.

This thesis adds to scholarship on being, place, space, language and landscape (Sauer 1925, 1963; Santos-Granero 1998, 2005; Thornton 2008; Johnson and Hunn 2010; Descola 2013; Green 2013) with a spiritual ecology and shamanic land ethic that dictate landscape morphology. It contributes to literature on animism, religious studies and revitalization movements (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971; Wallace 1972; Sponsel 2012; Kopinawa 2013; Harvey 2013) with an integrated cosmology and analysis of the Areruya shamanic highland revitalization movement. It also informs the field of historical ecology (Crumley 1987, 2007; Balée 1998, 2006, 2013; Rival 2006; Balée and Erickson 2006; Alexiades 2009) with an integral spiritual ecological dialectic. Further sections in this conclusion unite the fields of spiritual, historical and political ecology with an analysis of specific initiatives that inform the more general fields of ethnodevelopment, environmental anthropology and human geography (Nash 1979; Taussig 1980; Gray 1997; Berkes 2000; Escobar 2008; Blaser 2010).

Within the highly contested spiritual domain of the circum-Roraima landscape, the *piyai'san*, *kanaimi* and *pukena* are interlocutors who interpret and maintain (not necessarily embodying) a strict 'way of life' collaboratively negotiated with kindred biospiritual agents (Thornton 2011), all within an animated cosmos. Despite overwhelming forces of marginalization, these practitioners are very much alive, practicing their arts beyond the frontier. Just as there are three primary shamanic practitioners within the tripartite cosmos of the circum-Roraima landscape, there are also three fundamental principles within a shamanic ontology and land ethic that provide a valuable model for resource management, especially within the context of ethnodevelopment.

1) Landscapes are composed of diverse biospiritual agents that are directly interrelated, interdependent and interchangeable. For example, the circum-Roraima landscape, initially shaped by mythological demiurge ancestors (Makunaima), is composed of humans, plants, animals, stones, other-than-human beings (*piyai'ma*, *poito'ma*, *tɬwenkaron*, etc.) and their

imawariton (disembodied spirits, including those of ancestors). Not only are these agents composed of the same dark (*ewarupɪ*) and radiant light (*akwa*) energy, but they are also susceptible to disembodiment, shape shifting, reincarnation, possession and exorcism.

(2) The appropriate relationship between humans, landscapes and their other-than-human constituents is reciprocal—that is, everything exists within a circuit of energy and morality (*meruntɪ*, ‘strength or energy of life’) that requires giving and sacrifice in exchange for extraction and consumption. This principle is consistent with the law of conservation of energy (Lightman 2000): the total energy of an isolated system is constant—it cannot be created or destroyed; it can only be transferred from one form to another. Every act of appropriation of nature must be negotiated with all existing things through different mechanisms such as agricultural rituals (offerings of tobacco or fermented drink) and other acts of shamanic and symbolic exchange. In other words, no resources should be touched, moved or taken without first asking and offering something in exchange.

(3) Living landscapes and their interrelated constituents are structured in a pyramid of energy, authority and power that maintains both continuity and change within the system. The circum-Roraima landscape is composed of a biospiritual hierarchy where *piyai’ma/atai-tai* (an anthropomorphic manifestation and inhabitant of mountains) is the most powerful agent credited with teaching Amerindians how to weave, hunt, heal, harm, and much more. *Piyai’ma/atai-tai*, *poito’ma/pta’mna*, *rato/tɥwenkaron*, Eki No’soto and their kind are masters of places and resources who restrict and grant access. Hierarchy can also be associated with the concept of rhythm: a strong, regular and repeating cycle of movement or sound. Music is a fundamental unit of knowledge used as a medium for exchange/language between the shamanic practitioners and other biospiritual agents. An Arekuna *piyai’san* divines *moruwa* (‘warming songs’ to combat cold illnesses), while an Akawaio shaman may learn *mari’* (songs used to contact spirit helpers) from the plants, trees, stones, animals (especially birds), humans, natural phenomena and other-

than-human persons (e.g. Akawaio ‘cooling songs’ from *piyai’ma*). The Areruya *pukena*’ is known to receive songs from the *liga-liga* through dreaming. Some may challenge the notion of hierarchy as contradictory to the holistic interdependence expressed in the first principle; however, one need not look far to find this structure. Every being is born subordinate to and dependent upon its parents and ancestors. As individuals grow older, they develop more wisdom and authority, especially if they have children.

These three shamanic principles of interconnectivity, reciprocity and hierarchy manifest in the Amerindian ‘way of life’ (*etrakuasoman* in Akawaio; *mayu*’ in Makushi; *marshruman* in Arawak; ‘self-help’ in Creole English, aka ‘community work’). This ancient Amerindian tradition intimately associated with land modification—especially the production and consumption of cassava and its derivatives—necessitates cooperation and exchange between diverse cultural, ecological and spiritual constituents. During ‘self-help’, participants regularly sing songs often directed at the spirit masters of the landscape asking for fertility and protection. This perpetual dialectic with an extended community of beings and systems mediated by representative agents facilitates nuanced connectivity and heightened sensitivity to the exchanges of energy within and between collective bodies. Ultimately, all are participant and dependent upon this essential ‘way of life’.

The shamanic arts have endured, transformed and in some instances been revitalized (Areruya); therefore, the shamanic land ethic is situated within the landscape and its multitude of agents and shamanic practitioners; therefore a ‘shamanic’ ethnodevelopment project is anything that is intimately concerned with maintaining and extending durable Amerindian land tenure. Since the circum-Roraima landscape is highly contested, any model of ethnodevelopment will not be consensual, nor should it be. Just like the shamanic arts, ethnodevelopment projects function optimally when they are situated in place and supported by autonomous communities with expert interlocutors who can manage and distribute resources equitably (Scheyvens 1999;

Blaser 2011). The next sections discuss specific ethnodevelopment initiatives that have the potential to revitalize a shamanic land ethic within local communities.

Revitalization of local communities

The material presented and analyzed in ethnographic chapters demonstrates that Amerindian communities hold a plethora of knowledge that can be leveraged in the context of political, socio-economic and spiritual domains. This knowledge is deeply connected with their landscape and the ontologies that sustain it. This section highlights specific examples that can advance our understanding of how a shamanic land ethic can revitalize local communities.

According to informants, local models of landscape are being ignored in favor of extractive resource development. As evidenced by recent hydroelectric feasibility studies and memorandums of understanding presented in Chapter 3—particularly between Guyana and Brazil, but also including others—the government has their own plan for Amerindian lands, particularly in the Upper Mazaruni (Colson 2013). As shown by the overwhelming turnout, enthusiasm and political fervor surrounding the Areruya celebration in Jawalla in April 2013, Amerindians are rallying around this endemic revitalization movement to maintain their landscape and the cultural models that support it.

My fieldwork confirms that a primary interest of Amerindian Village Council members is to get titles to more land, including rights to subsurface minerals and the rivers that run through their territory. Kako, Phillipai and several other villages in the Upper Mazaruni were urgently trying to get the government to suspend all mining concessions affecting their land (titled and requested) and its natural resources. As a result of ad hoc mining and other deleterious land use, the Mazaruni River is so contaminated that it cannot be used for drinking, bathing or washing clothes. According to Village Council members, local communities and rivers would benefit from stronger land titles.

As clearly demonstrated by the case of the greenheart seed discussed in Chapter 4, intellectual property rights are weak in Guyana. Amerindians own a plethora of valuable knowledge, particularly with regard to medicinal plants, that needs to be acknowledged, respected and rewarded (Posey 1998, 2003; Blaser 2010; Reed 2008). Many Amerindian informants said that they would like Guyana's Amerindian Act (2006) to be revised to give them rights to plant and animal products that they have cultivated and engaged with for millennia. They believe that these rights would drastically improve the well being of their communities.

Maintaining a shamanic land ethic is intimately connected with the preservation of local languages. As expressed by Amerindian teachers, they struggle to reconcile local language, technology, skills and standards with external imaginaries.¹⁶³ Amerindian children throughout the interior of Guyana are expected to learn all the same information being taught on the coastland; therefore they are encouraged to emigrate mentally and physically from the land and the spiritual ecology that maintains it. As suggested by Cliva Joseph, an Akawaio teacher: "Most parents and grandparents in Phillipai speak only Akawaio so the kids speak and understand Akawaio, but can not read and write it. Therefore, we spend extra time to teach in English and Akawaio, but the exams are all in English so the children are encouraged not to speak their local language." Based on my ethnographic observations, many Amerindian schools do not have sufficient space and facilities for everyone who wants education beyond grammar school. For example, as explained by Cliva: "In 2010, 24 students from Phillipai went to secondary school in Waramadong [the only secondary school for the entire Upper Mazaruni]; in 2011, 15 students went; and in 2012, only 2 out of 37 graduates went to secondary school because of limited space in Waramadong dormitories." Certain NGOs such as the Rupununi Learners Foundation and government

¹⁶³ According to a personal communication with Audrey Colson (June 2015), the Pemon in Venezuela have had a bilingual program for a long time with teachers trained in both Pemon and Spanish. The Capuchins have also contributed by publishing Pemon dictionaries, stories, myths and accounts of daily life.

partnerships such as the NRDDDB and Bina Hill Institute have begun to address education deficiencies, but further work is still needed.

Amerindians have historically been disempowered through the naming of certain villages and landmarks by the government in order to make them more understandable to non-Amerindians. Many elders remarked that they would like to use their original Amerindian place names instead of village names chosen exogenously. For example, elderly residents of Fairview Village in the Iwokrama Forest want their village to be called Kurupukari;¹⁶⁴ elders in Jawalla, on the Upper Mazaruni, want their village to be referred to by its original name: Usari warapai.¹⁶⁵ This observation contributes to improving our understanding of Amerindian interests that they feel should be addressed in order to enhance their political voice.

Amerindian livelihoods are closely connected with the land and their knowledge of local ecosystems. One way to translate this knowledge into income is through ecotourism. Guyana has abundant ecotourism potential; however, some models are more promising than others. According to Ashley Holland, an expert river guide based in Yupukari who was interviewed during fieldwork, most tourists that come to Guyana are birders seeking rare species like the harpy eagle or cock-of-the-rock (*Rupicola rupicola*). The second largest group of tourists consists of sport fishermen attracted to the plethora of freshwater trophy fish in Guyana, especially the arapaima, the largest freshwater, scaled, air-breathing fish in the world. As evidenced by numerous Amerindian guides, local knowledge of these animals can be utilized for economic benefits.

Several tourists said that Amerindian communities with ecolodges should have plant gardens with *muran* and other medicines and forest products that visitors can learn about, sample

¹⁶⁴ *Kuru* means ‘snail’; *kari* is ‘hill’ or ‘island’ in Makushi. According to a Makushi *panton*, Insikiran (Makunaima) made the island and rock rapids here to block his pet snail from escaping to the ocean.

¹⁶⁵ *Usari* means ‘deer’; *pai* is a bay on a river in Akawaio. According to a *panton*, two men were hunting a deer that jumped into the Kukui River and was shot and hauled up on a large *tipu* (a sacred rock and home of *wairlarimu*, a dangerous dark haired ‘water tiger’) on the river near the center of the current village.

and purchase. Others indicated that they would be interested in receiving treatment from local healers, suggesting potential for the development of medical tourism. As explained by Russian Dorrick, a Village Councilor from Yupukari: “Most tourists want to see rare biodiversity; they also enjoy hearing traditional *panton* and *taren* that my grandfather knows and I am learning. This is part of our traditional knowledge.”

My fieldwork confirms Ganga’s assessment that ecotourism is a viable source of sustainable development for Amerindian villages in Guyana, particularly in the North Rupununi (Ganga 1994).¹⁶⁶ For example, Surama Ecolodge receives many guests and excels at generating co-benefits distributed equally among village residents—a point underscored by Scheyvens as a key to successful ecotourism operations (1999). When asked about the distribution of benefits, Surama villagers agreed that they were being shared. According to residents in other villages with ecolodges, such as Caiman House in Yupukari, not everyone feels better off.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 7, traditional Amerindian cultural practices, including songs and dances, have been transformed and revitalized through Areruya—the most institutionalized Amerindian movement that transcends the circum-Roraima landscape. As the only indigenous religion to Guyana, Areruya Leaders would like to return the faith to the Rupununi where it began under Pichiwöng. Fieldwork in the Rupununi confirmed receptivity to this idea since many Makushi informants wanted to learn more about Areruya and its compelling songs and dances. As persistently expressed by Areruya Leaders, if their faith returned to where it began, it could revitalize Amerindian culture and landscapes along the Rupununi and connect disparate groups, thereby empowering and revitalizing the entire region.

Many Christian missions in the circum-Roraima landscape are funded by wealthy foreign benefactors. Despite their noble humanitarian, ethnographic and linguistic work, many of these

¹⁶⁶ This discussion excludes ecotourism facilities such as Iwokrama, Rock View Lodge, Dadanawa Ranch, Karanambo Ranch and others because they are not community-run.

institutions continue to stigmatize certain aspects of traditional Amerindian culture such as drinking fermented cassava drinks—a important component of social interaction and source of subsistence and nutrition—and the use of traditional medicine such as *muran*, *taren* and other practices associated with the *piyai'san*. Each individual, congregation and village has a distinct spiritual ecological disposition; however, all face the same challenge of safeguarding traditional knowledge and practices while also syncretizing with exogenous belief systems and technologies. Areruya Leaders believe that one way to mitigate the erosion of local knowledge systems and revitalize the landscape is for Areruya to forge ties with wealthy donors who could help Areruya with mission efforts of their own.

The initiatives described in this section are indicative of the importance of a shamanic land ethic and practice for revitalizing Amerindian political, socio-economic and spiritual institutions. Based on my fieldwork experience, they exemplify the Amerindian aspirations to further integrate local knowledge and beliefs into the existing models based on the utilitarian anthropocentric worldview. Such revitalization efforts would allow local communities to preserve their cosmological ontologies and maintain landscapes of abundance.

Limitations and questions for further research

One of the limitations of this thesis relates to research permits. If permits were acquired for Venezuela and Brazil, this investigation would have included villages in these territories. It would have also been optimal to remain in the Upper Mazaruni for the duration of fieldwork, but this was not possible due to bureaucratic rigidities in Georgetown. The thesis would also benefit from more linguistic analysis, especially with regard to the many Areruya songs that were recorded but not analyzed due to a lack of time and translation resources. Thorough identification of plants and animals, particularly with regard to the sections on *muran*, would have enhanced understanding of these charms and medicines. Another limitation of the thesis is

that it does not include an emic map or cosmogram for the Areruya universe. The remainder of this section presents topics and questions for further research to address these deficiencies.

The highly sophisticated and endangered knowledge and practices associated with the ‘high science’ of shamanism represent an invaluable resource for present and future generations. There is much more to be learned about the *piyai’san*, *kanaimi*, *pukena*, other-than-human forces and the Areruya movement, especially with regard to their role in reinforcing social and environmental ethics. Further data on the spiritual ecological dimension of the circum-Roraima landscape would enrich our understanding of how the Akawaio perceive and manage their *potawa* (food and wilderness ‘reserves’). Additional research could also clarify the complex network of sub-categories of *siwonoton* (masters and mistresses of resources).

The circum-Roraima landscape has already proven its value by providing (without due compensation) *urari* (curare), a traditional poison applied to darts and arrows that played a significant role in helping Western scientists understand neurophysiology and the modern use of anesthesia (Foldes 1993). Amerindian informants claim to have cures for HIV/AIDS (*haiari*) and cancer in their forests. Further research is needed to understand the effects of ingesting greenheart seeds, *haiari* and other plant and animal products that have been utilized by Amerindians for millennia. A good place to begin such research would be the multitude of *muran* (charms/medicines), including countless plants, trees barks, lianas and animals such as ants, wasps, frogs and much more.

Further research could also focus on the psychological and ritual techniques and the associate plant, animal and spirit forces used by the *piyai’san*, especially with regard to *taren* (invocations). How do these traditional forms of healing and harming work? What can we learn from these ancient techniques and how can we apply this knowledge to Western medicine? What is the best way to mitigate certain health risks for Amerindian communities, particularly from

introduced foods, technologies, diseases and conceptual systems? How can traditional and Western medicine be syncretized to ensure healthy bodies and landscapes?

There is a great deal of linguistic work to be done. Some (Makushi and Akawaio) have worked with linguists to create alphabetic and written logics. Other dialects, such as Arekuna, still don't have a written language. As dialects continue to disappear at an alarming rate, research in this area would be invaluable for future generations and the integrity of the landscape. Local and foreign researchers should continue to transcribe *panton* (stories), *taren* (invocations), *muran* (charms), songs and other forms of traditional knowledge before it disappears. Every time an elderly Amerindian dies, valuable knowledge is lost forever, unless it is transmitted.

The Areruya Indians contain a wealth of knowledge, particularly within their songs. Additional research into these songs would deepen our understanding of how the Areruya conceptual system functions to maintain balance. Comparative studies could also be done with other syncretic movements in Amazonia and beyond.

Amerindians expressed interest in making and updating maps that include landmarks such as *yen* (caves/resource increase sites), *tipu* (sacred stones) and other places of spiritual and historical import. Maps and documentation of Amerindian intellectual property exist, but they are incomplete, often lacking the proper technology such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS), materials and expertise to construct and translate such representations. With the help of local and external researchers, these records could be updated and adapted as part of a wider campaign and demonstration of ties to ancestral lands.

Glossary

The Akawaio alphabet

Consonants	Vowels
k (kaware)	a (paka)
m (mure)	e (ere)
n (napui)	i (pipi)
p (pusau)	o (toron)
r (rato)	u (kuru)
s (saro)	i (iyi)
t (tukui')	u (pumu)
w (wakau)	
y (yui)	
' (ori'ori)	

akamisarai – a large herd of small cats

akwa – radiant light energy (*auka* in Pemon)

a'kwari – soul (*ekaton* in Pemon)

amaiyko'/maiko' – little people in Akawaio and Arekuna

a'pa – to spit fermented cassava drinks or masticated charms

atai-tai – the spirit name of *piyai'ma*: a giant, hairy anthropomorphized mountain

camoudi – anaconda or water boa (Creole English)

eki – cassava

Eki No'soto – Cassava Grandmother or Cassava Mama, the garden spirit force

ene - outsiders or harmful entities in Akawaio (*omá:kon* in Makushi)

eneoge – the spirit name for the *piyai'san*

epa – bones

eruparu - breath

esa' – body or owner

e'toto – a dark shaman or violent assault sorcerer more widely known as a *kanaimi*

eunakoit – nose bina; a reed dipped in a mixture of muran then inserted through the nose and out the mouth

ewan – torso, hammock or vital center

ewarupi - dark energy, shadow or shade

hepun - heaven

imawari - a disembodied spirit force

i'terpotiri - an authoritative elder/leader/master (*topotru* in Makushi)

jumbie – a malevolent spirit force (Creole English)

kaikusi - jaguar (tiger in Creole English)

kanaimi - a dark shaman or violent assault sorcerer (*e'toto* in Akawaio)

Ka'pon Pata - Above World

kawai - tobacco

kraore - a vine or bush rope
kuimu - a water serpent/dragon/monster
kukui - a type of hawk/imawari, as well a tributary of the Upper Mazaruni River
kupai – inlet or pool
kuranu - whirlwind
latoi - shaman teachers, helpers or partners
liga-liga - a source of heavenly music in the Areruya conceptual system
maipuri - tapir or bush cow
Makunaima – the eldest brother of the Amerindian mythological creation hero demiurges
mari' - spirit or healing songs in Akawaio; ceremonial armbands worn during a shaman's first public séance.
matapi - thatched cylinder for squeezing the toxins out of cassava
merunti - strength or energy of life
mita – mouth
moiyoi' - spider web in Akawaio
moroi' - fish trap
moruwa - spirit or healing songs in Arekuna
mtai rete - spider web in Makushi
muran - plant and animal charms
nakata - crown of the head
Nunamirita - Underworld
Nunpon pata - Middle World
Parishara – traditional song and dance festival
pata ewan - fertile land
patamona/pta'mna/tamna - little people or 'wild bush Indians' in Makushi
panton - story
piyai'ma - a Highland term for a giant, hairy, anthropomorphized mountain; spirit name: *atai-tai*
piyai'san - shaman
piinki - peccary
poito'ma - little people
potawa - a food and wilderness 'reserve'
poitiri - helper, assistant, servant or nephew
pukena' - Areruya prophet leader or elderly possessor of wisdom
pun - flesh or meat
rato - the water spirit force
saura - an ant-stinging shield
seruma - a period of restricted diet, isolation and rest
sinau - frog
siwon - a master
tanuaka - osprey
taren - invocation
ti'pan - a small shadowy human that shape-shifts into a bat
tipu - charm stone

tompu - ghost in Makushi

trara - giant river otters, aka water dogs

tukui' - hummingbird

Tukui' - traditional song and dance festival

tumun - the beginning of rainy season (April – June)

tuwenkaron - mermaid

urari - curare, a poison used on blow darts and arrows to kill prey

Waiaka - the Tree of Life holding all the animals, fruits and vegetables of the world

wairarimu - black water tiger/jaguar (aka *totraimʉ*)

warisi - Amerindian backpack

wase'ma - anus

wopaima - whirlpool

yapon - seat, stool or bench

yen - enclosure, cage, bag, container or cave

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