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GUARDIANS OF THE
COSMOS: BANIWA
SHAMANS AND
PROPHETS, PART I

INTRODUCTION

On a cloudy and muggy afternoon, I sat with Edu, an elderly Baniwa shaman, in front of his brother's house facing the rapids of Pukwäpan on the Aiary River. He was about to begin a cure on his wife and had invited me to watch. Just as he had finished snuffing *pariká*, the shamans' sacred powder, and was beginning to chant, a heavy downpour interrupted the cure. We waited until it subsided and then, unexpectedly, he decided I should also snuff *pariká* to understand better what he would see and do in his cure. We snuffed the dark red powder, and he immediately began chanting and pointing to places in the sky, the "other world" where the spirits and deities who would help him in the cure are located. I joined him on the shamans' dance path, clumsily following his motions in what must have appeared a ridiculous pantomime of gestures and half-understood words, like an actor who does not know his script. Unconcerned with my performance, Edu continued chanting and showing me the other world—the village of *pariká*, of Kuwai (the spiritual Owner of Sickness) and of Dzuliferi (the spiritual Owner of *Pariká* and the shamans' Tobacco). Then, as I watched, he proceeded with the cure, now and then stopping to indicate new places in the sky, or to show me pathogenic objects he had extracted, or to chase away evil spirits that had invaded the curing ground.

We snuffed *pariká* several times more as other patients arrived and waited to be treated. This time, finding myself almost completely incapacitated by the powerful effects of the snuff, I simply sat and listened

Fa-ch'in 法欽
 Fa-yüan chu-lin 法苑珠林
 Ho-lo-chieh 訶羅竭
 Hsing-hsiu 行脩
 Hsü kao-seng chuan 續高僧傳
 hsü-ling 徐靈
 hsün 熏
 Hui-neng 慧能
 Hui-shih 惠始
 Hui-yüan 慧元
 hun 魂
 hun-po 魂帛
 hun-shen 魂身
 Jen-chi 忍基
 jou-shen 肉身
 jou-shen hsiang 肉身像
 Kao-seng chuan 高僧傳
 ku-hui hsiang 骨灰像
 kuei 鬼
 Kuang-hua ssu 廣化寺
 Lin-chi 臨濟
 ling 靈
 ling-ch'u 靈處

Tao-hsin 道信
 Tao-te ching 道德經
 t'ing 亭
 ting-hsiang (J. chinsô) 頂相
 Tô daiwajô tôsei den 唐大和上東征傳
 Tôsei den 東征傳
 Tôshôdaiji 唐招提寺
 Tsan-ning 贊寧
 Ts'ao-ch'i 漕溪
 Tso chuan 左傳
 tsu-shih-t'ang 祖師堂
 tsun-su ch'ien-hua 尊宿遷化
 Tz'u-hang 慈航
 wang (forget) 忘
 wang (perish) 亡
 Wang Lo-han 王羅漢
 wei-p'ai 位牌
 Wei Shou 魏收
 Wei shu 魏書
 Wu-hsiang 無相
 ying-t'ang 影堂
 Yu-hsüan 幽玄
 Zokuzôkyô 續藏經

as he chanted. My sensations of the experience of *pariká* then became overwhelming, as I later wrote in my field notebook:

There were no visions, simply a feeling of not being there. An acute awareness of who I really was and of what Edu was doing—age-old practices, and patients waiting to get a treatment, chatting amongst themselves as the shaman, nearly in a trance, continued his chanting the best he could. My self-consciousness was overwhelming. I was unable to speak. I thought how heavy it all was and would be when I came to think of it later. I thought of losing myself, how I had become like the Indians in my ways of speaking, working and thinking. I thought of what Edu meant when he said, “I give food when I have it, this is our way,” “These are my kin, so I treat them well” (Notebook no. 11, pp. 12–20).

I felt, on the one hand, a terrifying distance between myself and the shaman because I could not experience the meaning that was being constructed in the event. No doubt Edu sensed my profound disorientation and sought to construct a meaning for me: he traced a line from the zenith of the sky to where we were, indicating exactly where the “cities of the whites” were located, and he said that in his trance he saw the spirits of my relatives who were looking for me.

On the other hand, *pariká* showed me what I may never have known had I continued thinking and acting as an anthropologist doing fieldwork. By the phrase “age-old practices,” I meant “the ancient and sophisticated history of religious ideas centered on shamanism” which I felt was in some sense connected to the roots of religious meaning in my own cultural experience.¹

That my experience with *pariká* changed the quality and direction of my fieldwork became apparent as time went on, for the analytic constructs with which I had been armed in my studies made no more sense, or seemed to go only so far. Yet, there was very little in the way of anthropological perspectives available at the time that did not reduce or transform the experiential level I sought to grasp into something else. Throughout the rest of my fieldwork, I found myself going deeper into the esoteric knowledge of Baniwa religious thought but without really having a language, other than the native concepts themselves, to communicate what I learned in a way that would make sense—in order, in other words, to aid me in traversing the “distance” of cultural experience. I remained too near to the “exotic minutiae” of local knowledge to be able to construct a satisfying image and idiom that would convey the whole.²

¹ The quote is from Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: MacMillan, 1988), p. 441.

² The phrase “exotic minutiae” comes from C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic, 1983), p. 70. The substantial

From the time of my fieldwork, nearly a decade was to pass before the publication of Lawrence Sullivan's *Icanchu's Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (1988). Written by a historian of religions, it is situated on the interface of anthropology and the history of religions, distant yet marriageable cousins ever since E. B. Tylor. At the heart of Sullivan's method of interpretation is the hermeneutic circle, defined as "the willingness to treat the attempt at interpretation as a peculiarly instructive cultural process affected by both the subject and object of understanding. In an authentic interpretation, one's method cannot stand objectively apart from one's data; it must become subject to the data in order to grasp adequately what one engages in the act of understanding."³

This study is an effort to interpret Baniwa shamanism in light of the perspectives offered in *Icanchu's Drum*. To the extent that my use of its forms and categories has clarified the nature of Baniwa religious thought, enabling me to read its poetry, the method has fulfilled its purpose.

The Baniwa are an Arawak-speaking people of the Upper Rio Negro basin on the borders of Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia, with a total population of approximately six thousand.⁴ Horticulture and fishing are their principal subsistence activities, although a long history of contact has involved them in various forms of production and extractive labor for markets. They are organized into approximately six localized, patrilineal, exogamous phratries, each consisting of four or five sibs

ethnographic literature on the Northwest Amazon, especially on shamanic and initiation rituals, describes very well the Tukanoan-speaking peoples, but patterns of Arawakan shamanism and ritual differ in fundamental respects. See, e.g., G. Reichel-Dolmatoff, *The Shaman and the Jaguar* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975); S. Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades: Initiation and Cosmology in the Northwest Amazon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

³ Sullivan, p. 16.

⁴ In Colombia, they are known as Curripaco; in Venezuela, the Wakuenai. Recent studies include N. Journet, *Les jardins de paix: Étude des structures sociales chez les Curripaco des haut Rio Negro (Colombie)* (The gardens of peace: A study of social structure among the Curripaco of the upper Rio Negro [Colombia]) (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Thèse de IIIème cycle, 1988); and J. Hill, "Keepers of the Sacred Chants: The Poetics of Ritual Power in an Amazonian Society" (Southern Illinois University, Department of Anthropology, January 1989). The principal study of the Baniwa in Brazil is R. Wright, "The History and Religion of the Baniwa Peoples of the Upper Rio Negro Valley" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University); other works include W. Saake, "Iniciação de um Pajé entre os Baniwa e a Cura do Marecaimbara" (Initiation of a shaman among the Baniwa and the cure of *marecaimbara*), *Sociologia* 6 (1959-60): 424-42; E. Galvão, "Aculturação Indígena no Rio Negro" (Indigenous acculturation on the Rio Negro), *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi: Antropologia* 7 (1959): 1-60; and A. E. de Oliveira and E. Galvão, "A Situação Atual dos Baniwa (Alto Rio Negro)" (The present situation of the Baniwa [upper Rio Negro]), *O Museu Goeldi no Ano do Sesquicentenario: Publicações Avulsas* 20 (1973): 24-40.

ranked according to a model of agnatic siblings. Traditional religious life was based largely on the cult of the sacred flutes and trumpets, *Kuwai*, representing the first ancestors of the phratries; on the importance of the religious specialists, the shamans, and the chant-owners; and on a complex cycle of dance festivals coordinated with seasonal activities.

Since at least the mid-nineteenth century, the Baniwa have engaged in messianic and millenarian movements in which traditional religious preoccupations and the powers of religious specialists have served as the basis for resistance to external forms of colonial domination.⁵ Since the 1950s, the introduction of Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism has created a serious division among Baniwa communities over religious loyalties and the continuation of traditional practices and beliefs. Invasions by prospectors and mining companies since the early 1980s, and the reduction of their lands by military and development projects, have posed very grave threats to the Baniwas' survival in Brazil. Nevertheless, they have become increasingly and more effectively organized politically in defense of their rights.

My fieldwork on shamans and chant-owners was conducted among the Hohodene, a Baniwa phratry of the Aiary River in Brazil. The guiding question of my research was to understand the religious bases of historical millenarian and messianic movements. Oral histories, mythology, cosmology, ritual, and shamanism were the principal topics of my interviews with Hohodene elders. Several shamans and chant-owners took me under their wing to teach me a portion of what they knew. Yet, as they made clear, one can only know "a little" by listening, watching, and asking questions. A lot is left to experience.

This study, divided in two parts, begins with a brief discussion of the curing practices, duties, attributes, and status of the shamans and chant-owners. Although the activities of both specialists are shamanic, limitations of space prevent a fuller treatment of the chant-owners. In order to understand shamanism, one must have at least an introductory view of cosmogony (i.e., the primordium, the mythic time of creation) as remembered in the myths. Here, the task is not easy; there is no one single myth that explains the beginning of shamanism. All of the major myth cycles refer to shamanism. To select one as being more elucidating than another would be the equivalent of arbitrarily selecting one episode of a long myth, undermining the integrity of the myth and distorting the meaning of the episode. One must similarly have an introductory view of cosmology, that is, how the universe is organized into a coherent system of meaning that is both fundamentally grounded in

⁵ R. Wright and J. Hill, "History, Ritual and Myth: Nineteenth Century Millenarian Movements in the Northwest Amazon," *Ethnohistory* 33 (1986): 39-54.

cosmogony and constitutive of what I shall show to be a hierarchy of spiritualized being and power. The multitiered cosmos is the temporal/spatial “map” representing various states of the soul and its transformation through which the shaman derives and constructs meaning in his curing and other activities. One of the legacies of cosmogony is that the world in which we live is permanently flawed by evil, sickness, and misfortune. Like a sick person, this world is in constant need of healing. In the shaman’s apprenticeship, he learns to do precisely that. In this sense, they are the guardians of the cosmos.

SHAMANS AND CHANT-OWNERS

The shamans and chant-owners have distinct but complementary roles and attributes that differentiate their practice but not in any exclusive way. Shamans may be chant-owners and vice versa. The differences seem rather to lie in the manner of training, curing, and the quality of knowledge each commands.

A great deal of the power shamans (*Maliri*) have is based on an extensive knowledge and understanding of mythology and cosmology, as well as on a detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the multiple sources of sickness and their cures. Through the mediatory role that the shamans have between the sick of this world and the spirits and deities of the Baniwa pantheon, the shamans cure, advise, and guide people, thus performing one of the most vital services to the ongoing health and well-being of the community.

Shamans are ranked by their peers and by others of the community on the extent of their knowledge, the efficacy of their cures, and the truthfulness of the advice they give. This ranking is correlated with the proven ability of a shaman to gain access to the several levels of the cosmos, each level being associated with higher and more important spirits and deities. Shamans with a “little” or “half-knowledge” have access to the lower planes of the cosmos and are called on to perform limited kinds of cures. Frequently, they are shamans who in their apprenticeship learned for only a few years of the usual six to eight and, for some reason, decided not to continue. Or, they are shamans who were once of a higher level but “lost” their powers with age or through a fall of some kind.

Shamans who have completed their apprenticeship have experienced higher levels of the cosmos, notably where the Owner of Sickness, *Kuwai*, and the Owner of *Pariká* and Tobacco, *Dzuliferi*, live. These “true shamans” are capable of curing all of the more serious ailments and have the powers to do a variety of tasks such as weather control, seasonal passage, obtaining food resources (making forest fruits grow, opening the “soul houses” of game animals for the hunt), and tasks re-

lated to human welfare (taking defensive or aggressive action against personal enemies; protecting people from the realization of evil omens). True shamans also have knowledge and powers related to eschatological concerns, acting as soul-guides in the passage of dying persons' souls to the soul houses of the deceased. They have the powers to communicate with the ancestors and spirits of the dead. Only shamans have the power to determine whether this world, as they say, is about to come to an end or not, as for example in the millenarian movements of the past.

True shamans are believed to have the power to transform into a variety of powerful animals, notably the jaguar (this transformation is described as "putting on a cloak," the "jaguar-cloak," *dzauí maka*). They may also transform into the deities themselves. In their apprenticeship, shamans obtain features of their physiology very much like the Owner of Sickness, Kuwai. At the conclusion of their apprenticeship, shamans are said to attain the highest level of the cosmos and become like Yaperikuli, the creator and transformer. In their thought, the shamans say, they make everything in the world—all elements, all people in the world.

The highest level of shamans, called "jaguar people masters," *Dzauinai thairi*, or sometimes "snuff jaguars," are said to know everything there is to know about the cosmos and have truly prophetic abilities. Very few shamans attain this level; those who do often begin their learning and instruction from the time they are children of five or six and are judged by their elders to have qualities that predispose them to begin learning at an early age. Much of their lifetimes, then, is devoted to a fairly continuous instruction so that by the time they reach the age-group of elders, their knowledge far surpasses that of their companions who began instruction later. It has happened also that true shamans have gained extraordinary powers by surviving near fatal illnesses and then becoming *Dzauinai thairi*.

The *Dzauinai thairi* that attain the highest level in the cosmos, the place of Yaperikuli, can continuously do so even in sleeping states and are able to obtain spiritual remedies from Yaperikuli. Their powers of prescience are formidable, for they are said to know events that occur in other villages outside of the normal means by which these events are communicated, and they know of events that will happen in the future. One *Dzauinai thairi* named Kudui, of the upper Aiary River, for example, foretold in the late 1960s of the coming of the white people to the area. In 1977, when the Brazilian military began construction of airstrips at strategic locations in the Northwest Amazon, the Baniwa took this event and the consequences of it as a fulfillment of Kudui's prophecy.

The *Dzauinai thairi* know of the intentions of people who come to visit in the area before these intentions are made public. Their powers in defensive or aggressive action against enemies are considerably widened to include the ability to influence the course of events at a long distance. Their powers of advising their kin extend to everything that might pose threats to health and well-being. Thus Kudui is said to have advised his kin that “there would be no more sicknesses” at a time when apparently epidemics were a cause of concern. Still today, Kudui is remembered (he died around 1975) as “like Yaperikuli, our salvation.”

A few words are in order here on the influence of Christian dogma on shamans’ practice and belief. Since Catholic missionaries have taught for over a generation among the Baniwa, it is to be expected that shamans have incorporated some of their ideas into statements about their practice. Yet it is only by way of comparison between two ways of knowing and representing the sacred. Thus, shamans say that Yaperikuli is “how we know” what the Catholics “know as Jesu Cristu.” Yaperikuli has a house as Cristu has a chapel; a pet Harpy Eagle as Cristu has the “Espiritu Santo”; a tribe of people as Cristu has the disciples. In this regard, shamans are the principal interpreters of mission teachings, which they explain to other people. The Catholic saint days, for example, when missionaries visit the Aiary and show films of Christ’s life, are times when shamans and elders sit as a group in the audience and make comparisons between what they see on the films and the mythology of Yaperikuli. The really influential shamans of the past were adept at this kind of interpretation such that, in a time of rapid influx of Christian ideas, they not only could make meaningful statements of the interconnections between Christian dogma and their belief but also could utilize this dogma to their own advantage.

The curing of sickness is the most important concern of all shamans. They classify the major types of sicknesses into four groups, according to their sources: (1) sicknesses of the people—all the more serious ailments, including those which result in death, are said to be given by sorcerers who, through fatal spell-blowing, transmit sickness to their victims; cures are through chanting and tobacco-blowing; (2) poison (*Manhene*, or *marecaimbara* in *lingua geral*)—substances mixed in food or drink that although given by sorcerers, are said to be of supernatural origin; cures are through extraction by sucking out pathogenic objects; (3) sicknesses of the forest—a class of forest spirits (*Yupinai*), spirits of the rivers and air, transmit sickness sent by the chief of the forest spirits, Iaradate; cures are through both chanting and extraction by sucking out; and (4) sicknesses sent by other shamans. Besides these, the failure to observe food restrictions or rules of seclusion dur-

ing rites of passage will automatically bring serious illness and sometimes death.

The shaman's main diagnostic and curing procedure involves a snuff-induced trance, the purpose of which is to communicate with the spirits and deities of the cosmos. A shaman's performance involves dance with rattles (*kútherūda*, or *maráca* in *lingua geral*), songs, and especially reading and interpretation of shapes and forms of clouds. The deities who dwell in the heavens inform, advise, and assist the shaman regarding the source, character, and treatment of sickness.

The shaman's repertoire of therapeutic techniques includes: (1) blowing (*liyápa*) of tobacco smoke over the patient to concentrate his soul in its central location, the heart; (2) sucking-out (*lipútsua*) pathogenic agents (mainly in the form of hair, wood splinters, rocks, darts) accompanied with rattle-waving over the point of extraction on the patient's body; (3) water-throwing (*liáruka*), in which consecrated bundles of leaves are mixed in a large pan of water, the shaman drinks some of the water, scoops out a gourd of water and leaves, spits out a stream of water onto the patient, and throws the water mixed with leaves onto the patient; the sources of sickness are then found in the vicinity of the fallen leaves; and (4) counsel and advice (*likaite*), in which the shaman informs the patient of the source of sickness, how the patient got it, whether it can be cured, and, if the cure undertaken by one shaman will be partial, what other remedies should be obtained or measures taken to alleviate the sickness.

A final point worth noting in regard to shamans' cures is that in a majority of the curing sessions I have heard of or witnessed, shamans performed their cures in groups of three or four, with one lead shaman who guided the ritual songs and actions, while the others served as respondents to the songs and procedures of curing. The number of patients varies for cures, yet in the majority of cases, more than one and up to six patients received treatment in any one session. Both facts have importance in suggesting that not only do shamans serve the needs of individual patients but also their collective concerns are directed toward the health and well-being of groups of kin and non-kin of several communities. The *Dzauinai thairi* were probably in part considered saviors because their message that there would be no more sicknesses and because the efficacy of their cures extended to a wide network of communities throughout the region.

Complementary to the shamans' predominantly extractive activity, the chant-owners' principal activity is the recitation of spells, *Iyapakana* (or *Iwapakaite*), accompanied by the blowing of tobacco smoke over medicinal substances. Elderly people are called on more than anyone else to chant or say spells for an enormous variety of tasks and purposes:

protecting against sickness, curing sickness, healing injuries and alleviating painful conditions, calling animals for the hunt or fish into traps, and calling the spiritual Owner of Gardens to ensure the growth of gardens. The more knowledgeable elders know the special chants and blessing spells for children in name-giving ceremonies, or the lengthy set of spells known as *kalidzamai*, chanted at the end of periods of seclusion in life-cycle rituals (birth, initiation, death). These special sets of spells are considered shamanizing activity (*malikai*); although one does not have to be a shaman to know them, often shamans do.

A separate study would be needed to interpret fully the nature of the cures and shamanic activities of the chant-owners. Jonathan Hill's excellent "Keepers of the Sacred Chants" on the Wakuenai chant-owners of Venezuela is a ground-breaking study on the language of these specialists.⁶ The material I was able to collect from the Hohodene in Brazil consists of upward of a hundred chants for a wide variety of occasions and thus does not allow any summary characterization. Nevertheless, a few words are in order on the relative importance of these specialists and the present situation of their practice.

There is no indication from the mythology or from statements by specialists that one activity is more important or powerful than the other. The myths leave it ambiguous which activity was "created" first and, in any case, both derive from the same source. On the one hand, shamans have a great deal more visible prestige, which can extend over wide areas due to the efficacy of their collective cures. On the other hand, the *kalidzamai* chanters have internal prestige in the exercise of an essential function in life-passage ritual, based on their esoteric knowledge of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the cosmos. Yet shamans have the powers to create and sustain the cosmos and prevent its destruction through their vertical journeys to the highest point of the cosmos and intercession on behalf of humanity. In this, the shamans utilize an esoteric knowledge equal to, or greater than, that of the *kalidzamai*. For this reason, at least some of the great prophets of the past were shamans who had reached the apex of shamanic hierarchy (*Dzauinai thairi*) and were *kalidzamai* chanters.

The serious religious conflicts that broke out in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of Evangelical Protestant and Catholic missionizing introduced a dimension of tension previously nonexistent among religious specialists. After having virtually destroyed the cult of the sacred flutes and waged an intense war against shamanism in the communities where they worked,⁷ the Protestants instructed indigenous pastors and

⁶ Jonathan Hill, "Keepers of the Sacred Chants."

⁷ R. Wright and S. Swenson, eds., "Special Issue: The New Tribes Mission in Amazonia," *Anthropology Resource Center Bulletin*, vol. 9 (1981).

deacons to continue their persecution of shamans in communities where Catholic priests had installed their missions. It is not that the Catholics were relatively more tolerant of shamans or the sacred flutes than the Protestants. Rather, at the time, the *Dzauinai thairi* of the upper Aiary were more prestigious and powerful than either of the missions and held their own against the attacks of both. The Protestant communities virtually lost all of their shamans, along with the sacred flute cults and their *kalidzamai* chanters. Only the lesser chant-owners were able to continue their knowledge and practice without persecution. Even so, the intolerance of the Protestants provoked a spiritual crisis among the chant-owners, many of whom claimed that a "sickness" had made them forget much of their knowledge.

Protestant evangelism arose as a millenarian movement among the Baniwa, but its messianic leaders were not converted Baniwa shamans or chant-owners. Rather, they were total strangers to the Baniwa: Sofia Muller, the first North American evangelist in the region, along with a follower from Colombia by the name of Vitor Correa, whose origin is unknown. The rapid acceptance of the evangelical message seems rather to have been due to a variety of other reasons: historical circumstances of suffering and oppression; a profound "millenarian" concern in Baniwa cosmogony, which I examine below; the identification of several powerful deities and the spirits of the dead with the white man;⁸ and, most important, the loss of their shamans.

COSMOGONY

THE BONE GOD

The myths of the Baniwa creator and transformer Yaperikuli form a complex corpus of over twenty stories beginning with the appearance of Yaperikuli in the primordial world and ending with Yaperikuli's creation of the first ancestors of Baniwa phratries and withdrawal from the world. More than any other figure in the Baniwa pantheon, Yaperikuli is responsible for the way the world is in its essence and form. There is every reason to consider Yaperikuli as the Supreme Being of Baniwa religion.

The name Yaperikuli means "he inside of bone" referring to his origin from inside the bone of a devoured and dismembered person, victim of voracious cannibalistic jaguars and animals who roamed the world at the beginning of time. The myth of Yaperikuli's origin, however, leaves it clear that not just one person came from inside the bone

⁸ R. Wright, "Yalanawinai: Images of the Whites in Baniwa History and Religion," in *Imagens do Branco na História Indígena* (Images of the white man in indigenous history), ed. A. Ramos and B. Albert (Brasília: Universidade de Brasília, in press).

but three—Yaperikuli and his younger brothers, collectively known as the *Yaperiku-nai* (“they inside the bone”), or the *Hekwapi-nai* (“universe people”). Narrators sometimes compared the three brothers to the three joined bones of a finger. While the three brothers were responsible for the creation of the universe, it was Yaperikuli alone who sought vengeance against the animals that constantly threatened the world with chaos.

I first consider the myth of Yaperikuli’s beginning. The myth is divided into three parts, of which the first and last are recounted in detail while the second is simply summarized.

THE BEGINNING OF YAPERIKULI (HOHODENE)

Part 1. In the beginning, the animals called *Duemeni* roamed the world killing and eating people without end.⁹ There were practically no people left. Then, one of the “father” animals took a bone of a person he had eaten and threw it into the middle of the river below. An old “grandmother” wept that there were no more of her people. So the “father” Enúmhère told her to fish the bone out of the river. She got it and put it inside a gourd. Inside the bone there were crayfish [*dzaka*]. She took the gourd back home and kept it beneath her. The crayfish transformed into crickets, and she gave them tapioca to eat. She nurtured them and they began to sing. Quickly they began to grow.

Then she took them into the garden. There she let them out, and they ate until they said they were full. She returned home with them and gave them tapioca, and they sang even more. They transformed into other crickets and climbed up above the hearth and sang again. They grew up well and were beginning to appear like people, to be born as the *Yaperiku-nai*. She warned them, “don’t do anything!” But they said, “No, we are the *Yaperiku-nai*, we are the universe people, we can do everything whatsoever.” Later, they transformed into painted-face woodpeckers, first the *Tchitchiro* and then the *Kúfe*. She took them again, already elders, into the garden and let them out. They quickly appeared. “Hey, you have to be quiet, don’t make noise, I am watching you, my grandchildren,” she said. “No,” they replied, “we won’t go away, we are the *Yaperiku-nai*, the universe people.” Then they ascended to the top of a tree. “You will fall!” she said. “No, we won’t fall, we are Yaperikuli, the universe people,” they said. They stayed

⁹ The *Duemeni* are a tribe of predatory animals, *due-* probably being an archaic form for “jaguar,” *dzai*. *Dzaukwapa* is the chief of the thunders (*Eenunai*); in this myth, he is called Enúmhère, which could be rendered as “Thunder younger brother.” In other myths, *Dzaukwapa* is the large black sloth, the Owner of Poison, and the harbinger of death. The title “jaguar” is used for a variety of beings, including Yaperikuli, and connotes “fierceness.”

there. Then they first made the agouti. They took a *uapixuna* fruit and said, "Grandmother, look! This will be the agouti." They threw down the fruit, and it became the agouti. Thus the agouti likes to dig up gardens and it eats manioc bread. They came back down. "You will fall!" she said. "No," they said as they came back down. "You will fall!" "We won't fall, we are the universe people, the *Yaperiku-nai*," they said. They descended until they arrived. "You've come," she said. "Yes, we can find our way, the *Yaperiku-nai*."

Then they transformed everything, they made everything in the world. Everything there is, *Yaperikuli* made. However they could, *Yaperikuli*. The *Yaperikuli* world. The universe people. The universe people lived. They made everything transform. They finished everything in the world. Thus they made the world, the *Yaperiku-nai*. The *Yaperiku-nai* long ago began the world for people. They made it long ago.

Part 2. When they had finished, the *Yaperiku-nai* then took vengeance against the animals, in payment for the killing of their kin. They meet four animals in sequence, each engaged in some disordering action: a *sarapó* fish, with no anus, empties the water out of a lake with a gourd; a porcupine chips off pieces of a blackwood tree; a sloth eats *urucú* plants; and a tapir kicks holes in an avocado tree. *Yaperikuli* gets each one to repeat the action, with a magic formula, then gets the animal to say where its weak spot is and kills it: poking a hole through the fish to make an anus; breaking the porcupine's head where it has no spines; and piercing the tapir's foot with a thorn. Only the sloth, which feigned that it was weeping for the people who had died, was saved. Thus the *Yaperiku-nai* took vengeance against the animals.

Part 3. Then, after they had all grown up, Enúmhère made a garden and the dry season came well! "Let's go burn the garden," the *Yaperiku-nai* said. They went to burn the garden. "Go over there in the middle of the garden," he told them. For Enúmhère was going to kill them and he set fire to the garden edge. As the fire approached them in the middle, he cried out "HEY! You will burn." "We won't burn, we are the *Yaperiku-nai*," they said, "we don't burn ever." They took an *ambaúba* log to the middle of the garden and made a hole at the top. The fire was burning quickly to the center of the garden. It made an inferno, as it's called. They got inside the *ambaúba* hole and closed it off. The fire burned, fiercely it burned. Then suddenly the log burst and the three shot out one after the other. Alive. "Why did our fathers do this to us," they said, "we are the *Yaperiku-nai*, this cannot be so."

They landed on a trail. Then along came a turtle crying. They caught the turtle as it was crying, "Why did they burn, all grown up." There was a huge tree. They took the turtle as it cried and threw it against the ribs of the tree with such force that its shell turned inward, as it is

today. It died. Yaperikuli saw the “father” coming. He took tobacco and blew spells over him. He then descended into the river and was bathing when the father came weeping. “What! You didn’t burn?” he said. “No, we never burn, we are the universe people, the *Yaperikunai*, you didn’t leave us to burn,” they said. They bathed and laughed.

The chaotic situation of the beginning represents the first catastrophe, of which there are many in Baniwa cosmic history, in the sense that it was a total destruction of the first people consumed by the insatiable appetites of predatory animals. Yet, like all destructions, it was the prelude to a new beginning when the universe would be recreated and the forces of chaos dominated. The Chief of the Animals and Thunders, Enúmhere, throws a bone into the middle of the river, a watery grave of nothingness in which all distinct forms are dissolved. From this condition, the bone becomes a vehicle, a container for the three beings who would eventually save the world and create its form anew. The bone is thus the first symbol of the new world.

The grandmother is the guardian of the container, nurturing and protecting the heroes as they grow and transform. In other myths, the grandmother figure is the one who closes off the earth compartment where people escape from the fires that destroy the world (see Appendix, second myth). Or, she keeps the life-giving remedies that counteract the lethal poison of the animals with which they attempt to kill Yaperikuli and his brothers.

If the progression of the first episode is examined closely, a distinct development of its spatial dimension is perceived that is closely connected with the growth of the *Yaperikunai* and the creation of a new form of the universe in the period of postdestruction. Table 1 summarizes these aspects. Spatial movement from below to above defines the vertical axis of creation.¹⁰ The gradual ascent of the *Yaperikunai* is also defined by a horizontal movement (from water to house to garden) and a progression from formlessness to contained spaces of domestication in which growth and transformation occur. Food is another dimension of this change, for while the predatory animals are defined by their unlimited and destructive consumption, the *Yaperikunai* eat only “spiritual” food (tapioca) indicating a soul that is coming back to life.¹¹ The conditions for reversing the animals’ destruction are complete when the *Yaperikunai* transform the fruit into an agouti, an animal that likes to eat manioc in the gardens.

¹⁰ In the same way, at the end of Yaperikuli’s creation of the world, he “looks for” the first ancestors by taking them up and out of the holes in the earth at the rapids of Hipana. These holes lead to *Wapinakwa*, the Place of Our Bones.

¹¹ I have in fact only seen tapioca given as food to dying people whose souls in their last moments on earth travel to the houses of the dead in the sky. It is said that Yaperikuli only “ate” coca, a spiritual food like tobacco.

TABLE 1

Yaperikuli's Movement in Space	Location	Containers	Transformations of the Yaperiku-nai
Below	River	Bone in water	Three crayfish
Below	House	House	Crickets
Below	Garden	Bone inside basket in garden	Crickets
Climbing up the hearth	House	Out of container, inside house	Other crickets/people
Climbing up a tree. . . .	Garden	Outside container, in the garden	Woodpecker/growing up
Top of tree	Other woodpeckers/transformers
Descending	Garden	Out of container, able to make their own way	All grown up

It is noteworthy that the principal transformations and spatial movements occur in the garden. According to Nicolas Journet, who has studied among the Curripaco Baniwa of Colombia, Yaperikuli is associated with a wild manioc plant: “The association is based on a story with common structures: in the same way that the hero is the last scion of his village, the ‘orphan’ plant [wild manioc] is the sole survivor of an abandoned garden, and both are taken in by women.”¹² In Journet’s view, one way of interpreting the myths of Yaperikuli is as the “vengeance of the plants” against the predator animals who constantly attempt to subdue or kill Yaperikuli but who, in the end, are transformed into game animals or wild and poisonous plants.¹³ In the context of the first episode, the garden and the house are areas of domestication of people and plants. In one sense, they are spaces of culture, in which the heroes regain the power of transcendence (symbolized by the vertical axis of ascent and descent) with which they will return to take vengeance against the animals, or nature.

The grandmother’s four warnings to the *Yaperiku-nai* are significant symbolic statements of the universe peoples’ powers, which in essence define what holds the universe together: (1) “Don’t do anything” (*madenhi*, “don’t work”), she says, to which they respond, “we can do anything whatsoever.” The warning pleads for the heroes to remain static and inactive; yet, it is their nature to change and to transform. The heroes declare their omniscience (another narrator said, “they knew everything when they were born, no one explained to them”) and omnificence.

¹² Journet (n. 4 above), pp. 324–26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 326; Wright, “The History and Religion of the Baniwa Peoples of the Upper Rio Negro Valley” (n. 4 above), p. 542.

(2) “You have to be quiet, don’t make noise” (*mepaka*), she says, to which they reply, “we won’t go away.” Here again, the warning pleads for them to be inactive and silent, to which they affirm their permanence: they will not disappear as they transform and leave their container. (3) and (4) “You will fall” (*Híwada uatsa*), to which they say “No, we won’t fall” as they ascend and descend. This final warning refers to their power of transcendence: the vertical passage the heroes complete—upon which their power to transform and to overcome the destructive nature of the animals depends—represents the final proof of their having fully grown up. Completely separate now from their original condition, at the top of a tree, the heroes remake life, transforming a wild fruit into a tame animal, symbolizing the new world that will take shape henceforth around them, as the narrator goes on to state. It is of no importance in what sequence creation took place: the knowledge and power to create “everything” whatsoever, imperishable and transcendent, is the basic condition for saving the universe from destruction. This power is likewise essential to the shaman’s learning.

The serial vengeance the *Yaperiku-nai* take on the animals may be seen to repeat the sequence of spatial locations of the first episode, but in each instance when the heroes encounter animals engaged in disordering actions, they get the animal to reveal its magic and then kill it, thereby gaining ownership over the domain. As the heroes subdue the animals’ destructiveness, they sustain their dominion and return order to the world. The four animals, however, are minor threats when compared to the animal chief of the final episode who returns to kill Yaperikuli.

Sullivan’s interpretation of cosmic conflagrations in South American mythologies is highly pertinent to understanding the meaning of the third episode: “Cosmic conflagration demonstrates the absolute spirituality of matter in the primordial world and shows that being in all its forms is susceptible to total spiritualization.”¹⁴ Cataclysmic fire “reveals a condition of complete and unbridled consumption” indicating that “the life of the cosmos is deeply associated with food.” “The catastrophe of fire ‘cooks’ existence to render primordial reality consumable and to make this world an endless cycle of consumption in which all is food: i.e., subject to a consumptive power that manifests its presence as spirit. The conflagration spiritualized the universe. That is, reality ultimately proved itself to be transcendent, able to sustain life beyond the forms of its primordial appearance. It ‘creates’ the spiritual world by rendering it eternal and invisible. Because they were totally consumed, the first beings have become spirits.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Sullivan (n. 1 above), p. 66.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

The animal chief, whose insatiable appetite destroyed all life before, returns to destroy the universe people with the all-consuming flames of a garden fire. It is a new garden made in the dry season, the beginning of the annual cycle and symbolic of the new life of the cosmos. The heroes stay in the center of the garden, a place of sacred being, and as the flames reach them, they reenter a container, an *ambaúba* log, which in other Baniwa myths is symbolic of spiritual passages. The conflagration, or “inferno” destroys all, but the miniature, closed-off world of the *ambaúba* bursts open with three loud noises of gunshots, and the heroes narrowly escape from death. We will see throughout this paper that the themes of a narrow escape from death inside of a container and powerful noises that open containers are essential to the drama of creation, having to do with processes of birth, death, and rebirth.

As spiritual reality, the *Yaperiku-nai* are immortal. Their passage is completed by bathing in the river but, on the way, they mark the transition (on the trail) by returning the animal chief’s act of destruction. Whereas the *ambaúba* served as the heroes’ vessel of salvation, the turtle’s shell becomes a fatal container, broken inward on the ribs of an enormous tree. After shamanizing the animal chief, the heroes descend to the river to bathe, a fully cultural (spiritual and purifying) use of an otherwise formless space from which they were initially retrieved.

THE ANIMALS AND THUNDERS

The struggles of Yaperikuli against the animals continue through a sequence of myths, the outcome of which by no means represents a clear victory for the heroes. These myths may be seen to contain an extended discourse on the themes of death and the end of the primordial world, which are examined from multiple points of view.

In the myth following the beginning of Yaperikuli, the hero tries to kill Dzaukwapa, chief of the thunders (*Eenu-nai*, all the monkeys and sloths, tree-living animals). Yaperikuli causes night and a great flood to come, forcing all the animals and thunders to ascend an *abiú* fruit tree in midriver. Yaperikuli then causes lightning to break the tree in half and the animals are devoured in the river by piranha. All are killed but Dzaukwapa who realized Yaperikuli’s scheme and escaped inside of a dried-up *abiú* fruit, floating away to the sky and singing, which begins evil omens (*hinimai*), the premonition of peoples’ deaths (see Appendix, first myth).

This myth is particularly important for shamans, as it is one of the main instances when Yaperikuli caused the world to end in the catastrophe that befalls the animals: in total obscurity, they are devoured in the waters. Yet, just as the thunder chief failed to consume Yaperikuli in the great conflagration, the hero fails to have Dzaukwapa devoured

in the flood, and the animal's song serves as an eternal reminder that people will die by poison, for Dzauikwapa was the first "owner of poison" (*manhene-iminali*).

Later, the animals kill and eat Yaperikuli's younger brother, but Yaperikuli succeeds in transforming his younger brother's heart into the harpy eagle Kamathawa which, on a day of heavy rains, avenges his death on his wife's father, Kunaferi, who is another form of the chief of the thunders. Kunaferi's dying body gives rise to fish-poison plants.

In a third myth, the thunders steal Yaperikuli's special poison (*likürümáhe*). The hero and his spirit-tribe (*Kuwainyai*) go to a drinking-fest at the thunders' house where they consume the poison inside the drink, but they had previously taken remedies to counteract its effects. Yaperikuli's younger brother, Mawerikuli ("he inside the small white heron"), said he would not go to the fest but later does. Since there are no more remedies for him, he dies from the poison. Yaperikuli lays him inside a stone house and tells him that three days hence, he will revive. But then a woman enters the grave, paints Mawerikuli with red *urucú* and, on the final stroke, she turns her hand over and Mawerikuli's bones fall in a heap to the ground. Thus death entered the world for all times. The shades of the dead (*danaime*), sources of fear and sickness to the living, are the reminders in this world of the primordial mistake of Mawerikuli.

Finally, in a fourth myth, the thunders attempt to kill Yaperikuli at night, but the hero, knowing of their plot, outwits them by hiding a poison arrow inside his blowgun and leaving his body asleep by the fire when the animals come. The thunder chief spits out a stone at Yaperikuli's body to kill him, but the hero fatally pierces the chief with his poison arrow. As the animals inter their chief, they lament that they must remain forever in the world as separate and distinct species ("houses") of monkeys and sloths without their chief.

Different modes of death (cannibalistic feasts, catastrophic consumption, poison and poisonous drink), manners of dealing with death (avenging or "returning" deaths, outwitting the killers), and the lasting traces of death (evil omens, wild and poisonous plants, a heap of bones and the spirit of death, and the multiple species of tree-animals) form central themes of this mythic discourse on the end of the primordial world and the new order created from the remains of the old. The new order contains traces of the old, for Yaperikuli never succeeded in totally eliminating the forces of chaos the thunders represent: poison (*manhene*) through sorcery is seen as one of the most persistent causes of peoples' deaths in the world today despite the norms to control it.

Catastrophic destruction of the world also remains a real possibility, for when the world seems that it has become infested with insupport-

able evil—as this is symbolized in the myths: demons, predatory animals, an excess of poison—then the conditions are sufficient for destruction and renewal. The history of the cosmos attests to this pattern: before Yaperikuli brought forth the first ancestors of humanity, he caused a great flood to wash away the demons and forest spirits to a distant mountain. Then he burned the world, forcing the remaining demons and forest spirits to flee (see Appendix, second and third myths). Once he had rid the world of these dangers, he looked for the first ancestors. However, some forest spirits escaped and, like the animals, continue to persecute humanity.

The exceptional power of the shamans lies in their ability to return to the primordial world of the *Yaperiku-nai*, the universe people, and to intercede with the deities who created order in the past and who govern the world eternally (*meedzaka-thairi*, “eternal masters,” as the shamans call the universe people). These will advise the shaman of what he needs to know.

KUWAI

The myth of Kuwai forms the second major cycle concerning the history of the cosmos. Infinitely rich in symbolism, the story of Kuwai is a central myth in Baniwa culture explaining four great questions on the nature of the world: how the order and ways of life of the ancestors and the first people are perpetuated for all future generations; how children are to be taught the nature of the world; how sicknesses and misfortune entered the world; and what is the nature of the relationship among humans, animals, and spirits that is the legacy of the primordial world.

The myth recounts the life of Kuwai, the child of Yaperikuli and Amaru, the first woman. Kuwai is an extraordinary being whose body consists of all worldly elements and whose humming and singing brings into being all animal species. His birth sets in motion a rapid process of growth in which the miniature and chaotic world of Yaperikuli opens up into the life-sized world of forests and rivers inhabited by human beings and the various species of forest animals, birds, and fish. Kuwai teaches humanity the first sacred rituals of initiation; yet, at the end of these rituals, Yaperikuli “kills” Kuwai by pushing him into an enormous fire, an inferno that scorches the earth, and the world then contracts back to its miniature size. Out of Kuwai’s ashes grow the plant materials for making the sacred flutes and trumpets played in initiation rituals and sacred ceremonies today. Amaru and the woman steal these instruments from Yaperikuli, setting off a long chase in which the world opens up for a second time as the women play Kuwai’s instruments throughout the world. Eventually, the men

regain the flutes and, with them, Yaperikuli brings forth the first ancestors of humanity.

It may be seen that the myth of Kuwai marks a transition from the primordial world of Yaperikuli and the animals and thunders to a more recent human past that is brought directly into the experience of living people in rituals. The first world of Yaperikuli was doomed to demise and destruction; humanity sees its vestiges as a given condition, while the world of Kuwai connects the distant world of the beginning to the new world constantly being created by humanity.

The sacred name of Kuwai, like the name of Yaperikuli, explains in part the concept that the deity represents. The first two letters *Ku-* refer to thunder, a powerful sound that, like the music of Kuwai, opens the world. The last three letters *-wai* refer to a cosmic junction, a meeting point (as in the word *Tsuwai*, the junction of sky and earth where the rivers no longer run). Thus the name represents the most powerful celestial sound in the junction/transition from one kind of world (the sky, the abode of the deities, the souls of the deceased) to another, the earth. This rendering of the name would make sense of such statements by shamans that Kuwai is both of this (present-day) world and the other (ancient) world of the sky and lives in the “center of the world.” In their cures, shamans bring the two worlds together in their songs and actions in order to effect a cure, that is, to regain the lost soul of an afflicted person. To shamans, Kuwai is the Owner of Sickness (*Idzami-kaite-iminali*), for his body consists of all the sicknesses that he left for humanity in the great conflagration that marked his “death” and withdrawal from the world. It is he whom the shamans must seek in order to cure the sick today.

Kuwai is also known by the name of *Manhekanali-ienipe*, the “unknown child,” for it is ambiguous in the myth of Kuwai whether he is the son of anyone. Kuwai is said to be “his father’s soul/heart” (*hlanerikaale*), “the Sun’s soul/heart” (*Kamui-ikaale*), and Yaperikuli’s child (Yaperikuli *ienipepe*), but since Kuwai was conceived by spiritual and not sexual means (for it was the shamanic “thought” of Yaperikuli that penetrated Amaru and made her with the Kuwai-child), it is more accurate to state that Kuwai is the projection and reproduction of his father’s soul, an entirely spiritual principle which became/was transformed into material representation by the great conflagration. This soul is given to all people who are initiated with the sacred flutes and trumpets, Kuwai, today.

Finally, Kuwai is known by the name of Wamundana, a word composed of *wamu*, the black sloth, and *-ndana*, shadow, shade, invisible dark interior. The notion is of a spiritualized animal, another aspect of Kuwai and a particularly dangerous one for its associations with sick-

ness, death, and catastrophe. As we have stated above, *wamu* is the Owner of Poison, as *Kuwai* is also said to be. The *wamu* is one of the forms of the chief of the thunders, *Dzawikwapa*, whom *Yaperikuli* failed to kill, and can bring death. *Kuwai* is thus his "shadow-soul."

It is for this reason that the sacred flutes and trumpets are extremely dangerous and can cause a catastrophe, death by poison, if they are exposed outside of their ritual context. The spirit *Kuwai* whom the shamans seek in their cures is said to have hair all over his body like the *wamu*. *Kuwai* entraps (as the sloth does) the souls of sick people, suffocating them if no action is taken, but he also allows the shaman to recover and return souls to their owners. The more serious sicknesses, then, are processes of entrapment of the human soul by the animal soul; recovery is their separation and the banishment of the animal from the living. For this reason, ritual fasting and abstinence from eating animals are forms of voluntary suffering to which individuals must submit if they wish to be cured, or to become fully cultural beings through initiation.

THE NEW ORDER

The world that *Yaperikuli* created was not only one of perilous danger, for parallel to the heroes' struggles, a series of myths also recount how *Yaperikuli* brings into being conditions that sustain and renew life. Three brief examples (out of many others that could be cited) will suffice to illustrate this.

In the beginning, there was no Night; it was always Day and people worked all the time with no rest. *Yaperikuli* obtained the container of Night from its owner, *Deepiferi*, but midway back home, he opened the small, but very heavy, container and Night rushed out like a flood over the world. From this seeming catastrophe, order was created as the animals took their places in the trees and awaited the dawn, which they announce when it comes. Thus was created the periodic alternation of day and night with its ordering of human and animal activities.

In another story, in the beginning, the earth was a tiny and infertile rock, the excrement of *Kuwai*. *Yaperikuli* took a sacred trumpet and blew it over the earth, which opened it up to its present size. Then the first Owner of Gardens, *Kaali-thairi*, took the earth and began to make gardens on it with all types of cultivated plants. Thus the earth was made for cultivation, the source of peoples' food today. Here again, from a sterile and static condition, the change sought produces order, allowing for growth and renewal.

Finally, *Yaperikuli* gets a "dry" tobacco from its owner *Dzuliferi* (in other versions, *Dthemáferi*), but *Yaperikuli* wants a stronger, "wet" tobacco. *Dzuliferi* tells him to go back home, and he will bring it to his

house the next day. When Dzuliferi comes (in other versions, Dthemáferi comes as a great wind and fire in the sky), he meets three children who tell him that Yaperikuli is not there. Dzuliferi plants the tobacco behind Yaperikuli's house and leaves. During the night, the tobacco quickly grew so that by morning, the plants had flowered. Yaperikuli then left tobacco for all people.

In all cases, the products of culture are obtained from their primordial, spirit owners who give them to Yaperikuli. In order to transfer them to all future humanity, a transformation is made, marked by powerful images of transition or passage (powerful sounds, fire, total obscurity) in which concealed, closed, or hidden containers/objects open up and burst out, as though through a "wrinkle" of time and space, from which a new order is awaited and created. The new order created sustains life for humanity, by defining a meaningful, symbolic order of the way people should live and prosper.¹⁶

In a similar way, the shamans received their special powers (*malikai*). The following myth of how Yaperikuli obtained thunder, the shaman's vision, and shaman's snuff (*dzato*, or *pariká*) is said to be the sequel to the myth of how manioc and garden plants were obtained from the Great Tree of Kaali, which sprang from the earth after the hero, Kaali, was burned.

YAPERIKULI OBTAINS MALIKAI

Part 1. Yaperikuli's younger brother first looked for *malikai*. He wanted to make thunder, so he went to a large, hollow tree and kicked it, but it made no sound. They told him to go to a certain tree and wait. He came to an *ibacaba* fruit tree and saw the harpy Kamathawa sitting on a branch, eating fruits. He went hunting for animals until night and nothing happened. Then at midnight, he heard a loud sound of Kamathawa's spit falling to the ground. He lit torchwood but did not see anything. At dawn, he climbed up to the top of the tree, got one of Kamathawa's little feathers, and sniffed it. Suddenly he looked around and saw the white eagle below him, but as a person. He descended the tree and asked, "Who are you?" "Jaguar Kamathawa, you were looking for me?" "Yes, I was looking for you." Then Kamathawa took his crest feather and gave it to him to sniff. When he did so, there was a great roar of thunder. At noon, he went back to find Yaperikuli, but

¹⁶ The myth of how humanity obtained fire repeats the pattern: Yaperikuli obtained fire from its owner Yawalferi. The caiman stole the fire, swallowed it, and went into its stone house at the bottom of the river, leaving Yaperikuli in darkness. Yaperikuli sent frogs who called the caiman out of its hole, whereupon Yaperikuli stuck a forked stick on its throat forcing it to open its mouth. Yaperikuli took back the fire, put it on torchwood, and gave it to all humanity.

Yaperikuli did not see him, for his younger brother had transformed. He told Yaperikuli he had made thunder sound, that he had found thunder. Then Yaperikuli sniffed Kamathawa's feather and saw like the shamans see today. Thus he first found the *malikai*.

Part 2. After awhile, Yaperikuli went to get *pariká*. This was in another world with another people, the *Yaperiku-nai*. [Here, the *Yaperiku-nai* represent a whole group of primordial shamans, including the *Wakaawenai*.] They went to cut down the Great Tree of Kaali (*Kaali ka thadapa*) at Uaracapury on the headwaters of the Vaupés River. Yaperikuli went with the *Wakaawenai*, the first people to sniff *pariká*. As they went, suddenly the Tapir eagerly ran to join them. They told the Tapir to go catch fish for them inside a fish trap and to wait until the tree fell down. As the Tapir went under water, the *Dūma* (Inambú) bird sang that the tree had fallen, but when Tapir emerged and asked if it had fallen, they told him it had not yet fallen. Three times this happened. Finally, when Tapir was at the bottom of the river, the tree fell. Tapir killed the fish, ran out and into the woods. One of the fish transformed into *saúva* ants. There were swarms of bees at the top of the fallen tree where the *pariká* fruits were. Yaperikuli could not get to them, but suddenly Tapir ran up and grabbed the fruits, taking them away from Yaperikuli.

Tapir called the *Wakaawenai* and Yaperikuli to sit in a circle and sniff the *pariká*. When Tapir greedily sniffed, he went crazy and changed into a Jaguar. He roared that he wanted to eat people without end. Yaperikuli saw this was bad and snatched the *pariká* away from Tapir, giving him *umarí* fruits to eat instead. The boto and the otter also went crazy with *pariká* and fell into the river. Three people were then left of the *Wakaawenai*.

Part 3. After a long while, the *Wakaawenai* ascended to the sky on *pariká*. They sang as they were ascending and transforming. They sang that others would come following them. Yaperikuli heard them sing, but when he went to find them, they had gone forever. Yaperikuli then returned to this world, for the *Wakaawenai* had gone from him.

By now, we are sufficiently familiar with images in Baniwa myths to recognize that the Harpy Kamathawa is the transformed soul of Yaperikuli's younger brother, killed by the animals, whom Yaperikuli sent to avenge his own death on the animal chief. The Harpy Kamathawa is Yaperikuli's "pet" (*ipira*) eagle who lives at the highest place in the cosmos, guarding its master's house and remedies. Its predatory quality is enhanced by the title "Jaguar" Kamathawa. Shamans attribute special significance to Kamathawa for its piercing vision or clairvoyance: crystals said to be obtained from Kamathawa allow the shaman to "see the whole world," aiding him to procure lost

souls. Feathers obtained from Kamathawa aid the shaman in his ritual to clear the sky of clouds and make the summer come.

In the course of the first episode, sensory and spatial/temporal codes work together to produce the desired conditions, the obtaining of shamanic powers of vision and sound. From a ludicrous attempt to sound thunder inside a hollow tree, the necessary vertical dimension between Yaperikuli's younger brother and his own soul, the Harpy, is created through which the experience of ascent and descent and subsequent transformations can occur. The inversion of the characters' positions, punctuated by the Harpy's spit-fall at midnight, corresponds to a reversal, or opening, of the hero's vision. Their encounter on the same plane collapses the vertical dimension, putting the hero in direct contact with his own powerful spirit ("You were looking for me?" "Yes, I was looking for you"). In both high and low positions, sniffing the eagle's feathers, like *pariká*, is the precondition for opening vision or making powerful sounds.

There is also a strong connection in this episode and throughout the myth with annual, natural cycles. Since the Harpy is connected with the dry season, the falling of its spit (indicating its weakness), its descent to the ground, and the making of thunder are all associated with the rainy season and frequent thunderstorms (in the months of August/September in the Northwest Amazon).

A more complete interpretation of this myth would demonstrate that it is the negative, inverse image of the myth of the beginning of fish-poison plants (*Kunaferi*), when the Harpy was created from Yaperikuli's younger brother's soul. Thus, the inverse of wild, uncultivated plants is the Great Tree of Kaali, the source of all cultivated plants. As in the first episode, the tree represents the connection between earth and sky, a symbol of the transition in space between different modes of being, the primordial and the present. The desired fruits, *pariká*, are the means by which this connection is made by the shamans today. The fruits are contained in a hole or compartment at the top of the tree which later, when the tree has fallen, becomes a rock that is still visible today.

The felling of the Tree severs the connection between the two worlds, "plunging being into the chaos of immediacy"; the unbridled greed of the Tapir and swarms of bees evoke a minor catastrophe that threatens to become total when the Tapir transforms into a cannibalistic jaguar.¹⁷ Typically, unless the animals are contained, they are incapable of controlling food, especially cultivated food.

As one might suspect of a myth whose central symbol is the source of food, there is a strong ecological code underlying the nature of the characters and their transformations. Thus I suspect, for example, that

¹⁷ Quote from Sullivan, p. 138.

the falling of the otter and boto into the water, as well as the final rising of the *Wakaawenai*, have to do with the rising and falling of important constellations (e.g., *niewia*, the "otter," which appears in July/August, when the rivers rise). Given the association of the Harpy with the dry season, it is not surprising that the episode opens with Yaperikuli's people going to cut down the Great Tree, which would coincide in the annual agricultural cycle with the end of the long dry season, when people begin to plant new gardens. This period coincides with the appearance of the Pleiades constellation, Oalipere, and also spectacular fish runs when species such as the *aracú* return each year to the same streams and spawn in recently flooded areas of forest and savannah. The fish are caught in great numbers with large fish traps (*cacuri*).

It is no coincidence, then, that in dream symbolism, the Pleiades are associated with the Tapir.¹⁸ Thus, Tapir's activities in the myth coincide with the fishing and agricultural activities associated with this constellation. Other details would confirm this interpretation, thus strengthening a link between the acquisition of shamanic powers and annual, natural cycles in the sustenance of life.

There is yet another level at which shamans understand this myth. The whole myth is about the search for *malikai*, shamans' powers. In real life, these powers are considered so dangerous as to make people who take *pariká*, but who are not shamans, go crazy. There is also a series of fatal sicknesses known as *ikaime* in which the victim becomes crazy (*napikaka*), runs wild, and in some cases, falls in the river reappearing again as an animal (such as the otter, *niewi-ikaime*, or the caiman, *katchiri-ikaime*). In their cures of these cases, shamans extract the rock-like seed of a fruit (*ikaime*). In the myth, the place where *pariká* is found in the tree is associated with both fruits and a rock.¹⁹

Just as with the sacred flutes, Kuwai, shamans' snuff is a substance of highly potent and ambivalent force: the means by which the connection or transition to the celestial realms of the deities and the Owner of Sickness is made. It is also, in the wrong hands, a source of death-dealing sickness or madness, the victims of which are doomed to the realm of the animals. Proper ownership of the substance is essential for mediation between worlds.²⁰

¹⁸ The house of the souls of deceased members of the Oalipere grandchildren phratry is called *Heemapan*, Tapir House. Also, the swarm of bees is a common image for the Pleiades in South American mythology.

¹⁹ *Pariká* (*dzato*) is also known as the "blood of Kuwai," "Kuwai's power." Blood is likewise a substance of ambivalent qualities: on the one hand, women's menstrual blood can cause sickness among shamans; on the other, menstrual blood represents regenerative life. The word *Malikai*, which I have loosely translated as "shamans' powers," is in reality composed of *Māli*-, small white heron, and *-ikai*, seed.

²⁰ It is tempting to see an association between the Tapir of the myth and chant-owners, parallel to the link between shamans and jaguars. If this were the case, then the myth could be read in terms of a "tension" between the two religious specialists, as Stephen

I have examined Baniwa cosmogony in considerable detail, for it is the essential basis for understanding shamanism. If I have dwelt at length on the myths, it is because the shamans themselves use myth as conceptual vehicles for explaining the nature and dynamics of the other world. The special meanings they attribute to the events of the primordial world, however, frequently go beyond the apparent to a hidden dimension that only the shamans are capable of disclosing.

The images of the first world confirm, on the one hand, its catastrophic and violent nature, death-dealing and chaotic, in which the creation of order suffers the constant threat of being dismantled. The very beginning of the cosmos is a state of dismemberment, of awesome and devastating events. Such a condition was never really eliminated from possibility; humanity is constantly reminded of its presence.

On the other hand, the primordial world is the source of renovation, renewal, and change. Spiritual creativity eternally transcends the destruction of matter: this is the essence of Yaperikuli's being. Spiritual creativity is the source of abundance and happiness that sustain life and create meaningful existence for the future, the "others who will be born" (*walima-nai*). Such images inform and shape the powers of the shamans as masters in traversing space and time, which separate the world of the present from the beginning; protectors of humanity and liberators of souls from entrapment; sustainers of life and of the order created in the beginning; creators of new life; and messengers of the deities. In the second part of this study, I will examine how these images and the central dramas of cosmogony are fully manifest in cosmology and the shamanic quest.

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APPENDIX

MYTH TEXTS (HOHODENE)

YAPERIKULI TRIES TO KILL THE DZAUIKWAPA

Yaperikuli went walking with the thunders and the animals, giving names to the rivers and streams. Then Yaperikuli made the day shorten quickly and night come. All the thunders and animals went to the top of an *abiu* fruit tree where they ate its sweet fruits. Yaperikuli made it get very dark. All of the monkey bands stayed together. Yaperikuli wanted to kill the Dzauikwapa (or *wamu*, the

Hugh-Jones has recently argued exists in Tukanoan shamanism ("Shamans, Prophets, Priests and Pastors" [paper prepared for the workshop on Shamanism, Colonialism and the State, King's College, October 3, 1989]). However, I have not been able to find any evidence whatsoever linking the tapir with chant-owners among the Baniwa. A stronger link could be made between the chant-owners and the anaconda.

black sloth). He made the rivers ascend around the tree until the water got just below the branch where the animals were sleeping. The Dzauikwapa, which always roams in the middle of the night, was eating fruits. Below him there was water and the fish ate the fruit seeds he dropped. Every time he dropped a fruit, the fish ate it. He knew then that Yaperikuli wanted to kill him, so he took a fruit that had already dried up, made a hole in it, and went inside. The Dzauikwapa then floated away upriver to the edge of the sky (*eenu táhe; eenu kurápe*).

Then Yaperikuli made thunder, lightning, and heavy rains and broke the tree in half. All of the remaining animals fell in the river and were devoured by piranha and alligators. Yaperikuli thought he had killed Dzauikwapa. One monkey (the acary, *tchitchi*) remained on the top of the tree unable to get to land. A woodpecker offered to take him across the water but got only halfway there and returned. Then the alligator came and carried the monkey on its back. Halfway across, the alligator broke wind and asked, "Does it smell?" "Yes, it does." When they got to the riverbank, the alligator broke wind again and asked, "Does it smell?" "Yes it does, a lot." As the monkey jumped off, the alligator bit off its tail which is why the acary has a short tail today. The acary was the only one who was saved. And as the Dzauikwapa floated away upriver, he sang "Hee hee hee oopipi eenunai." Thus began *hinimai*, evil omens that presage death, for the Dzauikwapa is the Owner of Poison (*Manhene-iminali*). Yaperikuli did not kill him.

FIRE BURNS THE WORLD

Before the fire burned, the forest spirit Pupeli (a little old forest spirit with an enormous penis that he had to carry with him in a basket; not dangerous like the other forest spirits) ran ahead to warn the people that the fire was coming. The fire came from below. Pupeli ran ahead and warned the people, "Hey, the fire is coming to burn." "Where are you going?" they asked. "Far away, to the west," he said, "then I come back around to the other side of the fire." Pupeli ran all the way to the other side of the fire. Thus he did not burn, he did not die.

Pupeli warned the people of the fire. He told them, "If you want to save yourselves, make a hole in the earth." When they had made it, he told them to get water, make beer and food, and leave it all in the hole. Then he told an old woman, their grandmother, that when the fire came, she should close off the hole. All the people got in the hole, and the old woman stayed outside. When the fire approached, she closed off the hole. The fire killed her, but the people were saved. The fire burned everything, but Pupeli ran with the other forest spirits to the other side. After the fire passed, the people came out of the hole.

Yaperikuli made the fire. He wanted to kill the other evil spirits in the world at that time. There were many evil spirits who ate people. He wanted to kill them all off, to get rid of the danger that was killing a lot of people. At that time, it was not like now—there were jaguars and demons that went into the settlements and killed and ate people.

WATER FLOODS THE WORLD

The hawk Haawa opened the way for the waters to come down. They flooded the world. A forest spirit, Inyaimé, saw that the floods were coming and told

the people (*Newikína*, a giant people) that he would flee to where the waters no longer run (*uni diakale*), for the world would be flooded. The waters covered the earth, to the tops of the trees, the whole world. The giant people got their canoes and tied them up to the tops of the trees. They got manioc and put it in the canoes. The shrimp swam downriver to where the waters no longer run. Three forest spirits did not drown. All the other forest spirits floated downriver to a hill. The people stayed where they were in the canoes. For four days, the waters stayed. Then they heard the Inambú singing from the water. The world was beginning to dry up and the waters to go down. On the hill, the forest spirits and bees could not descend the hill, they were trapped. Many forest spirits stayed on the hill. The earth began to dry up and the people descended from the treetops. The world was then very small.

Then the forest spirit Inyaimé said that the world was going to burn and that he would go far away. Our ancestors who were at the headwaters of a stream made a hole in the earth and got inside. They took manioc with them and stayed. They left an old woman to close off the hole when the fire came. The fire burned the whole world. An armadillo (*unidze*) made a hole in a rock and went inside and stayed there. After the fire, the people came out of the hole. They had kept manioc with them.

Robin M. Wright

GUARDIANS OF THE
COSMOS: BANIWA
SHAMANS AND
PROPHETS, PART II

In Part I of this study, we presented an outline of Baniwa shamanic practice and the predominant concerns of cosmogony as evidenced in the major myth cycles of world creation and destruction. Here, our attention will concentrate, first, on Baniwa cosmology, or the organization of the universe into a coherent system of meaning. The multitiered cosmos is the temporal/spatial map representing various states of the soul and its transformation through which the shaman derives and constructs meaning in his curing and other activities.

Second, our attention will focus on the salvific nature of the shaman's quest. One of the legacies of cosmogony, we saw, is that the world in which humans live is permanently flawed by evil, sickness, and misfortune. Like a sick person, this world is in constant need of healing. In the process of his apprenticeship, the shaman acquires the power to heal and remake the world through his total identification with the spiritualized being of the cosmos. In this sense, shamans are the guardians of the cosmos.

COSMOLOGY

To situate the shamanic process in sacred space, figure 1 represents the universe (*Hekwapi*) as conceptualized by a Hohodene shaman. The drawing was made at my request and, in its general form, corresponds to the way many nonspecialists understand the universe. Essentially, the universe consists of four levels: *Wapinakwa* (the place of our bones), *Hekwapi* (this world), *Apakwa Hekwapi* (the other world), and

APPENDIX

ABBREVIATIONS

AitĀ	Aitareya Āraṇyaka	PB	Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
AitB	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa	PGS	Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra
AV	Atharva Veda	PU	Praśna Upaniṣad
BĀU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad	ṚV	Ṛg Veda
BDhS	Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra	ṢaḍB	Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
ChU	Chandogya Upaniṣad	ŚānĀ	Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka
GB	Gopatha Brāhmaṇa	ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
JB	Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa	ŚGS	Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
JUB	Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa	SV	Sāma Veda
KB	Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa	TĀ	Taittirīya Āraṇyaka
KGS	Kāṭhaka Gṛhya Sūtra	TB	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
KU	Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad	TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā
MGS	Mānava Gṛhya Sūtra	TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
Manu	Manu Smṛti	VGS	Varāha Gṛhya Sūtra
MU	Maitrāyaṇi Upaniṣad	YV	Yajur Veda

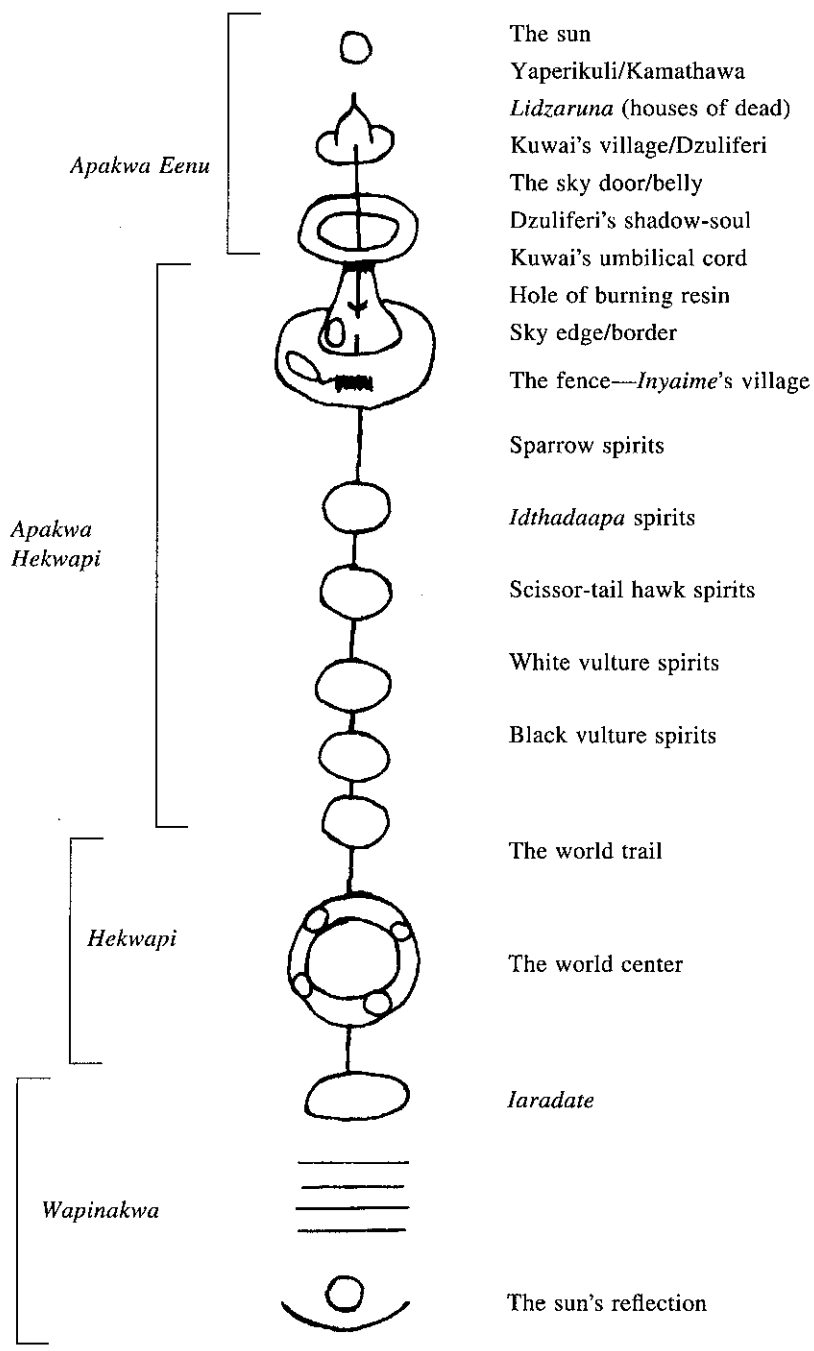


FIG. 1.—The cosmos according to Hohodene shamans

Apakwa Eenu (the other sky). Most levels consist of several flat planes or disks (-*kwa* is a classifier for long, flat objects). The centers of three planes (in this world and the other sky) are hollowed-out, open spaces, while the center of the highest level is closed and pointed. The unity of the cosmos is most clearly represented by the line running through the center, in actuality a trail (*hekwapi iapuana*) and passageways connecting the world of Yaperikuli to the lower part of this world, where the Chief of Animals and Forest Spirits, *Iaradate*, dwells. Unity is also represented by the reflection of the sun at the bottom of the cosmos, like a reflection in a pool of water.

THE PLACE OF OUR BONES

Wapinakwa is represented by four horizontal lines, said to be four kinds of wood (from bottom to top: ambauba [*dúkūli*], umari [*dūmali*], and two others unidentified [*dūwiri*, *wanáda*]). Each level of *Wapinakwa* is inhabited by a different kind of people: those with red bodies, those with black bodies, those who sleep hanging from logs, and one other. These people have very little relationship at all with the people of this world, posing no dangers nor influencing them in any way. It is said, however, that they are people who never were born and that, if this world should end, they would arise to inhabit the earth. This is consistent with the myths of the beginning of the first ancestors whom Yaperikuli and his brothers took out from the holes of the earth at Hipana, the center of this world (a rapids on the Aiary River), which is connected to *Wapinakwa*.

On the other hand, *Wapinakwa* is the place of the bones of the dead. A river of cold but sweet water runs through it (*ūni hapépawani*, *ūni putsidzápawani*), and, in chants to cure certain sicknesses, the pain of illness is cast into these waters. Shamans may look for the lost souls of sick people in this dark netherworld. Theories of the qualities of *Wapinakwa* are conflicting: some say it is like this world; others, that it is like Yaperikuli's world. The relatively undeveloped ideas of its nature, the apparent disconnectedness of its levels (among themselves and to the world above), and the lack of any vertical dimension (all is horizontal) stand in marked contrast with the rich elaboration of the upper layers of the cosmos. It is as though all is stasis in *Wapinakwa*, permanently lying at rest, painted in the colors of the bones of the dead.

THIS WORLD

This world (*hekwapi*) is composed of two planes: in the first is located the world center (*hekwapi pamudzua*); in the second, the house of animal souls (*Itchiri-nai napána*, or *Iaradate*). The world center is the place called Hipana, the principal rapids of the Aiary River. For nearly

all Arawak-speaking peoples of the northwest Amazon (Baniwa, Tariana, Puinave, and others), it is where the earth began and the first ancestors arose. It is also the sacred place of connection between the worlds above and below, where Kuwai was burned and his paxiúba tree burst up and out to the center of the sky. The large boulders of the rapids with their numerous petroglyphs, the holes in the middle of the rapids, and the gigantic boulder in the center are all visible evidence of the world in the beginning and its transformation. In fact, the entire world beyond the center shares in its sacredness, for, as the myth of Kuwai explains, when the women stole the sacred flutes and trumpets, they played them all over the world, which then opened up to its present size. Every rapids, hill, river, town, and country known to the Baniwa bears the sacred stamp of the beginning and is remembered in the *kalidzamai* chants sung at initiation rites. But just as the Kuwai myth marks a transition between the world of the beginning and human time, so sacred geography is constantly reinterpreted and modified by historical change. A colonial history of nearly three centuries has expanded and transformed the landscape, adding new dimensions to the process of opening up the world.

Shamans frequently characterize this world as *Maatchíkwe*, evil place, and *Kaiwíkwé*, pain place, contrasting it with the other sky, which is notable for its source of remedies against the pains of this world. This world is ultimately flawed by poison (*mahnene*) and sicknesses given by “other people”—sorcerers and witches in their interminable desire to inflict pain. All sicknesses and forms of pain were begun by Kuwai in his great conflagration and ascent to the sky at Hipana. Since all humanity shares in the nature of Kuwai, anyone can potentially practice sorcery, although all initiates are severely warned against it. Both shamans and chant-owners derive a great deal of their power from the fact that they can both cure and inflict pain.

The house of animal souls, *Iaradate*, is located in the sky of the lower world (*Thiāli-kúma*) and contains the souls of all animal species on earth. The Chief of the Animal Souls, *Iaradathíta* (or *Awakarūna*), commands a legion of spirits of the rivers, forest, and air whom he sends to affect humans, giving them fear, which leads to sickness. All sicknesses of this world not caused by sorcery or other shamans are given by these spirits. Like the spirits of deceased humans, sickness-giving animal spirits appear like a wind, encircling humans walking in the forest and leaving them with sickness.¹ Shamans have the power to

¹ *Iaradate* is not to be confused with the houses of the collective animal souls of deceased humans (*iaruda*). Each phratry has its own collective ancestral soul, a spiritualized animal that emerged when Yaperikuli procured the first ancestors. All members of a phratry share in this collective animal soul, which is represented as its Kuwai flute or

open and enter *Iaradate* and request from the Chief of the Animal Souls animals for peoples' food or the return of souls of people afflicted by the sickness-giving spirits of the forest and rivers.

THE OTHER WORLD

Above this world, the other world (*apakwa hekwapi*) begins with the five separate places (like compartments or rooms) of the bird spirits. The bird spirits are helpers (*wapira*, our pets) of the shaman in his search for lost souls and advise him of their whereabouts. They are female spirits, the daughters of Dzuliferi. After the shaman has completed five or six years of his apprenticeship, he is supposed to make a marriage with the bird spirits (especially the vultures) with whom he will have children who also help him in his search for lost souls. This spiritual marriage is the counterpart of the shaman's abstinence from sexual intercourse on earth. Clearly, the more spirit children a shaman has, the more powerful he will become. Each of these bird spirits is the owner of a specific kind of dart that the shaman acquires in his apprenticeship and that is associated with specific kinds of sicknesses and cures.

THE OTHER SKY

The top of the other world and the beginning of the other sky (*Apakwa Eenu*) is a complex place of transformation. One might say that it is pure transformation where, for example, the souls of the dead are purified and changed into their eternal essence or, if they have been evil in this world, are trapped in a place of eternal sickness. It is the place where shamans separate the souls of the dead from the living, and where the shaman himself must "die" in order to return to the eternal world of the deities and first people. It is to be expected that no simple description could adequately convey the dynamic nature of this transformative space. Here, I give an introductory discussion to be taken up again in the following section.

One notes that the borders of the sky (*eenu tiwatakawa*, sky border) are more distinctly defined than on other layers of the cosmos. The borders separate: the souls of dead people who have lived badly in this world (given poison, inflicted harm, or not respected the ways of life prescribed in initiation) confront a fence (*Kurara*) that blocks their passage and shows a trail to another village, *Inyaime dzakale*. Inyaime is a demon spirit, an evil manifestation of Kuwai (an "other Kuwai")

trumpet and which, after death, is incorporated into its phratry's animal soul house. The collective animal soul is distinct from the individual soul of each person, which, after death, can return as a sickness-giving spirit (*Kamainhiri*), shade (*Dánaime*), or evil omen (*hinimai*).

who, according to the Baniwa, takes many souls of the dead to his village. The trail there is beautiful, with sweet-smelling flowers, but the village of Inyaime is like this world, where people must work and suffer the same things they suffered in this world. It is also said to be intensely hot there, and people are always asking for water.

These images of an eternally unchanging condition and of being permanently on the border and outside contrast sharply with the way of the souls who continue the journey. These must first be purified by passing through a hole of burning resin (*mainia*, *mirawaka*) and fire, located in the hollowed-out open center of the sky. The burning separates (*lipekoka*, throws off, sheds) their physical and social identity (*newikika*, phratry) from their soul (*ikaale*). In reality, resin is burned round the borders of a village where a person has recently died, in order to close off a possible return of the deceased's soul to the village and to open the way for it to continue its journey to the houses of the dead (*liaruda*).

Once the soul has been purified, it appears a gleaming white, and, in reality, recently deceased people are dressed in clean white garments before burial to represent this transformation. From there, the souls follow the trail to their houses—some say to the borders of Kuwai's village; others, to Yaperikuli's village. The way is full of thorns and dangerous darts, but, once the souls are there, all is clean, pure, shining white, and beautiful. Souls are kept eternally occupied so that they will not remember their families and seek to return.

The shaman's journey to the other sky is described as more complex and will be treated in greater detail below. After passing through the hole of burning tree resin, the shaman's soul takes another trail to the middle sky where Kuwai and Dzuliferi are. In order to attain this sacred center, he must pass through the sky door (*Eenu ienúma* or sky mouth, for "door" and "mouth" are the same word), which is said to be constantly opening and closing like a scissors and is an extremely dangerous passage, after which he enters the sky belly (*eenu íwali*). The shaman must "die" before entering the door. Kuwai sends down his umbilical cord (*hliepolepi eenu*), shaped like a cross, which the shaman grasps as Kuwai pulls him up and through the door into the middle sky. There, the shaman seeks to retrieve the lost souls of the sick.

The symbolism of the shaman's death and return to the womb of the sky follows the generative and reproductive symbolism of *Apakwa Hekwapi*. For, if the bird spirit world represents the shaman's capacity to create spiritual offspring, the return to the womb brings the shaman to the source of the soul and of generative life itself. Having passed through the fire, the shaman emerges as pure soul and enters into communication with the spiritual reality of the primordial world.

Before entering the sky door, he sees the shadow-soul of Dzuliferi (*Dzuliferi-idanam*). Both it and the shadow-soul of Kuwai (*Kuwai-idanam*, or *wamu*), which entraps human souls, represent the dark side of the heart/soul (*ikaale*), a “human heart of primordial darkness,” in the empty, dark hole at the center of the sky.² Yet the shadow-soul refers beyond itself to what Sullivan has called the “world of fully manifest light”—here, in the world of Yaperikuli, in the highest realm of the cosmos where the eternal light of the primordial sun (*Häre*) shines is “the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent mode of being that humans experience in their inner beings as a dark absence constitutive of their own soul.”³

The place of Kuwai, *Apakūma*, is said to contain all the kinds of lethal sicknesses (*mahnene*) that entrap human souls and which Kuwai himself gives to people. Kuwai has a plantation, for example, with trees of poison darts (*Dzauī kūmale*). All of the primal shamans are said to inhabit this level.

Beyond the village of Kuwai, another trail leads to the level of Yaperikuli and the harpy eagle Kamathawa, the sky tip (*eenu tsūrūkwa*), which is closed and pointed like a knife, where the universe ends. Very little is known of this world, for very few shamans actually attain it. Most only see it at a distance. Those who do enter are the most knowledgeable and powerful of curers. I have no information on whether a further transformation of the shaman’s soul occurs before entering Yaperikuli’s village. It is said that this world is a hidden place (*lidawanikwa*), a place of happiness (*kathimākwe*), cleaner and more beautiful than any other place in the cosmos, where the souls of shamans sing the praise of the creator. It is a place of eternal light and of unyielding remedies. It is the source of all knowledge (*ianheke*) that began and made the universe. In shamans’ apprenticeship, they must reach a point near this level (like a room next to it) where they, like Yaperikuli, demonstrate their power to create in their thought everything in the world again.

From this description of the cosmos, it is easy to see how cosmology organizes the concerns of cosmogony in the creation of what we may call a hierarchy of spiritual being and power. The highest level represents omniscience (*ianheke*, knowledge) as the hidden and eternal (*meedzāka*) source of creative power and happiness. The second level represents the soul (*ikaale*) both as the generative source of life and as the dark seat of pain and the soul’s entrapment. The third level represents the temporal regeneration and reproduction of the spirit. This

² L. Sullivan, *Ianchu’s Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 261.

³ *Ibid.*

world is at once sacralized by its connection to the primordial world, bearing its sacred marks at its center and all throughout, and open to the creation of new meaning through individual and social histories. Yet it is eternally flawed, constantly threatened by the chaos of pain and the dark side of the soul. Finally, the world below represents the stasis of being at rest, yet the potentiality of new being should the world above collapse.

In the following section, we examine in greater detail how the process of shamanic initiation and cures give dynamic form to this spiritual being in the continuous creation of meaning.

GUARDIANS OF THE COSMOS

JOURNEYS TO THE OTHER SKY

Shamans have a relatively standardized way of describing their experiences during their apprenticeship and in their cures. Like myth, this description gives a form to the variety of their experiences and highlights their essential aspects. The following is based on the statements of two shamans, both highly respected in their community and former apprentices of the Hohodene prophet Kudui. As it is a highly condensed description, rich in symbolism, we will examine it from several different points of view: first, its relationship to cosmogony; second, the process of the shaman's apprenticeship as a gradual but total identification with the spiritualized being of the cosmos; and third, the salvific nature of the shaman's quest.

The shamans begin by sniffing *pariká*. Then everything transforms before their eyes. They first see the sparrow spirits in the other world (*Apakwa*). Then the place of the *Idihadaapa* (?) in *Apakwa*. Then the place of the scissor-tail hawk spirit called *Pulimakwa*. Then the white vulture spirit place called *Hülümana*. All the way to the harpy eagle spirit Kamathawa. The world is good where it lives. The shamans see it. They ascend the *pariká* stairs (*Yato-edana*), to the tip of the sky (*likuruapi eenu*) by the universe trail (*hekwapi-iedana*). They ascend to the end of the other world by the *pariká* stairs. They transform on *pariká*; *pariká* shows each place.

When the shaman takes *pariká*, he falls down as if dead (*maliume*). His body lies as if dead here in this world but, as it is lying, in his thought the shaman travels and sees the worlds before. He first goes to the water hole (*Ūni nūmana*). At the water hole, there is a log boat. Then comes a wind and the souls of the dead appear in the sky, the other sky (*apakwa eenu*). The shaman joins all the souls together with the wind, joining them together in the large log boat. He joins together each family that there is of each village of the dead in the boat (*Kawaale-itanina*, *Malitanina*, *Yumawa-itanina*, *Uwa-itanina*, *Molematanina* are the names of the boats). The wind pulls the boats. Then the shaman, sitting alone, takes tobacco and blows smoke over his kin's souls and

tells them, "You have to leave your kin behind, their souls will be more content." He then asks them, "How are you, my kin? Now the wind comes." And he blows over them with tobacco. They become more beautiful and he tells them that this world will get well.

The shaman then goes to the other sky, ascending on the stairs to where Yaperikuli is. The shaman sees the universe people and the old, old Dzuliferi sitting there with his tobacco. The shamans there are blowing tobacco and curing the sick. Then they see Yaperikuli's shadow. They see the sky. It is a beautiful white! Gleaming like silver, a new, other world there. So beautiful it is!

Then the shaman becomes as the universe master (*Hekwapi-thairi*). He changes his body and it becomes like wood. He then remakes the whole world: the water, the rocks, the trees, the animals, people—all in his thought. He makes the whole world well, everything as Yaperikuli did. The shaman is like Yaperikuli. He can mend bones that have broken. He is immortal. There in the sky. He does all of this for the world to become beautiful. He cannot let the world fall. When people say that this world will end, the shaman looks and says, "No, this world will not end."

Then the shamans see Kuwai. They must first be purified, passing through the bath of burning resin, throwing off their person, and purifying themselves well. The sky door opens. Kuwai sends down his umbilical cord that the shaman grasps and it lifts him up to the place of Kuwai. There they see the old Kuwai. Kuwai has hair all over his body, his sickness. The shaman greets Kuwai, "Are you Kuwai?" and tells him, "I have come to look for the life (*ikaale*, soul) of my friend." But Kuwai says, "No, I cannot let him go; he has to pay." The shaman gives Kuwai the patient's payment (*dawai*) and asks Kuwai to let the patient's life go. "What sickness is it?" Kuwai asks, and the shaman tells him. Kuwai tells him he has the sickness and the shaman asks for it. Kuwai takes it and puts it on a bench. "Now you can cure him," he says. Kuwai takes his hair and says, "I am Kuwai and this is the sickness he has. Now you can make your friend well."

Then Kuwai transforms into the shadow of Dzuliferi (*Dzuliferi-idanam*), an old, old man. There are many of Dzuliferi's people seated there: *Yumawali*, *Tana*, *Uwa*, *Inyaimewidane*. They tell the shaman to sit and sniff *pariká* with them. Dzuliferi then tells the shaman, "Oh, my grandson, I am sick, cure me." The shaman sniffs *pariká* and begins curing Dzuliferi, sucking out and vomiting the sickness. He shows the sickness to Dzuliferi. Three times he takes the sickness out of Dzuliferi: sucking out, throwing water, and blowing tobacco smoke. Then Dzuliferi sits up and says, "Now I am better," but it is Kuwai who is showing the shaman what to do. Dzuliferi transforms back to Kuwai and tells the shaman, "Now you can go to make your friend well. You can suck out again for the others (*walima-nai*, other future). If you had not come, I would almost have died. Now, this other man, your friend, will not die, you are already taking the sickness out of him. He will get better."

The shaman then takes up his cigar, sings again, and begins to come back down descending. He descends slowly, place by place in the other world. Descending, sitting down, descending, sitting down. Each place he lands, he makes lightning and thunder. Until he returns to our world of sickness

(*maatchikwe*). Here, he cures the sick man, telling him that Dzuliferi has said that he will get well.

The text is a remarkably concise statement of the essential powers of the shamans and also contains several of the fundamental themes and concepts of cosmogony and cosmology. It is one of the clearest expressions of the central theme of this article: the shaman as guardian of the cosmos. To understand this, the text may be seen to consist of five phases identifiable as the following: (1) ascent and transformation on *pariká*, (2) going beyond death, (3) remaking the world, (4) curing in the sky world, (5) descent, reentry to this world, curing in this world. In every one of these phases, the shaman's quest is conceptualized in terms of the protective and beneficial: to make the world beautiful; to make this world and people better and more content; to not let this world fall or end; to retrieve a lost soul and make a sick person well. In fact, it is as though the specific intent of the shaman's journey—to retrieve and revive a lost soul—were so interconnected with the larger, cosmic drama of making the world better that it is impossible to separate them. In all phases, the beauty, goodness, unity, order, and truth of the primordial world stand in contrast with this world, *Maatchikwe*, the place of multiple pain and evil. The shaman's quest, we might say, in one sense is to beautify (*rualiapikwe*) this world. The beautifying of this world through the creation of order is essential to its salvation and healing.

It is not surprising, then, that the central drama of cosmogony—Yaperikuli's repeated struggles to create order and to purify the world of sickness-giving spirits as a necessary precondition for life—is replicated in the central phases of the shaman's journey. To illustrate, phase 2 finds the shaman at the water hole, where he joins all the souls of the dead together and separates them from the living, leaving both the dead and the living content. This separation is necessary, for if the dead were to return to the living, this would have disastrous consequences of sickness. In phase 4, the shaman is purified through the fire hole and reborn into the sky world where he meets Kuwai and retrieves lost souls. In phase 3, the shaman becomes like Yaperikuli and remakes the world and all its elements. Now, in the myth of Yaperikuli's search for the first ancestors of humanity, this world—at the time full of sickness-giving spirits and demons—was drowned by water and then burned by fire—both separating and purifying acts—before Yaperikuli raised the first ancestors who sang Kuwai music up out of the holes in the rocks at Hipana, the center of the world and the connection with Kuwai's umbilical cord.

An extended discussion along these lines would demonstrate, further, that the phases of the shaman's journey replicate the phases of

cosmic history—not, obviously, through any simple correspondence but through a parallelism over many myths. For example, the myth of the beginning of Yaperikuli finds its clearest parallels in phases 1, 3, and 5; the myth of Kuwai, in phase 4;⁴ the myth of the beginning of evil omens and how death entered this world, in phase 2. What we have discussed in Part I in terms of the transferral of, or passage from, the primordial world to this world as a wrinkle in time and space is most clearly seen in the shaman's gradual and marked descent from the sky world and reentry into this world accompanied by lightning and thunder. In short, one could compile examples to illustrate this point.

From the accounts of various shamans, the decision to begin apprenticeship may be due to a calling (e.g., a deathly sickness which the person has suffered) and/or the parents' selection of one of their sons to learn. The actual process of apprenticeship begins with a long period of restriction, including fasting, isolation, and celibacy, during which the apprentice begins to take *pariká* and to eat medicine, that is, ingesting elements taken from the sky (rocks, darts, wood slivers, hair). The master extracts these from the sky with his rattle (*kutheruda*), swallows them, vomits them up, and puts them in the apprentice's mouth, shutting them up inside with the handle of his rattle (fig. 2). These elements represent all the different forms of sickness extraction (*ipútsuakarūna*) the shaman will use in his practice—from the sickness given by forest spirits to poison. Thus, at the same time the shaman is totally restricted in his external relations with this world, his interior (mouth, stomach) is literally filled up, transformed into a spiritual container much like the mouth of the sky which engulfs, transforms, and extrudes objects. At some point, also, the shaman's mouth is said to become the mouth of Kuwai (*Kuwai-inūma*).

Other, more powerful spirit objects obtained in this phase are used in the higher forms of cure; for example, the crest feathers of Kamathawa, which become the shaman's crest feathers, are used in the making of summer, to open the skies, and to make the world better. Or they are weapons, spirit darts, the weapons of the shaman, such as the darts of Kuwai and Dzuliferi that serve as swords (*mapalikuíta*) to cut off peoples' heads (recalling the ancient war practice of decapitation). For, as the shaman creates alliances, so must he be prepared for the possibilities of spiritual struggles against cosmic processes.

In the next phase, the shaman acquires spirit helpers. He continues to ingest spirit food, especially darts (*walama*) and wood slivers, for the bird spirits are the owners of these objects. Here, we note the connection

⁴ See, for a more detailed interpretation, R. Wright, *The History and Religion of the Baniwa Peoples of the Upper Rio Negro Valley* (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1981), pp. 414–28.



FIG. 2.—Shamans extracting elements from the sky. In their right hands, they hold the sacred rattles (*kutherruda*); in their left hands, the bones for sniffing *pariká (dzatoapo)*. (Photograph by the author.)

between spiritual assistance and consumption, for, as the shaman ingests their objects as spiritual food, so he establishes a lasting relationship of alliance through marriage and kinship with the spirit world. It is as though the basic metaphors of human society (food, reproduction, and alliance) were extended to the spiritual world.

In the following phase (corresponding to phase 2 of the text), the souls of the deceased are separated from the living through the powerfully transformative nature of water. Wooden containers (log boats), the vessels at the center of the sky, serve as the vehicles with which the shaman, standing alone and above, joins together all the souls of the dead and effects a separation, a passage from one world to another, affording both the souls of the dead and the world of the living the possibility of a future life of well-being and happiness.

This phase also marks the shaman's mastery over fire, as symbolized in the blowing of tobacco smoke over the souls of the dead. Tobacco is considered food for the soul and is associated with the elements of wind and celestial fire. In the context of shaman's cures, tobacco is particularly effective in bringing back lost souls and in centralizing (*liwaketa*, joining together) the soul from the various parts of the body (hands, feet, shoulders, head) to the seat of the soul, the heart. Thus we have the image of the dispersed souls of the dead coming together, being pulled by the wind (*ikaale*, soul, and *kawaale*, wind, are closely connected in shamanic language) into vessels (the shamans' log canoes) at the center, where the shaman blows tobacco smoke over them both to sustain them and, like the great fires of myth, to separate them from their prior existence. The shaman serves here as the mediator between two states of being in the passage from matter to spirit.

It is a short step in the shaman's spiritual development to the next phase, in which he becomes a master of consumption by literally being consumed and ingested—first, in the hole of burning resin, separating his body from his soul, and second, by the sky mouth/belly through which he returns to the center of the soul, like a fetus returning to its mother's womb. As he has learned to practice control over the passage of sickness into his body, he is then able to harness this knowledge in the interest of curing others. In his passage, he becomes like the sickness itself, so that he may regain the soul of his patient.

The encounter of the shaman's soul with Kuwai, the Owner of Sickness, is mediated through the offering of *dawai*, the material (yet sacralized) payment for the lost soul. Once Kuwai accepts the payment and a relationship of exchange is established, Kuwai gives the sickness from his body to the shaman. Then he transforms into the shadow-soul of Dzuliferi, for, like the *dawai*, the shadow-soul is the reflection of the sick person's soul being sought in exchange.

It is significant that the process of regaining the soul is one of bargaining and exchange with Kuwai, symbolic of the kind of social relationship between affines, as animals were the affines of Yaperikuli. In this exchange, material form is given in return for its spirit form, or more exactly, the shaman restores the unity of manifest form and spirit. Material forms (*dawai*, the pathogenic object Kuwai takes from his body, which is the animal shadow-soul) are exchanged for the soul. This is followed by the transformation of Kuwai into the shadow-soul of the Patron of Shamans, Dzuliferi. Significantly, Dzuliferi then addresses the shaman as “my grandchild,” indicating that a change has occurred in social relationships from affine to patrilineal ancestor. This change allows the shaman to extract the sickness and to regain the soul that he will later reunite with the patient’s body in this world.

Dzuliferi then says, “If you had not come, I would almost have died.” This illustrates again a central theme of Baniwa cosmogony: the narrow escape from death inside the womb. In the myth of Kuwai, the child Kuwai cannot be born because its mother, Amaru, has no vagina and Yaperikuli has to open a passage in order for the child to come out of her womb. In the myth of the beginning of Yaperikuli, the hero escapes from death inside an ambaúba tree that bursts apart from the heat of fire. Soul loss and the shaman’s quest to regain souls replicate the central drama of cosmogony: overcoming the animal affines who seek to kill or consume Yaperikuli’s kin and whom the shaman, like Yaperikuli, must bargain with or transform in order to save the soul from death.

Finally, the shaman’s remaking of the world demonstrates his absolute mastery over form. Having been purified of all traces of human limitations, his soul is formless and thus can assume any form whatsoever, including that of the Master of the Universe. Why is a wooden log an appropriate form? For one, the special kind of wood into which he transforms (*Dzauí Kamathawa ikudaita*) is one of the spiritual medicines the shaman has ingested during his apprenticeship, obtained from the harpy eagle Kamathawa. The special power of this wood resides in its great strength for opening the world. In the following section, we shall see that the act of opening the ancient and hidden world of Yaperikuli is an act of revelation, unlocking the power to create the elements of the world and thus to restore its order.⁵

⁵ Along with these soul changes, the shaman acquires a series of what we may call outer coverings, extensions of his body and soul, and symbolic attire that represent his transformed nature: (1) various “cloaks” (*liamáka*) of Kuwai, the jaguar, red caraiurú, which, like an outer skin, cover the shaman when he takes *pariká*; (2) various sacred rocks and crystals that aid in clairvoyance, in producing thunder, and in traveling to all parts of the world (one multifaced stone [*miyáke*] is said to have a face for each thing the shaman can do); (3) various weapons and clothing—shoes, belt, and guns loaded with spirit darts, all from Dzuliferi, Thunder (*maweno*), and the Eternal Master, with which to

LIKE THE BONE GOD: SAVING THE WORLD FROM DESTRUCTION

In all phases of the shaman's journeys, songs accompany the acts of his creation and transformation. We shall consider here three songs, all taken from the final phase of his spiritual development—when he re-makes the world—which demonstrate that, far from being a feat of pure technical mastery, the spiritual remaking of the world is the basis of the salvific power of the shaman. That is, his power to save the world from death and destruction and hence to guard the cosmos, derives from his mastery over the creation of forms.

In the first song, the shaman sings that he is “keeping/healing the world” (*pamatchiatsa hekwapí*). The following is a translation of the song:

- 1 “Heey, heey
- 2 Where will it be, it will come back to stay with us
- 3 His world,
- 4 Dzuliferi.
- 5 Where will it be, it will come back to stay with us, his hidden place of long ago
- 6 My grandfather Dzuliferi
- 7 (repeats 5)
- 8 Dzuliferi.
- 9 For now I come and open his hidden place of long ago
- 10 My grandfather, grandfather.
- 11 I will brush away, brush away
- 12 Their tobacco
- 13 Smoke⁶
- 14 Of the jaguar-shamans⁷
- 15 Thus will it be I open his dwelling place,
- 16 Father Dzuliferi, Heee
- 17 (repeats 15)
- 18 Thus will it be I raise his wood, Jaguar Kamathawa

make thunder and lightning and to communicate with other shamans. More than any other single object, however, his rattle (*kútherüda*) represents the central symbols of his art. It is said to be his soul, and a shaman deprived of his rattle immediately becomes vulnerable to death. Its overall shape is that of a bird's head with a long beak and crest feathers. Its handle is cut at the end in the shape of the mouth of a beak, and its globular body is incised with designs representing Dzuliferi, Kuwai, and the trails of the sky. Four small holes are cut on each side through which, the shamans say, they see. The small seeds or stones inside are said to be alive, from the sky, and from the heads of Dzuliferi and Kamathawa. As much a weapon as an instrument for extraction, the rattle is the means by which the shaman, in his cures, takes the forms of sickness from the sky (the rattle cuts them like a knife) and ingests them, later to extract them again from the patient. In short, it is the instrument through which the connection between the sky worlds and this world is made. In its design, it may even be seen to resemble the overall shape of the cosmos.

⁶ “Brush away the smoke of their tobacco,” i.e., clean the sky of clouds.

⁷ *Dzauí malinhai*, other jaguar-shamans.

- 19 Thus will it be I raise his crest feather, Jaguar Kamathawa
 20 With them will I brush away their tobacco smoke
 21 Of the jaguar-shamans, I come and open
 22 His world
 23 Never do we seek him who does not want to know how
 24 To open the ancient, hidden world, my grandfather
 25 (repeats 23–24)
 26 Thus will it be I open, I open his world, Jaguar Yaperikuli
 27 Thus will it be I look for medicine⁸ to open his world
 28 Never do we seek him who does not want to know how to open his
 world, Eternal Master
 29 Heee
 30 (repeats 28)
 31 He sees that we open his ancient world
 32 My grandfather, grandfather, heee
 33–34 (repeats 31–32)
 35 Thus will it be his medicine box in the place of happiness, his world of
 Jaguar Yaperikuli, heee
 36 There is his ancient, hidden place, my grandfather, my grandfather, the
 Eternal Master
 37 Thus will it be I open it with him, the sun's children
 38 Heee, I open it, his world, the Eternal Master
 39 Thus I brush away and open
 40 With us, I open his ancient, hidden world, my grandfather, grandfather
 41 Thus will it be his medicine box, Jaguar Yaperikuli, his happiness
 place, Jaguar Yaperikuli, heee.
 42 Thus will be his happiness place, Jaguar Yaperikuli
 43 Thus I open it, he comes and opens it, heee
 44 Thus will it be he comes and opens it, his ancient, hidden world, my
 grandfather, grandfather
 45–46 (repeats 43–44)
 47 For so it will be I open it with this *teko, teko Maliweko-kuthe*⁹
 48 I raise it, thus will it be, his wood Jaguar Kamathawa
 49 Thus will I stay in his place, Dzuliferi
 50 His place, Dzuliferi
 51 Thus he comes and stays, he opens his world
 52 Thus he comes and opens it, his world, Dzuliferi
 53 His happiness place
 54 Thus will be his happiness place, the Eternal Master
 55 (repeats 54)
 56 Thus will be his ancient, hidden place
 57 For thus will it be I open it, his ancient, hidden place, my grandfather,
 my grandfather
 58 Thus will it be never do we seek him who does not want to know how
 to open it, his ancient, hidden place, Jaguar Yaperikuli
 59 (repeats 58)
 60 Thus he comes and opens it with us, our ancestors:
 61 Our ancestor, the Eternal Master, our ancestor Dzuliferi,
 62 Our ancestor Jaguar Yaperikuli

⁸ *Teko likurumhethé*, shamans' medicine to enter the sky.

⁹ *Maliweko*, a rock, an ancient house of fruits.

- 63 Thus will be his world, his world Jaguar Yaperikuli, I open it with us
 64 The other sky, the other sky, we are with Jaguar Yaperikuli
 65 We are with him, Jaguar Yaperikuli, we are in the other sky
 66 His companion, my grandfather, my grandfather, the primal sun *Häre*,
 his companion, my grandfather *Häre*
 67 His companion *Häre*, *Häre*, his companion, our ancestor Jaguar Ya-
 perikuli
 68 I open it with them
 69 Thus will be his ancient, hidden world
 70–71 (repeats 68–69)
 72 My grandfather Jaguar Yaperikuli
 73 For so it will be I open it
 74 So will it be the happiness place
 75 Happiness will they have
 76 (repeats 75)
 77 Thus will it be I open it with them
 78 The Eternal Ones
 79 You see I open it
 80 Their medicine box, the Eternal Ones
 81 So will it be as in the beginning
 82 He opened it
 83 His medicine-box
 84 The Eternal Ones
 85 His world
 86 His ancient, hidden world
 87 My grandfather, grandfather, Jaguar Yaperikuli
 88 Haaaaaw! Haaaaawfff!”

Shamans explain this song in the following manner. The shaman procures the ancient, hidden world (*lidawanikwa oopi*) of Yaperikuli. In his thought, he sits where Yaperikuli sits and seeks to open the ancient hidden world. He uses the wood and crest feathers of the sacred harpy eagle, Yaperikuli's pet, to open it. He blows away the clouds to open the sky and make a beautiful sky. The shaman thinks: there are others who don't want to know, to become as in the beginning, but they cannot open the ancient hidden world as the shaman does. The hidden world is the place of eternal happiness, the world of the jaguar Yaperikuli. When the hidden world opens for the shaman, he ascends to it. He sits in the place of Dzuliferi and opens the world again in the sky above. The shaman is then near Yaperikuli and sees the entire world. He can make everything as Yaperikuli did in the beginning. He gets what Yaperikuli had in the beginning: how Yaperikuli saw the world in the beginning (*Yaperikuli ikenyuakarumi likapa kwameka hekwapu*) in his thought. He then can make the world. The shaman is near the sun, *Häre*, the eternal body of Yaperikuli. He has arisen and has requested from the sun *Häre* to open the ancient hidden world of Yaperikuli. He sees that the world becomes happy, that all people become happy, as in

the beginning. Thus the shaman makes the world better, healing the world, not letting it end. The shaman knows when the world will end. He advises Yaperikuli and he doesn't let it end.

Opening (that is, revealing) the ancient, hidden world of eternal happiness unlocks Yaperikuli's primordial creative act, preventing the end conceptualized as closure. It stands to reason that the shaman has the power to heal the world, considering that the cosmos represents spiritualized being and that the healing of individuals is a drama of cosmic proportions.

The second song, also sung in this phase of his apprenticeship, refers to a time when the world *did* come to an end. It is called "The Night End Long Ago" (*Deepi Karumi Oopi*) and recalls the myth of Yaperikuli's killing of the animals, during a long night when Yaperikuli caused a flood forcing the animals to ascend an *abiú* tree, which he broke with thunder and lightning. The following is a short exegesis of the song given by a shaman (given its complexity and length, we prefer to cite only the exegesis, which summarizes its principal ideas):

This is a song for shamans. When people don't know how to see, with *pariká*, they don't know how to explain this song. The world ended once. Night covered the whole world. The shaman requests that Yaperikuli make the night pass, to leave the world as it is now. *Pariká* shows the shaman. It opens the world. *Pariká* makes the stairs on which the shaman ascends. He rises to the sky. Then he takes three kinds of sacred tobacco and blows it on top of the people. He asks that the world not be left to end. The shaman arises and gets near Yaperikuli. He doesn't want that the world be left to end. He opens the world. For night came and stayed for awhile. It was Yaperikuli himself who made this happen. Later, he saved people by his song. The shaman takes *pariká*, ascends, and raises people up again and they become happy. They were sad, now they are happy, Yaperikuli's people. Then Yaperikuli asked them, "So, you are not going to remain like animals? Killing and eating people with poison?" Yaperikuli saved us.

The acts of raising the *pariká* ladder, opening the world, and the shaman's request that the day return all restore the temporal/spatial separation of night and day, the living from the dead, happiness from sadness. The catastrophic end of the world thus signifies a time when sadness reigns, in total obscurity, as in the world of the shades of the dead. The shaman intercedes, on behalf of humanity, for the end to pass and the world to become beautiful again.

The final song, also from the same phase of the shaman's apprenticeship, refers to the mending of bones in the sky. While it would seem to simply focus on the treatment of broken bones, one must also remember that bones are essential to the very foundation of the cosmos (as

Yaperikuli is “he inside of bone”) and that a plausible interpretation of the broken bone would be cosmic collapse, in which case mending, like the spiritual healing of the world, restores its unity. For this reason, this kind of cure is consistent with the salvific role of the shaman. As one shaman explained, “He mends bones in the sky for the world to become beautiful. He cannot let the world fall. When people say this world will end, the shaman looks and says, ‘No, this world will not end.’” The following is a summary of the song’s content:

The shaman walks with Dzuliferi and looks for the bone of Mawerikuli (the first person who died in a heap of bones). He finds it and looks for the bone of Kuwai (*liapipemi Manhekanali*). He leaves them both with the broken bone to mend it well. He gets the sun’s, *Häre*’s, tobacco and blows tobacco smoke over the bone, shaping it with his hands, and then he sucks out. Then he looks for the bone of Kamathawa, *Kamathawa dzatoapi*, the eternal bone (*Meedzaka Yapi-nawa*), the *pariká* bone. He joins this to the mended bone and makes the bone new. He then looks for where his people (*liKuwaikere*) are and joins them together, to make them better. He ascends to the middle sky, the other sky, and makes the Kuwaikere better. He takes the bone of Kamathawa from the sky and fixes it again with people. He ascends to the tip of the universe (*litsuruikwa*), the ancient hidden world of Jaguar Yaperikuli and Jaguar Kamathawa. The shaman cannot let the people stay sad. When the bone is fixed, they become happy. If the shaman doesn’t fix it, people will die.

The bones mentioned in the text refer to perhaps the most fundamental cosmic processes. The bones of Mawerikuli signify the impossibility of regenerating the life of a person after death. The bones of Kuwai (the sacred flutes and trumpets) represent the continuity of the past, ancestral world with the present and future and the creation of new life. The bones of Yaperikuli, the eternal source of the cosmos, recall the creator’s rebirth from a condition of dismemberment. The *pariká* bone is the vehicle of shamanic transformation. The sequence in which these bones are mentioned also reproduces a process of returning from the world of the living, along a vertical axis, to the tip of the sky, Yaperikuli’s world. This reconstruction of the vertical dimension coincides with the mending of the bone and consequently the restoration of the relations between upper and lower worlds and their inhabitants. The *Kuwaikere* appear to represent spiritual beings who embody this reversed perspective.

The salvific power of the shaman consists, then, of at least three processes: opening the ancient hidden world of eternal happiness and assuming the place of the creator, reestablishing temporal order, and restoring the vertical dimension of the cosmos. In all these endeavors, the eternal light of the sun, the smoke of sacred tobacco (fire), and the

visionary, transformative qualities of *pariká* are the source of the shaman's creative acts.

CONCLUSION

We are now in a better position to understand more fully the millenarian and prophetic powers of the shamans. Cosmogony demonstrates that this world is intrinsically flawed by evil, misfortune, and death (*Maatchikwe*, the place of evil). Like a sick person, the world constantly needs to be healed, in other words, to be returned to a state of integrated spatial and temporal order. The death of the world, when the world collapses into total darkness, is the equivalent of being consumed by poison and death-dealing sickness. Cosmogony shows that narrow escapes from death inside a closed container (a womb, a log) are essential to salvation. The shaman's apprenticeship and constant journeys to the other world replicate this process of narrow escape, so that, every time a shaman completes his apprenticeship and remakes the world, he saves it from death. The shamans thus have the most vital job of sustaining ordered life, of preventing the death of the world, and of constantly healing the world.

It follows from this that, if there were no more shamans, then the world would come to an end. For that reason, during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when Evangelical Protestants attacked and destroyed the sacred flute cults and the shamans' practice, converted Evangelical Baniwa concluded that the end was imminent. In fact, they declared that the waters would rise and people should tie their canoes to the tops of their houses, and that the world would become totally dark, exactly as in myth and in the shamans' song "The Night End Long Ago." But when a group of Evangelicals went to kill the powerful shaman/prophet Kudui of the upper Aiary, with poison—shutting out the last light, in a sense—he, like Yaperikuli, knew of their intentions even before they arrived and turned them back. This explains why the shamans of the Aiary still today remember Kudui as "our salvation."

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ZEN IN THE ART OF
FUNERALS: RITUAL
SALVATION IN
JAPANESE BUDDHISM

Funeral rituals, even ones with an artistic aura, rarely appear in descriptions of Zen art or Zen practice. Although little commented on, the art of Buddhist funerals in Japan is very Zen. In order to understand the Zen of Japanese funerals, first one must leave behind preconceptions based on religiously inspired images of what Zen should be and, instead, examine how Zen functions as a religion in Japanese society. One of the most important social roles of Zen, as in other religions, is to guide the living through the experience of death. Buddhist scholars, who should know better, not uncommonly disparage funerals as mere ritualism peripheral to fundamental Zen insights. Yet for lay people suffering the loss of a loved one few occasions are charged with more emotional power and religious meaning.¹ Zen funerals, furthermore, like their counterparts in medieval European Christianity, historically constituted one of the more significant regular meeting points between the closed religious world located within monastic institutions and the larger secular community they served. The exploration of Zen funerals thus can aid our understanding of how the religious worldview of monks attained expression in the world actually lived by lay people as well as how monastic institutions, by giving new meaning to the process

¹ One need only read the traditional hagiographies of Buddhist monks to realize the profound impact of familial death experiences for awakening individuals to the truth of Buddhist teachings. For suggestive studies of the varied roles that myths, ceremonies, and conceptions of death have in human societies, see Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh, eds., *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976).