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# The Origin of Night and the Dance of Time: Ritual and Material Culture in Northwest Amazonia

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## Introduction

This essay deals with stories about the origin of night that are told by the indigenous peoples of Northwest Amazonia.<sup>1</sup> It examines how the experience of time is made concrete in the sounds and colors of the insects, birds, and animals of the forest; in the composition, textures, and colors of the materials used in house-building; and how these natural indices of time are recreated in the objects, songs, and dances of ritual dance festivals. With the annual round and human life cycle marked by sequences of such festivals, each one structured as a further sequence of song verses sung and danced from dusk to dawn, time itself takes on the quality of a dance and so becomes subject to human control. Along the way, I also provide an explanation of why it is that *muipũ* or *mubihũ*, words for both “sun” and “moon” in several Eastern Tukanoan languages, appear to be made up of two morphemes, *mui* or *mubi*, “*caraná*” and *pũ* or *hũ*, “leaf” and would thus have the literal meaning of “*caraná* leaf” or “palm leaf used for thatching.”<sup>2</sup> I shall argue that the identity between sun, moon, and *caraná* is no coincidence but rather forms an integral component of the way in which time is symbolically represented and controlled, a topic dear to the heart of my teacher Edmund Leach (see Leach 1971a; 1971b).

My essay is based on a reading of over forty published stories concerning the origin of night and related topics interpreted through the lens of my field research. The stories I am concerned with—some of them long narratives, others shorter fragments or notes—are published in books and articles relating to speakers of Arawakan, Tukanoan, and isolated Makuan languages living in Northwest Amazonia.<sup>3</sup> Although these stories are typically published as discrete entities associated with named ethnic units—a “Tukano myth about the origin of night” as opposed to a “Cubeo myth about the origin of roofing leaves”—the reification of these different “myths” and their attachment to different “tribes” is largely illusory. When time allows, origin stories of earth, forest, houses, *caraná*, night, sleep, and dance songs are often told as a single sequence, with each part having the same basic structure. Furthermore, disparate groups living across a large area of Northwest Amazonia tell strikingly similar versions of these stories, and what differences exist do not necessarily reflect cultural contrasts between the groups or differences in the knowledge or repertoires of the people concerned. Many are simply the results of the various contingent circumstances that surround narration, recording, and publication.

Claude Lévi-Strauss long ago demonstrated that there are strong theoretical grounds for rejecting any notion of myths as discrete, stable entities and that where one myth ends and another begins is always a moot point. Following his (1955:435–6) advice that a myth consists of all its variants and that analysis will be enriched by taking all these variants into account, I hope to show that stories about night, roofing leaves, song, and dance are integrally related and make sense of one another so that obscure details in one published version become clear when considered in the light of another. On both theoretical and empirical grounds, I therefore treat all the stories as parts of a single body of ideas.

## The Origin of Night and Other Stories: An Overview

Northwest Amazonian stories about the origins of night form one episode of a much longer creation story. When told in full, this story begins with the origins of the land, its rivers, and its forests; moves on to the origins of house frames, thatch, night, and sleep; and culminates

with the origins of song and dance. These elements make up the components of space and time and are the prerequisites for the ordered social life that the Creator Deities established at the beginning of time.

The episodes in this sequence relating to the land, houses, thatch, night, and sleep typically have the same plot structure, one that is exemplified in the story of the origin of night. A summary of this story might run as follows: having built their longhouse or maloca and covered it with thatch, the Creators, typically a group of between three and five brothers, still faced a major problem—the sun hung motionless at a single point in the sky and there was no night. With no night, no sleep, and no set periods for eating, rest, and other activities, life was an endless round of work and food soon ran short. One day, the Creators discovered the existence of night located in a far-away house. Determined to do something to alleviate their intolerable life conditions, they set out for the house of the Owner of Night to ask for what only he possessed.

When the Creators arrived, the Owner of Night warned them that what they sought would come at a heavy price. They would get not just rest and sleep but also dangerous animals and spirits, gossip, quarrels, bad dreams and sorcery, laziness and a lack of energy, and ultimately death. He emphasized that night required great vigilance and special ritual precautions and should be treated with the utmost respect. To avoid the dangers, they should obey strict rules regarding diet and sex, resist sleep, and remain awake for as long as possible. They should treat night as a special time set aside for serious pursuits such as telling sacred stories, learning shamanic spells, and using these spells to manage the fertility and good order of the world and to keep illness and misfortune at bay.<sup>4</sup>

In several stories, before Owner of Night gives the Creators the night they seek, he first gives them sickness and sores. In some versions, this is because they failed to offer him anything in exchange (e.g., Bourge 1976). In others, the Owner of night mishears their request for night as a request for sores—*ñami*, the word for “night” in most Tukanoan languages, is close to *kami*, the word for “sore.” This detail serves to underline the connection between night, time, and human mortality discussed below.

Before the Creators set off for home, the Owner of Night stayed up late into the night to talk with them, telling them how to manage the night he would give them and teaching them the spells they should recite before they opened the container so that they could keep the dangers of night at bay. He told them that before releasing the night, they should first prepare manioc beer and then only open the container inside the maloca and in the context of a ritual dance. He then issued a further set of detailed instructions about how to bring the night to an end, repeating that under no circumstances should they open the container outside in the forest on their way home. However, as they had no previous experience of night and the long conversations that can take place during it, the Creators were soon overcome by sleep, and only the youngest brother managed to remain awake to hear the lesson out.

In the morning, the Owner gave the Creators a container full of night. In most versions, the container is the palm-leaf box that is used to store feather ornaments, but in some it is a pot or a nut.<sup>5</sup> The Creators were puzzled by the container, for it seemed at once too small to accommodate all that they needed and unusually heavy for its relatively small size. It also emitted strange sounds—as they were about to learn, these were the noises of crickets and other nocturnal creatures. Unable to contain their curiosity, but still far from home, they decided to peek inside—with disastrous consequences. A night of black insects, black birds, bats, night monkeys, black clouds, and heavy rain flew out, scattering in all directions and enveloping them in darkness. Stumbling around in the dark, unable to see and feeling wet, cold, and very tired, the Creators only just managed to make a shelter to shield them from the rain before they were overcome by a deep sleep.

Stories from the southern part of Northwest Amazonia tell how, as they slept, the Owner of Night appeared as a bat, removed the Creators’ eyes, and took them home to roast and eat as a punishment for their failure to obey his instructions. However, with great foresight the youngest managed to protect his eyes and was thus able to rescue those of his sleeping elder brothers and replace them in their sockets (e.g., Arhem et al. 2004:472–9; Fontaine 2010; Trupp 1977:30–7).

As the night dragged on, the elder brothers woke fitfully, desperately trying to recall the Owner of Night’s instructions, but to no avail. Their youngest brother then stepped in, followed the instructions to the letter, and brought the catastrophic first long night to a close.

Whilst the details vary, the other episodes in our story sequence concerning the origins of earth, trees, house frames, and the caraná thatch all have the same basic plot structure—the lack of an essential material; the visit to an Owner; the Owner’s warnings and instructions about dangers, responsibilities, and spells; the mysterious container; the Creators’ disobedience in opening it; the catastrophic results; and the role of the intelligent and attentive youngest brother, the prototype of the ritual specialist or *kumu*, in undoing the damage and re-establishing order. The stories are connected not only because they form a logical sequence where each event is the precondition of the one that follows and because they share the same structure but also because they share a similar outcome. On the positive side, the material in question is now available for all of humanity to enjoy but, because the Creators disobeyed the Owner’s instructions, instead of being easily manageable and free from problems it is now unevenly distributed, involves hard work, dangers, illness, and can also cause death.

In the stories about roofing leaves, sleep, and night that are my special concern here, the main axes of variation include the number, names, and identities of the Creator Deities involved; the identity of the Owner of Night—he is usually a frog but sometimes a bat or cricket; the relation between the Deities and the Owner—the latter is usually a grandfather but sometimes a father-in-law or brother-in-law; the nature of the container given to the Deities—this is usually a pot or the box used to store feather dance ornaments. In addition, many versions about the origin of night contain lengthy details about various events that happen during the first catastrophic long night that results from the Deities opening the container. I shall only be concerned with some of these details here.

Armed with this general summary, let us take a closer look at stories about caraná and then at stories about night.

### Caraná and Owners

In our sequence of stories, the Creators first obtain the earth that makes up the land where they will live and then trees of the forest that provide the thick posts, thinner poles, and vines they use to construct the first ever maloca, a single building coterminous with the whole universe. Having got this far, they now realize that they still lack the leaves necessary to make their maloca’s thatched roof. They set off to get the leaves from the Owner of Caraná.

The Owner of Caraná agrees to give them what they need but warns them that being the owner and headman of a maloca carries heavy social responsibilities and requires knowledge of many shamanic spells. A maloca headman is responsible for the well-being of his people, for organizing their work and other activities by day, and for staying up late into the night offering his housemates snuff, cigars, and coca as he tells them stories and leads them in conversation (see esp. Fernandes and Fernandes 1966:93–103; Fontaine 2010:826–7; and Matapi and Matapi 1984:8–15). Furthermore, the Owner of Caraná warns the Creators that the leaves he will give them may well contain hidden perils. The red, clayey earth that often sticks to the leaves is a premonition of the earth of the grave, and when crickets that hide in the thatch sing in the house at night, this is an omen of death. Finally, the Owner gives the Deities the leaves they seek tightly bundled inside a feather box,<sup>6</sup> telling them that they should only open the container when they are standing up on the framework of their new maloca and ready to put the thatch into position.

Needless to say, the Deities ignore what they are told. Skeptical that such a small quantity of leaves could possibly cover so big a house, and curious about the noise of chirping crickets coming from the box, they peek inside. The leaves fly out in all directions, covering the sky and making it dark. Had the Deities done as they were told, caraná leaves would now be easy to find and thatching easily completed. But now stands of suitable caraná palms are relatively scarce and haphazardly distributed throughout the forest and thatching a maloca is hard work that takes up much time.

But who are these Owners? In the Tukanoan languages of Northwest Amazonia, the controller-owner of the missing material is usually referred to as either a “father,” as in (Barasana) *Nyami Hakü*, “Father of Night”; or an “elder, mature person,” as in (Tukano) *Púsua Bükü*, “Old Caraná,” or (Barasana) *Nyami Bükü*, “Old Night.” In this context, the terms “father” and “elder” both imply the idea of an Owner, a being who encompasses and incarnates the materials concerned as an extension of his person. Owners are senior, a “father,” and larger or “mature” in this sense.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1.** *Nyami Soda*, The Owner of Night (photo William W. Lamar)

In the case of caraná, the Owner is firstly a bird, either a hawk or a macaw who embodies all of caraná, houses, and house-building.<sup>8</sup> In this guise, his outspread wings are the gables of the maloca roof, his bones are the posts and poles of the house frame, his sinews and veins are the vines that bind the frame together, and each of the different feathers on his body (the tail feathers, primaries, wing coverts, etc.), is one of the various species of caraná whose leaves can be used to make the roof and walls of a maloca. In a manner typical of their totemic inclinations, when Tukanoan speakers tell the caraná story in detail, each species of caraná and each of the different weaving patterns used to fix the leaves to the roof battens is assigned as the possession of a different group (e.g., Correa 1996:343). Listing off this kind of detailed information is an essential component of the spells associated with house-building. The spells are used to control the materials, to render them safe to use, and to ensure that they provide effective protection from thunder and rain, and from and attack by hostile spirit forces.

But the Owner of Caraná also turns out to be the same person as the Owner of Night and Sleep. In this guise he is (Barasana) *Ñami Soda* or (Tukano) *Ñamiri Sota*, *ñami/ñamiri* meaning “night/s” and *soda/sota* being the name of an unidentified tree frog with large, golden eyes and slit-like pupils that give the creature the appearance of sleeping (Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> This is but one of the many ways in which, in different versions of the story, this Owner embodies night and sleep: he also has a body made up of night and day; has big, droopy eyelids; wears sleep on his head in the form of a set of feather ornaments; is lazy and a heavy sleeper who sleeps by day rather than night; and can only be woken by placing a red-hot potsherd on his chest or by cracking his shins with a heavy club or wooden pestle.<sup>10</sup>

These are examples of the widespread Amazonian Owner figure discussed by Carlos Fausto (2008). In these stories, Owners figure as containers. They are identified with the houses in which they live and, like the containers that they give to the Creator deities, they are beings who encompass in their bodies and persons all of a class of creatures, objects, or materials, or all of the attributes of a particular phenomenon. In this context it is also worth noting that the notion of ownership carries significant political implications that are an important dimension of the responsibilities and dangers inherent in houses, caraná, and sleep that the stories so emphasize. The act of building a maloca represents a claim to status on the part of the man who initiates the project as well as a tacit recognition of this claim by those who agree to assist him and live with him. As *wiiogü*, “house-builder,” or *wii übü*, “house chief,” the terms for headman in Tukano and Barasana, make clear, a maloca owner is identified with the building he creates and is also responsible for maintaining a harmonious and well-ordered



life for the people who live under his roof, who he represents. They are (Barasana) *ī wiiāna*, “the people of his house” and it is he who orders the rhythm of their lives in a daily round of work and an annual round of dance festivals, guides their conversation each evening, and sends them off to sleep each night. As one who orders space and time, a maloca headman thus partakes of the qualities of the Owner from whom houses, caraná, night, and sleep derive.

### Leaves, Feathers, and Hair

In our stories, Owners, bodies, and containers turn in upon themselves in a densely layered pattern of reciprocal reference. The story of caraná tells us that the maloca is also the body of a bird-like Owner whose different feathers make up all the different varieties of leaves. The implication here is that leaves, feathers, and, by extension, feather ornaments, are all one and the same. This is also suggested in a Cubeo story where the Owner of Caraná gives the deities a box whose top half contains leaves to roof their maloca and bottom half contains the ornaments they should use in a dance to celebrate the end of house-building (Correa 1997:154). The fact that the Owner of Caraná gives the Creators leaves inside a box used to contain feather ornaments not only confirms the identification between leaves and feathers but also adds further density to these associations: the maloca, with its painted panels on each side of a mouth-like door, wears its thatch just as a dancer with his painted face wears his feather headdress or as an ordinary man wears his hair—the maloca is a person (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Reynel’s Maloca, Rio Pirá-Paraná (photo by author)

Feather ornaments and thatch also come together through technology, appearance, and function. To make thatch from the leaves of the *Lepidocaryum tenue* palm, the preferred caraná throughout Northwest Amazonia, the leaflets are interwoven into a dense, layered pile attached to a palm-wood batten, round which the leaf stems are tied in intricate patterns, each one associated with a different group. The resulting strip of thatch looks strikingly like the layered surface of a Tukanoan feather headdress made from layered macaw wing covert feathers, with their shafts attached to a headband woven from twined palm-fiber string (Figure 3). The relation between headdress and thatch is underlined in the phrase *boa tuti*, or “layered feathers,” which refers to a defensive barrier created by spells blown by Makuna *kumua* or ritual experts. The barrier is generic, but its concrete referents are simultaneously the frontal crown and the walls and roof of the maloca that protect its inhabitants from wind and rain.

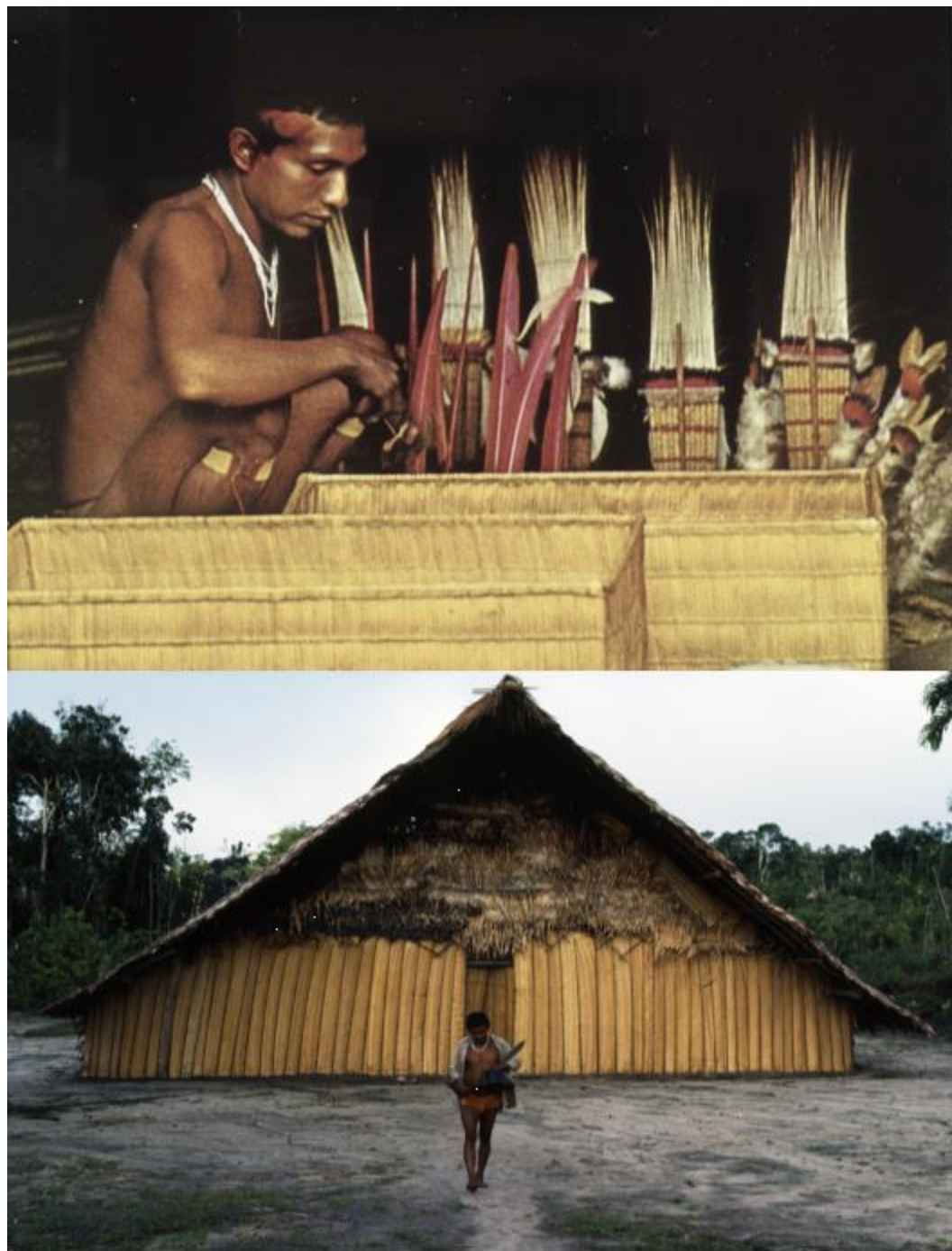


**Figure 3.** *Above*, Tukanoan frontal crown detail; *below*, inner surface of thatch. Note similar construction. (photo by author)

This connection between thatch and feathers also explains why two Yukuna-Matapi authors would bring together the two different kinds of weaving by beginning their book on feather ornaments with a discussion of palm trees. They explain that feather ornaments and palm trees belong to one and the same “world of decoration and weaving,” and that the decorative patterns of the maloca roof and those of feather ornaments and face and body paint form a complementary pair (Matapi et al. 2010:19–20).



The layered interconnections between hair, feathers, ornaments, and feather-like palm leaves is also revealed in another detail of the stories considered here. During the first catastrophic night, the Creators made palm-leaf shelters to protect themselves from the torrential rain. The stories take pains to specify the varieties of palm used for these shelters, sometimes explaining further that the leaves of the chosen species determined why different Tukanoan groups have different hair—straight, curly, or kinked (Azevedo and Azevedo 2003:190; Fernandes and Fernandes 1996:97, fn. 117). It thus comes as no surprise that the Makuna should extend the meaning of the term *boa*, “fur, hair and feathers,” to include “trees and forest,” for the forest is another form of covering and growth that shares the texture and near-black appearance of hair.

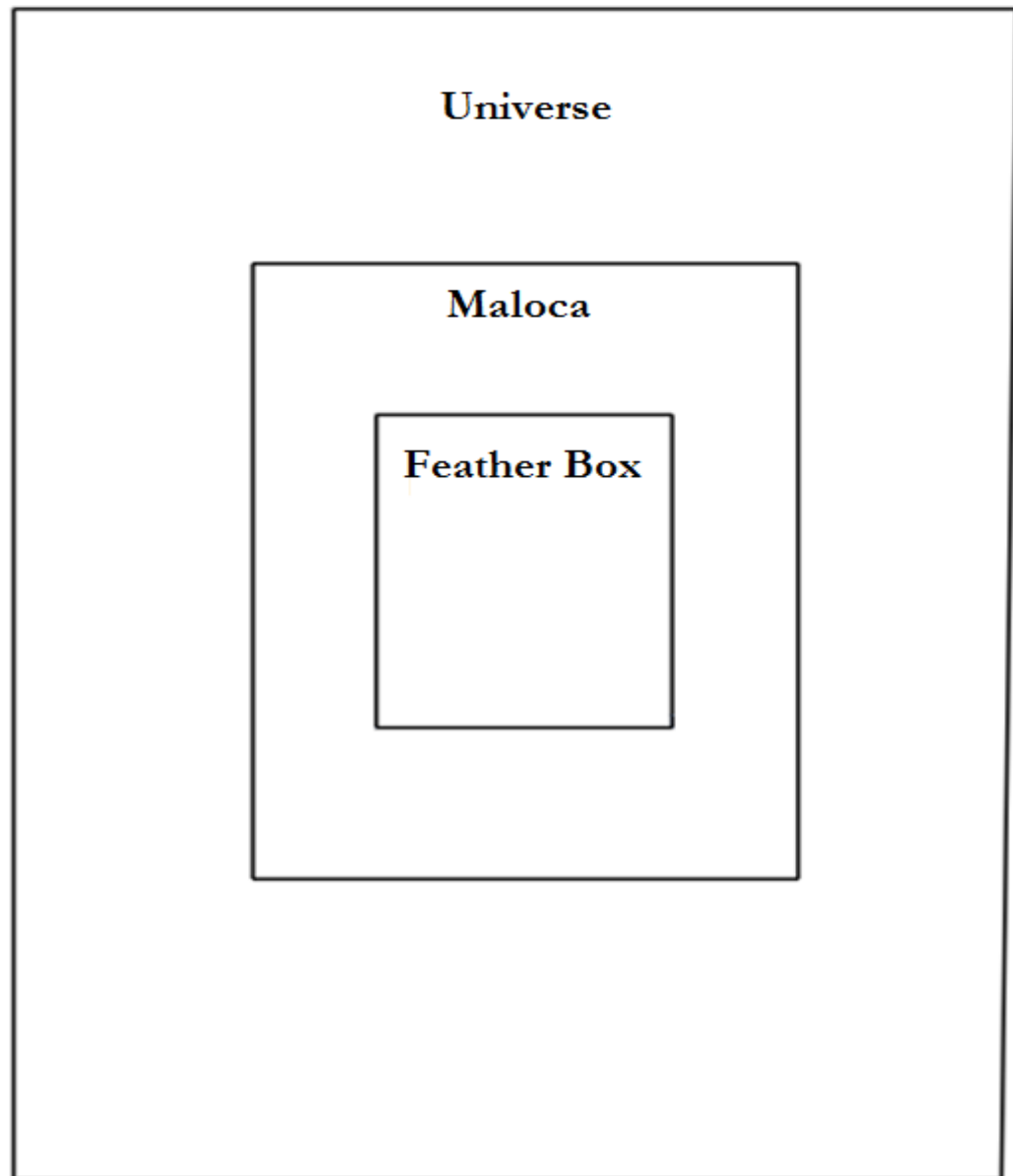


**Figure 4.** *Above*, Tukanoan hêhêhũ palm-leaf featherbox (photo Brian Moser); *below*, Hêhêhũ used in maloca construction (photo by author)

The feather box itself is made from (Barasana) *hêhêhũ*, the same palm leaves that are used to make the walls of the maloca and thus fall within the generic category “caraná” or (Barasana)



*mubi* (Figure 4).<sup>11</sup> The material identity between feather box and maloca suggests that the feather box is a maloca in its own right and, by extension, that the ornaments inside the box are people. A visit by a party of Tukanoan Kotiria and Desana to the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin made this strikingly clear. The visitors were delighted to see the ornaments collected from their area by Theodor Koch-Grünberg in 1903–5 but also dismayed that the meticulous curators had classified them by their material. The feather box was stored with assorted basketry from all over Amazonia, the feather ornaments were kept with various feather artifacts from other groups, whilst ornaments made from teeth and bone were kept in a generic teeth-and-bone store. The visitors exclaimed in horror, “Those ornaments are people. They will be lonely if they are separated from their companions. They all belong together inside their maloca, the feather box.”



**Figure 5.** The universe, maloca and feather box as nested containers

At the other end of the spectrum, the origin stories make clear that, in primordial times, there was only one maloca, a building that was coterminous with the universe, with its floor as the earth and its house posts as mountains supporting a thatched-roof sky. Inside this house, the sun hung motionless in the sky just as today the feather box is stored suspended from the roof and hanging above the center of the maloca. So here we have a series of equivalent containers of different scale—the universe, house, and feather box—one inside the other (Figure 5). In the stories, these nested containers suggest a complex play of perspectives. We are told

that, before time was set in motion, there was only one house, the universe-house built by the Creator Deities, and in which they were now living in a permanent state of daylight. But they also set out from this house to visit another smaller house, the house of the Owner of Night and Caraná, itself a container of night contained within this universe-house. With respect to the Creators in their universe-maloca, the Night Owner's maloca was like a feather box, a source of night contained inside their Universe-maloca but, from the Owner's point of view, his maloca contained a yet smaller night-container, the box he gave to the Creators. Outside in the universe-maloca there was only eternal day but, inside the Night Owner's maloca, night not only already existed but also existed on two different scales: that of the house in which the Owner sat by night to issue his instructions and that of the box he gave to his visitors. When the Creators opened this smallest box, its contents darkened the entire universe. I will return to this perspectival play between container and contained below.

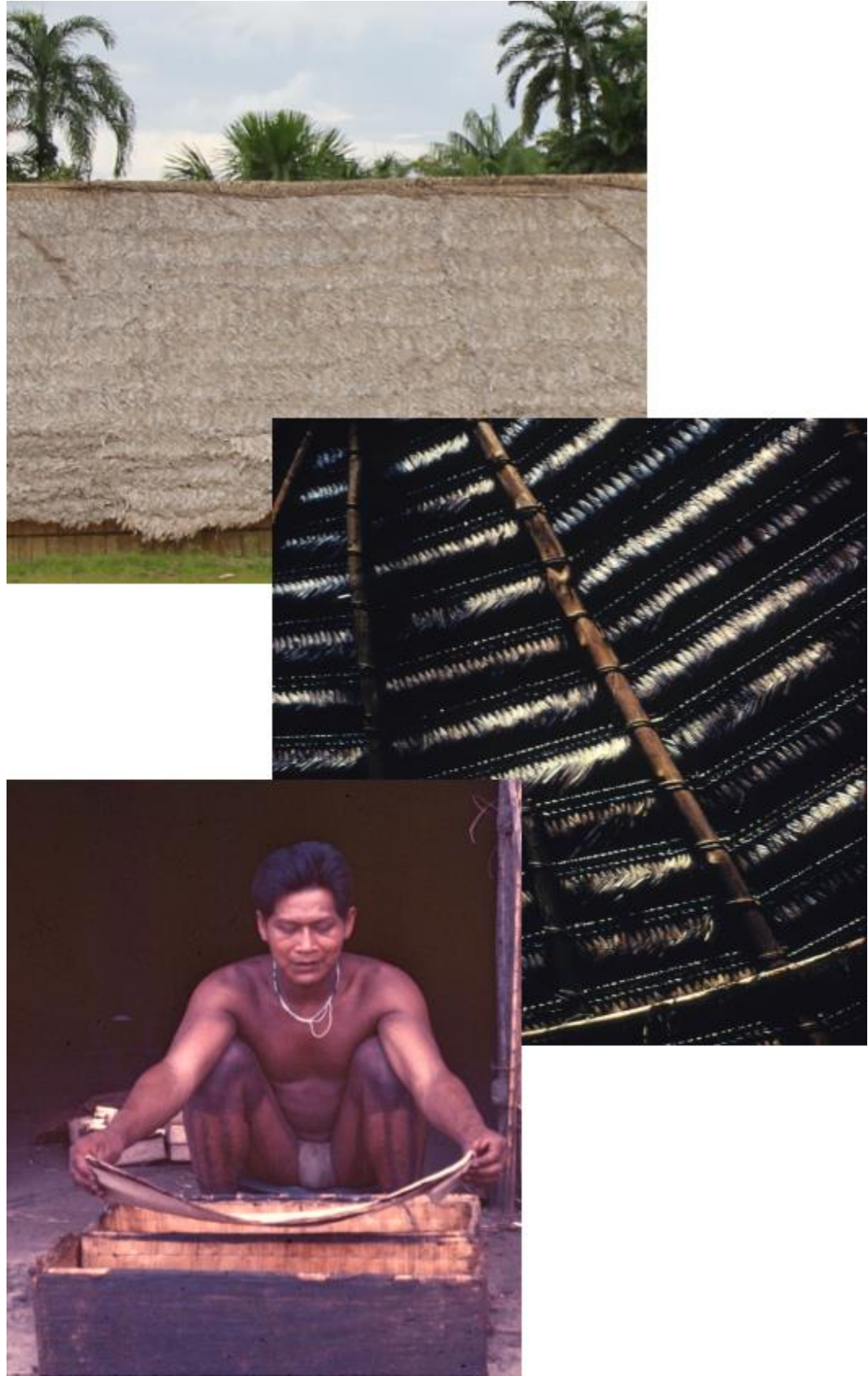
With leaves, feathers, and ornaments firmly in place, we can now begin to understand more clearly why the Owner of Caraná should also be the Owner of Night and why sun and moon should be called *muipũ* or *muhibũ*, terms that seem to translate as "caraná" or "roofing leaf." The interiors of Northwest Amazonian malocas are cool and quite dark, an impression reinforced after being outside in the bright, hot equatorial sun. In contrast to this, the first thing one notices about an unthatched house frame is the stark, bright interior that recalls the initial endless long day that the stories of night's origin describe. This was a world or maloca, with no night or roof and with a motionless midday sun hanging in the sky. Putting thatch on a house frame not only makes a protective roof but also shuts out light and turns the interior dark, a change like the alternation between light and dark associated with sun and moon. A Cubeo version of the story makes this link between thatch and night explicit by stating that when one of the Creators opened the box of leaves, a black cloud approached and, as the already-woven leaves positioned themselves on the house frame, the sky went dark (Correa 1997:152).<sup>12</sup> To complete the picture, the pinpoints of sunlight that shine through small holes in the maloca roof stand out against the dark, soot-blackened interior and are identified with the stars that shine in the night sky (see also Fontaine 2010:79).

The thatch of a maloca thus has an on/off effect like that of a light switch: when put in place it causes a change from light to dark or day to night, and when it is removed for repairs the effect is reversed. But there is yet more to it than this; these changes between light and dark are also an inherent property of the leaves themselves. Inside and out, the newly made roof of a maloca is dark green, the color of the raw caraná leaves and of the forest more generally, a color assimilated to black. Over time, the sun's heat bleaches the feathery leaves on the outside to a near white, whilst over time the warmth and smoke from the fires within turns the dense inside surface to a sooty black.

Meanwhile the feather box, made from the same material as the house walls, produces a mirror image of this effect. The box, made from boiled palm leaves, starts out a uniform, bright sun-like yellow but, over time, the smoke inside the maloca turns the box's exterior black whilst the interior retains its original color (Figure 6). The switching effect of these palm leaves is therefore not just a function of their absence or presence on the roof but also a function of time. Finally, in a further variant of this two-colored box theme, a Cubeo story tells us that, after the first-ever night, the Bat and Owner of Day went to check that night and day were now in proper order. From the Big River he brought back two kinds of ash, one white and one black, which he put on top of the feather box (Correa 1992:48, 1997:64).

Thus far we have established that leaves and feathers, or maloca roof and feather ornaments, are two manifestations of the same kind of material and that both function as indices and causes of an alternation between light and dark, or day and night. The maloca and feather box thus make up interdependent parts of a system of time and if sun and moon are both *muhibũ* or "caraná leaf" and leaves are feathers, we might well predict that the feather box is itself a manifestation of the sun and, by implication, of the moon as well.<sup>13</sup> This fits with the following: the box is kept as the complement of another source of light, the post on which resin is burned for illumination; it hangs suspended above the floor of the maloca just as the sun in the stories hung motionless above the earth at the beginning of time; it is made from bright yellow materials but turns black; and it contains a set of feather ornaments whose dominant colors are those of the sun. We will see later that, in some versions of the story of the origin of night, the identity between sun, moon, and feather box is made quite explicit. We

will return to this below but let us turn first to another detail of those stories: the way that night is given material form.



**Figure 6.** *Above*, sun bleached maloca roof exterior; *middle*, smoke blackened maloca roof interior; *below*, feather box with black exterior and yellow interior (photo by author)

## The Substances of Night

In different versions of the stories, the night that flies out when the Creators open the container appears in several different guises that come in various combinations. This variety is organized in three principal registers. Firstly, in a meteorological register where night figures as dark clouds, rain, wind, and thunder—the heavy clouds and violent rain of Amazonian thunderstorms often turn daylight to twilight. Secondly, night figures in an auditory register as the shrill noises of countless crickets and frogs calling from dusk to dawn and as the haunting cries of nocturnal birds and mammals that accompany them. Collectively these creatures are known in Barasana as *Nyami biükürã*, the “Masters or Owners of Night.” The third register is visual. In the stories where night comes from a pot, it is sometimes described as a black earth-like substance or as similar to the soot that collects on cooking pots and the interior of the roof (Fontaine 2010; Schackt 2013:116–20). Other stories focus on either bats or birds, and especially on birds that have predominantly black feathers. Here a contrast is often drawn between black and pale varieties of the japu or oropendola, whose brilliant yellow tail feathers are used in sunburst crowns that are explicitly associated with the sun.<sup>14</sup> The Barasana terms *umu ñigü*, “black japu” (*Cacicus solitarius*), and *umu bokü*, “light-colored japu” (*Gymnostinops yuracares*, *Psarocolius viridis*), make this contrast clear.

The weight of this avian contrast is brought home in different ways in several versions of the stories of the origin of night. In one story, black and light-colored japus fly out together when the box is opened, presumably as night and day (Galvão and Galvão 2004:430). In another, one of the Creators first sends a light-colored japu to check whether the long night is drawing to a close and then takes bright feathers from this and other birds to make the day bright and clear (Azevedo and Azevedo 2003:191). In another, the Owner of Night promises the Creators, “If you open the box at the right time, you will have the feathers of parrots and japus to make ornaments” (Buchillet 1983:201).<sup>15</sup> The right time was the nighttime of ritual, not ordinary daytime; the right place was inside the maloca, not out in the forest, and the implication is “if you get it wrong, your feathers will be black.” In another story, the black insects that escape from the box are accompanied by nocturnal douroucouli monkeys and also by birds such as japus, macaws, and parrots, whose feathers are used to make ornaments (Fernandes and Fernandes 1996:97). Finally, in yet another story we are told that the box contained not just birds but also ready-made feather ornaments (Piedade 1997:171–3). All this is consistent with the box being not just a container of darkness and night but also a container of light and day, an object that condenses sun, moon, and time.

A further point to note here is that although only one version of these stories states explicitly that the container of night also contained dance songs, chants, and shamanic knowledge (ACAIPi 2015:59–69), the very presence of feather ornaments implies the presence of songs because dance and ornament are the obligatory accompaniments of any serious song. This link between night, ornamentation, and song is also hinted at in a story where, to bring the first catastrophic night to a close, the youngest brother sings verses of a song that compare the qualities of light in the progression from night to day to the strings of black, red, ochre, and white beads that hold a gourd-like world motionless in its wicker support and which must be untied to allow the movement from night to day (Fernandes and Fernandes 1996:98–100; Silva 1994:173–5). These strings of beads are at once ornaments and mnemonic devices that encode sequences of song (Hugh-Jones 2016:173–4).

Finally, night also figures in the form of ants (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:26; Schauer and Schauer 1975:303–14), partly because many ants are black but also because the nuptial flights of (Barasana) *ñamia*, “night ones,” a species whose flying queens are much sought after as food, take place at night as opposed to the daytime emergence of other *Atta* species.

## Hypnos and Thanatos: Between Hope and Despair

In most of our stories, night is contained in the feather box, but a pot or nut are the other containers most often mentioned. The nut in question is probably a highly polished black *tucúm* nut like that used to store red *carayurú* face paint and sometimes kept inside the feather box. As spherical black objects that release darkness and sleep, these nuts would appear to be the counterpart of the white eyes the Owner of Night steals from the Creators to punish them for



flouting his advice about when and where to open the container of night. Night and sleep imply a form of blindness akin to the literal blindness the Creators experience when the Owner of Night removes their eyes. When their eyes are restored, the Creators can see again just as they can when dawn brings the first, long night to an end. A different version of this eye-related pairing of black and white is found in a Tariano story. Here human beings not only first experience sleep but also acquire the black part of their eyes during the first long night. The story adds that, like the Owner of Night, nocturnal animals see day as night and night as day. During the day, when they sleep, their eyes are white; at night, when they are awake, their eyes are black (Andrello n.d.; see also Fontaine 2014:64–5).

None of the stories give any indication as to what kind of pot we are dealing with and enquiries amongst my Barasana friends have thus far drawn a blank. However, internal evidence seems to point toward the prototype pot of night being the small ceramic pots that are used to store curare poison. To begin with, its black, tar-like appearance makes curare a good candidate for a material form of night, and descriptions in the stories of a black, ceramic container with a cover tied with string sound much like a curare pot. Then there is (Barasana) *Rima Hino*, “Poison Anaconda,” the Owner of Poison, a character in a different set of stories but who is like the Owner of Night, being another heavy sleeper who can only be woken with hot pot shards or blows on his shins. In addition, just as the pot of night is a pot full of black, biting ants, so too is Poison Anaconda’s curare pot a pot of insects: its cover is the web of a poisonous spider, the string that holding the cover in place is a poisonous centipede, and the spatula is the tail of a scorpion. Poison also figures in the phrase “the poison of night” (Barasana *ñami rima oka*), which is used to refer to all the different dangers of night, from spooky animals and malevolent spirits through to sorcery, sickness, old age, and death. Finally, the pot of night was indeed a pot of poison not only because in some stories it was preceded by a pot full of sores (see above) but also because the acquisition of night set time in motion. With the alternation of day and night came not only the annual alternation between the dry and wet seasons but also the alternation between life and death.

As in Greek mythology where Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death) figure as twin siblings, themes of mortality and immortality permeate the stories dealt with here. The Owner of Night and the Creators who visit him are all immortal beings who live on today as enduring sources of shamanic powers and knowledge but, as a result of the Creators’ stupidity and the Owner’s anger, ordinary mortals are condemned to die (see esp. Matapi and Matapi 1984:8–15).

One manifestation of the Owner of Night’s immortality lies in the division of his body between night and day, a feature noted above. Another is his ability to renew himself by changing his skin. When awoken from his deep sleep, he first appears old and ugly, with tangled hair and a face covered in drool. Each day he removes this old self as a skin or mask, hangs it on a beam in his house, goes off to bathe, and reappears clean and bright. He sports a painted face and a necklace and ear ornaments (Azevedo and Azevedo 2003:188; Lana and Lana 1980:109–10).

The themes of skin changing and immortality that figure prominently in these stories bring us back to poison and to insects. Insects play a prominent role in the stories of caraná and night: the Owner of Night is also the Father of Crickets (Schauer and Schauer 1975:303–14), and the container of night contains ants, crickets, fireflies and other insects. Insects are appropriate not only because their black color and nocturnal singing and flight all connote night but also because they shed their skins, a sign of immortality shared with poisonous snakes and spiders.

The connection between insects and immortality is clear in a story, widespread in Northwest Amazonia, about a deity who offers coca to the ancestors of humanity from a gourd infested with poisonous stinging and biting creatures. Because the ancestors refused to eat from this gourd, today all people must die, but the snakes, spiders, and poisonous insects who did eat can change their skins and now live forever (Fulop 2009:49–51 and cf. Hugh-Jones 1979:180–1, 264–5). This story, intimately linked with the origin of night, is also a transformation of another story in which the same poisonous creatures steal their poison from Poison-Anaconda’s pot of curare, a candidate for the pot of night, as discussed above.

The pot of night was indeed a poisoned chalice for, whilst the generations may succeed one another like day follows night and one season follows another, everyone must die. By contrast, feather ornaments are everlasting. The first prehuman beings were creatures of pure

spirit whose bodies took the form of these ornaments and still exist today as immortal spirits inside their feather-box maloca. During the rituals that ensure social reproduction and the fertility of the seasonal round, the dancers who wear these ornaments make a fleeting return to this immortal, ancestral state.

If my hypothesis about the pot of night being a curare pot is correct, we might conclude that, in boxes of immortal ornaments and pots of poison as two alternative containers of night, our stories express a tension between hope and despair or between immortality and death. Be that as it may, what is certain is that the different containers correspond to two alternative ways of controlling night: pots are on the side of dull, noisy nocturnal insects, and feather boxes are on the side of colored birds and human song and dance.

### Noises in the Forest: Song and Dance in the House

As described above, before the Owner of Night hands over his container of night to the Creators, he first issues them careful instructions about how to handle this dangerous material. Some of these instructions relate to when and where they should open the container. Although not all versions provide details, when they do it is clear that the Creators should do this inside the maloca in the context of a ritual dance—the appropriate context for the activities of the ritual specialists who ensure the continuity of the seasons and fertility of species, and who protect people from the dangers associated with night.<sup>16</sup> The other set of instructions concerns the correct way to bring the first night to a close and to ensure a measured and regular alternation between night and day.

In the stories that have night contained within a nut or pot, these instructions indicate that the Creators should reproduce the changing patterns of insect noise that mark the passage of night, especially the period from midnight through to dawn. In some versions, the Creators simply create or transform themselves into the animals or birds whose cries signal the approach of dawn.<sup>17</sup> But in others, the Owner of Night issues explicit instructions that the Creators should imitate the changing sequence of sounds made throughout the night by different kinds of crickets. Like versions of the story from the Pirá-Paraná area, in a Cubeo story the Owner tells the Creators that they should first repeat “ti-ti-ti, ti-ti-ti”; then “tiri-tiri-tira-tira tiri-tiri-tira-tira”; then “ti-ti-tira-tira, ti-ti-ti-tira.” He tells them that they will hear the insects respond to their different calls and that if do all this correctly the night will end and dawn will break (Correa 1997:60–5).

But it is very difficult to get all this right, especially when one is cold and wet and stumbling around in the dark and rain—and even harder if one failed to stay awake and hear the instructions in the first place. Therefore, the elder brothers consistently fail in their attempts, and it is only with some difficulty that the youngest Creator finally manages to remember the instructions correctly and bring the catastrophic first night to a close.

In stories that have night contained within the feather box, the instructions become more elaborate. Many still include the imitation of insect noises, but they focus on the manipulation of the box and its ornaments, the singing of human dance songs, and the use of musical instruments in the form of either a ritual whip or a rattle lance. The following account is based on an amalgam of several different versions.<sup>18</sup>

The evening prior to giving night to his guests, the Owner of Night takes the feather box down from the roof and begins to push it slowly across the floor of the maloca with the tip of his toe, a gesture that serves to underline that, for him at least, the box is very light. The Creators will soon find that it is actually very heavy—one reason they are keen to look inside. The Owner begins pushing the box at dusk, starting from the rear door, the women’s door of his maloca, and arriving at the front, men’s door at dawn. Each push of his toe corresponds to a minute and, in different versions of the story, he marks each hour either by beating the box with a ritual whip or by imitating the nightly round of changing insect noises with a rattle lance.

At the same time, on each hour, the Owner takes one of the ornaments from the box, explains its use to the visiting Creators, puts it on his body, and then demonstrates the words and accompanying steps of one verse of a dance song. At midnight, he then reverses the process: he takes off the ornaments one by one, stowing them back in the box as he continues to demonstrate the ongoing sequence of song and dance. At dawn, when the box is full, he hands it to the Creators, bids them farewell, and goes off to sleep.

The Creators set off toward home. Having unwittingly released an endless cold night by opening the box at the wrong time and in the wrong place, the elder brothers fail miserably in their attempts to bring night to an end. Their youngest brother then steps in and ends the night by repeating the proper sequences of cricket noises, ornamentation, song, and dance. In different versions of the story these actions come in various combinations and may also include beating the feather box with a whip to drive the singing crickets back inside.

When viewed as a whole, the stories present the Owner of Night's instructions on how to control night and bring it to an end in two different registers, one mainly aural and associated with animal noises in the forest, the other both aural and visual and associated with human song and dance in the house. These different registers are predominantly, though not exclusively, associated with two different kinds of container: a nut or pot on the one hand and a box of feather ornaments on the other.

One set of instructions concerns insects. Here notions of time and sequencing apply only at the level of sounds—the round of changing cricket noises signals different parts of the night, but the insects and their containers remain as black as night. Nighttime is an essentially colorless experience, but during it one's sense of hearing is greatly heightened. The other set of instructions concerns birds, not only because the box figures as a container of both birds and feather ornaments but also because there is an implicit contrast here between the noise of colorless, nocturnal insects and the songs of the colorful, diurnal birds who provide the prototypes and raw materials for human song and dance. Birds may belong to the forest alongside insects but, unlike insects, they can be domesticated and brought inside the house as pets and sources of feathers. In the avian and human worlds, song and colored feather ornamentation go hand in hand.

In the stories where the instructions are associated with the feather box, both aural and visual-chromatic terms convey ideas of time and sequence at several different levels. The Owner of Night's demonstration is a teaching session, and the stories reflect quite closely the temporal ordering and other features of ritual dances in Northwest Amazonia. However, the very condensed form of the stories assumes a degree of inside knowledge on the part of the listener.

Feather ornaments are especially associated with ritual dance feasts, and the most important dancing happens at night. The ritual consists of a sequence of two different dance songs. The first part or "small dance" (Barasana *basa miita*), when the dancers wear only simple red and yellow sunburst crowns, may begin up to a whole day in advance. Then, around dusk, the feather box is opened, full sets of ornaments are distributed between the dancers, and dancing of the second song, the "big or main dance" (Barasana *basa biiki*), begins. As in the stories, a change in ornamentation marks the temporal sequence of the dance, and the distribution of ornaments to the dancers at dusk is like a miniature version of the distribution of leaves and ornaments throughout the world when the Creators first opened the feather box—they bring on the night.

All night long the dancers dance a sequence of different verses of one and the same song, with the end of each verse marked by a long session of chanting. From midnight onwards, the kumu, or ritual expert, announces these chant sessions by sounding his rattle lance, thus marking the passage of time. Otherwise he sits quietly blowing spells over gourds of coca and other substances held on special stands, activities described in some stories as keeping time in motion by undoing the four knotted strings of beads that keep the gourd-like world from turning (see p. 86 above). In contemporary Northwest Amazonia, these procedures are referred to as *el manejo del mundo*, the "ordering of time and seasons" (Barasana *rodori rotigü*) that ensures the reproduction of humans and animals, the fruiting of trees, the spawning of fish, the passage of sun, moon, and stars, and other cyclical phenomena. After dawn, in the full light of day, the dance ends; the kumu removes the ornaments from the exhausted dancers' heads, stowing them back in the box as the dancers go off to sleep.

As in real life, there are repeated references in our stories to the requirement that a dance should last the whole night and that the dancers must remain awake throughout. Appropriately, the feather ornaments are sometimes referred to as the "ornaments of sleep," a reference to the fact that it is hard to stay awake at dances and also to the paradoxical double identity of the ornaments as, at once, a manifestation and a negation of night. If night first took the form of ornaments, wearing ornaments, staying awake, and dancing the night away introduces a form of day into night that acts as a denial of time and death.

Instructions involving first putting on and then taking off an ordered series of ornaments whilst also singing and dancing a sequence of different song verses allude not only to the overall temporal structure of a typical dance festival but also to a chromatic ornament sequence running from front to back on the head. Behind a frontal crown of yellow and red macaw feathers with a lower band of white down comes first a panache of white egret plumes, then a red macaw tail, then a stick of white down topped by two yellow feathers, then a white egret wing, and finally a hank of animal fur string. The principal visual effect of this sequence is an alternation between white and red-yellow (Figure 7), an alternation that corresponds to that between the white clouds of the wet season and the red-yellow sun of the dry season. But the small touches of black feathers that set off these dominant yellows, reds, and whites still hint at the presence of night and moon.



**Figure 7.** Yellow-red vs. white alternation in Tukanoan headdress (photo Brian Moser)



An indigenous person telling or hearing stories about the origin of night will take it for granted that the time released from the container was not just the time of night and day but also that of the annual round of the seasons and the human life cycle. A series of dances celebrate the seasonal felling of swidden gardens and an abundance of food from fruiting trees, flying ants, spawning frogs, and migrating shoals of fish that follow the seasonal pattern of rainfall, each one requiring different ornamentation, songs and dance steps, and musical instruments. Further dances mark important events in human time—a girl's first menstruation, a boy's initiation, or the inauguration of a headman's new maloca. This wider sense of time is not explicitly stated anywhere in the published stories, but it is implied by their copious references to the origins of different species of tree fruits in accounts of the first long night (See esp. ACAIPI 2015:59–69; Århem et al. 2004:472–9; Correa 1996:342–5), in details such as the fact that animals released from the container of night became constellations in the night sky (Andreollo n.d.; Rojas 1997:127–9), and that these constellations are themselves feather ornaments.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, whilst it is already clear that the passage of the feather box across the floor of the house marks the divisions of the night from dusk till dawn, this detail also confirms what was already apparent in some of the material discussed above, namely that the box is a manifestation of the sun and moon—the box causes night and day, as it contains feather ornaments with both solar and lunar connotations. It is made from leaves whose color is that of the sun; it contains ornaments whose colors and form are those of the sun; and it hangs above the center of the maloca as the sun hung in the sky before the liberation of night. To clinch it all, when the Owner of Night marks the passage of night by pushing the feather box across the floor of the maloca from its back door to front, the box retraces the west-to-east paths of the moon and sun. The maloca is aligned east–west with a central beam in the roof called the “path of the sun.” The box thus moves in tandem with the moon across the night sky and with the sun as it travels up the underground river to rise in the east at dawn.

From the material above, we can now conclude that stories of the Owner of Night dressing, dancing, and singing are not only stories of the origin of night and time but also stories about the origin of ornaments, songs, and chants and of the whole ritual cycle. As a Makuna version tells us, it was not just night that escaped from the container; so too did all the dances and ritual knowledge that are mobilized during dance festivals (ACAIPI 2015:59–69). Put the other way around, it also implies that these same ritual festivals provide the motor and regularity of time and ensure the continuity of life. This is achieved through the nested temporal registers of dancing—the rhythm of the dancers' songs and steps, the repetition of the words and steps over the course of each dance, and the sequence of different named dances that divide the year and mark the stages of people's lives. In the ornaments they wear on their heads, the dancers are wearing the sun, moon, and stars, and as they dance round and round the central posts of the house they incarnate the heavenly bodies that wheel around the earth. The time of the dance is the dance of time.

### **The Rattle Lance and Feather Box: Instruments of Light and Darkness**

It should now be clear that the feather box and rattle lance form a pair, the first a container of crickets and source of night, the second an instrument that imitates the sounds of crickets and controls this night. The rattle lance (Barasana *besumii yukiü*; Tukano *yeegü*) is unique to the Northwest Amazonian area from which our stories originate. It consists of a flexible tapering rod of finely polished hardwood some two meters in length. Toward the thinner, lower end that terminates in a sharp point there is a hollow swelling, with slits in its sides, that contains small crystal pebbles. The lance is thus a maraca on a long, flexible shaft and is played either by shaking it with both hands or by grasping it toward its upper end in one hand and striking the shaft with the other, or against the shoulder, so that it vibrates along its length, causing the rattle to sound more rapidly as it circles round and round.

The top of the lance is richly decorated. The end has two bone or teeth prongs with two engraved sections below, each with two roundels on opposite sides separated by hourglass shapes. Each upper roundel represents the sun, each lower one the moon, with the hourglass shapes between as gourd stands. Further down are three feather ruffs, the first of black curassow feathers, the second of red and yellow toucan tail feathers, the third of white down from high-flying vultures or birds of prey, with bands of iridescent blue cotinga feather mosaic

between them. Underneath the white ruff, the engravings are repeated with another white down ruff below (Figure 8). Attached beneath this bottom ruff is a string of monkey fur ending in a pair of bright yellow japu feathers fringed by red and yellow toucan feathers. This fur string appears to echo Ermanno Stradelli's description (cit. Biocca 2007:52) of "large hanks of human hair removed before the object is sold to a white man"—human hair and monkey fur both have connotations of periodicity (see Hugh-Jones 2014:164). In sum, with its rattle at one end and bright-colored celestial feathers at the other, the lance is an instrument of both sound and light, with fur or hair and images of sun and moon underscoring its role as an instrument for the control of time.



**Figure 8.** Rattle lance (Comissão Científica de Exploração do Ceará 1862)

At each dance, an appointed kumu manages the proceedings and protects the participants from the perils of the night and the dangers of the season with which the dance is associated. The kumu controls the lance, and uses it to mark the divisions of the night. He sounds it first around midnight and then periodically between the sessions of chanting and dancing that go

on through dawn just as, in these stories, the Creators imitated the sounds of insects to divide the night, sometimes with the rattle lance, sometimes with their own voices.

The lance is the subject of elaborate verbal commentary that further emphasizes its role in the control of time. In addition to the engravings of the sun and the moon, the feathered top of the lance is the face of the Sun and the shaft is his dorsal column, an *axis mundi* uniting the different layers of the universe (See Beksta 1984:82–3; Hugh-Jones 2009; and the illustration in Lana and Lana 1980:196). The swelling at the end is the container of night, with its two halves dividing night and day and the point below as the key to the box that held the night. The lance was also the compass that the ancestors used to guide their travels upriver from the east in the ancestral canoe and the gnomon they used to find the equatorial region where they now live: stuck vertically in the ground under the midday sun the lance cast no shadow (Galvão and Galvão 2004:29).

Finally, when not in use, the lance and feather box are stored together as a pair, hanging together at one side of the central space of the maloca on a vine slung from the roof. Paired with them, on the opposite side of the central space is another source of light: the light post where burning resin, placed on its flattened top, lights up the maloca at night (Figure 9).



**Figure 9:** Feather boxes and rattle lance suspended from roof with light post in foreground (photo by author)

### Conclusion: The Well-Tempered Night

In the passages above, we have explored some of the dense, intersecting connections among leaves, birds, feathers, ornaments, feather boxes, rattle lances, pots, insects, insect noise, bird song, and human song and dance scattered in somewhat random fashion across stories about the origins of caraná and night told by different groups throughout Northwest Amazonia. In numerous stories, as they come to us in published form, many of these details are missing, and even when they are present they often seem to make no sense at all. It is only when the pieces of the jigsaw are brought together and fleshed out with lived ethnographic reality that the bigger picture comes into focus.

In the relationship between leaves and feathers and the light/dark switching effects of caraná, we noted a complex play of perspectives. Firstly, the universe, maloca, and feather box are related as the same structure on different scales nested within each other. In the stories, these containers figure as the universe-house of the Creators, the house of the Owner of Night within this overarching house, and the box of night contained within the Owner's house that

he then gives to the Creators. Working up the scale, each container stands in the relation of feather box to maloca.

We are now also in a position to understand why the Owner of Night was so insistent that the Creators should open the box of night in the right place and at the right time—inside the maloca and when they had already lit a fire to illuminate the interior, brewed plenty of manioc beer, and made all the preparations for a ritual dance. The appropriate time to open the box was at dusk when day would give way to night, when the Creators could clothe themselves in robes of light and the most important part of their dance would begin—just as people do to today.

Although these stories refer to the container as a box or pot of night, I have argued above that it is actually a container of time, a container of both night and day or light and dark with a switch-like effect that figures in the stories as the presence/absence of the maloca roof, the exterior/interior of this roof, or the exterior/interior, top/bottom, or opposed sides of the feather box. When the impatient Creators opened container by day in the forest and not yet at home, this caused a separation of night from day that was simultaneously an inversion between inside and outside or light and darkness and a change in scale: material in one container now filled its larger analogue. Changing one bad situation for another, the stuff that belongs outside the house was now released within—night was now outside the container, filling the whole universe with darkness and ending the permanent day. But the still-immobile sun was now banished to the other side, either the outside of the universe-house or to the underworld, the place where the sun goes at night.

As discussed above, our stories suggest two solutions to this problem: a more limited one associated with cricket noise and with night contained in a pot or nut and a more elaborate one associated with human song and dance and with night contained in the feather box.<sup>20</sup> The former presents night and day as stark alternatives, whilst the latter suggests how ritual functions to control and temper the impact of night. Let us look at this in more detail.

The bleached/blackened, light/dark switching effect between the exterior and interior of the maloca and feather box discussed above has a yet further temporal, perspectival dimension. During the daytime, sunlight illuminates the interior of the universe and exterior of the maloca whilst the dominant sound is the song of colored birds, with the noise of crickets and other insects fading into the background. Inside the maloca, the situation is reversed: the sun lights its exterior, but the interior is quite dark, for no light comes from the light post or from the paired feather ornaments. Inside the box, the situation is again reversed: its interior is lit up by the ornaments, people in their own right who are no doubt singing and dancing there, for this is their nighttime and the maloca-world outside is in darkness.

On the night of a ritual dance, all the terms are reversed. The exterior of the maloca is dark, with only dim light from the moon and stars, no colors visible, and with the song of colored birds replaced by insect noise that fills the air. But inside the maloca, this dark night is tempered by a kind of day. With the interior lit by a flame of burning resin on the light post, the ornaments are now taken from the box and distributed amongst the dancers, a repeat of the first opening of the box but this time under the carefully controlled conditions taught by the Owner of Night. Instead of being enveloped in darkness, the dancers put on the ornaments one by one, then dance round and round the maloca clothed in costumes of light. They have now become like the Creators, with their maloca now on a cosmic scale. Meanwhile, the interior of the feather box is now dark; the ornaments are absent, out dancing with the dancers as they too shift up in scale. Finally, as the sun rises in the sky and the new day begins outside, the cycle starts again: the dancing ends, the crickets fall silent, the ornaments are stowed away in their box and the interior of the maloca is once again dark—another night in the day.

We have seen then that the feather box acts as a spatiotemporal operator, a time machine containing sun and moon that can turn day into night and night into day, and as a device for the ritual control of time. Its efficacy depends, on the one hand, on details of its color and the material from which it is made and, on the other, on its relation to the rattle lance with which it is paired. The rattle lance brings me to a final comment on Lévi-Strauss's "instruments of darkness."

In a discussion of the acoustically coding of time and seasons in South American mythology, Lévi-Strauss (1973:361–422) draws an analogy between the tapped-out sounds of various Amerindian noisemakers and the European clappers and rattles whose sounds once replaced those of church bells toward the end of Holy Week. With reference to a Tupi version of the



origin of night, he observes that a nut containing night is an instrument of darkness in a literal, visual sense. By contrast, its European musical analogues are only so in a figurative sense, for their link with darkness comes only from an association with the darkness that covered the earth when Christ died and with ancient rites involving the extinguishing and renewal of domestic fires.

This may true but, whereas European clappers and rattles are musical instruments (and despite his interest in acoustic coding), Lévi-Strauss was hard-pressed to find a convincing example of an Amerindian musical instrument of darkness. In the paired feather box and rattle lance, objects that operate in tandem in a combination of visual and musical registers, we have a perfect example of what Lévi-Strauss had in mind. The feather box, an instrument of both darkness and light, is primarily visual but it is also a musical instrument: it produces sounds when beaten with a whip and contains ornaments closely linked with singing and dancing, including elbow and ankle rattles whose sound is that of nocturnal insects (Luis Cayon, pers. comm.). By contrast, the rattle lance is primarily musical but its ornaments of sun, moon, and sky make it a visual instrument as well. When the feather box was opened, it released ornaments that set time in motion, but this time went from one extreme to the other, a long day replaced by a long night. It was the sound of the rattle lance and the singing and dancing that went with it that cut short the long night and guaranteed a tempered alternation between night and day.

In reaching this conclusion, I have tried to make sense of a large corpus of stories by relating one to another and putting them back into their ethnographic context. At the same time, I have used the stories to shed new light on aspects of a culture shared in common across much of Northwest Amazonia, and in particular how song and dance and the ritual manipulation of objects associated with insect noise serve as a means of controlling time. And this brings me full circle back to Leach, for Leach's essay on time in Andamanese ritual (Leach 1971b) is also all about the relation between insect noise, singing, dancing, and time.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is a shortened and revised version of Hugh-Jones 2015a.

<sup>2</sup> Like *mui* and *mubi*, the *Língua Geral* "caraná" applies to all of roof, thatch, thatching leaves, and the various palm species from which these leaves derive. For convenience, I shall use this term throughout.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed list of these published stories, see the appendix to Hugh-Jones 2015.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed treatment of the restrictions and spells associated with night, see Fontaine 2010, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> For night contained in the feather box, see AIETÜ 2005:133; Azevedo and Azevedo 2003:189; Buchillet 1983:200; Correa 1992:48, 1997:61; Fernandes and Fernandes 1996:95; Galvão and Galvão 2004:428; Lana 2009:47; Lana and Lana 1980:110; Schauer and Schauer 1975:307. For night in a pot, see ACAIPI 2015:62; Correa 1989:39, 1992:121, 1996:344, 1997:63; Hugh-Jones 1979:268; Palma 1991:69; Trupp 1997:33. For night in a nut, see Århem et al. 2004:473; Fontaine 2010:50.

<sup>6</sup> Århem et al. 2004:473 has the leaves in a nut.

<sup>7</sup> Wealthy white people are "fathers of money."

<sup>8</sup> For hawk, see Bourge 1976:140; Correa 1989:38; for macaw, see Azevedo and Azevedo 2003:148.

<sup>9</sup> Probably *Hyla punctata* and/or other small arboreal hylid frogs.

<sup>10</sup> On these details see esp. Århem et al 2003:472–9; Barroso Baré 2005:25; Fernandes and Fernandes 1996:93–103; Fontaine 2010; Galvão and Galvão 2004:427–3; Hildebrand 1975; Hill 2009:75–80; Lana 2009:31–66; Lana and Lana 1980:109–12; Matapi and Matapi 1984:8–15; Rojas 1997:125–6; Romero 2003:53.

<sup>11</sup> The leaves in question are probably *Attalea microcarpa*.

<sup>12</sup> In Trupp 1997:34 palm leaves coming from inside the Pot of Night give rise to night.

<sup>13</sup> Sun and moon are both *mubihũ* and could be said to be parts of the same entity. As twin brother manifestations of a single primeval sun, they exchanged powers and positions at the beginning of time so that today's sun was once the moon and today's moon the sun, beings distinguished as day and night persons (Barasana *ümiagiũ*, *ñamiagiũ*).

- <sup>14</sup> See AEITÜ 2005:132–5; Buchillet 1983:200–3; Correa 1992:121, 1997:61; Lana and Lana 1980:111; Reis 2013:65–8.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Correa 1997:154 where both ornaments and leaves fly out of the feather box.
- <sup>16</sup> Sometimes the Creators are told merely to ensure they have wood to make a big fire (e.g., Matapi and Matapi n.d.:61), sometimes they are told to prepare manioc beer and body paint, the prerequisites of ritual dances (e.g., ACAIPI 2015:62; Buchillet 1983:200–2; Galvão and Galvão 2004:429), and sometimes the requirement of a full dance is made explicit (e.g., AEITÜ:133; Azevedo and Azevedo 188–91; Reis 2013:66).
- <sup>17</sup> Here a contrast is often made between the white-headed piping guan and Spix’s guan with their different calls, colors, and times at which they are active in the predawn period. See also Lévi-Strauss 1970:204, fn. 3, on “bird-clocks.”
- <sup>18</sup> Azevedo and Azevedo 2003:188–91 Buchillet 1983:200–2; Galvão and Galvão 2004:427–33; Lana 1980:31–66; Lana and Lana 1980:109–12.
- <sup>19</sup> On feather ornaments, seasons, and constellations see Hugh-Jones 2013, 2015b and Oliveira 2010.
- <sup>20</sup> I had assumed these two were mutually exclusive, with the box version only in the northern part of the region. But when I discussed an earlier version of this paper (Hugh-Jones 2015) with people in the more southerly Pirá-Paraná, they assured me that they too knew all about the box version. When I asked why they had not told me this before, they replied, “You never asked!”

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