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# Musical Body of the Universe: Unity and Multiplicity in the Spiritualized Cosmos of the Hohodene

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## Abstract

This paper explores the meanings of ‘Body’ and ‘Spirit’ in relation to one of the most important personages in Hohodene cosmology, the spirit “Keeper of Sickness and Sorcery”, named *Kuwai*. [“Yurupary” in *lingua geral*] This Great Spirit is an extraordinarily complex synthesis of the Hohodene (and other Baniwa, northern Arawak-speaking peoples) worldview. His ‘Body’ was full of holes from which the breath of his soul produced a very large range of sounds, melodies, and song. All of these sounds correspond to primordial ancestral songs; they refer to core values and processes in Hohodene society: kinship vs affines, sorcery vs healers, the first ancestors (who were not yet fully human) and their relations. Taken as a whole, the Body of Kuwai, later transformed by the Creator Father *Nhiaperikuh* into sacred musical flutes and trumpets, can be understood as the means for reproducing ‘society’ and the ‘universe’. Thus, this paper explores the Hohodene musical body of the universe.

In my interpretation, I seek to unravel multiple layers of meaning related to this figure by utilizing native exegeses that connect narratives, graphic representations (including petroglyphs), shamanic cures and visions, sacred geography, and sacred chants. I hope to show that Hohodene notions of Self, Cosmos, and History are intertwined in an all-encompassing multiplicity of living entities into one material and spiritual ‘Body’.

## Introduction

For the Arawakan-speaking Hohodene of the Northwest Amazon region, the body of the great spirit *Kuwai* is the universe, in which material and spiritual manifestations are inextricably interwoven. Relations with the spirit-world, like relations with the world of the Whites and relations with the category of outsiders within society (i.e., the sorcerers) are all equally important for indigenous identity and historicity in the most basic sense of the terms, that is, the reproduction of society and cosmos in time and space. Society consists not only of patrilineal kingroups and exogamous patri-phratries, but also, “other groups”, alterity, peoples outside the circles of kingroups. Cosmic history for the Hohodene, as remembered in narratives, chants, and petroglyphs, is interwoven with actual processes and events such as interethnic relations with the Whites, and the history of sorcery accusations which have given rise to prophet movements since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When I began field research among the Baniwa three decades ago<sup>1</sup>, I was taught about *Kuwai* by a very elderly shaman, who after explaining dozens of times the story of *Kuwai*, exclaimed to me one day: “I am *Kuwai*. You are *Kuwai*, we all are *Kuwai*” a simple and profound expression of identity. It says that there are common features of humanity, and those features are defined by who the spirit *Kuwai* is.

This is the question I shall explore in this paper. Through it, we can understand better indigenous notions of history as a process, a dynamic, consisting of the struggle by a society to reproduce its own cultural identity, materially and spiritually, despite, or even because of, the threats from the external, and potentially enemy, world to change and undermine that identity. Statements by Hohodene elders about their contemporary social and political situation, as well as their historic ancestors, are framed in terms that readily harken back to narratives of the primordial world, especially in the time of *Kuwai*.

The Northwest Amazon region has been compared to a “Tower of Babel” because of its linguistic diversity. The more than 22 ethnic groups who consider themselves as distinct socio-political units are grouped by linguists into three major language families: northern Arawak, eastern Tukano, and Maku. Despite their linguistic diversity, all peoples share in a number of cultural patterns and institutions, among them the sacred rites of passage involving the ancestral flutes and trumpets which are considered to be the collective Body of the first ancestral being from which came the multiple first ancestors of all living peoples. These flutes and trumpets are extremely sacred, for which reason they are generally hidden, wrapped in leaf bundles and buried along the riverbanks in places that only the adult men know. The traditions of *Kumai* are for that reason highly relevant for understanding the interconnectedness amongst widely separated communities, located a day or more by canoe or motorboat from each other, but which have first ancestors and historical ancestors in common.

I should clarify that the present-day cultural situation among the Baniwa and Koripako of the Northwest Amazon is that most are evangelical, who abandoned the *Kumai* traditions in the 1950s and '60s when they converted to fundamentalist evangelicalism introduced by the North American New Tribes Mission. Over the last few years, however, there has been a notable effort on the part of indigenous organizations and government agencies in Colombia and Brazil to support the revitalization of pre-evangelical cultural heritage<sup>2</sup> (the knowledge, beliefs, and practices associated with the ancestral flutes and trumpets) that in the year 2010 was officially recognized by the UNESCO. There have been numerous projects supported by humanitarian and charitable foundations over the past 20 years that have supported the revitalization of institutions suppressed by the Catholic and Protestant evangelical missionaries. My impression is that there are still divisions between those communities who continue the traditions, and those who abandoned them long ago.

The first point of discussion in this paper is a demonstration of how the ‘body’ of the great spirit of *Kumai* is a singular representation of the universe as an entity comprised of multiple material and spiritual parts expressed through sonic imagery. The inter-relations amongst the parts constitute a dynamic and living universe through which flow primordial life-principles bestowed or ‘left’ by the creator deities.

This argument finds strong theoretical support in the recent ethnological interpretations of subjectivity and materiality, in Santos-Granero’s collection (2009) *The Occult Side of Things* as well as Pitarch’s elucidating discussion of multiple souls and the construction of historical identity in *The Jaguar and the Priest* (2013). Many of the points raised here were developed in my *Mysteries of the Jaguar shamans* (2013); however, new insights inspired by the works mentioned have led me to see a deeper connectedness between material and spiritual planes in the Hohodene universe.

One of the features of the sacredness embodied in the ancestral flutes and trumpets is a strong prohibition against the women and the uninitiated from seeing them, or knowing in detail what they look like. In contemplating the strong taboo which still exists in traditionalist communities, I’ve come to the conclusion that much of what has been said regarding male dominance and symbolic violence enacted in the ceremonies of the flutes is misguided; consequently, outsiders who constantly try to break the secrecy are doing a tremendous harm to the identity of the various sibs/phratries<sup>3</sup> when they insist on revealing the flutes and trumpets to those who cannot see them by virtue of the ‘law’ and traditions of the tribes. This can be demonstrated by the close links perceived between the creation cycles and the prohibition itself.

Among northern Arawakan societies, phratric exogamy is imperative to social relations; i.e., women marry out of the phratry into which they were born and into a phratry with whom their families wish to establish or continue alliances. The taboo on outsider women seeing the sacred ancestral flutes of their husbands’ phratry has little if anything to do with a supposed dread of ‘incest’ (which does not exist in Baniwa mythic narratives) and more with the potential dangers of an ‘external Other’ gaining the knowledge of an ‘insider’ by discovering the source of the phratry’s ancestral power. This represents a great risk expressed in the mythic cycles of the primordial world, in which the Creator and his kin are always opposed to ‘other peoples’, non-kin, affines, animal tribes, generally the enemy tree-animals who are portrayed as the primordial sorcerers.

In the very first cycle of creation narratives, the animal-tribes steal poison from the Creator and with it, they kill the Creator's younger brother. Thus, death entered the world, eliminating definitively the possibility of humans retaining their primordial immortality. The ensuing struggle over sorcery in the narratives is constant and without resolution; it is equivalent in present-day society to the struggles between the jaguar shamans/prophets and the sorcerers (who have animal-like features attributed to them by shamans). The implications of this struggle are that women who come from Other tribes and marry into the Hohodene phratry bring with them the potential threat of destruction. They are, for that reason, prohibited from knowing the secrets of the flutes and trumpets. It is clear, however, that women of *the same* sib and phratry do know about their sib's primal ancestry, and perhaps what the name of their phratric flute ancestor is. *But* they are prohibited from speaking about them - as are the initiated boys who actually do see the flutes and trumpets.

The women are, according to the narrative tradition of *Kumai*, intermediaries with the outside world of non-Hohodene peoples, as shamans are intermediaries with the Other World of the great spirits. Both therefore are locked in a kind of complementary opposition that is the moving force or dynamic of reciprocity and exchange, implying both marriage and sorcery. Ancestral power embodied in the flutes and trumpets, known collectively as *Kumai*, thus distinguishes one phratry's collective identity from another. Since the law of exogamy (marital exchange) is a centrifugal force through which the external world (in-marrying women, non-indigenous peoples) penetrates the internal world of the sib/phratry, there is an extreme taboo on showing the flutes to the women, which we interpret to be an adaptive mechanism to preserve intact the *internal* continuity of phratric identity against the threatening powers which outsiders represent. This, we argue, underlies statements made by important shamans about not giving up the traditions, for then “the enemy will take over and the people will be ruined.” (Wright 2013, Chapter 1) The quality of ‘open-ness to the exterior’, so often cited in the ethnological literature on indigenous Amazonian cosmologies, is marked by an intense ambivalence that is powerfully represented in the figure of *Kumai* for the northern Arawak-speaking peoples of the Northwest Amazon.

### “With Shame He Comes”: The Hidden Anomaly

In the sacred narrative of *Kumai*, as soon as the child was born, the men hustled him away and hid him in the forest because of its grotesque appearance, strange and extremely violent acts – a mouth full of jaguar teeth, a placenta that had the form of a poisonous stingray, the child's uncontrollable thirst for milk. The Sun father was astonished that his child had such a strange form and yet, the child emitted melodious sounds from various parts of its body. The child was so “ashamed” at its strange appearance, it is said, he angrily sucked dry the teat of a sloth ‘wetnurse’. Fearing the havoc that his child would wreak in the world, the Creator sent him away to live hidden downriver for a long time. *Kumai* was his child, the “soul of his father, the Sun”, produced by the shamanic knowledge (*lianbeke*) and powerful coca (*hlipatukairi*) of his father, transmitted by the breath of incantation into the body of the first woman Amaru.

One 98-year old jaguar shaman narrated the birth of *Kumai* as follows:

At *Kumai*'s birth, he was hidden away. *Kumai* was taken to *Kumai ifakabruakan*. (place where he was nursed by a sloth mother) The men showed *Amaru* [the mother] a stingray, called *niamaru*, saying that the only thing that was born was just the stingray-placenta. Before *Kumai* was born, his mother *Amaru* went looking for a place to give birth to her child. She first went to the Uaupés River, later to the Içana River – at the place called *Tsépan* – and she lay down there. Later, she went to *Puwedali*, on the *Ucaiali* (Uaupés) River, and went to lie down there.. Later, *Hipana* (Uapui), and she stayed there. After *Kumai* was born, he was hidden from her at a place downriver. At *Dumalipekwa*, three places below. *Thuruapekwa*, *Thiripidapekwa*. *Nbiäpirikuli* went after him.

The child's mother "knew" that the men had taken her child away, and she "wanted" it back. Throughout the story, the men deceive the women fearing that they would take the dangerous powers embodied in *Kuwai* away, which would leave them helpless. This dread of being without an identity and inability to do anything at all is cited as the basis for the secrecy ideology. According to the narrative, when the women did steal the flutes, the world became chaotically noisy, disordered, as a wild storm of poison darts shot out of the flute mouths. Once the Creator succeeded in taking back the flutes, he adorned them, and their melodious sounds, embodying the true attributes of 'personhood', were reproduced, so he then declared: "now people can take these and blow them".

In other words, the whole process of reproducing new generations of adults, and by extension, the entire universe, was complete when the Creator succeeded in replicating the melodic voice of his own child – the Creator breathed new life into a replica (*blinapia*) of his son's body, transformed into flutes and trumpets made of paxiuba palmwood, wrapped with treebark and strong vines. The powerful feather of the hawk called *Haawa*, when attached to the flutes, made them emit the "one and only" (*bnahawaakatsa*) true sounds of *Kuwai*, empowering all material forms and shapes with the creative 'burst-of-breath' (Hill & Chaumeil, 2013).

In the following discussion, I seek to show systematically how all the sacred flutes and trumpets together form the spiritual and material Body of *Kuwai*. By combining all the features of the individual instruments together, we may come to a deeper understanding of the relation between spirit and matter in the Hohodene universe. For each instrument, I ask: what cultural categories are being highlighted? What view of 'the universe' is communicated through the body and sounds that *Kuwai* makes?



**Figure 1.** *Kuwai – Idzamikatse Iminali*: The Keeper of Sicknesses (drawing by shaman's apprentice, Uapui Cachoeira, Rio Aiary, 2010)

*Kuwai* embodies both a concept of Multiple beings-in-One, and One Being-in-Multiplicity that is the Universe. The multiplicity is made up of the bodies of *Kuwai* ancestral spirits, each of which is very different as are the melodic sounds and noises they produce. Each ancestral spirit has its own 'body', but is also a part (arm, leg, and claw) of the universal Body that is *Kuwai*.

The drawing above was made by a shaman's apprentice, under the guidance of the

master shaman Manuel da Silva. *Kuwai* has another sacred name, the “bicho”, the Animal, *Wamundana*. Each body part of *Kuwai* has a name and a melody, associated with primal land-living animals, birds, tree-living animals, fish, and especially, the jaguar. All of these animal parts together comprise his ‘Body’. Stories about many, if not all of these animal/bird/fish beings can be found in mythic narratives that explain some feature or quality of these animals. These mythic narratives have to do both with the primordial world, and categories of social life that are being placed in relation to each other. The sacred narratives as a whole provide a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of the cosmos. (See Figure 7 below, the author’s composition of important spirits and deities in the Hohodene cosmos) Shamanic hawk spirits, two parts of *Kuwai*’s spirit-body, are opposed to tree-living animals, which are primordial ‘enemy’ sorcerers. Today, shamans are opposed to sorcerers, but in a complementary way, since one is necessary for the existence of the other.

All of *Kuwai*’s body together emits powerful music, the sounds of the primordial world. This world was re-created by the powerful knowledge of the sun father of *Kuwai*, creator of all life, and it was transmitted as the collective ‘soul’ of what would later become the very first, not-yet-human, ancestors, primordial beings with different shapes and forms that are often seen in the petroglyphs. When these primordial beings emerged from the holes of the earth and were given their lands, they were followed, in a kind of procession, by the first male and female phratric ancestors who had sacred names, tobacco, and pepper that are the property of each phratry. At a later point, a secondary emergence, these first ancestors acquired the bodies that human beings have today. Nevertheless, the source of all humans today is *Kuwai*, the soul of the sun father.

The black sloth (*wamu*) is the counterpart of the *Kuwai* first ancestors; it is one of *Kuwai*’s principal ‘shadow-souls’ (*idanimi*), or dark projections of its inner self, “that which walks in front” (as the Hohodene say), but there are other such projections of *Kuwai*: as a monstrous, one-eyed demon, spirit of the dead (*Inyaimé*), and as a big-bellied monkey.

All of these images are seen in the material environment. The Hohodene often remember the details of the stories as they travel the rivers and observe along the way places that are the dwelling-places of spirits, or the sites of important primordial events. So, the spirit of *Kuwai* is everywhere present in the environment. The shamans’ chants sung at initiation are highly codified ‘thought-voyages’ that remember the spirit-names of every known place in the world. *Kuwai*’s music created the world, in the sense of opening it up (expanding “like a balloon”) from its primordial, miniature size, to the huge territory that the Baniwa know today as the places of “all those who speak our language”. There are today *Kuwainai*, ancestral spirits everywhere in the world, but they are normally hidden from sight and can only be manipulated by the shamans.

The powers of *Kuwai* are just too dangerous in the hands of the women, and without these powers, the men in this patrilineal society would have no identity. They would not know what to do except become enemies and wage war against whomever has taken away the Body of *Kuwai*. The *Kuwai* flutes and trumpets must be kept secret; only the shamans have control over managing the Animal spirits in the environment around them and sorcerers inside the human community. In short, the sacred instruments can easily be interpreted in terms of perennial political struggles that have their origins in the primordial universe.

*Kuwai*’s body and his knowledge gave rise to sorcery (*Kuwai* is called the “Keeper of Sorcery”, *manbene-iminali*) because, upon *Kuwai*’s ‘death’ in an enormous fire that made the world contract back to its miniature size, his Body dispersed, was absorbed by, or gave rise to all species of insects, sickness-giving spirits, and plants that may be used in sorcery. For that reason, the shaman is the principal agent in Hohodene society who can ward off, “cast away” their danger. The evangelicals, it is said, believe that the demon-spirit *Inyaimé* is “everywhere in the world”, which from the shamans’ viewpoint is ludicrous, a simplistic view of classifying the diversity of the spirit-world with which they must engage.

## Inside and Outside, Open and Closed: Ambiguity in *Kuwai's* Body

There are other ways of representing *Kuwai* that complement the one we have given above; especially important here was put forth by a Hohodene jaguar shaman Luiz Gomes, a distant cousin of Manuel da Silva. The anthropologist/linguist Dr. Omar González-Náñez who has worked for 4 decades among northern Arawak-speaking peoples especially in Venezuela, requested that Luiz draw *Kuwai*, also known as *Kuwai-ka-Wamundana*, the “Keeper of Sorcery and Sickness”, *Kuwai's* principal animal-soul identity as “the black sloth shadow-soul.” (see Figs. 6, 9, 10, at end of this article, evidently drawn with the anthropologist's input; and Ch. 4 of my 2013 book). The main differences with Figure 1 above are (1) the designations of the kinds of sicknesses associated with each part of *Kuwai's* body, and (2) the apertures along the outer boundaries of his body. When *Kuwai* was alive, each of these apertures emitted in the form of a breath-soul a certain melody of bird, fish, or animal-song. After *Kuwai's* fiery ‘death’, the parts of his body corresponding to the apertures became flutes or trumpets cut from a giant paxiuba palmtree that burst from the earth at the place of his burning.

All ancestral flutes and trumpets are considered to be parts of the Body of *Kuwai*.<sup>4</sup> Most of them come in pairs, replicating the long bones of *Kuwai's* body. The exceptions are the single flute called *Mulitu*, a frog, said to be *Kuwai's* penis; and the triple flutes called *Waliadoa*, Young Sister initiate, corresponding to three claws of one of *Kuwai's* paws.

Each pair has a sacred name that corresponds to a primordial, ancestral being, one of many whose bodies had shapes drawn as long flutes or trumpets in the petroglyphs, found throughout Baniwa territory. Considered altogether, the graphic representations of these primordial beings, corresponding to the long bones, claws, and other parts of *Kuwai's* ‘Body’, comprise a cultural memory of the primordial world, how it came into being, and the world-changing events that made the world the way it is today. (Wright, 2013; Xavier Leal, 2008; Gonzalez-Náñez, 2007) This cultural memory can be understood as a social history as well, in the most essential meaning of the term as a view of how society is reproduced over time (Turner, in Hill, 1988). For, the elements comprising *Kuwai's* body orient the Hohodene today as to who their kin and allies are, and who their affines and enemies are.

The Body of *Kuwai* shown in Figure 6 below consists: firstly, of a complex combination of sicknesses and remedies concentrated along both a central internal axis and the external covering of the body; and secondly, numerous holes all over the body that produce a variety of animal sounds (that later became material ancestral flutes and trumpets of existing phratries), each defining central features of Hohodene Identity. To understand this, it is important to know that the external part of *Kuwai's* body, while covered by fur, is still full of holes. (See Figure 11, below) I shall analyze the elements of sickness and sorcery in *Kuwai's* Body first, followed by the notions of ancestrality and growth.

The body parts of *Kuwai* considered to be sources of both sicknesses and remedies are: (a) the crown of his head (*Kuwai ithipale*), (b) throat (*linveda*) (c) the heart/soul (*ikaale*) and (d) the umbilicus (*bliepuble*). All of these are key points of soul passage, i.e., of entry and exit of human souls at birth, coming-of-age, sickness, and death, thereby linking *Kuwai* to the knowledge and powers of the priestly chanters, sorcerer and the shaman. These points are both ‘open’ and ‘closed’ depending on context; e.g., the crown of a newborn's head is not completely ‘closed’ but becomes so with time; similarly, the navel, and so forth.

Around the crown are clustered various material forms of sicknesses that shamans attribute to *Kuwai's* hair, materially manifest as tucum fibre, from the moriche palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*), also known as buriti.<sup>5</sup> This “hair” represents sicknesses produced by a sorcerer's poison, *manbene*. Other elements include a white stone “that gives headaches” and a snake that produces a painful type of sickness called *hiniathi*.

The “heart/soul” concentrates four major sicknesses that the shaman learns how to cure first during the first stage of his/her apprenticeship: sicknesses given by the *yoopinai*, spirits of the environment (manifest in almost any plant, insect, etc. form); the *walama*, darts that come from shamans, whether human or not <sup>6</sup>; the *baikuita*, pieces of wood; and *iraidalimi*, sicknesses of the blood, such as hemorrhaging.

Finally, the umbilicus which is said to contain the most powerful remedy (*tápe*) against sorcerers' poison; “our umbilicus” is the connection between the first ancestors of the

phratry and all their descendants. The umbilicus constitutes the very first soul which enters a body in 'This World' at birth. It is initially 'open', then is 'closed' following post-partum rites; it is 'open' at the moment of a person's death and passage to a post-mortem state. The umbilical connection to the primordial ancestors is also understood to be a unique remedy against the poison of sorcery, which takes a soul away to the 'other', demonic *world of Inyaimé*. For the shaman Luiz, it is from the umbilicus of *Kuwai* that the shaman takes out medicine for *ifiukali*, a grave sickness of the digestive tract resulting from eating rotten fish that results in a person's becoming thin, anemic, wasted away. This sickness produces an excessive 'openness' of the body's orifices; like all other sicknesses mentioned, it has its origins in the stories<sup>7</sup>.

The internal axis, as we might call it, in *Kuwai's* body consists of the major sicknesses, which are nevertheless the sources of remedies that shamans can use to cure the same sickness. This ambiguous feature of the powers contained in *Kuwai's* body is as essential to understand as it is to know how each type of sickness and remedy came into being and why.

The identification of poisonous plants and plant fibers with animal hair or fur is given in the narratives. As one elderly jaguar-shaman explained:

"After *Kuwai* had gone away, *Nhiaperikuli* filled a pot with *manbene* (poison) and then, a friend of his drank the plant poisons called *hfero*, *lixupana*. He began to have diarrhea. *Nhiaperikuli* took the ceramic pot to his house and left it there in order to keep it from others' wanting it. He ordered his people the *Kumaikere*<sup>8</sup> to make sure that no other people could come and take away the poison. The *Eenunai* [tribe of tree-living animals, such as monkeys and sloths], however, succeeded in tricking them and stole the poison from *Nhiaperikuli*." (Matteo P., 1998)

The fur (*Kuwai liidzu*) of his animal-body is considered one of the most potent types of poison which a true shaman in his trance journeys to the "Other World" (*Apakwa bekwapi*) where *Kuwai's* spirit lives today, must obtain from the "Body of *Kuwai*" in order to cure a patient in "This World" (*Hliekwapi*).

*Kuwai's* body was **covered** by hair or fur, which seems like an ambiguous mixing/merging of the categories 'open' and 'closed' referring, as we shall see, to aspects of the universe. Similar to the sloth's body, which harbors innumerable kinds of fungus that live symbiotically in its fur, *Kuwai's* fur was full of poison. Similar also to the sloth's habits, *Kuwai's* body was most often 'closed', exercising great control over his digestive orifices, appropriate for the fasting period he imposes on initiates. When his body 'opens', it is either to emit creative sounds, or to emit fluids that fall like rain on the earth.

It is important to understand how these sound emissions are modulated throughout the narrative, corresponding to distinct meanings related to dietary restrictions (e.g., a melody sung in harmony vs a chaotic bellowing of sounds; a diet of ripe forest-fruits vs a cannibalistic devouring of flesh).<sup>9</sup>

## Viscera, Body Fluids and Their Significance

*Kuwai's* **viscera** (specifically, his liver, *lixupana*) contained **poison** that was absorbed by certain plants (*hfero*) after his death; these plants have the shape of a liver<sup>9</sup> and very likely, are fibrous, like tucum. Larvae associated with rotten wood (*halieri*) are said to be the "bile of *Kuwai*" (*lidanhe*), part of his poisonous animal-form associated with rot. Here again, we note the association of fibrous plants, *Kuwai's* "hair", and animal "fur". However, in *Kuwai's* way of seeing the world, the larvae are "his heart-soul" (*ikaale*) suggesting life-in-rot, while to humans, they are the bile that spoils the meat of freshly killed game animals.

One of the most important fluids of *Kuwai's* **body** is his "**blood**" which is identified by the shamans as *pariká* (*dzaato*), the psychoactive that shamans inhale in its dried out form as snuff in order to 'die' (enter into trance) and 'open' the way to the "new, Other World" of the deities and spirits; this "blood" nourishes the shaman's own heart/soul, *ikaale*, i.e., the source of life-supporting energy in the blood that can be vital to cures. *Pariká* is derived



from the resinous exudate of the inner bark of various *Virola* trees – again, a plant-source of a vital element in *Kuwai*'s body.

*Kuwai*'s saliva, *liahnuma*, likewise is both a creative, seminal fluid that regenerates the physical world, but can also be used in sorcery. One example of *liahnuma* in the material world is all the forest-vines that flower at the time of the Pleiades, called *Thameali-wape* that drop from the trees. These came into being when – in the narrative – *Kuwai* “becomes other”, “dies”, and transforms into a monstrous ogre *Inyaime*, spirit of the dead. At that moment, *Kuwai* emits a powerful roar of sound, as saliva pours out from all the holes of his body, an exceedingly ‘open’ state. This moment in the narrative can be understood as the transition between the dry and rainy seasons in the annual ecological cycle. Then, the universe undergoes a major transition powerfully represented in the narrative as the catastrophic ‘death’ of *Kuwai*, followed by its immediate transformation into a monstrous sorcerer that devoured three young initiates. The vines are the visible materialization of this dramatic moment of transformation.

An **excessive loss** of life-giving fluid, saliva, is one feature of the most dreaded ailments an initiate could get, a wasting-away sickness, *purakali*, characterized by constant salivation, along with a grotesque dis-assemblage of the person into deformed plant and animal parts. (See my article, 1993, “Pursuing the Spirits” for further discussion of this condition) *Purakali* is a form of Other-becoming that occurs at seasonal changes, for example, from dry to wet, or is the result of not obeying dietary restrictions at these critical moments of time. When this occurs, a powerful reaction from the “Keeper of Sicknesses” can be expected against the initiate, just as happened in primordial times.

The ‘other side’ of *liahnuma* can also be seen today in acts of sorcery, when a sorcerer will cast a spell by spitting along the trail where a victim will walk. Sorcery produces a condition of physical ‘**open-ness**’ in its victims in which an excess of fluids is involuntarily expelled from the body (vomiting, diarrhea). *Kuwai* embodies “his father’s soul” but can transform into various spirit-Others which belong to groups of “enemies” (–*puunda*): *Inyaime*<sup>10</sup> – an extremely dangerous, cannibalistic ogre, a transformative spirit of death, known as the “Other *Kuwai*”; *Yoopinai*, the sickness-transmitting spirits of the forest, rivers and riverbanks; and the White Man, *yalanaminai*, who, many believe, was generated from the rot of a slain enemy Anaconda.

The “heart/soul” of a sorcerer today is said to become an *inyaime*, a demonic ‘other’ spirit, non-human, without a soul. The kind of spirits called *yoopinai* are said to have the material bodies of plants, bushes or shrubs, as well as the countless kinds of insects, bugs, and spiders which can give sickness and pain to humans, when, for example, the latter invade their spaces (outcroppings of rocks, along the riverbanks).

The *yoopinai* came into being (“were born”) from *Kuwai*'s ashes at the moment of his spirit's departure from This World. Most importantly, at the moment of his burning in a great fire, *Kuwai* lets loose from his body all of these spirits which then spread throughout the world. His fur, it is said, “ran and entered the body of the black sloth”, *Kuwai*'s “shadow-soul”. If an initiate breaks restrictions imposed on all who are participating in the *Kuwai* rites, it is believed that a catastrophe will take place. For, the other side of *Kuwai* is his **power to destroy life**, through violence, chaotic and loud sounds like the crashing of thunder, or by unleashing sickness and diseases throughout the world.

### ***Kuwai*, Cultural Transmission and Growth**

The story of *Kuwai* relates how this multiple-in-one being came into the world and develops through an entire life-cycle: conception, pre-birth, baby/infant, adult, old man, post-mortem body/soul, material ancestral flutes and trumpets. During the story, an initiate is instructed on the multiple relations between humans and other beings. *Kuwai* was eventually ‘killed’ at the end of the first initiation rite when his father pushed him into an enormous fire. Following this, an enormous paxiuba palmtree – the material, plant transformation of the body of *Kuwai* -- burst out and upwards from the earth to the sky, the material form of the celestial ‘umbilical cord’. *Kuwai*'s father then measured, cut down, and produced ancestral

trumpets/flutes. These were the first ancestors of the phratries, but they did not have bodies like humans today, nor did they perform any actions except that of going to live in places of the first world where their descendants may still live today. These first ancestors constituted the first material and spiritual links to the land.

At a later point, the first phratric ancestors with real human bodies came into being, and these shared some of the qualities and imperfections of the primordial beings, deities and great spirits. They created things, made mistakes, or fought amongst themselves. The names of these first ancestors are remembered and form part of the stock of ancestral names bestowed upon newborns today.

Following the first ancestors, at a much later point in time, the more recent, 'historical' ancestors are remembered for specific events and processes significant to the social reproduction of the phratry, or to the Baniwa/Kuripako-speaking peoples as a whole. For example, the stories relate first contacts with the White people, and the Hohodene struggles to survive epidemic diseases and forced relocation.

Thus, we may say that the knowledge of *Kumai* constitutes the cultural memory of the phratries, which includes all of the life phases and transitions that people will pass through, as well as the principal processes in the drama of cosmic and human history. The more recent historical ancestors are recognized for their courage in overcoming enemies, for making alliances and guaranteeing the material prosperity of the phratry, and for founding actual settlements in their phratric territory. The historical 'wise men', or savants, prophets, visionaries and 'dreamers' (Wright & Hill. 1986; González-Náñez, 2007) comprise a special category of ancestors, the jaguar shaman protectors of humanity against sorcerers. There are thus several continuous links that can be made between primordial time, historic past, and the present which it is the responsibility of the elders to maintain unbroken.

The meanings of the body parts of *Kumai* directly refer to categories that are always engaged in their understanding of society in history: besides their being body parts of *Kumai*'s primordial body, they represent the nature and qualities of the collective Self (sibs and phratries), and of the collective Others or alterity, as categories-in-time, embodied by living groups.

Ancestral powers of fertility, reproduction and growth, coupled with catastrophic powers of sickness and sorcery, are embodied in the sacred flutes and trumpets. In this world, everywhere there are ancestral souls (*kumainai*), there will also be spirits of enemies, sickness and sorcery. The danger of losing the connection, breaking the link, with the primordial past cannot be understated. For the Hohodene, without their traditions, they believe they would succumb to the enemy others. This is how many Hohodene understood the catastrophe produced by evangelical conversion in the 1950s, and how Manuel da Silva believes will happen if the children today forget their ways due to the new technology they are being introduced to, and their abrupt access to the globalized world accessible through the internet.

In the performance of initiation rites today, the sounds of the flutes and trumpets along with the whips that were part of *Kumai*'s body are believed to be what make the initiates and fruit-bearing palm trees grow. The whips break open the initiates' skin allowing the sounds to penetrate the initiates' heart/souls. With these sounds, there is growth and expansion; with *Kumai*'s whips, plus the 'fire' of sacred pepper consumed in the final and most sacred parts of the rite, the initiates 'dry out', that is, they become immune to the potentially dangerous ancestral spirits that belong to the aquatic world of the dead, underwater (*Kumainai*).<sup>11</sup> Initiates are taught to control bodily needs by fasting ('drying out') and to become fully cultural beings by recognizing and experiencing the music of the sacred. In the story, *Kumai* only revealed his music and power in controlled doses. When he does reveal his full power, it is with the mediation of his father's presence; without that mediation, the initiates succumb to their bodily desires, provoking a catastrophe that ends in the disastrous devouring of three out of the four initiates called *Malinali-ieni*.

When *Kumai*'s melodies are played, today as in the beginning times, they are always accompanied by the sounds of whips lashing the bodies of the participants. In resisting the pain of the whips (not demonstrating pain through crying or even flinching), all life grows "with force" (quickly) and strength. This is why the men play the flutes and trumpets during the time of the ripening of forest-fruits, at the base of the fruit-trees – in order to make them

grow in abundance, as food for the initiates and whoever is “seeing *Kumai*” (Hugh-Jones, 1989, P. Maia, 2008; Vútova, 2013). It is also why, after whipping the initiates three times, the Hohodene elders stretch the bodies of the initiates, “to make them grow quickly.”

### **Sacred Sounds and Growth**

The apertures, ‘holes’, in *Kumai*’s body, were externalized and materialized after his sacrifice in the great fire. All the apertures materialized into a single enormous paxiúba palmtree that connected This World and the Other World, at the place where *Kumai*’s spirit ascended and remains today. The multiple sacred flutes were then measured and cut from this single source; once the tree was broken into pieces and fell to the ground, the Creator fashioned them in such a way as to replicate the melodic sounds of the original Body of *Kumai*. His thorax became the great trumpets that bellow out the Jaguar Bone song that “opened up” the world, making it expand like a balloon to its present-day size.<sup>12</sup>

The shaman’s drawing below positions the apertures in *Kumai*’s body in such a way as to indicate an order, on both sides of the body, of named flutes and trumpets (each stick or oblong shape representing a long flute). From the meanings attributed to each of the flutes, we come to understand that they are all about cultural transmission, more specifically (1) the most significant features or attributes of primordial ancestry, (2) the powers of the primordial world transmitted to all future generations, and especially (3) the vital importance of transmitting cultural memory.

These meanings altogether constitute the shamans’ understanding of the Universe and its dynamic processes of reproduction. By reproduction, I mean not merely biological reproduction, the physical body in the material sense that Reichel-Dolmatoff gives to the flutes (1995, 1996). For, besides being parts of *Kumai*’s primordial Body, the flutes and trumpets represent the nature and qualities of Personhood, or the collective Self (sibs and phratries) Others. These categories, in dynamic relations amongst themselves, constitute the universe in motion.

### ***Kumai-ka Wamundana: By Parts***

What I shall now do is demonstrate how each of the pairs of sacred flutes and trumpets refers to an attribute of cultural Personhood, in both individual and collective senses of ancestry, as well as attributes of Alterity. *Kumai*’s Body may be divided into four parts: left and right sides, upper and lower parts (in relation to the body’s center, the heart/soul). Internal and external parts of the Body constitute the linkages between collective Self-identity of the phratry and attributes of Alterity.

We begin with the left side where the following figures (holes, ancestral flutes) are situated:

***Maliawa.*** The drawing below comes from a petroglyph which displays the bodies of 2 flutes in the shape of 2 triangles connected together at their mouths, with a pair of wings and stick shapes that are the appendages of the White Heron, *Mali*. The entire shape corresponds to the body of the ancestral being *Malianali*, Young White Heron, which corresponds to the first two fingers of *Kumai*’s paw and is always the first pair of sacred flutes that dance in the initiation ritual procession:



Figure 2. *Maliawali*

The name *Maliawali* recalls the primordial male\_initiates of the story, for these are named *Malinali-ienipe*. The first pair of long flutes *Maliawali* mimics the sound of a rattle being shaken followed by a high-pitched song of a white heron in flight “*Tsatsatsa, Tseytsemtseytsem.*”

***Waliadoa*:** a group of three long flutes meaning Young Sister. In the story, *Waliadoa* is the first daughter initiated by the first woman *Amaru*. Young Sister is the female partner of *Maliawali*, corresponding to the ritual relations of *kamaratakan*, “like a marriage” between young male initiates and their female partners, the Hohodene say. For, evidently the meaning of the first two pairs is related to the category of ‘marital relations’, conceived as an exchange.

The body of *Waliadoa* is represented in the petroglyphs at *Ehniapan* (Jandu Rapids) where the primordial initiation rite took place, and it shows a complex form. The body of *Waliadoa* is sectioned in three parts, corresponding to three long flutes, each of which is marked distinctively, perhaps corresponding to the parts of each material flute: the first on the left is sectioned in 3 parts, while on the right is sectioned in 2 parts, and the middle in 4 parts. The top portions of each flute comprise a single head with sockets for 2 eyes and 2 ears. Evidently, the appendages of each paw have been altered, making it impossible to determine whether there are three or two fingers on each paw, as in the petroglyph of *Kuwai* at *Enukwa* (see below, fig.12).

The three ancestral flutes of *Waliadoa* correspond to the thumb, index finger, and middle finger of *Kuwai*’s left paw. Together, they sing a sad melody that consists of three distinct phrases; “*Eeteytumdeeee Nupitamtamdeeee Nupitamtamdee*” sung in such a way as to equalize or balance the final couplet– rising at the end of the first, and descending at the end of the second. The word *nupita* may signify “I weep, I weep”. *Kuwai*’s tears are said to be the rains, the time for scheduling the initiation rites.

It is said that, when *Kuwai* came into the world, he wept at his own grotesque shape: with the teeth of a jaguar, with holes all over his body, consisting of multiple parts all somehow integrated into one being. He was ashamed (*-paymaka*) and his father astonished at the strangeness of his body. His father sent him away to the forest and then to the sky. *Kuwai* was not wanted except by his mother whom the men tricked into thinking that nothing had been born except a stingray placenta. *Kuwai* became an outsider because of his dangerous powers, but the intention of the Creator’s bringing him into being was to be able to transmit all the knowledge he had about shamans, sorcery, and how the world is.



Figure 3. *Waliadoa* (petroglyph at *Ehniñpan*, Içana River)

**Mulitu the Frog:** The small figure in the center of the petroglyphs at *Ehniñpan* (Jandu Rapids) is the frog *Mulitu*, said to be *Kuwai*'s penis, which is the only flute played singly. The single toot “*Muu*” mimics the song of the frog (see Hill 1993, for a discussion of this flute and correlation with ecological cycles). It is said that this single, short flute responds to womens' questions about the sex of their yet-to-be-born babies.



Figure 4. *Mulitu* (frog)

**White Monkey, *Halu*, and the *Eenunai*:** The fourth song is of White Monkey, *Halu* (*Cebus gracilis Spix*), and a pair of long flutes coinciding with *Kuwai*'s arms. The White Monkey is one of several tree-living animals whose sounds are parts of *Kuwai*'s body. The White Monkey's song is a high-pitched “*Wa wa wa wa wa wa wa wa*” followed by the low pitched flute refrain “*te'm te'm*”, like a musical dialogue between the two flutes.

There are several other furry tree animals that comprise the body of *Kuwai-ka Wamundana*: *Tchichi* (*Acary*, *Pithecia Onakary*) and *Ipeku* (night monkey, owl monkey), both of which are considered as very powerful omens of impending death. In one of the stories, the *Dzawikwapa* was the original ancestor and primary chief of all the tree-living animals. These all belonged to different “Houses” of tribes called collectively the “Thunders”, *Eenunai* (*Eenu* = sky, thunder). Today, they no longer exist as tribes with a single chief, but rather as separate “houses”.

They were primordial sorcerers, among the Creator's principal enemies. The night monkey *ipeku* especially is considered a descendant of *Dzawikwapa*, primordial chief of the *Eenunai*, and a harbinger of death, an omen if the monkey appears at dusk singing in the trees or sitting on the ground at the outskirts of a village. *Kuwai*'s ‘shadow-soul’ is the black sloth, *wamu*, which is the primal animal “keeper of sorcery” (*manbene iminali*). The furry coats of the black sloth and its ‘helper’, *tchitamali*, the white sloth, are filled with poison, *manbene*, which came directly from *Kuwai*'s fur as it burned in the Great Fire that marked the end of *Kuwai*'s passage from This World. As one elderly narrator and jaguar-shaman, Matteo, recounted:

*Tchitamali thádua* is the mother of the chief of poison. *Tchitamali* is *Kuwai's* pet (*ipira*). *Wamu* is *Kuwai's* pet (*ipira*). In the story of *Mawerikuli*, *linupa* (the stench of the dead that brings on sickness) began. In the end, *Mawerikuli* went to Paradise. The soul of the dead arises, becomes beautiful, for his/her place, *lidzakalekwa*, in Paradise has already been prepared, in the city of the dead. His/her body has become all White. (Matteo P., 1998)

In one important story, the *Eenunai* lost their overall primordial unity after the ‘death’ of their chief, called *Witháferi*, who was carried around in a manioc sieve by two land-animal helpers, the anteater and the *paca*, a rodent. (See illustration below) As the stories tell, the *Eenunai* (Thunders, tree-living spirits), *Itchirinai* (mostly ground animals such as Tapir, Anteater), and the *Umavalinai* (aquatic spirits which came into existence with the killing of the primordial Anaconda) were affines and enemies of the Creator which constantly plotted to “kill and eat” him by predatory sorcery.

The Creator outsmarted them for the most part by spying on them, preparing superior traps, undergoing transformations, and other artifices; but they caused enough damage as to have killed one of his younger brothers, and almost “killed off” all of the Creator’s people, forcing the Creator to burn the entire world and then flood it, which made the enemy spirits flee to the mountaintops and the deep, interior of the forest and rivers. Drawings produced by shaman apprentices in 2010, at my request, illustrate the corporeal anomalies of many of these spirits (e.g., Long Arm), many of them being predators of humans. Others are harmless and can serve as auxiliaries to the shaman in his quest to retrieve the souls of the sick.



**Figure 5.** The Animal chief *Witháferi*, who was carried around in a sieve by his two helpers the anteater and the *paca* (Drawing by Thiago Aguilar, Uapui, 2010)

**Jaguar Bone**, *Dzauinaapa*, is the thorax of *Kuwai*, or ribcage, *ivarudali*, the longest and most powerful of the trumpets (*botutos*) that propitiate transformation in whomever or whatever the Jaguar Bone song, a deep and resonating “Heeee”, is intended to change. In the narrative and the drawing of *Kuwai-ka-Wamundana* reproduced below, the 2 Jaguar Bone trumpets stand in contrast with the wasps (*Aini*), produced by ‘play’ instruments made by the first initiates, and considered to be “false *kuwai*, nonsense”. *Kuwai* himself contrasted these buzzing wasp flute imitations of the children with the truly powerful sound of Jaguar Bone that made the world grow and culture be reproduced.

## Phratric Ancestors: Hohodene and Walipere-dakenai

Among the more powerful pairs of trumpets are the first ancestors of two major phratries of the Baniwa peoples. One pair, *Thuwiri*, japu birds, is said to be the Hohodene first ancestor; the other pair, whose name is almost a homonym (*Thuma*) is the first animal ancestor of the Walipere-dakenai phratry, whose name refers to a ‘woodpecker’. These phratric bird ancestral trumpets are as prominent in the initiation ritual processions as the Jaguar Bone trumpets, and may even take its place. Both are important parts of *Kumai*’s body (the chest and leg).

These two phratries have maintained affinal (marital) relations since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as oral traditions relate (Wright, 2005). In Hohodene drawings of the cosmos (see Wright, 1998, 2013), the ancestral deities who raised the two phratries’ ancestors out of the emergence hole at *Hipana* were related as ‘brothers’. In the historical relations of the two phratries, after a long period of warfare that led to near-extinction, they came to be united through marriage, trade and alliance. Affinal relations, however, are marked by competition, treachery, and duplicity, unlike agnatic sibling relations or kin of common descent; sorcery by poisoning is a formidable characteristic of affinal relations, setting them apart in spite of the agnatic ancestrality that ideally brings them together.

Since the drawing discussed in this article was informed by a Hohodene shaman’s point of view, several instruments shown are directly related to Hohodene identity more than to any other phratry. Each phratry in Baniwa society consists of a number of sibs, that is, a group of communities who consider themselves to be agnatic siblings, descendants of the same primordial and the same historical ancestor, regardless of whether they can actually trace descent or not. In the case of the Hohodene phratry, there are five sib-ancestors represented in the drawing:

- *Aini*, the Wasp, ancestor of the *Hipatanene* sib;
- *Mami*, Wild Chicken;
- *Bubule*, a sentinel bird, which represents *Kumai*’s “kneecap”, ancestor of the *Herieni* sib of Hohodene;
- *Atine*, the jacamim, a ground bird.
- *Dzathe*, the toucan, pair of trumpets, *Kumai*’s thighs, are said to be the bird ancestors of the Piapoco peoples who today live in Venezuela but were, a long time ago, co-residents of the Aiary River with the Hohodene. (Vidal, 1987) Again, history is re-membered in and by the ancestral flutes and trumpets. Despite dislocations and migrations, ancestral connections continue in the cultural memory of the phratry.

The category of ‘bird-ancestors’ is not exhausted by social historical connections, however, for two other pairs of flutes refer to shamanic bird auxiliaries, the *Kawawiri* and the *Idxadapa* hawks, both of which have important places as sentinels in Hohodene drawings of the Universe (see Fig. 8 below). The first is associated with the wind (*kawaale*), and the second with rain (*iidza*). These shamanic auxiliary bird ancestors occupy an important place as the principal opponents of the primordial Thunders, or tree-living spirits, the *Eenunai-Chichi* and *Ipeku* in particular –who were constantly seeking to destroy the Creator. The latter are the Creator’s sorcerer enemies, *Ipeku* being associated with the night, and *Chichi* with catastrophic thunderstorms. These are kept in check by the shamanic hawks which craftily overcome the monkeys by trickery. The conflicting relation of shamans vs sorcerers is indeed a fundamental dynamic in Hohodene primordial history, as it is in recent history of the disputes between kin and affines.

Two other categories of animal entities are present in the ancestral body: the ancestral fish and land animals. The suckermouth fish *Taali*, or surubim, is not only highly prized for its meat but also, as a flute, is considered an emblem of identity for the Baniwa and Kuripako. (See J. Hill, 1993; Hill & Chaumeil, 2011, for more details on the Surubim fish flute and restrictions related to its fabrication) In real life, these fish swim in large numbers at the time of spawning, producing a deep, buzzing noise underwater, comparable to the humming of the *Kumai* trumpets.

In one of the first historical notes about Baniwa ceremonial life, in 1823, the traveler Johann Natterer mentions a great dance of the surubim flutes in the large Baniwa town at

Tunui Rapids. The flutes are painted white in intricate designs, ornamented with a white hawk feather, and are explicitly mentioned in the story of the primordial child (*purakalinyai*) who disobeyed his father's warning not to eat raw fish. The child began 'wasting away', losing all aspects of human-ness, becoming grotesquely other; he heard the buzzing of the "white *Kuwai*", the white surubim fish *Taali*. The surubim are, in essence, once kin who were transformed, became other through the treachery of the affines or through their own errors in following the norms of seclusion. (*itakerinai*)

Another great fish embodied in the trumpets is the traia, *Iniri*, an enemy of the Creator, which consumed the Creator's younger brother who nevertheless prepared to defend himself with various shamanic items, sat inside the great serpent/fish's belly until reaching the mouth of the river where, with the help of the birds, killed and opened the belly of the serpent/fish. The Creator's younger brother, practically dead from the poison of the fish, made a long return journey home during which, by drinking the sweet remedies of the bee-spirits (called *Kuwainyai*) and nectar of fruit-trees, he was able to revive, "exchanging his life for another." Here, the serpent/fish ancestor is a predator of humans but was defeated, and pieces of his body became a wide variety of aquatic animals (turtles, various kinds of fish) distributed throughout the downriver world.

This story is the basis for a very powerful shamanic chant to "bring back the heart/souls" of those who have suffered some terrible accident and lie unconscious. Sometimes, the chant is used as a defense against the White Man's sicknesses (Hill, 1993). Another chant, considered more powerful and secret, acts against the sicknesses coming from the original female ancestress, mother of *Kuwai*, who, after the women lost their power over the sacred flutes, was sent by the Creator on mission to the outside world where she became Mother of the Whites. Historical consciousness is deeply embedded in these shamanic chants which work to keep updated the ancient forms. These images are similar to what Pitarch, using the notion of "folds" developed by Guattari, understands as the memory "souls" of Tzeltal Maya. (2013)

### Body Adornments and Skins

Unfortunately, space limitations prevent us from discussing in detail two other aspects of *Kuwai*'s being that merit attention: the adornments attached to each flute or trumpet that identify the instruments with distinctive 'skin covering', or *maka*, in the forms of fur, feathers, or fish scales of the ancestral entity. Adornments complete their personhood; while each is distinctive, all nevertheless share in the essence and powers of their unique source. The coloration, texture, or other outstanding characteristics of these adornments are the basis for their 'spirit-names'. (See Hill, 1993; Wright, 1993/4)

*Makkim* is the concept of external layers of the Body, the 'skin' covering that is "like a shirt" the Hohodene say, like the bark wrapping on the flutes and trumpets. Ornaments and body-painting are associated with emotive states; *kerawidzu* (caraiuru, red vegetal dye) is frequently used as body paint, and in ritual contexts signifies new life, new blood, happiness; feather crowns, such as the owl-feather crown, *pupuli-pe*, are used in funeral rituals to refer to the spirit of the dead. The *makkim* are in a sense like 'spirit-names' (*naakuna*) in that they highlight a striking feature of the 'person'; however, the *maka* (sing.) can be a disguise, mask for another 'person' altogether; for example, the great Anaconda in Hohodene narrative is the Creator's father-in-law, a treacherous being but underneath the Anaconda covering is the ancestral piranha fish, both predatory beings. The Creator likewise has a *maka*, with which he is able to trick his enemies into thinking he is in one place while he has stepped out of his 'skin' and hidden, in order to slay the unsuspecting enemy.

### Connections to Sacred Geography

The second important aspect mentioned only in passing here refers to the connections of the sacred flutes and trumpets with places, sacred spaces in the "mythscape" (Wright, 2013)



of *Kuwai*. Elsewhere, I have shown how specific geographical features (e.g., a hill, cave, or riverbed) are poetically invoked with metaphoric references to the Body of *Kuwai*. (1993/4) The chants sung at the pepper blessing (*kalidzamai*) during initiation re-member *Kuwai*'s Body, the parts of which are spread out over an enormous territory in the Northwest Amazon, corresponding to the area of all communities of northern Arawak-language speakers (opposed to communities which do not speak the same language, collectively known as *maakunai*).

Further, key places focused in the narrative of *Kuwai* are generally sites with numerous, extraordinary petroglyphs, the placement of boulders which must not be disturbed, powerful rapids and waterfalls, and other features of the ecology that not only re-member the details of the story but continue to be the sources of sustenance and life. Each sacred site is 'blessed' by chanters to protect newly initiated adults from any potential sickness or harm associated with place. Ancestral flutes belonging to specific sibs are kept hidden in streams near the village site (which sometimes are near sites of settlements by historical ancestors). This materializes the indelible link between the spiritual "Body of *Kuwai*" and a notion of ancestral territory that the phratry must guard against any outside intrusions. (Elsewhere, we have elaborated in far greater detail the ideas of "mythscape" among northern Arawak-speaking peoples. Wright, 2013; Wright, González-Náñez, Xavier Leal, in press).

## Conclusion

After the entire process of reproducing his son's Body is complete, the Creator then declares, "people [meaning the new generations] can take these ...and play them." In other words, the key notion is continuity of the cosmos, *Kuwai*'s body, present everywhere in This World and the Other World. This was entrusted to all future generations (*walimani*) to care for, remember in rites, and teach to new generations until the end of time. It is easy to understand now how the Hohodene view of their Universe is a musical body.

In this interpretation of *Kuwai*'s Body, we have brought to light the senses of ancestral power contained in the 'knowledge' (*ianbeke*) and the 'heart/soul' (*ikaale*) of the Sun Father, Creator of all life. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Sicknesses, Sorcery, and Remedies: sorcerer animals vs shamanic bird sentinels; the ambiguous duplicity in shamanic power and knowledge;
2. Growth, Fertility, Resistance to Pain: whipping in the rites of exchange (*Poodali*) or ceremonies of initiation (*Kwepan*) that induces growth at the same time it teaches resistance to the pain of the world; the trumpets are understood as transformative agents of expansive growth;
3. Agnatic sibling ties, transmission of values between ancestors and descendants; the birdsong of ancestral flutes and trumpets represents the ties of "kinship" (*ikitchienape*) amongst sib-members of a phratry; the birds are the sentinels which guard over potential enemies; they are the preferred helpers of the shamans;
4. The Sacred "Body of *Kuwai*" refers to an all-encompassing territory, including multiple communities of peoples who speak the same language; the entire set of ancestral instruments constitutes the unity of spirit in and through the instruments and their music, which are always in This World, whether hidden underwater or hidden in a special enclosure in the ritual house of initiation;
6. Cultural Memory and Social History: ancestral instruments that symbolize historically formed relations of marriage and political alliances;
7. Replicability of Ancestral Identity by means of musical instruments, the 'heart/soul' (*ikaale*) of the Sun, a key to the meaning of *Kuwai*'s life, generated by the knowledge (*ianbeke*) of the Creator Father.

The all-encompassing totality of *Kuwai*'s being, the powerful univocality of *Kuwai*'s sounds, the "powerful sound that opened the universe" (*limale-iyu*) is unique among Amazonian cosmologies for its capacity to encompass within its spiritual body the multiplicity and diversity of the material world. It is not difficult to understand why such a tremendous power should be kept a secret, too dangerous to handle (like the powerful

images of *Unkegila* of Native North America); a potentially destructive creativity, or equally, a potentially creative destruction (as in regeneration), the spirit of *Kuwai* is obliged to remain hidden, ashamed (*paymaka*) of its grotesque features<sup>13</sup>, yet it is the instrument by which all life is reproduced. The remarkable elaboration of this all-encompassing power demonstrates a truly complex metaphysics which this brief article has merely scratched the surface.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The research on which this paper is based has been conducted over a period of 3 decades among the Hohodene peoples of the Aiary River in the Northwest Amazon. A Northern Arawak-speaking people, the Hohodene are one of several phratries that comprise a hypothetical ‘people’ called by outsiders the “Baniwa”. This name is not an ethnonym though outsiders have used it since early colonization in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and today it is accepted by the native people as an ethnonym.

<sup>2</sup> Known also as “Yurupary”, a lingua geral (trade language of the area) term to refer to the ancestral being whose body gave rise to the sacred flutes and trumpets. Each ethnic group has a different name for this spirit, so missionaries since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century reduced this cultural diversity to a single battle against the “Yurupary”, which actually is a Tupian demiurge of the forest.

<sup>3</sup> Sib: a set of communities who consider themselves to be agnatic siblings and descendants of one common *Kuwai* ancestor, and one common ‘historical’ ancestor. ‘Phratry’ is a set of sibs ranked according to the order of emergence of primordial ancestors from the holes of the (now) rapids of *Hipana* on the Aiary River.

<sup>4</sup> The numbers of pairs varies with the knowledge of the narrators; Luiz Gomes named 16 pairs, most other narrators named fewer.

<sup>5</sup> Shamans say that in *Kuwai*’s village in the Other World, there is a plantation of buriti palm trees the greatest of which is the “Jaguar *Kumale*”, covered with thorns.

<sup>6</sup> The *Yoopinai* spirits have their own shaman, a declared enemy of humans, whose material bodily form is the lizard (*dopo*).

<sup>7</sup> An anaconda impregnates the Creator’s wife who betrayed him by having sexual relations with the anaconda; the resulting chaotic situation was the origin of the sickness *ifunkali*, which people today get from eating raw or rotten fish/meat.

<sup>8</sup> *Kuwaikere* is one of several names referring to the spirit people with whom he lived. There are also *Kuwainyai*, bee-spirit keepers of potent medicine, honey that helps “bring back the soul” of an unconscious person.

<sup>9</sup> These plants are used in Brazilian popular culture to ward off evil spirits (*Espada de São Jorge*, for example).

<sup>10</sup> Negative other (*Inyai*, other; *me*, neg.)

<sup>11</sup> Just as an unripe fruit is difficult to open because its shell is still ‘wet’, so the initiates have to be the right age for the opening of their skin to occur.

<sup>12</sup> In the rituals when the sacred flutes and trumpets are played, the adult men and women whip each other often with such force in their strokes that they leave red welts on the back or chest. When it is an initiation ritual, the elders whip the initiates three times, then immediately step down on the initiates’ feet while stretching the initiates’ torsos by lifting up their arms at their bent elbows. This is to “make the initiates grow quickly”, the elders say.

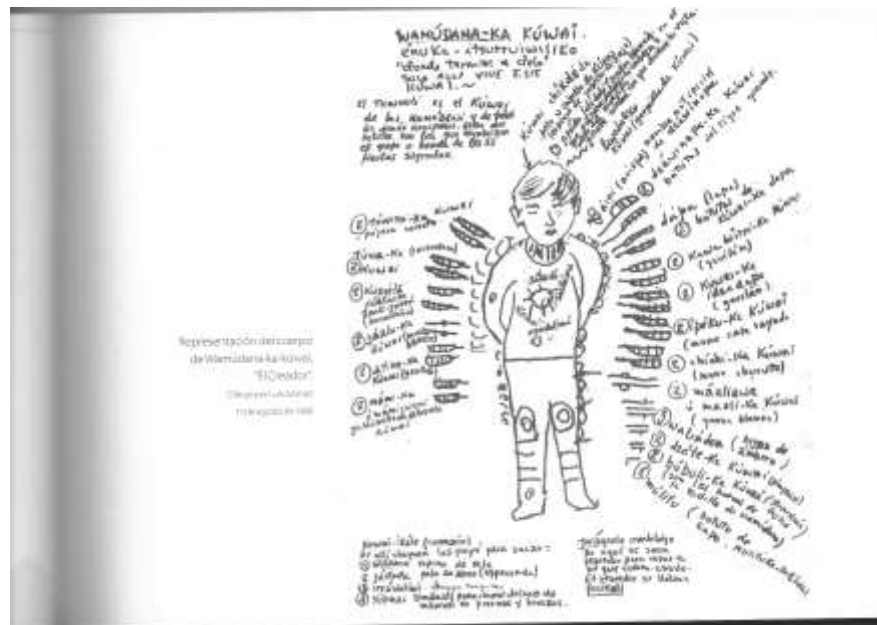
<sup>13</sup> Compare Overing’s interpretation of the figure of Kuemoi among the Piaroa where she develops the notions of the grotesque and folly (Overing, 2006). With *Kuwai*, the ludic aspect can be seen in the childrens’ play instruments.

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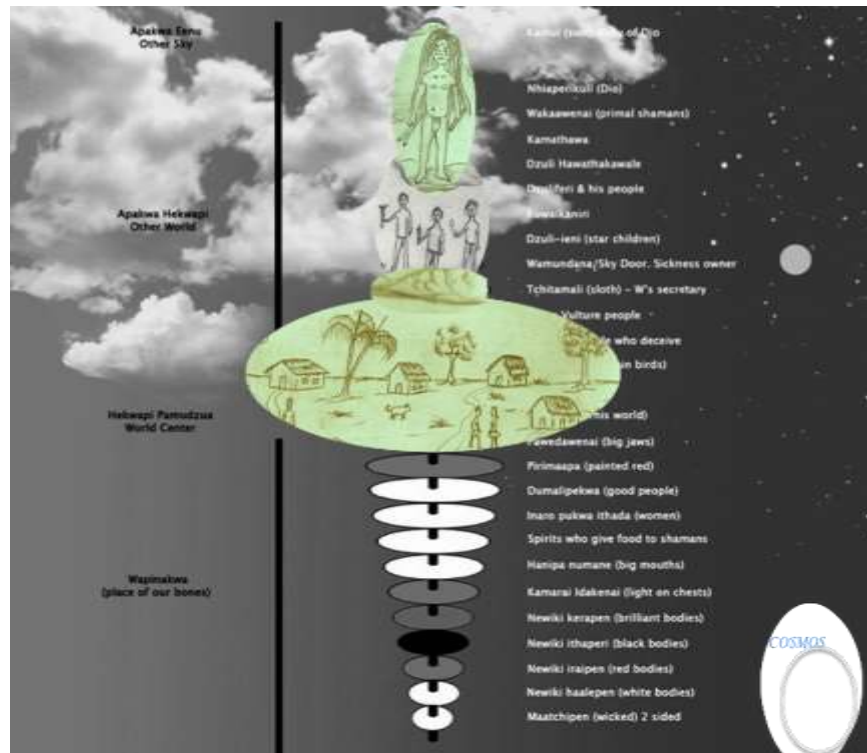
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**Figure 6.** The body of *Kuvai-ka Wamundana*



**Figure 7.** Author's Composition of the Great Spirits and Deities of the Baniwa Cosmos. The drawings were made on separate sheets of paper by a jaguar shaman's apprentice. Beginning from lower left to lower right, upper right, upper left, and in-between, these are: *Dzuliferi*, the “Spirit of shamanic Power”; *Nhapirikuli*, the Creator at his island home of *Warukwa* (Ig. Uarana); *Kuvai-ka Wamundana*, the great spirit guardian of sorcery and the ancestral powers; *Amaru*, the First Woman, whose spirit today lives at the “edge of the world”; three of the forest spirits: “Long Arm”; the “chief of the animals”; the half-furry/half-smooth-skinned deer); and the Spirit of Death, *Maverikuli*, the first person to die at the hands of the tree-living *Eenunai*.



**Figure 8.** The Other World that the pajés see in their soul journeys. The drawing of the great spirits was done by the same apprentice; the arrangement of layers of the cosmos was done under the direction of the principal jaguar-shaman. Above the human village are the great Spirit of Power *Dzuliferi* and his three auxiliaries the jaguar- shaman- spirit- others, *Dzani malinyai*.



**Figure 9.** Detail of *Kuwai's* heart/soul and navel, with sickness-giving spirits and darts and wooden pieces stuck in the heart (*ikaale*); the navel is associated with the “bleeding sickness” – when the umbilical cord becomes infected and swollen with blood.

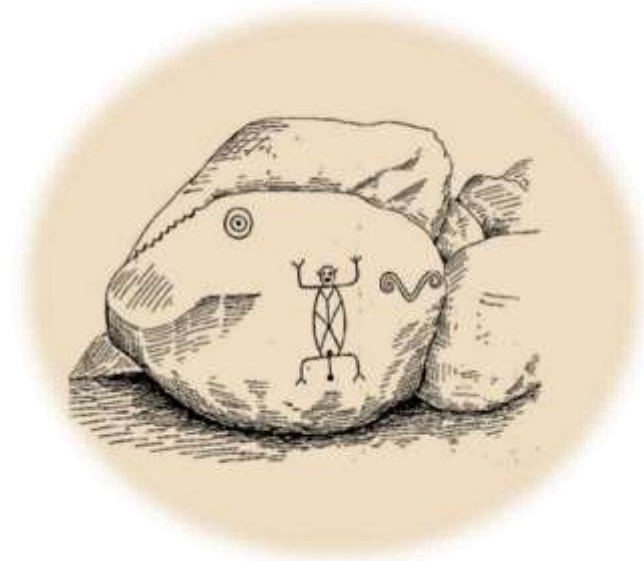


Figure 10. The left and right sides of Kuwai's body.





**Figure 11.** Petroglyph at *Hipana*: a body full of holes, a head shape with two eyeholes, whip, and long tail.



**Figure 12.** Petroglyph at *Enukwa*, rapids immediately below *Hipana*, shows the framework of the body of *Kuwai*, with two symbols of the sounds emitted from his body.

