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TRANSFORMING SPIRIT BODIES

MATERIALIZATION AND EMBODIED DEPENDENCIES IN SOUTH AMERICA

Edited by Sinah Theres Kloß, Lena Muders and Taynã Tagliati

DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES

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Edited by
Jeannine Bischoff and Stephan Conermann

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Transforming Spirit Bodies: Materialization and Embodied Dependencies

1 Spirits, Materiality, and Dependency

Spirits can transform their own bodies or can be actively manipulated and modified by humans. In specific ritual contexts, humans can embody spirits. This can occur, for example, in healing rituals and through "constructive" possession or when spirits afflict humans and take possession of their bodies in harmful ways that negatively affect the possessed person's health and wellbeing. In such situations, spirit and human bodies may mingle, overlap, unite, compete, or fight within a single entity, although a wider range of social actors and their bodies are often part of these dynamics and practices. Such social actors experience close and intimate body-to-body contact, which may enable the mutual exchange of (im-)material energies and substances requiring different levels or states of in/tangibility, in/visibility, in/audibility, and extra/sensory perceptibility. Bodily fluids, such as blood, are, at times, vehicles carrying an individual's spirit or soul.

In spite of—or precisely because of—this diversity of relations between humans and spirits, the categories and entities of humans and spirits may not always be well differentiated. Humans may be considered as and may conceive themselves as (en-)spirited subjects, animated by something that we term spirit, soul, *karon*, *shakti* or *atman*, *ánima*, *neseki* and *kunu*, ancestor, ghost, or the Holy Spirit. These and similar concepts, whose meanings do not necessarily overlap or should be understood as equivalent, encompass the idea of a metahuman entity. Alternatively, as Marshall Sahlins fashionably dressed up this idea, "People are spirits themselves."[1]

Spirits and materiality have an ambivalent yet undeniable relationship. It is precisely for this reason that analysis of this topic is promising, particularly when taking into account that human and other-than-human entities may share substances and agency during the processes of materialization and dematerialization. These are necessarily always influenced by relations of power and dependency, as they not only have material but also social dimensions. However, alleged vagueness and immateriality of spirits, which we discuss further below, are challenging as a field of inquiry. In academic contexts, they may not be taken as legitimate research topics because they are still haunted by the categorization of spirits under "superstition." This view of the "belief" in spirits as irrational superstition was, until the mid-twentieth century,

1 Marshall Sahlins, *The New Science of the Enchanted Universe*: *An Anthropology of Most of Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022): 42.

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influenced by enlightenment discourse in Euro-American scholarship.[2] Many scholars agreed that as scientific knowledge advances, the belief in concepts, powers, and entities that cannot be scientifically proven and verified would become redundant. It was proposed that scientific rationality would soon eradicate the belief in spirits and other "supernatural" entities, such as ghosts, deities, and gods, casting these notions and ideas out into the supposed "premodern" realm of religion and magical practices.[3] The best-known theories in this regard are those of Max Weber regarding the disenchantment of the world, in which he defines spirits as a heuristic countercategory to rationality:

> That in turn means the disenchantment of the world. Unlike the savage for whom such forces existed, we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the spirits or pray to them. Instead, technology and calculation achieve our ends.[4]

Popular religious practices and beliefs were actively marginalized and stigmatized as "magical" and "outdated."[5] The practices that included spirits, ghosts, and ancestors were often either banned or "came to be looked upon as epitomizing irrationality and backwardness and obsolete remnants of premodern thinking by the enlightened subjects of the postcolonial era."[6] In many places, scientific rationality and its attendant practices came to be regarded as "prime markers of European superiority" and hence became a key concern for many "native political and intellectual elites of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centur[ies]."[7] For example, regarding Kali-Mai Puja in Guyana, discussed by Marcelo Moura Mello in this volume, possession rites and various spiritual beings became marginalized and stigmatized over the course of the twentieth century. Manifestation or possession rites that had the objective of healing and counseling were increasingly considered inappropriate and excluded from mainstream Hindu practices, which were in the process of being consolidated to create a respectable Hindu tradition that was based on Sanskritic deities. This consolidation was considered necessary to prevent mass conversion to the predominant Christianity of colonial society. Some marginalized rites were maintained, however, and developed into what is today known as the Madras tradition or Kali-Mai Puja in the Carib-

2 Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser, "Introduction: Multivocal Arenas of Modern Enchantment in Southeast Asia," in *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser (New York: Berghahn, 2012).

3 Alan Howard and Jeannette M. Mageo, "Introduction," in *Spirits in Culture, History and Mind*, ed. Jeannette Marie Mageo and Alan Howard (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

4 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004): 13.

5 Endres and Lauser, "Introduction": 2.

6 Endres and Lauser, "Introduction": 3.

7 Endres and Lauser, "Introduction": 2.

bean, which continues to be labeled as backward and uneducated by those who do not partake in them.[8]

However, the ban on practices of relating to spiritual beings was not solely based on scientific rationality. Robin Wright demonstrates how the Baniwa in the Upper Rio Negro have dealt with Catholic missionaries and, from the 1940s onwards, with the New Tribes Mission (currently Ethnos360). While the Catholic Salesians were tolerant of shamanic practices, still continuing to emphasize the teaching concerning Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit, the evangelicals completely prohibited shamanism and important rituals, such as those involving the Baniwa sacred flutes.[9] In fact, several flutes and shamanic objects were thrown into the river,[10] and converted evangelical Baniwa were encouraged to persecute the Baniwa shamans who were living in the Catholic Salesian mission.[11]

If it is acknowledged that there exist not one but multiple modernities,[12] we must also recognize that the various modernities do not exclude spirits, ghosts, deities, demons, and other spiritual beings. On the contrary, spiritual beings remain important social actors and means of communication in most societies. They often continue to influence social, economic, and political dynamics and relations of power and hence must be considered as "key agents within networks of sociocosmological relations that are essential for the reproduction of any society."[13] They may actively influence the reproduction of social structures, the (re-)construction and contestation of sociopolitical hierarchies, and the negotiation of power relations in these structures. Thus,

8 Sinah Theres Kloß, *Fabrics of Indianness*: *The Exchange and Consumption of Clothing in Transnational Guyanese Hindu Communities* (New York: Palgrave, 2016); Sinah Theres Kloß, "Manifesting Kali's Power: Guyanese Hinduism and the Revitalisation of the 'Madras Tradition'," *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies* 41, no. 1 (2017); Marcelo M. Mello, "Dutch Spirits, East Indians, and Hindu Deities in Guyana: Contests over Land," *American Anthropologist* 124, no. 2 (2022); Marcelo M. Mello, "Espíritos, História E Colonialismo Na Guiana," *Revista de Antropologia* 64, no. 2 (2021). For the Trinidadian context consult Keith E. McNeal, *Trance and Modernity in the Southern Caribbean*: *African and Hindu Popular Religions in Trinidad and Tobago* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); J. Brent Crosson, *Experiments with Power*: *Obeah and the Remaking of Religion in Trinidad* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

9 Robin Wright, "Guardians of the Cosmos: Baniwa Shamans and Prophets: Part I," *History of Religions* 32, no. 1 (1992).

10 Glenn H. Shepard Jr, Claudia Leonor López Garcés, Pascale de Robert and Carlos Eduardo Chaves, "Objeto, Sujeito, Inimigo, Vovô: Um Estudo Em Etnomuseologia Comparada Entre Os Mebêngôkre-Kayapó E Baniwa Do Brasil," *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas* 12, no. 3 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1590/1981.81222017000300006.

11 Wright, "Guardians of The Cosmos."

12 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," in *Multiple Modernities*, ed. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (Somerset: Taylor and Francis, 2002).

13 Oliver Tappe, Tijo Salverda, Andrea Hollington, Sinah Theres Kloß and Nina Schneider, "Global Modernities and the (Re-)Emergence of Ghosts: Introduction," *Voices from around the World* no. 2 (2016), https://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/7059/ [accessed 26.07.2024].

spirits actively contribute to the (re-)production and embodiments of dependency relations, influencing whether such relations are based on interdependence or asymmetry. Omission of this topic and the category of spirits from the analysis of historical and contemporary power relations and coercive practices reproduces a Eurocentric or ethnocentric bias that maintains and does not critically reflect on the seemingly enlightened and disenchanted exclusion of the disregarded "supernatural" or "numinous."

Due to the marginalization and stigmatization of spirits, research on spiritual entities has also been largely marginalized in many academic disciplines and research projects. Research on spirits has been especially promulgated by anthropological inquiry, while scholarly engagement with deities and gods has been considered a legitimate topic of inquiry in the social sciences and humanities. This division, or compartmentalization, of research can still be seen today and was partly reflected in the organization of the conference that gave rise to this edited volume, which was held in September 2022. In response to our open call for papers, we received an overwhelming majority of submissions from scholars in anthropology, with only a few exceptions from researchers in the fields of sociology, archaeology, and literary studies. While we made every effort to maintain the interdisciplinary nature of the conference and, ultimately, of this edited volume, the majority of this volume's contributions have their home in anthropology.[14] In addition, it is partially due to our own regional research foci that our contributions center on spirits in South America, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, and Suriname.

The evaluation of spirits as legitimate or illegitimate research subjects is influenced by the differing ontological statuses of spirits and gods. Outside of scholarly research, gods are usually regarded as the "foci of more elaborated social institutions than spirits," often attended by high-status priests.[15] According to Robert Levy, Jeannette Mageo, and Alan Howard, this is because gods are commonly "conceived as being more like social persons, usually idealized ones" and their "appearance is often canonically standardized, and they inhabit a humanlike world of social relations with humans and other gods."[16] Acknowledging that there are differences across such interpretations, they suggest that spirits, in their free and unbound form, are more commonly thought of as threats to the social order and are frequently expelled and eradi-

14 Exceptions to this include the contribution by Marcony Alves and Cristiana Barreto, who, drawing on archaeological research, demonstrate that pre-Columbian iconography is grounded in historical ontological notions that persist in Amazonia to this day, such as those of body transformation and predation; as well as the sociological research of Luis Bastidas Meneses investigating the adoption of the deceased victims of paramilitary forces in Colombia, demonstrating how structural violence and religion may induce ritual innovation.

15 Robert I. Levy, Jeannette M. Mageo and Alan Howard, "Gods, Spirits, and History: A Theoretical Perspective," in *Spirits in Culture, History and Mind*, ed. Jeannette Marie Mageo and Alan Howard (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1996): 14.

16 Levy, Mageo and Howard, "Gods, Spirits, and History": 15.

cated to re-create and re-establish this order, while gods are more often viewed as inducing and reaffirming social order.[17]

However, we suggest that, rather than being the exception, the various kinds of spirit—especially those labeled as benevolent—are often considered to be social persons, who—like gods and deities—have the authority and power to maintain social order, as well as to challenge and destroy it. The spirit realms are usually as influenced by social order and hierarchical structures as the human realm. Indeed, spirit worlds may be organized similarly to human worlds, or, vice versa, the human social order may reflect spirits' own social order. These worlds may be conceptualized as being deeply entangled, not as distinct spheres. Social order and relations are considered interdependent and continually negotiated and reproduced. Among the manifold case studies and contexts that provide insight into how the spirit and ancestor worlds are organized and mutually co-constructed, Piers Vitebsky's *Dialogues with the Dead*, for example, discusses how the human and spirit worlds interact in the context of the Sora in eastern India. In his case study, the "underworld" of spirits is characterized by social order and power relations.[18] Furthermore, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro demonstrates that Amazonian cosmologies challenge the assumption of a humanlike world belonging to the gods as a contraposition to an unhuman-like world belonging to spirits, as for many Amazonian peoples, spirits live in societies that are similar to or resembling those of humans, albeit in a metahuman realm.[19]

Social science research that centers around influential theorists Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber has focused on religions, gods, and their roles in industrialized societies. In such studies, spirits were often exiled "to the margins of human experience, rendering them more the results of psychological aberrations than culturally understandable constructs."[20] Apart from the problematic premise that spirits are merely cultural constructs,[21] this perspective also overlooks the role that spirits play in capitalist

17 Levy, Mageo and Howard, "Gods, Spirits, and History": 16.

18 Piers Vitebsky, *Dialogues with the Dead*: *The Discussion of Mortality Among the Sora of Eastern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

19 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio," *Mana* 2, no. 2 (1996), https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-93131996000200005.

20 Howard and Mageo, "Introduction": 3.

21 Approaches that consider spirits and ghosts to be merely symbolic representations and as a means of expressing, for example, social discontent continue to be published. For example, Mu-chou Poo suggests in the introduction to the edited volume *Rethinking Ghosts in World Religions* (2009) that ghosts can be defined as a "kind of post-earthly existence of a dead individual, which can be perceived by those still alive in a variety of different forms" and that the volume's contributions reveal that ghosts are useful in analyzing how "collective imagination" works. Mu-chou Poo, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Ghosts in World Religions*, ed. Mu-chou Poo (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 4.

societies, for instance, with respect to the role and concept of the Holy Spirit.[22] For example, in this volume, Agustina Altman and Alejandro López provide the exemplary case study of the integration of the Holy Spirit into the Moqoit cosmos of spirits in colonialism and missionization in Argentina, where the Holy Spirit reclaims an out-standing role among all the spirits that engage with human bodies.

Weber's observation of the disenchantment of the world may appear to be a logical and palpable diagnosis of the rapid industrialization and societal transformations he witnessed. However, he failed to grasp that "we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the spirits or pray to them" not because "technology and calculation achieve our ends," but exactly because technology and calculation may be considered as the new spirits of capitalist society.[23] Drawing on Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, Alf Hornborg demonstrates, "even technological efficacy is cognate to magic,"[24] as technology is fetishized in capitalist society. It is entrusted with agency that was previously demanded from and restricted to gods and spirits.[25]

In tracing the history of spirits in social thought, we must address the concept of fetish,[26] which was a product of the enlightenment theory of primitive fetish-

22 Catholicism condensed the phenomenological possibility of all the spirits in One only: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was the death of the other spirits in the public Christian world (in the private world, "smaller" or "unholy" spirits continued to endure).

23 The topic of capitalism, commodities, technology, and spirits has been extensively discussed and goes beyond the scope of this introduction. However, it seems noteworthy to refer to some of the key studies that have focused on the topic, especially in the context of Southeast Asia and most prominently by Ahiwa Ong in her classic study *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*, in which Ong discusses spirit possession as a means of resisting capitalist modes of production. Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*: *Factory Women in Malaysia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987); Aihwa Ong, "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 1 (1988). Spirits of prosperity have been analyzed by Peter A. Jackson in the context of Thai capitalism: Peter A. Jackson, "Royal Spirits, Chinese Gods, and Magic Monks: Thailand's Boom-Time Religions of Prosperity," *South East Asia Research* 7, no. 3 (1999), http://www.jstor.org/stable/23746841 [accessed 10.09.2024]; Peter A. Jackson, "The Enchanting Spirit of Thai Capitalism: The Cult of Luang Phor Khoon and the Post-Modernization of Thai Buddhism," *South East Asia Research* 7, no. 1 (1999), http://www.jstor.org/stable/23746975 [accessed 10.09.2024]. For a discussion of the "modern" fascination of technology—or tech-gnosis—and spirits in Indonesia, consult Nils Bubandt, "Spirits as Technology: Tech-Gnosis and the Ambivalent Politics of the Invisible in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 13, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-017-0391-9.

24 Alf Hornborg, "Technology as Fetish: Marx, Latour, and the Cultural Foundations of Capitalism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 4 (2014): 131.

25 For a discussion of commodity fetish, materialist spirits, and capitalism in Korea consult Laurel Kendall, "Korean Shamans and the Spirits of Capitalism," *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 3 (1996), http://www.jstor.org/stable/682720 [accessed 10.09.2024].

26 The term "fetish" comes from the Portuguese word *feitiço*, which originated from the Latin *facticius* (referring to manufacture), meaning "artificial" or "non-natural." In the fifteenth century, it also referred to witchcraft. The Portuguese used it to describe objects and practices they encountered among West-African peoples, and it was later adopted by West African people as *fetissu*. Over time, it

ism.[27] In the nineteenth century, the term "fetish" was already well-established in European thought and was used to describe objects that, in non-industrialist societies, were attributed with personhood and agency. Fetishism was pejoratively characterized "the error of worshiping material objects."[28] Marx added that Europeans also exhibited fetishistic practices, but in a different mode, that of commodity fetishism. According to this, commodities were imbued with intrinsic value, as if they did not originate from human work, assuming a magical or spiritual quality.[29] While non-capitalist fetishism attributes full personhood to things, capitalist fetishism only attributes agency "to non-living things."[30] Drawing on discussions of fetishism and ethnographic research among plantation workers in Colombia and *mestizo* miners in Bolivia, in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, Michael Taussig insightfully argued that the spirit of the evil that is fetishized in the embodied image of the devil "mediates the conflict between precapitalist and capitalist modes of objectifying the human condition."[31]

Fetishism is only one concept articulated in social and cultural anthropology that examines human relations to spirits; another productive concept is animism. The term animism was coined by Edward Tylor in 1871 to characterize the belief in spirits and spiritual beings, drawing on the Latin *anima*, which meant soul or spirit.[32] Animistic worldviews imbue tangible entities with a subjective capacity and conceptualize embodied presence as animated by a "soul." Philippe Descola has been revising the concept of animism since the 1990s, conceiving it to be a mode of conceptualizing nature in terms of society; thus, animism refers to "sociologies of nature," embedding a human disposition into animals, plants, and other natural beings, while integrating nature into the social sphere.[33] Acknowledging that personhood is relational and is

evolved into the French word "fétiche" with the meaning predominantly used today. See: William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (1987), https://doi.org/10.1086/RESv13n1ms20166762.

27 See also Christina Antenhofer, ed., *Fetisch als heuristische Kategorie*: *Geschichte—Rezeption—Interpretation* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011); Rogério Brittes W. Pires, "Fetische und ungerade Dualismen: Anmerkungen zu afrikanischen und afroamerikanischen Religionen," in *Fetisch als Heuristische Kategorie: Geschichte—Rezeption—Interpretation*, ed. Christina Antenhofer (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011).

28 Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II": 45.

29 Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

30 Hornborg, "Technology as Fetish": 136.

31 Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010): xvi.

32 Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*: *Hunting, Animism, and Personhood Among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 2.

33 Philippe Descola and Gisli Palsson, *Nature and Society*: *Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996).

not restricted to humanity,[34] animism can also be understood to refer to "the personhood of things."[35]

Spirit possession has been another primary field of inquiry concerning spirits in social and cultural anthropology. This has certainly been influenced by spirit possession, as regarded as a performative event in which spirits make and claim a distinctive presence sensible to humans. In such an event, a spirit is acting on, with, or through a human body. According to Michael Lambek, human bodies can provide "the vehicle by means of which spirits can be held in focus, [. . .] through which they can be sustained in steady communication, and from which they can be expected to speak."[36] Spirit possessions are a source of both suffering and of healing. In spirit possession studies conducted in the late twentieth century, spirits were understood to be mere representations of individual psychological processes (psychiatric dissociative states) or of social, political, and historical processes.[37] Toward the end of the century, social and cultural anthropologists adopted a more holistic approach, observing spirit possession as embedded in a specific historical and socio-cultural context. Spirit possession was considered to offer symbolic means of dealing with conditions of systematic inequality, including modernity, colonialism, capitalism, and religious and other hegemonies.[38] More recent studies, including those of Erik Mueggler,[39] Heonik Kwon,[40] and Victor Igreja,[41] have focused on ill-health and, through an interdisciplinary and epidemiological lens, have examined spirit possession as a phenomenon of

34 A.I. Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Primitive Views of the World*, ed. Diamond Stanley (Columbia University Press, 1960). Also Nurit Bird-David, drawing on ethnography with the south Indian Nayaka, proposes animism as relational epistemology, i.e., it is a relational mode of being, knowing, and perceiving the world. Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (1999), https://doi.org/10.1086/200061.

35 Sahlins, *The New Science of the Enchanted Universe*: 75.

36 Michael Lambek, "Afterword: Spirits and Their Histories," in *Spirits in Culture, History and Mind*, ed. Jeannette Marie Mageo and Alan Howard (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1996): 240.

37 Victor Igreja, "Spirit Possession," in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Hilary Callan (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018).

38 Paul Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories*: *Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa* (London: Routledge, 2013 [1995]), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315021669; Janice Boddy, "Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 1 (1988); Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*: *Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Janice Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994).

39 Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts*: *Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

40 Heonik Kwon, *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807596.

41 Victor Igreja, Beatrice Dias-Lambranca, Douglas A. Hershey, Limore Racin, Annemiek Richters and Ria Reis, "The Epidemiology of Spirit Possession in the Aftermath of Mass Political Violence in Mozambique," *Social Science & Medicine (1982)* 71, no. 3 (2010), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.04.024.

collective suffering in post-conflict or post-war contexts, in which spirits play a role in executing transitional justice. These approaches focus on the collective perceptions and consequences of spirit possession that go beyond the individual body, as observed in the earlier psychoanalytic approach. Spirit possession is therefore not only a subjective embodied phenomenon but also impacts group dynamics and, consequently, cultural and social transformations.

2 Spirits as Powerful Social Actors

Spirits may act as powerful social actors, alongside and in relation with humans and more-than-humans. Posthumanist approaches have developed since the 1990s, taking into account the agency of other- or more-than-human entities, and seeking to decenter the human as the main category of analysis.[42] In such frameworks, a variety of terms and concepts emerged, among them being "multispecies" and "more-than-human." The latter is of particular importance for this volume, as it accommodates spiritual beings and other non-living entities, while the former reifies a particular epistemology that is implied in the term "species."[43] *More Than Human* was the title of a science fiction novel by Theodore Sturgeon of 1953, but the term became popular among scholars following the publication of David Abram's book *The Spell of the Sensuous* in 1996,[44] which popularized the term "more-than-human world." First promoted in ecological and geographical studies, the term actively sought to include animals, plants, minerals, meteorological phenomena, spirits, deities, and so on in analyses. Alternative terms, such as nonhuman and other-than-human, have also been discussed and adopted.[45] These all have the shared concern in common of moving away from the human, without necessarily excluding it, amplifying analysis to plural ontological categories of beings.[46] Recently, scholars have expanded these post-

42 Andy Miah, "A Critical History of Posthumanism," in *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, eds. Bert Gordijn and Ruth Chadwick (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2008): 2.

43 Catherine Price and Sophie Chao, "Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Nonhuman, Other-Than-Human: Reimagining Idioms of Animacy in an Age of Planetary Unmaking," *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v10i2.1166.

44 David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensous*: *Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

45 For an in-depth discussion of these terms, consult Price and Chao, "Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Nonhuman, Other-Than-Human."

46 Although the use of such terms comes with moderation in the anthropological field, "multispecies" and "more-than-humans" are constantly adopted by prominent scholars such as Anna Tsing and Donna Haraway. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*: *On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Donna Jeanne Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

humanist categories to create the umbrella terms "many worlds" or "the pluriverse."[47]

From the early concept of animism to the contemporary pluriverse, spirits have had a sometimes hidden, sometimes explicit, but always influential and continuing presence in human society. Spirits can bring fortune, merit, good luck, and wellbeing, grant miracles, and attend to requests (Bastidas Meneses, this volume); however, they are often also responsible for disease, traumatic past, and tragedy.[48] They are actively involved in power negotiations and the (re-)production of social hierarchy, as noted above. They can claim powerful positions when they give, distribute, withhold, or withdraw resources that other beings depend on. They may exercise control over human beings (and other entities), while they can also be controlled by others.[49] Humans may acquire and learn specific (bodily) techniques that "enable them to tap into the powers of the spirit world and enhance their own potency."[50] As Kirsten Endres and Andrea Lauser have observed, scholarly engagement with spirits has commonly found that spirits are central to and "have always been closely associated with the implementation of power."[51] Or, in Lambek's words,

> Spirits emerge or recede as products of discourse and loci of power, authority, or resistance. Collectively authorized and celebrated, or restricted to the realm of individual dysphoria, spirits provide an idiom with which to get a handle on experience, a means to step beyond the quotidian, the better to understand it. And yet for participants the stance is not that of the distant, detached observer, but its very opposite—not "outside," but intensely, immediately, and deeply "within." Spirits provide a vehicle with which to experience a loss of control, to speak from and about it, but also to recapture control.[52]

As powerful social actors, spirits are "transworldly, transreligious, and transethnic beings," who "move freely [. . .] between historical pasts and political presents"[53] and in this capacity engage with "contemporary political processes, power relations, and moral values."[54] In this sense, we add, they can be further regarded as transhistorical actors, who influence not only historical narratives contributing to contemporary

47 Marisol de La Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*: *Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

48 Tappe, Salverda, Hollington, Kloß and Schneider, "Global Modernities and the (Re-)Emergence of Ghosts," np; Christine S. VanPool and Todd L. VanPool, *An Anthropological Study of Spirits* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25920-3: 31; Lambek, "Afterword": 240.

49 VanPool and VanPool, *An Anthropological Study of Spirits*: 31.

50 Endres and Lauser, "Introduction": 6.

51 Endres and Lauser, "Introduction": 6.

52 Lambek, "Afterword": 246.

53 Endres and Lauser, "Introduction": 6.

54 Endres and Lauser, "Introduction": 7.

understandings and accepted versions of history[55] but also raise awareness of the temporal dimension of social interaction, performance, representation, and narration, conflating the past and the present, or at least complicating their relation.

Spirits are often historical social actors (with or without specific biographies) and witnesses of historical events. They may be malevolent agents from the past, as discussed, for example, with regard to Dutch spirits in Guyana, where the roaming and sometimes possessing spirits of former colonizers are sometimes blamed for racialized discourse and (violent) tension among people of Indian and African descent in contemporary society.[56] However, spirits may also have an ahistorical character, as they are, for example, omnipresent in Amerindian oral histories of time outside of historical time (that some might call mythology). In this mythological time, all humans were able to communicate with other-than-human beings and, unlike today, this channel was open and not restricted to shamans. All of the entities in the world shared a similar condition, characterized by continuous communication and the ceaseless transformation of bodies (Alves and Barreto, this volume). Viveiros de Castro suggests that these oral histories show nostalgia for a time when they could communicate with other beings: "Myth, then, is a story of the time when humanity communicated with the rest of the world."[57] In this volume, André Demarchi demonstrates that these ahistorical (mythological) and historical beings and ancestors are manifest presences in Mebêngôkre-Kayapó ceremonies of name confirmation. Due to their mythical origin, some names bear their original nonhuman owners' "agentive weight," as well as that of all the human owners who had the name before. In such ceremonies, ahistorical and historical time meet.

Due to their ambiguous temporal positionality, spirits may have agency in power negotiations and may become actively involved in contemporary politics. For example, during the political crisis surrounding the presidential elections in Bolivia in 2019, Lena Muders was analyzing *ñatitas* in La Paz. *Ñatitas* are human skulls of relatives or strangers or even those taken from archaeological contexts, which as *almas* (souls) enter relationships of mutual care and dependency with living devotees.

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55 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*: *Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

56 Brackette Williams, "Dutchman Ghosts and the History Mystery: Ritual, Colonizer, and Colonized Interpretations of the 1763 Berbice Slave Rebellion," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3, no. 2 (1990); Mello, "Dutch Spirits, East Indians, and Hindu Deities in Guyana." For an analysis of spirits and racialized identities in Guyana and Suriname, consult Brittes W. Pires, Rogério, Stuart Earle Strange and Marcelo Moura Mello, "The Bakru Speaks: Money-Making Demons and Racial Stereotypes in Guyana and Suriname," *New West Indian Guide* 92, no. 1–2 (2018); Stuart Strange, *Suspect Others*: *Spirit Mediums, Self-Knowledge, and Race in Multiethnic Suriname* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

57 Elsje Lagrou and Luisa E. Belaunde, "Do mito grego ao mito ameríndio: Uma entrevista sobre Lévi-Strauss com Eduardo Viveiros De Castro," *Sociologia & Antropologia* 1, no. 2 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1590/2238-38752011v121, 11. Translations from Portuguese are by the authors.

One interlocutor expressed her confidence in her uncle Henry's skull and the other *ñatitas*, who, according to her, would remove President Evo Morales from office.[58] Focusing on human remains, ancestors, and spirits in the context of contemporary politics, Jonatan Kurzwelly critically reflects on recent policies and practices of the restitution of musealized human remains. According to so-called "societies of origin," ancestral spirits may reside in the bone, and therefore, human remains must be understood to be the embodiment of these entities; in addition, the repatriation of the remains to their original place, often framed by public ceremonies, can also serve political and diplomatic aims. According to Kurzwelly, "restitutions can provide some sense of spiritual and emotional justice in the form of recognition of spiritual claims and demands, and of historical trauma, alongside the return of ancestral spirits."[59] Facilitating the re-encounters of former colonized people with their displaced ancestors' bodies and spirits gives institutions and nation states the opportunity to acknowledge their violent colonial legacies. However, the prevailing asymmetrical relations of dependency have not yet been overcome, as recent controversial negotiations have shown in the case of Germany, Namibia, and the Herero and Nama.[60]

Spirits may either be instrumentalized or actively claim or request a role in the negotiation of political practices, hierarchies, and structures. For example, Nils Bubandt demonstrates that in the postcolonial politics on the island of Ternate in eastern Indonesia, where sultanates have been regaining power in political decision-making and ruling since the beginning of the twenty-first century, spirits take an active part in contemporary decision-making as political advisors, carrying a special authority.[61] Here, spirits who lived under the sultanates prior to Dutch colonization are conjured up in possession rituals in which they "assert themselves as political subjects and informants," possessed of political efficacy and actively influencing regional politics. In this context, they are "historical figures who act politically in this world"[62] and who can be manipulated to achieve certain desired ends in "political struggles or forms of social control."[63] Strategic manipulation of possession is not restricted to or reserved for humans: Bubandt analyzes how a royal ancestor spirit omitted to mention the pe-

58 Lena Muders, "Ñatitas: Perzeption, Praxis und Materialität eines Schädelkultes in Bolivien," in *Objekte der Krise—Krise der Objekte: Materialitäten des Außergewöhnlichen in unterschiedlichen Gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Kontexten*, eds. Elena Demke, Heiner Fangeru, Annika Felten, Nils Löffelbein, Ludwig Morenz, Karoline Noack and Naomi Rattunde (Berlin: EB Verlag, forthcoming 2025).

59 Jonatan Kurzwelly, "Bones and Injustices: Provenance Research, Restitutions and Identity Politics," *Dialectical Anthropology* 47, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-022-09670-9.

60 Jonatan Kurzwelly and Malin S. Wilckens, "Calcified Identities: Persisting Essentialism in Academic Collections of Human Remains," *Anthropological Theory* 23, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/14634996221133872.

61 Nils Bubandt, "Interview with an Ancestor: Spirits as Informants and the Politics of Possession in North Maluku," *Ethnography* 10, no. 3 (2009).

62 Bubandt, "Interview with an Ancestor": 298.

63 Bubandt, "Interview with an Ancestor": 311.

riod of European colonization in Indonesia when Bubandt consulted him as an informant, cultivating a "colonial amnesia."[64] Many spirits, he concludes, act as "'presentist' rather than 'historicist' political beings,"[65] following specific objectives that are relevant to contemporary political organization and society.

Spirits have claimed central positions in the implementation and contestation of sociopolitical power and continue to do so.[66] They have often been discussed as being counter-hegemonic and as forming a means of imitating (former) colonial powers, obtaining the power of the one being mimicked by way of mimesis.[67] An in-depth discussion of this already well-researched topic is beyond the scope of this introduction; however, it is important to note some of the most relevant findings to understand spirits' role in analyses of dependency relations. For example, Paul Stoller argues that "Songhay spirit possession is a sensory arena of counter-memory"[68] and a "site of mimetic production and reproduction, which makes it a stage for the production and reproduction of power."[69] Lambek suggests that spirits bring "the authority of the past to bear on the present,"[70] noting, on the basis of spirit possession in Mayotte, that here possession "entails the construction, elaboration, and deployment of alternative and multiple voices that join and transform larger conversations" and that these "additional voices provide a measure of critical distance and often speak with more authority, more freedom, or more levity, than other voices."[71] Thus, possession rituals may become sites of resistance, in which specific social inequalities, which have been reproduced in for example hegemonic, patriarchal, and imperialist contexts, are contested and opposed. In addition to its political relevance, spirit possession is also intrinsically related to processes of materialization, an aspect that we turn to in the next section.

3 Spirits and (De-)Materialization

Categories and definitions of spirits, ancestors, ghosts, demons, deities, and other spiritual entities are multiple and may overlap. The etymology of the word "spirit" shows that, in its Latin origin, *spiritus* means for example the "action of breathing," "respira-

64 Bubandt, "Interview with an Ancestor": 307.
65 Bubandt, "Interview with an Ancestor": 308.
66 Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*: *A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories*; Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*.
67 For a discussion of the efficacy of imitating colonizers, see Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*: *A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1992).
68 Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories*: 34.
69 Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories*: 37.
70 Lambek, "Afterword": 239.
71 Lambek, "Afterword": 244.

tion" and "breath."[72] In the Abrahamic religions, the breath of God is considered to animate bodies that are composed of natural elements. Air, in wind form, also animates—in the sense of giving motion to—material things. Among the Mebêngôkre-Kayapó, Taynã Tagliati observes in her ongoing research that the sounds produced by the spirits of the dead (*mekaron*) are associated with the wind.[73]

The wide range of historical and sociocultural contexts in which spirits are relevant make it impossible to propose a universally valid definition of spirits. It is likely redundant to seek such a definition, particularly if we begin from the premise that knowledge of spirits—and, moreover, knowledge in general—can only ever be contextual and partial. However, a recurring theme in the scholarly categorization of spirits is their supposed immateriality. Spirits are often defined by their immaterial quality and as having a nonmaterial existence, although scholars often recalled that this definition is not universal. For example, Christine and Todd VanPool define spirits as "non-physical agents that have some form of consciousness and varying degrees of influence over the material world," further elaborating that spirits "may be tied to a physical essence, but they may exist independent of any physical body."[74] Diana Espírito Santo and Ruy Blanes report that in "anthropology the word *spirit* or the term *spiritual entity* has tended to be associated with a transcendent, nonmaterial sphere of existence, even if we know from ethnography that this is far from universal."[75] Similarly, Levy, Mageo, and Howard, in their characterization of spirits and gods as endpoints of a continuum, suggest that, in common English language usage as well, the notion of the spiritual (including deities and spirits) usually implies immateriality, an understanding based on Cartesian dualism.[76]

The question of the (im-)materiality of spirits, spiritual entities, and spiritual beings has been receiving attention since the mid-2010s. This has been stimulated in particular through the research and work of Diana Espírito Santo.[77] For example, in a

72 "Spirit (N.)," in *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/spirit_n?tab=etymology#21464538 [accessed 22.07.2024].

73 The Kayapó word *karon*, itself, refers not only to spirits but also to pictures. *Karon* is, therefore, an image. For another association of spirits to image in Amazonia, see: Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky*: *Words of a Yanomami Shaman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013): 54.

74 VanPool and VanPool, *An Anthropological Study of Spirits*.

75 Diana Espírito Santo and Ruy L. Blanes, "Introduction: On the Agency of Intangibles," in *The Social Life of Spirits: An Entity in Brazilian Umbanda*, eds. Ruy Blanes and Diana Espirito Santo (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014): 14.

76 Levy, Mageo and Howard, "Gods, Spirits, and History": 12.

77 Diana Espírito Santo has published the monographs *Developing the Dead: Mediumship and Selfhood in Cuban Espiritismo* (2015), *Fluid Spirits: Cosmology and Change in Contemporary Brazilian Umbanda* (2018), and *Spirited Histories: Technologies, Media, and Trauma in Paranormal Chile* (2023). She has co-edited numerous volumes on spiritual entities and (im-)materiality, including *Making Spirits* (2013, with Nico Tassi), *The Social Life of Spirits* (2014, with Ruy Blanes), *Articulate Necrographies* (2019, with Anastasios Panagiotopoulos), *Mattering the Invisible* (2021, with Jack Hunter), *The Dynamic Cosmos*

contribution discussing the making of spirit bodies in Afro-Cuban religion, Espírito Santo suggests that here spirits "yearn to partake of this worldly 'matter,'" and they urge "their mediums to furnish them with spaces of 'representation.'"[78] However, she warns against considering human bodies mere receptors of spirits, arguing that some of her interlocutors had conceptualized the human body as "*constituted* on spirits at many levels of its structure" because the spirits "bring their own energetic patterns from past lives" that ultimately "get entangled with the medium's own material system, engendering, in this way, a spirit-ized bodily biochemistry, altering her own thoughts and behavior."[79] This resonates with Rogério Brittes W. Pires' contribution in this volume, where he suggests that his Saamaka interlocutors in Suriname usually considered a person's body to be foremost "an iteration of the matrilineal substance" and that—as every person has an ancestor as their spiritual godparent who "sprouts" and "raises" them—this implies that the person and the spiritual ancestor share bodily substances and consequently share dietary restrictions and food taboos (Pires, this volume). In this sense, spirits' corporeality cannot be negated, and instead, their "constitutive transcorporality" has to be asserted.[80]

Human beings may experience and perceive processes of spirits' (de-)materialization as "shifts in the body's emotional and somatic density."[81] Luiz Costa, in this volume, further addresses material transformation with respect to spirits and shamanic powers: a living shaman condenses the power of a deceased shaman, whose soul has ultimately become a jaguar-spirit after death, into a material gemstone. This transformation occurs as the outcome of a shamanic battle, in which the victor can "capture the spirit of the defeated entity," resulting in the production of the *dyohko* gemstone. The *dyohko*, which is the source of shamanic power that was earlier inserted into human bodies in shamanic initiation, is defined as a transforming substance emanating "from nonhuman spirits" that is "viscous when in the body of shamans and appears as a resinous stone" when removed (Costa, this volume).

In the study of spirits and their embodiments and when critically reflecting on their (im-)materiality, it is necessary to reflect on the notion of materiality itself. As some theorists in the field of New Materialisms have rightfully cautioned, the understandings of materiality and immateriality are not universal, and their definitions depend on sociocultural contexts and the various knowledge systems that social actors

(2022, with Matan Shapiro), and *Other Worlds, Other Bodies* (2023, with Emily Pierini and Alberto Groisman).

78 Diana Espírito Santo, "The Making of Spirit Bodies and Death Perspectives in Afro-Cuban Religion," in *Articulate Necrographies: Comparative Perspectives on the Voices and Silences of the Dead*, eds. Anastasios Panagiotopoulos and Diana Espirito Santo (New York: Berghahn, 2019): 97.

79 Espírito Santo, "The Making of Spirit Bodies and Death Perspectives in Afro-Cuban Religion": 96.

80 Eduardo Viveiros Castro, "A floresta de cristal: Notas sobre a ontologia dos espíritos amazônicos," *Cadernos de Campo* 15, no. 14–15 (2006): 326, https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9133.v15i14-15p319-338.

81 Espírito Santo, "The Making of Spirit Bodies and Death Perspectives in Afro-Cuban Religion": 94.

(including scholars) are embedded in and rely upon. Much of scholarly publishing continues to reproduce ideas and the understandings of materiality that "in fact remain indebted to Descartes, who defined matter in the seventeenth century as corporeal substance constituted of length, breadth, and thickness; as extended, uniform, and inert."[82] However, what is considered matter (and what is not) is "itself culturally and historically specific and, as such, contested terrain."[83] For example, different degrees of materiality may exist, on the basis of which all kinds of existence and entities may be considered to be more or less material. This has been discussed in the context of Hindu concepts of materiality, where even energies are considered to consist of subtle matter, although this is imperceptible to the human senses. As Sinah Kloß discusses in the context of Caribbean Hindu traditions, most Hindus "understand materiality as a continuum, ranging by degree from subtle energies to gross substances" and that, according to them, "everything in this world is more or less material, including souls, knowledge, sound and energies."[84] This differentiation does not reflect a dualistic understanding but emphasizes that even subtle bodies and energies—including spirits—are to a certain degree material.[85]

Materiality can be understood not as simply existing but as something that is relational and evolving, as "something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference."[86] Therefore, we believe that it is fruitful to consider materiality in a "relational, emergent sense as contingent materialization—a process within which more or less enduring structures and assemblages sediment and congeal, sometimes as a result of their internal inertia but also as a manifestation of the powerful interests invested therein."[87] New Materialist theories also emphasize "active processes of materialization of which embodied humans are an integral part."[88] Further, we believe that the manifold ways in which spirits materialize must be considered, and such analysis should also look for processes of materialization that go beyond (although do not omit) spirit possession. The moments and sites of manifestation in other kinds of rituals can provide a more comprehensive understanding of spi-

82 Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 7.

83 Angela Willey, "A World of Materialisms," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 41, no. 6 (2016): 993, https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243916658707.

84 Sinah Theres Kloß, "Sensitive Bodies: Materialisation, Energetic States and the Balancing of Bodily Boundaries During Pregnancy and Birth," *Body & Society* (forthcoming).

85 Barbara A. Holdrege, "Body Connections: Hindu Discourses of the Body and the Study of Religion," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 3 (1998); McKim Marriott, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism," in *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, ed. Bruce Kapferer (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976).

86 Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms": 9.

87 Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms": 29.

88 Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms": 8.

rits' (de-)materialization and the ways in which this can affect related social power dynamics.

This suggestion is supported by recent approaches taking into account the various ways in which spirits (de-)materialize. For example, in the context of spirit writing, Webb Keane argues for the concept of "transduction" across different semiotic modalities, discussing how it can generate religious powers. Keane uses the analogy of a turbine that transforms the movement of water into electrical energy to illustrate this idea. The act of transforming something from one semiotic modality to another is seen as a source of efficacy that allows human beings to access divine power.[89] Furthermore, the moments and modes of shape-shifting and metamorphosis have been considered by other researchers to be fruitful perspectives on spirit materialization and transformation.[90] Patrice Ladwig proposes a focus on movements or the "ontic shifts" of beings, for instance, when beings "slip" or transition "from one form of being into another."[91] In this context, the notion of trace may be useful for analyzing these ontic shifts and the processes of (de-)materialization. According to Ladwig,

> Ghosts and spirits leave material traces in this world. Trace might indicate the places where they appear, the materiality of the ritual items to deal with them, or the offerings they receive. The trace is in that sense a track, a footprint or an imprint—a sign left in the material domain of something that in conventional ways is not graspable for most people not endowed with the special capacities to do so.[92]

Traces may be useful for directing attention to the "indexical presence of a being, but also its absence."[93] Kristina Wirtz argues in her study on materiality and spiritual agency in Cuba that, indeed, materializations are the means through which spirits "act in the world" and that "humans seek to capture the attention and power of spirits through complex manipulations of the material world."[94] She takes into account these manipulations, which, as we suggest, rely on various practices of (de-)materialization (or, with Keane, transduction). Wirtz suggests that the notion of perspicience—knowledgeable seeing—is a useful approach for analyzing these manipulations. She defines

89 Webb Keane, "On Spirit Writing: Materialities of Language and the Religious Work of Transduction," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 1 (2013).

90 Istvan Praet, "People into Ghosts: Chachi Death Rituals as Shape-Shifting," *Tipití: The Journal of the Society of Lowland South America* 3, no. 2 (2005): 140.

91 Patrice Ladwig, "Ontology, Materiality and Spectral Traces: Methodological Thoughts on Studying Lao Buddhist Festivals for Ghosts and Ancestral Spirits," *Anthropological Theory* 12, no. 4 (2012): 429, https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499612471933.

92 Ladwig, "Ontology, Materiality and Spectral Traces": 431.

93 Ladwig, "Ontology, Materiality and Spectral Traces": 440.

94 Kristina Wirtz, "Spiritual Agency, Materiality and Knowledge in Cuba," in *Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in Afro-Atlantic Religions*, ed. Paul C. Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014): 100.

perspicience as "related to the tangibility or sense-ability of spirits"[95] and as capturing "the connection between sensing and knowing, between sensory perception and ontological knowledge."[96]

The processes of (de-)materialization, through which spirits may be part of an entangled and distributed agency, provide insight into how social actors act on, act in, or act as matter. The ways in which human and more-than-human beings (including spirits) materialize in ever-changing bodies or objects, how they produce traces, (re-) produce shared substances, and possibly even sense this (material) intra-action, forms the focus of this volume. Because processes of materialization do not only have material dimensions but also have social dimensions, power dynamics and shifting relations in these processes must also be addressed.

4 Outline of the Volume

This volume addresses the social and material dynamics outlined above, beginning with Luiz Costa's study of the enduring impacts that relations of asymmetrical dependency between human and more-than-human entities have for the Kanamari in the Brazilian Amazon region. Following out the biography of the shaman João Dias, Costa analyzes these asymmetries in three distinct realms of relationship: between parents and children, shamans and familiar spirits, and bosses and clients. João Dias navigated through all three of these relational modes and ways of depending, which have persisted after his passing. In Costa's view, the concept of dependency is fundamental to the Kanamari understanding of personhood, which is itself intertwined with ownership relations. The act of feeding, he suggests, is central in the creation of both the role of the dependent and the role of the provider, taking into account not only the physical act of providing food but also nurturing and sustaining (dependent) others. Ownership is considered to be a foundational aspect of kinship, creating a dynamic in which owners assume responsibility for the wellbeing of their dependents. Feeding forms the basis of asymmetrical dependencies and ownership relations, which are essential to the Kanamari concept of personhood and kinship. Costa concludes that even figures as influential and powerful as shamans, who may have many dependents, are subject to dependency themselves. His case study presents how João Dias, first dependent on his parents as a child and on bosses as an adult, met yet another condition or relation of dependency after his death: his spirit becomes captured and familiarized by a living shaman, who turns him into the living shaman's familiar spirit whereby João Dias becomes again a dependent.

95 Wirtz, "Spiritual Agency, Materiality and Knowledge in Cuba": 126.
96 Wirtz, "Spiritual Agency, Materiality and Knowledge in Cuba": 124.

Rogério Brittes W. Pires explores a case study in which the idiom of nurture and the relevance of feeding become relevant in the context of reparative exchanges with one's deceased ancestors. Here, these ancestor spirits claim powerful positions, although they must also be fed. Analyzing the role of spirits in the composition of bodies and society among the Saamaka maroons in Suriname, Pires describes two types of spirits who are related to dead ancestors and can appear through visions, dreams, or possession. These are the avenging *kunu* and the protecting *neseki*, who define kin groups sharing certain vulnerabilities that influence dietary peculiarities and taboos. Pires elaborates that the members of a matrilineage must enter into a relationship of reparative exchange with the threatening *kunu* as a direct result of someone in the matrilineage having caused another's death. This reparative exchange includes the provision of periodic sacrifices, libations, and visits to the deceased. This forms a relation of dependency to a *kunu*, which always remains asymmetrical, as the sacrifices and service offered to the *kunu* can never fully equal the guilt but are only able to appease the spirit. Pires suggests that this transforms a relationship of enmity between groups into one of debt. *Neseki*, on the other hand, are the souls of dead patrilateral ancestors who begin to dwell in young children and thereby become part of their personality, assembling their body and its vulnerabilities, making them into full humans. *Neseki* make people who they are through their transmission of physical, spiritual, and emotional treats, their protection, and their tutelary presence. Unlike *kunu*, *neseki* do not depend on gifts or sacrifices. Ultimately, Pires concludes, *kunu* and *neseki* spirits are both essential for the composition of the bodies and social relationships of Saamaka, as the dead and the living are united into relationships of asymmetrical dependency and shared vulnerabilities, remaining malleable and constantly in motion.

Marcelo Moura Mello examines the ways in which humans transform and purify their bodies to endure the embodied manifestation of the divine during ritual practices, which, among other things, relies on specific dietary practices. In the contemporary Guyanese worship of Kali, also known as Kali-Mai Puja, bodies that manifest deities must be permeable to divine power (*shakti*). This permeability is achieved through active transformation of the body into an "apt vehicle" of divine power requiring bodily discipline. Indeed, the quality of the manifestation of the deity depends on the bodily discipline that is exercised before the ritual. Mello reports that bodies are prepared for manifestation through purification, which means that the *marlo*s—the religious experts—have to abstain from sex and polluting substances such as meat, eggs, and alcohol. This purification is commonly referred to as fasting. Thus, the corporeality of human beings places limits on the deities' power and directly affects the relationship between humans and more-than-human entities. Furthermore, as religious experts, *marlo*s have powerful positions in their religious communities, similar to shamans and religious experts elsewhere. Thus, they play a crucial role in mediating the relationships between devotees and deities, (re-)creating and negotiating asymmetrical relationships of dependency between human beings and the divine.

This fosters a mode of dependency between devotees and the *marlo*s, as the former rely on the latter for access to divine powers. Those who are capable of enduring a divine manifestation enjoy an elevated social status and increased level of control within the discussed Hindu communities. *Marlos*' bodies, Mello adds, are not only affected during ritual manifestation, but, like all (human) bodies, they are also affected by the deities' control over the land that nurtures them.

Rituals directed at the wellbeing of their practitioners and that center around human bodies are also addressed in this volume by Luis Bastidas Meneses, in the context of Colombia. Bastidas Meneses focuses on the case of the Rio Magdalena Region and the souls of the unidentified deceased and practices that relate to *las benditas ánimas* (the holy souls) in purgatory. In the early 1990s, the Magdalena River often carried the bodies of victims of paramilitary violence to the banks of the town of Puerto Berrío. During this time, paramilitary groups exercised violent justice beginning in the 1980s, where transgressors of their imposed order were violently punished by executing them secretly and throwing their mortal remains into the river. The mortal remains rescued by the people of Puerto Berrío were often unidentifiable and were buried in the local cemetery under the designation N.N. (No Name). Because paramilitary justice had declared them sinful criminals, according to Catholic dogma, these unidentified souls were destined to suffer in purgatory. However, a soul's time in purgatory can be shortened when their relatives pray for them. Between the living of Puerto Berrío and the dead N.N., a relationship of interdependency was observed. By adopting an anonymous N.N., caring for that grave, and praying for its resident, the living can hope for miracles and support for their earthly problems with health, finances, or social relationships. In addition, prayers for them could shorten the souls' time in purgatory, helping purify them from all of the negative accusations they received in their lifetimes and that may have led to their violent end. The chosen relatives of an N.N. perceive the soul's presence not only through their benevolent actions but also through bodily sensations: they see, hear, and feel these souls, and they can interact in dreams. The souls in purgatory are venerated individually, like Catholic saints, but they are neither saints nor gods but *ánimas*. Through being part of this relationship of mutual dependency, the social status of a dead person changes from that of a criminalized victim of lethal violence to a benevolent *ánima*, stripped of all supposed sins.

The action of spirits on the lives and bodies of followers of Christian churches can be observed throughout South America, as this volume's contribution from the Argentinian context also reveals. Agustina Altman and Alejandro M. López explore how Moqoit cosmovision and cosmo-politics, including an understanding of bodies as assembled and fluid units that enter relationships with nonhuman entities, impact their interpretation of missionary religious practice and their construction of an indigenous modernity in the Argentinian Chaco. Here, power is an essential component of the human body, personal health, and wellbeing. The more power that a body contains, the more fluid it is; it may come to adopt a variety of bodily regimes, in the

shape of humans, animals, plants, or astronomical or atmospheric phenomena. The borders of the Moqoit body are porous and can be crossed by nonhuman entities, who can harm or strengthen the individual person. Thus, border management is important for regulating incoming and outgoing flows. A healthy body, which is a body filled with power, cannot be entered and accessed by harmful entities. This is relevant, as humans share the world with powerful and chaotic nonhuman entities that are linked to fertility and abundance and with whom they can enter pacts to receive power. Strong emotions stem from the presence of a powerful spirit or nonhuman entity in a body. Bodies are thus assemblages of relationships of different powerful entities. Further, shamans can heal by blowing or sucking the harmful entity out of the body, in which process the entity materializes as small objects. The shaman can ingest these objects to incorporate them into their own power arsenal.

Moreover, Altman and López discuss this understanding in the context of the missionary activities of Pentecostal churches. These activities led to the construction of a new socioreligious reality combining "autochthonous" cosmovision with Christian paradigms. The researchers' interlocutors explained the success of the Christian colonizers through what they considered to be a strong pact with the Holy Spirit. Following this, the Moqoit adopted the Holy Spirit as another nonhuman spiritual entity with whom they can enter into pacts to increase their power and wellbeing. However, the exclusiveness of the monotheistic rule of the *Evangelio*, which does not permit them to enter into pacts with spirits besides the Holy Spirit, incurs their displeasure and doubt. The ecstatic experience of joy and singing in Pentecostal services manifests the presence of the spirit in their bodies. Modes of interaction with non-human entities, such as dreams, are incorporated in their religious practices.

A different mode of mediating interactions with more-than-human entities takes place in Central Brazil. In his comparative analysis of the Ge peoples of Central Brazil, André Demarchi explores the intricate intertwining of relationships between skin, blood, and spirit and the profound influence that body painting has on these elements. Highlighting the gendered dynamics and the predominantly role of female persons in the tradition and knowledge of body painting, Demarchi illustrates the therapeutic and prophylactic effects of annatto and genipap painting on the human body. The act of body painting strengthens the body's boundaries and diminishes its susceptibility to external spiritual forces. Demarchi's interlocutors understand blood as the vehicle of the *karon* (spirit or soul), and thus consider blood to be potentially hazardous. They consider the contamination by blood to be a transference of someone else's *karon*, which can result in illness or even death. The skin has a pivotal role to play in encapsulating and safeguarding both blood and *karon*, creating a barrier that separates the individual's body from the external world and the bodies of others. To the Ge, skin painting fortifies the skin, rendering it less susceptible to external influence. Suggesting that "body-painting acts precisely in the continuous reconstitution of the skin," Demarchi questions Terence Turner's concept of body painting as a social "second skin." Instead, he posits that this understanding is "eminently representational"

and foregoes material and embodied dimensions.[97] He further emphasizes that for the Ge groups, annatto is associated with humanity and beauty. Annatto ink is crucial for fabricating children's bodies, and it is strongly linked to the concept of health. Although genipap is related to beauty and health, it has the additional capacity to protect against malevolent spirits, making human bodies invisible or dark to them. There is a sequence that children and adults go through in leaving seclusion with respect to the use of body painting: first, red annatto ink is applied, followed by the all-black painting with genipap ink, and only then is the skin ready to endure the painted graphic designs. The skin must be prepared to bear the weight of graphisms, as they are, ultimately, aesthetic appropriations of the agentive capacities of others.

Painted patterns embody cosmological principles on peoples' skin and on the objects that they use. This volume concludes with the archaeological study of ceramic styles from the Brazilian Amazon. Marcony Alves and Cristiana Barreto explore the iconography of Marajoara (400–1300 CE) and Tapajó (or Santarém) (1000–1650 CE) ceramics, which they take to be materializations of the Amerindian cosmological principles that have been described in ethnographies of post-Columbian societies. In the study of ancient Amazonian cosmology, the imagery on durable ceramic artifacts appear to be the most fruitful source, suggesting that changes and continuities can be observed from pre- to post-Columbian times. They argue that Amerindian societies in the Amazon region share an animist or perspectivist cosmology that is based on certain premises about bodies, souls, and powers. In this view, the world is inhabited by humans, animals, and spirits, whose capacity to change physical form varies from the mythological to present times and from ordinary to more spiritual beings. Shamans can change their body's form and thereby communicate between and relate to both humans and other-than-humans. The composite images found on pre-Columbian ceramic represent this cosmology surrounding transformations, and the multiscale depiction of humans, animals, and composed creatures reflect their ontological position in cosmic layers. While pre-Columbian iconography includes iconic depictions of humans, animals, and composite beings with traits of different creatures, abstract geometric patterns are now dominant in contemporary Amerindian art. However, such geometrical motifs, sometimes visibly inspired by animal bodies or body parts, transmit the same ontological principles in a more codified way: bodily transformation and construction and ontological predation remain the main iconographic themes. Understanding post-Columbian iconography requires exclusive knowledge; however, this iconography allowed shamanic practices to be continued in spite of colonization, proving indigenous resistance and agency in the context of asymmetrical power relations.

97 See Demarchi in this volume.

5 Conclusion

This edited volume focuses on the bodies and embodiments of spirits, their (im-)materialities, and their bodily transformations, which they may be subject to or which they themselves may prompt in different sociocultural contexts. This study draws attention to the embodied experiences of asymmetrical dependencies among humans and spirits and the ways in which experiences of (inter-)dependence are negotiated in their interactions. The volume's contributions highlight that spirit entities may be central to the (re-)construction and experience of symmetrical and asymmetrical dependency. More-than-human entities can make a significant contribution to agency in social interactions and negotiations of power. In accordance with critical posthumanist approaches, this volume seeks to challenge the anthropocentric views that continue to dominate scholarly analyses of power relations, dependency, and coercion, and it emphasizes the need to focus on agency as distributed, entangled, and relational.

Using the term spirit bodies, we intentionally draw attention to and question body-spirit dualism, which has often been criticized but has proven to be persistent. Highlighting processes of spirits' (material) transformation, we support earlier suggestions to avoid considering spirits to be discrete or fixed entities but rather as processual and ever-changing entities, not as opposed to but in close exchange and interaction with (human) bodily matters and corporeality.[98] Emphasizing the notion of spirit bodies, we do not suggest that spirits necessarily must have material or corporeal bodies. Indeed, in some contexts, they may be considered as immaterial or may be generally characterized by immateriality. Instead, analyses that consider spirit bodies to be dynamic presences, transformed by but also actively transforming other entities, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of humans' interdependence with other-than-human entities, consequently providing a more nuanced reflection of the role of materiality and immateriality in such contexts, as, in Sahlins's words, physicality may be regarded as "metaphysicality and, in that sense, spirituality."[99] Spirits and their bodies provide a means of further analyzing and conceptualizing embodied dependencies from a posthumanist perspective.

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98 Lambek, "Afterword": 243.

99 Sahlins, *The New Science of the Enchanted Universe*: 50.

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Luiz Costa

Ownership and Debt-Peonage among the Kanamari

1 Introduction

This chapter shows that dependency is a basic element in Kanamari theories of the person. The Kanamari are an Indigenous Amazonian people who worked in the extractive economy for around 100 years, between the latter half of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth centuries, and who today live in a range of federally demarcated lands, mostly along the middle course of the Juruá River and neighboring basins in southwestern Brazilian Amazonia.[1] Three particular relations concern me here: those between parents and children, shamans and familiar spirits, and bosses and clients. These relationships can loosely be termed "asymmetrical," as the first party to the relationship has greater productive and/or distributive capacities, more possibilities for action and decision-making in a given context, and/or greater power, including—at least in terms of the relations of bosses to clients—the administration of physical force. The second party to the relation is less able, or is rendered less able by the relation, having fewer means of achieving more restricted ends, even if only in a given moment, in certain settings and in light of specific tasks. The latter party in these relations is more or less dependent on what the former party provides—irrespective of whether it receives food, goods, protection, knowledge, or anything else.

Despite the general similarities between relations of this type, I follow Kanamari in contrasting, on the one hand, relations between parents and children and between shaman-familiar spirits, which I call ownership relations, and, on the other hand, relations between bosses and clients, which I call debt-peonage relations.[2] Ownership relations are a condition for kinship, predicated on feeding as a means of making one party responsible for the other, who becomes dependent on the food giver. Feeding establishes the preconditions for the modulation of this bond into one where both

1 For background information on the Kanamari, see Luiz Costa, *The Owners of Kinship: Asymmetrical Relations in Indigenous Amazonia* (Chicago: HAU Books, 2017): 10–13. This research is based on 25 months of fieldwork carried out between 2002 and 2015. Although most Kanamari live along the tributaries of the middle course of the Juruá basin, my fieldwork was carried out among the Kanamari living along the Itaquaí river in the Javari basin, who migrated into this area at the turn of the twentieth century. Two Kanamari lands are found on the Japurá River, far from their original homeland, and there are Kanamari families living in the midst of other Indigenous peoples and also with non-Indigenous people.

2 As I have shown elsewhere, there are also important differences between parent-child relations and shaman-familiar spirit relations, Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 48–58. For the purposes of my discussion in this chapter, however, these differences have no importance.

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parties contribute to productive activities and apply kinterms to each other. Debt-peonage relations, in contrast, are anathema to kinship, predicated on supplying (*aviamento*) peons with material means for extracting rubber or timber as a way of binding one party to the other. Supplying keeps people permanently indebted, unable to free themselves from their unending obligations to bosses. Despite these radical differences and their contrastive effects, I show that all of these forms of asymmetrical dependence ensure that the dependent party remains less likely to harm other people, while acting according to ethical expectations and behaving in appropriate ways; in a word, I propose that some sort of dependency is inherent to a Kanamari theory of the "person" (*tukuna*) although the form and effects of dependency vary.

I should clarify that I will not discuss symmetrical relations that involve mutual interdependence between peers,[3] as I have done so elsewhere.[4] In Amazonia these relations, while varying widely in the forms they take, the values they are attributed, and the sorts of effects they generate, have always been the cornerstone of Amazonian theories of the person. They include potentially reversible relations between substitutable terms, including modalities of predation, exchange, and giving, as defined by Philippe Descola.[5] In addition, they include most descriptions of Amazonian sociality "where moral virtues and the aesthetics of interpersonal relations [. . .] are the overriding concern,"[6] that is, where people depend on each other to fulfill their desires, demands, and obligations.[7] Since the 1970s, when Amazonian anthropology realized that "an especially rich elaboration of the notion of the person, with special reference to the body as a focal symbolic idiom"[8] was key to understanding Indigenous cultures, these relations have been understood as central to defining humanity and kinship—which may amount to the same thing.[9] Such relations can certainly have moments when they appear, to participants or analysts, to be asymmetrical.[10] How-

3 Alain Testart, "Aboriginal Social Inequality and Reciprocity," *Oceania* 60, no. 1 (1989): 1–16, 7.

4 Costa, *The Owners of Kinship:* 148–68.

5 Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 333.

6 Joanna Overing and Alan Passes, "Conviviality and the Opening up of Amazonian Anthropology," in *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*, eds. Joana Overing and Alan Passes (London: Routledge, 2001): 1–30, 7.

7 Peter Gow, "The Perverse Child: Desire in a Native Amazonian Subsistence Economy," *Man* 24, no. 4 (1989): 567–82.

8 Anthony Seeger, Roberto da Matta and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "A construção da pessoa nas sociedades indígenas brasileiras," *Boletim do Museu Nacional* 32 (1979): 3.

9 Peter Gow, "O parentesco como consciência humana: o caso dos piro," *Mana* 3, no. 2 (1997): 39–65; Marcela Coelho de Souza, "Parentes de Sangue: Incesto, Substância e Relação No Pensamento Timbira," *Mana* 10, no. 1 (2004): 25–60.

10 This possibility is at the heart of Pierre Bordieu's critique of Mauss's theory of the gift (*Le sens pratique* [Paris: Minuit, 1980]: 167–89) and Claude Lévi-Strauss' theory of the principle of reciprocity (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, rev. ed. [Boston: Beacon Press, 1969]), to refer to but a couple of famous examples.

ever, the parties involved in them are in some sense equal or at least formally equivalent, and the relations that they engage in are reversible and can, at least theoretically, be recast through a defining symmetry, traditionally conceptualized as a form of reciprocity or its reduction to the synthetic formula of the gift.[11] Instead, despite their varied effects, the relations described in this chapter are, as Descola[12] frames it, "one-way and irreversible relations between nonsubstituitable terms."[13]

I draw the contrast between ownership and debt-peonage by charting the biography and posthumous destiny of the shaman Dyo'o, better known by his Brazilian name João Dias. This biographical approach anchors my discussion in one man's journey as a dependent of his parents and his bosses until his death, when his soul had to be submitted to a new relation of ownership, becoming the dependent of a living shaman. Of course, no adult is always and everywhere dependent; indeed, becoming an adult requires one to submit others to oneself and have others as dependents, as well as to be dependent on others.[14] For instance, as a shaman, João Dias owned many powerful spirits that he controlled, feeding them tobacco snuff, aligning their volition with his own in order to cure or cause harm. I have followed other authors in referring to these processes of developing enhanced capacities by restricting or channeling others' movements and capabilities as "magnification."[15] Processes of magnification will only concern me tangentially in this chapter. Instead, I investigate those moments in which João Dias was dependent on others to argue that, however many dependents one has at any given time, one must (or should) always remain dependent on others. While magnification rests on making others into dependents, it is the effects of the concomitant processes of "minification" on those others that I will foreground through João Dias's biography.

Though I know quite a bit about João Dias' life and death, and though I will read his life and death through Kanamari theories of how dependency makes persons, there is a degree of cheating to my account. Most of what I know about João Dias' life concerns his final days, and, indeed, the fate of his soul, which still haunts the Kanamari today. So I will, in a sense, substitute a biography of João Dias' childhood for an ethnography of childhood among the Kanamari, assuming that his early life was fairly

11 Carlos Fausto, *Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 172–76.

12 Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*: 333.

13 On how asymmetrical relations may be inverted but not thereby directionally reversed see Luiz Costa and Carlos Fausto, "The Enemy, the Unwilling Guest and the Jaguar Host: An Amazonian Story," *Homme* 2, no. 231–32 (2019): 195–226, and Luiz Costa and Carlos Fausto, "Afinidades e Diferenças: Algumas Considerações Sobre a Política Da Consideração (Parte 1)," *Mana* 27, no. 3 (2021): 1–29.

14 Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 120–35.

15 Carlos Fausto, "Donos demais: maestria e domínio na Amazônia," *Mana* 14, no. 2 (2008): 329–66; Carlos Fausto and Luiz Costa, "Afinidades e Diferenças: Algumas Considerações Sobre a Política Da Consideração (Parte 1)," *Mana* 27, no. 3 (2021): 1–29; Carlos Fausto and Luiz Costa, "Afinidades e Diferenças: Algumas Considerações Sobre a Política Da Consideração (Parte 2)," *Mana* 28, no. 1 (2022): 1–33.

typical of the early life of all Kanamari, as I have no reason to suppose otherwise. I will also refer to his shamanic initiation, assuming, again, that this was typical of shamanic initiation as I observed it during my fieldwork. In this sense, I will provide an ethnography of Kanamari infancy and shamanic initiation which we can assume applies to João Dias, before turning more specifically to how dependency played out in his biography.

2 Childbirth

When João Dias was born he had to be made human through processes of feeding, as do all Kanamari. Newborns inhabit a particularly critical juncture, as the birth of a child is not the emergence of a new kinship relation but rather an event that throws existing kinship relations into disarray.[16] The threat infants pose to kinship is already evident during pregnancy, when all coresidents must *tohai'ik*, "be careful." This involves, for example, being aware of one's surroundings, paying attention to others' actions and behavior, and taking care of what is eaten. Kanamari have to "be careful" on many occasions, but these fall into two broad classes: first, they must take care during any activity that requires leaving the settlement and its immediate surroundings, whether physically (such as when hunting or traveling) or metaphysically (when dreaming or taking ayahuasca), and second, when a foreign element has become present in the settlement. The latter occasions include inter-settlement rituals, the unwelcome manifestation of spirits (as indicated by ominous signs, such as a sudden breeze or things falling for no apparent reason), the presence of sorcerers in the vicinity, and so on.

Taking extra care during pregnancy is an example of precautions observed because a foreign element, in this case an unborn child, is present among related people. In contrast to perinatal restrictions in other parts of Amazonia, none of the prepartum restrictions on diet or mobility are said to protect the unborn child from harm.[17] Rather, they protect the group of coresident kinspeople, including the expectant mother, from the harm that the fetus may cause. The unborn child is hence not the object but the cause of the proscriptions that kinspeople impose on themselves.

When the pregnancy is brought to term, the approaching delivery redoubles the character of the prepartum prohibitions. While the visible belly of a woman produces

16 Gow, "The Perverse Child": 577; Patrick Menget, "Time of Birth, Time of Being: The Couvade," in *Between Belief and Transgression: Structuralist Essays in Religion, History, and Myth*, eds. Michael Izard and Pierre Smith (London: Tavistock, 1966): 193–210.

17 For studies of Amazonian perinatal practices, see Menget, "Time of Birth, Time of Being": 193–210; Laura Rival, "Androgynous Parents and Guest Children: The Huaorani Couvade," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, no. 4 (1998): 619–42 and Aparecida Vilaça, "Making Kin Out of Others in Amazonia," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8, no. 2 (2002): 347–65, among many others.

a heightened state of "being careful" that applies to her and her coresidents, the water breaking forces the soon-to-be parents to *opikan*, "lie down." The father makes his way to his hammock, which is hidden under his mosquito net. The baby is delivered by a midwife who washes the blood and vernix in an herbal bath to diminish the harmful effects of afterbirth on the parents.

"Lying down" modifies "being careful" in two ways. First, it narrows the scope of those to whom the prohibitions apply from coresidents in a village who must be careful and soon-to-be parents who must lie down. Second, it escalates prohibitions on behaviour and diet, to such an extent that there is very little that those that are "lying down" can do. The Kanamari distinguish between a general state of being careful, which is expected of all coresidents during any pregnancy, and a paralyzing state of lying down, which forces future parents into near-absolute inactivity.

Lying down always occurs *mimi tom*, "on blood." After birth, the Kanamari say that they "lie down on the child's blood." Blood can be visible or adduced through its "stink," which can outlast postnatal bleeding by a few days. The preposition *tom*, "on," has the sense of "in connection with" and that of "in the vicinity of": the couple lie down (typically in raised hammocks) due to *and* at some distance from the child's blood. After birth, the most pressing concern is to ensure that both new blood and the afterbirth are removed from the village. As the parents are immobile in their hammocks, this task falls to close kin who clean the blood on the floor with water and soap.

As with prepartum care, postpartum lying down is not intended to promote a newborn's well-being but to protect their kinspeople from the danger it brings. In fact, lying down occurs even in the absence of a living child, such as in the cases of stillbirths or abortions. Here, there is no living child, only blood, which indexes the virtuality of a new existence.

Why are newborns so dangerous? First, they are unsocialized and unrelated to those to whom they are born, lacking the kinship that characterizes the ongoing ties that constitute the village space into which they make their appearance. Second, their emergence modifies the existing field of relationships rapidly and radically. This capacity to upturn and endanger kinship leads Kanamari to associate the child with the enemy.[18] This is hardly unique in Amazonia, where there are evident analogies, if not explicit associations, between perinatal taboos and seclusion and rites related to homicide.[19] One vector for these analogies and associations is blood, which is sometimes linked to an immaterial property that may be translated (by bilingual Indigenous people or the anthropologist) as "soul." It is often the case that, in Amazonia, killing causes the blood and/or soul of the victim to enter (or otherwise affect) the killer, who must then be subjected to seclusion rites, typically to expel or neutralize the dangers

18 Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 114–20.

19 Beth Conklin, "Woman's Blood, Warrior's Blood, and The Conquest of Vitality in Amazonia," in *Gender in Amazonia and Melanesia: An Exploration of the Comparative Method*, eds. Thomas Gregor and Donald Tuzin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 141–46.

of blood (through processes such as vomiting and blood-letting) while acquiring from the enemy certain qualities that are accrued to him as supplementary capacities, such as new names, songs, and so forth.[20] Killing and homicide seclusion, when successful, can result in different postmortem destinies, stall bodily decay, or enable life to "persist."[21]

Kanamari homicide rites are superficially and procedurally similar to other Amazonian homicide rites, but they differ fundamentally in their results. Kanamari acquire nothing from the victim: no names, body parts, or reproductive capacities.[22] On the contrary, killing leads to the premature aging of the killer and, if care is not taken, of his coresidents as well. The only thing that seclusion can do is to inhibit the process thereby set in motion. Killers, whether kinspeople or foreigners, are described as "angry," and their behavior is classified as "worthless." Overall, for the Kanamari, in contrast to other parts of Amazonia, killing does not result in vitality but rather decay.

Killing is dangerous because it causes blood to enter the kinship space. The victim's blood infuses the killer's body, causing his belly to swell. The man then has to return to his village and "lie down" in his hammock under the mosquito net. It is explicitly said that the killer "lies down on the [dead] man's blood," just as new parents "lie down on the child's blood." The killer must forcibly vomit the blood out or else he will wither and ultimately die.

Childbirth and homicide bring foreign elements, physically manifested as blood or its traces, into the sphere of kinship relations, and thus place it at risk. Blood must therefore be obliterated from this sphere if kinship relations are to thrive. However, the analogy ends there: while, during homicide, the danger ends when all of the enemy's blood has been made to disappear, during childbirth cleaning the place of birth of blood is not sufficient because the child-enemy needs to be converted into a kinsperson.[23] Entering the space of kinship along with postpartum bleeding—which can

20 Aparecida Vilaça, *Strange Enemies: Indigenous Agency and Scenes of Encounters in Amazonia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 88–93.

21 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem e outros ensaios de antropologia* (São Paulo: Cosac & Nai, 2002); Fausto, *Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia*: 164.

22 See also Laura Rival, *Trekking Through History: The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 55.

23 Seclusion following menarche also involves the girl "lying down" due to the excessive presence of blood, exactly like the proscriptions that are observed after childbirth and homicide. The aim of the proscriptions is, once again, to prevent the girl from aging quickly and coresident men from becoming "unlucky" (*miori*) in the hunt. Postmenarche seclusion lies midway between homicide, which clears the kinship space of all blood, and childbirth, which does the same but must reckon with the newborn and the blood that flows within it. Menarche signals the transformation of a girl into a woman, as evidenced by her capacity to harbor new life, to "cook" (*horon*) her partner's sperm into a fetus. The rites thus oversee the removal of new blood but produce a woman who will bleed every month, unless she is pregnant. The Kanamari say that all menstruation should be followed by lying down, but other

cause premature aging of the newborn's parents and other coresident kinspeople—the child's danger starts to be curbed as it comes to be fed by its mother, first with breastmilk and later with premasticated manioc. Feeding, which generates an asymmetrical relation between a caretaker and dependent, is the main technology for restraining the danger of the newborn, humanizing it as it is made into a kinsperson related to those who were careful and laid down when it was born.

Thus, like all Kanamari, João Dias was born an enemy to those who would become his kinspeople, and like all Kanamari who survived being born, he was breastfed by his mother and made into a kinsperson, after which he was cared for and nurtured into maturity.

3 Feeding

How does feeding make enemies into dependents? The Kanamari word for "to feed [someone]," *ayuh-man*, has the root *ayuh*, referring to a need for something or someone. *Ayuh-dok*, for instance, means "to need to defecate"; *ayuh-pok* means "to need to have sex"; and *ayuh-tyuku* means "to need to die," i.e., to be suicidal. In these examples, *ayuh* indicates a mechanical or physiological necessity over which people have limited control. The Kanamari translate *ayuh* in both these phrases with the Portuguese word *precisar*, "to need." In *ayuh-man*, *ayuh* is bound to *-man*, a polysemic verb that means "to make/to do/to fabricate/to get" as well as "to say." The word *precisar* does not appear in Kanamari translations of *ayuh-man*. Instead, people always translated it to me as "to give food" (*dar comida*), although it literally means "to make need" or "to cause need."

Causing another being to eat creates a need in that being toward the feeder. The Kanamari call this induced need *-naki-ayuh*, in which *naki* is equivalent to the English preposition "in." Thus, *naki-ayuh* is literally an "internal need" or "urge." Because *naki-ayuh* is always directed toward the feeder, it can be translated as "dependence on [the feeder]." *Kamanyo na-naki-ayuh awa niama*, for instance, means "Kamanyo needs [depends on] his mother." Here, there is a univocal and unidirectional dependence of the fed (Kamanyo) on the one who feeds him (his mother). What is conveyed is a constitutive, at times vital, need that follows from feeding.[24]

than the menarche, I only observed light proscriptions on diet (i.e., avoidance of large game animals) and bathing (menstruating women bathe downriver from men to avoid polluting them).

24 Luiz Costa, "Fabricating Necessity: Feeding and Commensality in Western Amazonia," in *Ownership and Nurture: Studies in Native Amazonian Property Relations*, eds. Marc Brightman, Carlos Fausto and Vanessa Grotti (New York: Berghahn, 2016): 81–109, 85–85; Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 25–34.

The feeder becomes the *-warah* of those he or she feeds. *-Warah* has complex semantics, which I synthetically translate as "body-owner," a composite of two common translations of *-warah* in the context of its occurrence in a possessive noun phrase.[25] To keep to the examples relevant to this chapter, a parent may be referred to as *opatyn-warah*, "body-owner of children," and a shaman (*baoh*) can be referred to as *dyohko-warah*, "body-owner of spirits." The reciprocal term for a *-warah*, the fed party who depends on the feeder/*-warah*, is variable, but subordinate status is marked in two ways: either with the use of terms such as "pet" and "child" (including "son" and "daughter"), both of which are linked to notions of filiation, or by drawing on a term that normally implies no relation of subordination and marking it with a possessive pronoun. Thus, the reciprocal for the "body-owner of children" is "her/his/its child" (*awa opatyn*), while that for the "body-owner of spirits" is "his spirit" (*awa dyohko*).

Feeding is the means of making the child into a kinsperson, annulling the danger of the blood it brings into the world and, at the same time, making the mother the body-owner of the newborn. Feeding a child is successful when the child suckles soon after birth. The act of feeding hence creates a filial relation between feeder and fed, owner and owned, mother and child. With respect to a theory of the person, we can say that feeding minifies the newborn, reduces its potential to harm the living as it becomes humanized, while, at the same time, it magnifies the mother, makes her a nurturer and publicly announces that she will care for a dependent.[26]

Growing up entails a slackening of the child's dependence on his or her mother as it creates relations of dependence of his or her own—*his* or *her*, because this is when gender roles start to be differentiated. Children, formerly fully dependent on their caretakers, are gradually made into owners of others who in turn become dependent on them, in accordance with the expectations of gender roles. At around age ten, girls are given pets to feed, and they will begin to help care for their younger siblings or cousins. In this way, they hone their productive and redistributive skills, developing the capacity for care and attentiveness and expressing, *in potentia*, their capacity to marry and reproduce. This is all the more evident because, at the same time, they begin to help their mothers with household chores or accompany them to the garden.

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25 I have elsewhere discussed in great detail the semantics and grammar of *-warah*, as well as the ethnographical implications of the meanings that are conveyed by it. Luiz Costa, "The Kanamari Body-Owner: Predation and Feeding in Western Amazonia," *Journal de la société des américanistes* 96, no. 1 (2010): 169–92; Costa, "Fabricating Necessity"; Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*; Luiz Costa, "Language and Ethnography: A Reply to Allard," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris* 105, no. 1 (2019): 143–60.

26 Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 122. It is very explicitly the mother who, by breastfeeding the newborn, becomes its body-owner. The father is sometimes said to be the body-owner of his wife in the context of the filial relation because he provides food for her while she is breastfeeding. As the child ages, these relations are rearranged, and the father, who obtains meat for his child, can be said to be its body-owner directly.

Boys may take care of kinspeople younger than themselves, although they are rarely given pets. Teenage boys virtually become homeless as they move constantly within their village or between villages in search of fun and romance. At this age, dependence on parents becomes substantially lax. Girls tend to travel less, but they gradually grow less attached to their houses and move around more freely in the village, visiting relatives in other households. Similarly, they accompany older women to the gardens and help bring manioc back to the village. Following the menarche and its corresponding period of seclusion, they often travel without their parents.[27]

In the past, all boys underwent the first stages of shamanic initiation. These first stages involved a shaman inserting *dyohko* into the bodies of boys aged 5 or 6 years. *Dyohko* is a complex concept,[28] but, for present purposes, it can be defined as a substance that emanates from nonhuman spirits which is viscous when it is in the body of the shaman and appears as a resinous stone when the shaman removes it from their bodies. The *dyohko* is the source of shamanic power and enables shamans to cure and cause illness. The initial stage of the shamanic initiation, which should probably be considered the first stage in the production of manhood, required the insertion of these small resinous stones into the bodies of boys who were men-to-be. Most boys did not take shamanic initiation further, but did, for a while, feed the *dyohko* in their flesh through the inhalation of tobacco snuff, the food of the *dyohko*. Thus, boys maintained the dependent *dyohko* in their bodies through feeding, at least for a while. Meanwhile, they began to participate in subsistence activities, including accompanying their fathers on hunting and fishing trips.

As they age, most boys lose the *dyohko* that they had in their bodies. It returns to its original owner, the shaman who inserted it into them. Their shamanic initiation is therefore aborted. A few, however, learn to keep *dyohko*, and they eventually reach the stage of a proper shamanic initiation, where they acquire a jaguar heart, which is the postmortem manifestation of a dead shaman's *dyohko*. When a shaman dies, the *dyohko* in his body "stands up" and assumes a jaguar form, which can harm the living lest it be familiarized by another shaman. João Dias became a shaman in this way, acquiring a "bitter" body, saturated with *dyohko*, and becoming the owner of the spirit known as Pima, the dead shaman whom he familiarized.

4 Working for Bosses

During the rubber boom, boys would often spend some time working for the whites. This invariably meant spending some time under the supervision of one or more local

27 Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 120–28.

28 Luiz Costa, "As faces do jaguar: Parentesco, história e mitologia entre os Kanamari da Amazônia occidental" (PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2007): 343–45.

bosses, working and developing relations of debt-peonage that could potentially ensure a steady flow of merchandise in the future.[29]

This is precisely what happened when João Dias began to withdraw from his constitutive dependency on his parents. Around the time he became the feeder of Pima, he also found himself a debt peon. João Dias reached adulthood during the 1940s—a period that the Kanamari call the Time of Rubber. From the start of the twentieth century up until the mid-1970s, the Kanamari were largely engaged in work in the Amazonian extractive economy, including rubber tapping and lumbering, as well as auxiliary work, such as hunting and fishing for bosses and housework.[30] By no later than the 1930s, the tributaries of the middle Juruá, where the Kanamari have lived since time immemorial, were overrun by rubber estates and the whites who labored in them, who had little regard for Kanamari villages or hunting territories. Their choice was either to work for the whites or leave their traditional lands.

In order to deal with the newfound threats of the extractive economy, the Kanamari adopted a strategy that was common to a range of their neighbours:[31] they offered young boys to local bosses, whom they knew well and could reasonably trust, for work in rubber tapping or logging. This work would require that the adolescent, or even preadolescent, boy spend a long period away from his kinspeople, living in camps, deep in the interior of rubber estates. Bosses supply peons with merchandise, including the material means to extract rubber, as well as clothing, hammocks, tents, and food, usually canned goods, so that they need not hunt and can dedicate all of their time to rubber tapping. The initial "supplying" of this merchandise creates a debt that the peon is expected to pay with the rubber he collects. However, these debts are never actually paid off. Bosses ensure that the rubber owed them is always valued below the amount originally agreed upon, so that new materials need to be

29 Today, Kanamari who work for the whites take up positions in the National Indigenous People's Agency (Funai), in the Secretary of Indigenous Health, or as schoolteachers. Most of these jobs are accessible to women. In the past, however, women rarely worked directly for bosses. The Kanamari say that pre-pubescent girls who went to work for the whites, far from the watchful gaze of their kinspeople, would be likely to marry and hence never return to live with their kinspeople. The Kanamari value working for the whites as a means of learning a trade and as a way to be exposed to the ways of life of these invading foreigners; but it is only worth it if those who gain this experience later return home, where they marry and settle. I do know of some older, married women who worked as housemaids for the whites but only while accompanying their Kanamari husbands.

30 On the Amazonian rubber boom, see Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850–1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983). For a pioneering description of the impacts of the rubber boom on native Amazonian substance economies, see Peter Gow, *Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991): 115–25.

31 See Oiara Bonilla, "O bom patrão e o inimigo voraz: Predação e comércio na cosmologia Paumari," *Mana* 11, no. 1 (2005) 41–66; Oiara Bonilla, *Des proies si désirables: Les Paumari d'Amazonie brésilienne* (Toulouse: Pu Midi, 2022) and Luiz Paulo Bittencourt, "Criar e ser criado: A familiarização como operador sociocosmológico no Juruá-Purus indígena" (Master's thesis, Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2021): 158–228.

supplied to peons, who thereby incur further debts, in such a way that the relation becomes a form of bondage. Hence peons *depended* on bosses to supply them with the means of their livelihood. This is the situation João Dias found himself in. His parents offered him up to work for a local boss, with whom he lived for close to a decade. João Dias transferred his dependency on his parents and guardians to dependency on his boss.

Now, without minimizing the violence of debt-peonage relations in any way, a clear analogy appears between parents' care of a child through feeding and the tutelage of a boss toward his employee; or, in terms of the synthetic formulas provided above, between ownership and debt-peonage. Much as feeding makes available for the fed that which would otherwise not be available because of their reduced productive capacities, a boss outfits his or her employees with the material to work in the extractive economy because of their reduced material conditions. This analogy makes more sense if we recognize causing another to eat by giving them food as a prototypical instance of a more general asymmetry involving one participant making available to another something that was previously unavailable, thus creating the latter's dependence on the former. At its limit, *ayuh-man*, which, following native translations, I have rendered as "to feed," need not be related to eating or subsistence activities at all. *Ayuh-man* could perhaps be glossed as "to provision" or "to supply," which would immediately make sense of the analogy that exists between ownership and debt-peonage.[32]

Elsewhere in southwestern Amazonia, bosses are described as adopting their Indigenous employees as "children" or "godchildren,"[33] in situations in which relations of supplying in debt-peonage contexts very clearly became entangled with relations of feeding in kinship contexts. In some cases, the hierarchy of debt-peonage provided the basis for processes of identity formation through the agglomeration of previously dispersed peoples and their communal work for powerful foreigners. Among the Piro of the lower Urubamba, for instance, "the enslavement of ancient peoples by the rubber bosses first brought them into peaceful coexistence,"[34] which opened the formerly endogamous and mutually hostile local groups to each other. Following the peak of the rubber boom, the Piro worked under the control of Pancho Vargas, "great boss of the Piro" or their "chief." Vargas organized every aspect of the lives of the Piro, arranging marriages, organizing their work, baptizing their children, sponsoring rituals, and ensuring that everyone lived with everyone else—in brief, creating kinship for the Piro.[35] The Piro leave no doubt as to the violence and coercion that underscored Vargas' capacity to create kinship, but they also admit it had advantages: by forcing

32 Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 27–29.
33 Bonilla, *Des proies si désirables*: 298–303.
34 Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*: 61–68.
35 Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*: 214–16.

people to work for him in one place Vargas created the condition of coresidence upon which Piro kinship rests.[36]

The Kanamari are no strangers to this strategy. Recently, as the National Indigenous People's Agency (Funai) began to provide the Kanamari with merchandise such as metal pans, cotton hammocks, machetes, and knives, it came to be seen as "feeding" the Kanamari, and hence it began to be called "our body-owner" or "our father."[37] However, in contrast to what occurred among their neighbors, the Kanamari did not consistently use this strategy toward bosses in the extractive economy.[38] In fact, bosses were never said "to feed" the Kanamari at all. Given Kanamari patterns of mobilizing asymmetrical relations established through feeding as a condition for coresidence, this is somewhat surprising. Why did the Kanamari not adopt their neighbors' strategies? Alternatively, why were they able to elude the hierarchy of extractive activities that would have, perhaps forcibly, made them into the kin of the foreigners who "fed" them?

There are several reasons for this, some contingent and others structural. I limit myself to one in particular, namely, that the Kanamari appear to have participated in the rubber boom following its heyday in the first two decades of the twentieth century, only engaging with extractive economies toward the mid-twentieth century. This means that they mostly started to work in extractive economies after the wealthy and dominant bosses of the early 1900s had left the region. Following the erosion of the Amazonian rubber economy in the first years of the twentieth century, which culminated in an ultimate and definitive collapse of the price of rubber after World War II, the powerful bosses departed Amazonia, and their successors needed to find novel ways of keeping debt relations in place. Indeed, Kanamari oral histories make it clear that they were engaging with a diversified economy that included the extraction of some rubber alongside other forest products, incipient logging, as well as hunting and farming for local bosses. This complex economic picture made it much more difficult

36 Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*: 220; Throughout Amazonia, kinship and coresidence are conflated and are often formally indistinguishable. All of one's coresidents are hence usually kin, and all kin are usually coresident. This process was first described by Peter Rivière for the Trio, who observes: "Co-residence can be as closely binding as the ties of genealogical connexion, and in Trio thought they are not clearly distinguished" (Peter Rivière, *Marriage among the Trio: A Principle of Social Organization* [Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1969]: 65). The Piro value the kinship that they make in contemporary villages, through the desires and needs of autonomous persons, but they must accept that it is impossible to live with everyone who they want to live with, and Vargas's estate had the advantage of solving this problem, even if it was a solution the means of which would be unacceptable if adopted by Piro people.

37 Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 173–83.

38 It was used sporadically and to a limited extent, where some boys were treated as the children of the bosses who adopted them, even if only for a time (Costa, *The Owners of Kinship*: 92–96). At least in one case, a parcel of the Kanamari population were adopted by a boss who took them to the Javari river, far from their homes in the Juruá valley. However, there is no sense in which the Kanamari collectively made themselves kinspeople through the bosses, as they were to do with the National Indigenous People's Agency during the latter half of the twentieth century.

for the Kanamari to maintain ongoing and consistent relations of submission to a single boss, and there were few or no bosses who were capable of maintaining large numbers of people for longer than it took to accomplish a specific task. As a result, they sought out a range of small-time bosses, based in different estates, in order to obtain the goods that they desired during the period. Instead of resting their fortunes on a single boss who could maintain many of them, the Kanamari expanded their debts and multiplied their relationships in a chain of dyadic pairings. As their debts and bonds were individual and conflicting, the Kanamari were forced to move erratically toward new bosses and away from those to whom they were already in debt. Because, during this time, bosses rarely had the means of maintaining tight control over an estate, and because the Kanamari were spread out over a very large area, well surpassing the limits of any estate, the Kanamari could adopt a strategy in which they dodged their debts by escaping the purview of any one boss, establishing new debts by offering to work for another.[39] While debt-peonage remained an inescapable, structural fact, particular relations with particular bosses were negotiable. Rather than creating global ties of filiation, through which all Kanamari become dependent on the bosses, dependency in the rubber economy produced an excessive mobility that inhibited the emergence of kinship.

5 Shamanism

João Dias did not live long enough to see Kanamari lands demarcated and the severance of their dependence on bosses. He died during the mid-1970s, and the Vale do Javari Indigenous Reservation became a reality in the early twenty-first century.[40] Because he was a powerful shaman, however, his death was accompanied by an added risk, since the *dyohko* in his body assumed a jaguar form and fled into the forest. It hence posed a vital threat to the living, João Dias' former kinspeople, who lived in fear of its presence in the limits of their villages.

After a shaman's death, the *dyohko* assumes the form of a jaguar to the eyes of shamans and nonshamans alike. However, living shamans, due to the *dyohko* that is embedded in their own flesh, can interact in non-violent ways with the jaguar and thereby come to see it in the form of its previous image (that is, in the form of the deceased). Furthermore, there is a window of time after the shaman's death during which the *dyohko* is unaware that its former owner has died, making it confused. In

39 Luiz Costa, "Worthless Movement: Agricultural Regression and Mobility," *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 7, no. 2 (2009): 151–80, 169. For a similar Paumari strategy see Bonilla, *Des proies si désirables*: 96.

40 It occurs to me now that I have no statement on how exactly João Dias died. He was certainly well over sixty years old when he passed away.

this period, the *dyohko* seeks out its former kin, believing that they are still its actual kin. Once it finds them, though, it is unable to see them in their likeness. It can only see them as "others" (*onahan*). For this reason, it "makes enemies of them," inflicting harm on them through sorcerer darts. The death of a shaman is thus necessarily a tense affair for the living, not only because they are mourning a kinsman but also because they fear the darts thrown from the confused jaguar heart of the deceased. The loophole in this perspectival nightmare is that living shamans are not only able to see the spirit in their former image (i.e., as the deceased shaman) but are likewise able to be seen as kin, rather than as an "other," by the deceased shaman. Thus, after the death of a shaman, another shaman must go to meet the spirit, for only a shaman can stop the harm caused by a jaguar heart. This type of encounter, which pits a shaman against a jaguar heart, is called *omahik*, which I translate as "shamanic battle."

João Dias became a jaguar at his death, and the shaman that went to meet him was Dyumi, a man I know well, who was then and is still married to João Dias' daughter. Decades after the death of João Dias, this is what Dyumi told me about the meeting:

> I magically captured my father-in-law's soul, a dyohko. He died; João Dias died. It then became a jaguar. I saw it then, my father-in-law's soul, a very big jaguar. I went by myself, along a path that led from the Sibélio stream. I went with my machete, clearing away the undergrowth. Deep in the forest, I saw the dyohko, my father-in-law João Dias's heart. I went further along the path and came face to face with the jaguar. First, I spoke to it. I called, "Hey, father-in-law!" Silence. I called again. Silence again. The jaguar stared at me, and I stared at it and at the forest behind it. It became a person. A true person. I stared again and it was João Dias itself. Its true body-owner. I said: "Come here, father-in-law."
>
> "Where is Nui?" it asked after its brother. It remembered.
>
> "He is downriver, my father-in-law," I said to it.
>
> "I want to go to him, I want to see Nui," it told me. I took my pouch, which I had already filled with dyohko, and began to pierce it. Once, twice, many times I pierced it, but I could not magically capture it.
>
> "You have made me an enemy, Dyumi!" it said. "You have truly made me an enemy!" It scolded me. It did not know [that it had died]. It said again: "I am going to see Nui."
>
> But I kept piercing it with dyohko. It became a jaguar again. Then I magically captured it. It had been harming people, Luiz. It had been piercing people with dyohko.[41]

41 This report uses the word *dyohko* in apparently different ways. First, João Dias is himself a *dyohko*; second, Dyumi, a man who had undergone shamanic initiation, had extracted *dyohko* from his own body and filled a pouch with *dyohko* stones. Dyumi then uses these *dyohko* projectiles to attack João Dias, to reduce him to a form whereby he could be magically captured and familiarized. Despite this apparent polysemy, these *dyohko* are not different things, but manifestations of the same thing: the *dyohko* in Dyumi's body, which he extracts and keeps in a pouch, is what will become a jaguar at his death, requiring that another shaman magically capture him, just as he magically captured João Dias.

In a shamanic battle, the victor magically captures the spirit of the defeated entity, reducing the latter to a *dyohko.* A shamanic battle is a predatory relationship established between two agents. These may be two rival shamans or, as in this case, a shaman and a jaguar heart. The result of this predatory relation is the transformation of one of these agents into a patient vis-à-vis the other. In the case of Dyumi and João Dias, it was the latter who was magically captured and had its capacities constrained by Dyumi's control over it. It will henceforth be fed tobacco snuff by Dyumi, and stored in a pouch, to be called upon only when Dyumi needs it. Thus, a predatory event can be converted into adoption and control.[42] Had Dyumi lost the struggle, João Dias would not only have familiarized his *dyohko* but also eaten his flesh.

Furthermore, the battle transforms the relation between Dyumi and his ex-father-in-law into one of filiation. In fact, the shamanic battle is framed by a complex operational sequence that ensures that filiation is the only possible outcome. The battle itself has two moments. When Dyumi first encounters João Dias, the latter appears to him in three ways: initially as a jaguar, subsequently as a human, and then as a father-in-law. Although the father-in-law/son-in-law relationship has important sociological correlates in bride-service societies in Amazonia, its coupling with the jaguar conveys a surfeit of predatory power precluding the passage from predation to familiarization. Although Dyumi pierces it with his darts, he is unable to magically capture João Dias while it is a jaguar/father-in-law.

However, during the melee João Dias's confusion suddenly gives way to clarity. It realizes that it is no longer speaking to a son-in-law but to an enemy ("You have made me an enemy Dyumi! You have truly made me an enemy!"). It is the shamanic battle that decides the direction in which João Dias comes to rest. Dyumi continues to pierce his enemy, which turns back into a jaguar before it is finally magically captured. At first, João Dias appears as a jaguar/father-in-law and the battle transforms him into a jaguar/enemy. It is only once the transformation was completed in this way that João Dias could be defeated and magically captured (and the jaguar could be made a pet). Shrunk to a gemstone, João Dias was then stored by Dyumi in his pouch, fed snuff, and, as a consequence, brought to call its former son-in-law "my father." Predation creates enmity, which then allows feeding to create filiation.

6 Conclusion

Kinship is predicated on dependency instilled by feeding and is expressed as filiation, as exemplified during birth and growth, as well as in shamanism, which creates rela-

42 Carlos Fausto, "Of Enemies and Pets: Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 4 (1999): 933–56; Carlos Fausto, "Feasting on People: Eating Animals and Humans in Amazonia," *Current Anthropology* 48 (2007): 497–530.

tions of filiation. Kinship is not possible through relations of dependency where individual strategies multiply those on whom one depends. This multiplication of relations of dependency is refractory to the enactment of feeding as a relational schema. Here, dependency is not understood as feeding but debt-peonage.

One aspect of João Dias's biography stands out, not as exceptional but as exemplifying a fact common to all Kanamari: that his life is one of near-permanent asymmetrical dependency on others, whether his parents, bosses, or shaman-father. As far as I am able to reconstruct João Dias's biography, there are but two fleeting moments when dependency is absent: within the twenty-four hours immediately following his birth, before he begins to be breastfed by his mother and where he is a danger to those who would become his kinspeople, and immediately following his death, when he becomes a jaguar who is finally defeated and familiarized by Dyumi. These two moments are when he is most dangerous to those around him, harming those kinspeople-to-be who fail to observe taboos or misrecognizing and attacking his ex-kinspeople. Whether it creates kinship or places restrictions on it, asymmetrical relations and forms of dependency are basic features of the Kanamari theory of the person. Anyone who is not dependent on another is a danger to all others.

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Rogério Brittes W. Pires

Shared Vulnerabilities: Avenging Spirits, Corporate Groups, and Other Concepts (Saamaka, Suriname)

1 Introduction

Saamaka Maroons from the Upper Suriname River consider that the dead participate in the affairs of the living in multiple ways.[1] They may reach out to the living in visions, in dreams, or through possession; act as ghosts or ancestors; appear as *kunu*—avenging spirits who act matrilaterally; or come as *neseki*—spiritual godparents who often act patrilaterally. Saamakas argue that, through different mechanisms, *kunu* and *neseki* bring people together through shared vulnerabilities. Being potential victims of the same avenging spirits is part of what makes the members of a matrilineage; two people having the same spiritual godparent means that both were spiritually sprouted and raised by a common ancestor, sharing bodily substances and food taboos. The danger posed by the potential attack of a *kunu* creates, as counter-effect, relations of mutual protection, which may, or may not, result in *social groups*.

Herein, I briefly recap the criticism derived from Melanesian and Amazonian ethnographies of the anthropological models since the 1970s I refer to as "groupist." This underscores certain aspects of the social organization of the Surinamese Maroons, which at first, may seem to be well described by functionalist concepts, particularly due to local concerns about the order and continuity of lineages. Drawing on ethnographic evidence concerning *kunu* and *neseki*, the ideas espoused by the Maroons, concerning embodiment and corporeality as well as cooperation and corporation, may ironically be described as *spiritual-functionalism* because of their resonance with outdated anthropological concepts, such as *corporate groups* and *complementary filiation*. However, Saamakas are surely not functionalists in the precise sense of the expression; in their conceptualizations, ghosts and other spirits are considered much more relevant than the agency of social structures or related constructs.[2]

1 An earlier version of this chapter was published as Rogério B.W. Pires, "Vulnerabilidades compartilhadas: De grupos corporados a espiritual-funcionalismo entre os Saamaka do Suriname," *Etnográfica* 28, no. 2 (2023): 761–81. Aside from everyone I have already thanked in that article, I am also indebted to Sinah Kloß, Lena Muders, and Taynã Tagliati at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies for the insightful comments on this chapter.

2 Between 2011 and 2014, I spent 14 months in Upper Suriname, mostly in the village of Botopasi. This chapter is decidedly ethnological, i.e., comparative, and spends more time with theoretical debates than with ethnographic description. For more detailed ethnographic data, see Rogério Brittes W. Pires, "*A Masa Gadu Konde: Morte, Espíritos e Rituais Funerários em uma Aldeia Saamaka Cristã*" (PhD diss., Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, 2015).

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2 Corporate Groups

Social groups were central in much of the twentieth-century anthropological theory. This *groupism* was a defining characteristic of the functionalist anthropology inspired by Émile Durkheim and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, expressing that society is ultimately anchored in *corporate groups*.[3] For these theorists and their group-centered models, the central scientific task of anthropology was to describe how groups are arranged (morphology) and categorize these different arrangements (typology). This understanding of society is genealogically affiliated with social contract theories[4] and with the European obsession of ordering its colonial subjects.[5] Another important line of affiliation is often overlooked: corporate groups are synonymous (from economic, political, and legal perspectives) with *corporations*, such as trading companies or other chartered commercial organizations, as *legal entities*.[6] Comparative jurist Henry Maine first introduced the concept of corporation to anthropological debate. In *Ancient Law*, Maine argues that the basic unit in "primitive societies" was not the individual but the family, acting as a "corporation"—a word used in the abovementioned sense established by British legal tradition. Maine claimed that primitive societies are founded on *status* (rights acquired though group membership), whereas modern societies are based on *contracts* established between free individuals. Herein, the corporation forms a legal person, as an alternative to the individual. Its defining characteristic is consequently its immortality, a trait absent in "natural persons" or "physical persons."[7] Although the corporation forms a contrast to the individual, the two are not exactly opposite. As Márcio Goldman states, "these 'corporate groups' turn out to be conceived in the image and likeness of individuals, as authentic 'superpersons' endowed with specific interests, needs, desires, rights and duties."[8]

3 Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (Chicoutimi: Université du Québec, 2002 [1912]); A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Routledge, 1952).

4 George Stocking Jr., ed., *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1984).

5 Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca, 1973): Introduction, 9–19.

6 According to James Dow, "On the Muddled Concept of Corporation in Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 75 (1973): 904–8, it was Meyer Fortes, "The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups," *American Anthropologist* 55 (1953): 17–41, who instituted in anthropology the troublesome amalgamation of two distinct concepts: *corporation*, which Maine had imported from English law; and *corporate group*, the Parsonsian translation for the Weberian concept of *Verband.* Yet, what matters here is the current usage of these expressions in anthropology, which treats them as synonymous. Therefore, I make no distinction between them.

7 Henry Maine, *Ancient Law* (London: John Murray, 1908 [1861]).

8 Márcio Goldman, "Uma categoria do pensamento antropológico," *Revista de Antropología* 39, no. 1 (1996): 97. Translations from Portuguese are by the author.

Other interesting connections await revelation by a genealogy of the concept of the corporation and its variants. However, I am not engaged in genealogical criticism here but rather *ethnographic* (or *ethnologic*) criticism. Examining the Saamaka Maroons in Suriname, I contend that the idea of corporate groups is misleading when it comes to a description of how Saamakas live together and conceptualize their collectivity. However, I also hold that there is still reason to engage with corporation and related concepts because, while they may have fallen out of fashion, they represent extant epistemological foundations for anthropological discourse. Beginning with these, we may establish the way that anthropology explains sociality, developing from that point more empirical alternatives to this type of explanation.

This is nothing new. Since the 1970s, anthropologists have challenged groupist models—which prevailed in anthropology until the mid-twentieth century, empirically supported mainly by the work of British Africanists—and disputed their usefulness in certain ethnographic areas. The criticisms that were developed in New Melanesian ethnography and Lowland South America ethnology have now been thoroughly absorbed into the mainstream of anthropology.[9] I highlight two points of these critiques in particular. First, they deny group-centered anthropological models (and the concept of society, the most encompassing of all corporate groups) while also problematizing the individual, as the atomic constituent of a group and the antithesis of society. For this reason, late twentieth century theoretical contributions of Melanesianists and Americanists tend to gravitate to issues of corporeality and the body, making them central in accounts of Amerindian perspectivism[10] and of Melanesian androgyny, dividuality, and fractality.[11] Second, the authors here mentioned all aim for symmetric theories, that is, theoretical constructs granting conceptual status to native discourses, categories, and practices. The criticism of group-centered theory was therefore driven by more than intellectual dissatisfaction with rigid functionalist models or by discomfort with the ways in which corporate group theory reflects bourgeois, colonialist ideologies opposing the individual to society. Both issues are relevant, but New Melanesian and Amazonian ethnographies were largely founded upon the dawning ethnographic recogni-

9 Roy Wagner, "Are There Social Groups in the New Guinea Highlands?" in *Frontiers of Anthropology*, ed. M.J. Leaf (New York: D. van Nostrand, 1974); Joanna Overing-Kaplan, ed., *Actes du XLIIe Congrès international des américanistes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Société des Américanistes, 1977); Roberto DaMatta, Anthony Seeger and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "A construção da pessoa nas sociedades indígenas brasileiras," *Boletim do Museu Nacional (N.S.)* 32 (1979); Marilyn Strathern, "The Concept of Society is Theoretically Obsolete—For the Motion (1)," in *Key Debates in Anthropology*, ed. Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 1996).

10 Tânia Stolze Lima, "O dois e seu múltiplo," *Mana* 2, no. 2 (1996); Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio," *Mana* 2, no. 2 (1996).

11 Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1988); Roy Wagner, "The Fractal Person," in *Big Men and Great Men*, eds. Maurice Godelier and Marilyn Strathern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 159–73.

tion that group-centered terminology simply could not account for what indigenous people from the Amazon and Melanesia did, said, and thought. The structural-functionalist conceptual apparatus was a liability for anthropological translation. In short, Overing, Viveiros de Castro, Wagner, Strathern, and others acknowledged that groupist theory had no *ethnographic adherence* for their contexts of study.

My own research has been conducted among the Saamaka Maroons in Suriname,[12] in the tropical lowlands of South America, but among African American people who are sociologically comparable to the groups that were studied by classic British Africanists. While living with the Saamaka I frequently heard statements that made me think that, despite everything that I had learned from contemporary anthropology, certain concepts stemming from classic group-centered anthropology could have ethnographic adherence for my research.

In the following, I present two *modi operandi* of the dead that are central to the lives of the Saamakas that I have known: avenging ghosts called *kunu* and the *neseki*, benevolent spirits that act as basic components of Saamaka persons. The fact that the *kunu* take revenge not only on the person who is directly to blame for their deaths but also on the guilty party's entire matrilineage seems to lend ethnographic adherence to the idea of corporate groups in the study of Maroons in the Guianas. It was rather easy for ethnographers of these groups, following the symbolic-functionalist trend of 1960s and 1970s anthropology, to interpret *kunu* as symbols, or ideological embodiments of lineages. *Neseki,* on the contrary, were little studied by most anthropologists working in the Guianas, although they are no less important in people's lives than *kunu*. If we seek symmetry between anthropological and Saamaka social theories, we find a different description of the role of that the *kunu* play in Saamaka life. Furthermore, juxtaposing *neseki* and *kunu* moves the focus of anthropologic attention away from group-centered theory and toward a description of bodily-cum-spiritual and collective-cum-personal compositions. In Saamaka, spirits are the material from and against which fractal persons are composed.

12 Scholars must be careful when using African(ist) data or concepts in considering African American situations. Here, I do not make any claims concerning the "Africanness" of the Maroons of the Guianas. I merely highlight my initial impression of resemblance between certain aspects of Saamaka sociality and the image of Africa created by classic Africanist anthropology, which is only one possible Africa among many—cf. Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

3 Matrilateral Kinship, Avenging Spirits, and the Structure of Saamaka Lineages

Between the Caribbean and the Amazon, six Maroon (or *Businenge*) peoples live in their traditional territories in the forests of Suriname and French Guiana—and, more recently, also largely in the urban areas of the region—the Saamaka, Ndyuka/Auka, Boni/Aluku, Matawai, Pamaka, and Kwinti. These populations formed from the association of bands of fugitives from Dutch colonial plantations from as early as the seventeenth century. The Saamaka crystallized as a group in their decades-long war against the white colonists, which culminated in a peace treaty with the Dutch crown in 1762 that recognized their freedom within the territory around the Upper Suriname River. The other five groups share similar histories. This unique ethnogenesis explains why these Maroons were the only population of African descent in the Americas described in the earlier anthropological literature as composed of unilineal descent groups.

"Clan" is the most common anthropological translation for the Saamaka word *lo*, which generically means an unspecified quantity, such as "a lot" or "a bunch." In the strict sense of the word, *lo* are the largest internal divisions of the Saamaka people, each of them initially formed by a bunch of fugitives from a specific plantation. Each clan or *lo* is internally divided into *bee*, a word that can be translated into anthropological jargon as "matrilineal exogamous corporate group." In Saamakatongo (the Saamaka creole language), *bee* can mean "lineage," "belly," or "womb," indicating that the members of a matrilineage ultimately descend from the same womb, belonging to an apical ancestress. Next, each lineage or *bee* is further subdivided into *wosu dendu* (the inside of a house), a partition we might call "matrisegment"; each of those are divided into *bobi* ("breast"), which is similar to a "minimal segment."

Why should one translate *bee* as "matrilineal exogamous corporate group"? Here, I continue with the vocabulary chosen by anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s. As Richard Price put it in one of his early works, "On an abstract, ideal level, Saramakas conceptualize their social universe as made up of corporate, matrilineal groups which are exogamous, internally undifferentiated, and eternal, and which they call *bee*."[13] Price and other scholars developed their descriptions of the *bee* on the characteristics that made it easily fit the established conventions of structural functionalism.[14]

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13 Richard Price, "Avenging Spirits and the Structure of Saramaka Lineages," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 129, no. 1 (1973): 90.

14 Edward Green, "Matawai Lineage Fission," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 133, no. 1 (1977): 139, about the Matawai: "The *bee* is a clearly bounded corporate group which results from a rule of matrilineal descent and which usually consists of less than 100 members"; Diane Vernon, "Bakuu: Possessing Spirits of Witchcraft on the Tapanahony," *New West Indian Guide* 54, no. 1 (1980): 7, about the Ndyuka: "Within the framework of the clan, the matrilinear descendants of individual ancestors form the most relevant social group in [Ndyuka] society: the *bee*—the corporate matrilineage."

I leave the terms "matrilineal" and "exogamous" and focus on "corporate groups." In a way that is highly reminiscent of the corporations of "primitive times," speculatively inferred by Maine,[15] the Saamaka *bee*—along with the *lo*, *wosu dendu*, and *bobi*—is characterized by its members being ethically coresponsible for each other's acts. If a man is accused of rape, the rightful punishment allotted to him is that of a collective lashing or beating by the male members of the victim's family, although this punishment may also be carried out on a matrilateral classificatory brother of the accused (*baaa*) as an equivalent.[16] In addition, matrilineages transmit fundamental political and economic assets. The property of a captainship (the position of village captain, or *kabiteni*) and land tenure for gardens or houses are fundamental rights not belonging to a person but rather to their *bee* or *lo*. A person has lifetime rights over these assets; however, they are, in principle, inalienable from their clan or lineage. Thus, there is no private ownership of political office or land; both are inherited matrilaterally: when a woman dies, her sons and daughters are heirs, and when a man dies, his sisters' sons and daughters inherit. Because political office, exogamy, and land are central to the definition of the Saamaka *bee*, it would make sense to call it a corporate group.

However, there is a major force that is central to the definition of Saamaka matrilineages that goes beyond legal, land, and economic matter: that of the *kunu*, one of the most dangerous threats that are conceived of by the Saamaka. These *kunu* are avenging spirits that appear whenever a person is to blame for someone's death, whether directly or indirectly. Filled with the desire for revenge, the spirit of the deceased is committed to persecuting the killer and his or her entire matrilineage for all eternity. Misfortunes, illnesses, and deaths are routinely attributed to *kunu* attacks. When a person kills another (or is responsible for triggering a series of events that culminates in someone's death), an unending curse is created that falls on their *bee*. Any malicious or careless action can engender an avenging spirit that has the ultimate ambition of the total destruction of the guilty lineage.

Even before I had properly learned to speak Saamakatongo, some of my early Saamaka acquaintances who were proficient in English took the time to explain why some mentally ill (*siki a hedi*) persons lived in the village or why some people never entered certain areas of the bush. More often than not, the main reasons were related to *kunu.* I have heard plenty of variations of the following stories—as of many others.

15 Maine, *Ancient Law*: 112.

16 The word *baaa* is the Saamaka equivalent for the English "brother" and "cousin" in the ego's generation, whether matrilateral or patrilateral. In this example, however, only a *baaa* of the same lineage could legitimately stand in for ego, i.e., a man of his generation, matrilaterally related to him. The greater the proximity between the culprit and his "brother" (in terms of genealogy *and* intimacy), the more acceptable the substitution. There is, therefore, a continuum of coresponsibility.

A Saamaka couple got married and moved to French Guiana. However, the woman turned out to be a bad wife, that is, "the way she was living was not good," as it was told to me. She began to cheat on her husband, stole from him routinely, and, finally, abandoned him. Overcome by grief, he became ill and soon died. At his death, he became a *kunu* for his ex-wife's matrilineage, as he made known through a spirit-medium in his wife's home village whom he possessed. Two men in the woman's family were mentally unstable, and I heard whispered claims that this *kunu* was, at least in part, responsible for their psychological disorders. People considered these men's conditions to relate to multiple causes, including disregard for food taboos, curses called upon them, and the distress they suffered while living in Paramaribo. Nevertheless, spirit-mediums and oracles have again and again revealed that the same *kunu* is at the root of their suffering.

In the mid-twentieth century, a pastor (*dominee*) of the Moravian Church of Suriname went to live with his wife in Botopasi, a historically Christian Saamaka village of Upper Suriname. This *dominee* was held in high regard by the people from Botopasi when I lived there. He was considered an outstanding man that masterfully led the Sunday service. He had had good relations with everyone in the village—a prominent local religious figure. One day, a close Saamaka friend of his was attacked by witchcraft (*wisi*). This friend was well protected spiritually (*tapa*), and the person who cast the evil spell on him was probably also well protected. As a result, the spell did not affect its intended target and also did not backfire against its origin. Instead, it deflected onto the pastor, who soon fell ill and died. The ghost of the pastor, however, did not become a *kunu* for the original bewitcher but rather for his friend's matrilineage. People must always seek to protect their close acquaintances, and the friend of the pastor failed to do so, thus being culpable to his friend's enraged ghost.

These examples indicate how prolonged and complex the chains of events causing *kunu* can be. Typically, an avenging spirit originates as a result of a violent act, such as a homicide using physical or magical means. However, disrespect and humiliation can also harm and culminate in the creation of a *kunu* upon the death of the victim. As the Saamaka saying has it, "the day a leaf falls in the water is not the day it rots" (*na i daka di uwii ta kai a wata a ta poi*). This understanding of causality as distributed and delayed has pronounced effects on Saamaka conceptions of time and history.[17] As seen in the second example, carelessness toward others can engender *kunu*, even in the absence of ill intentions. Thus, it becomes apparent that ethical actions always imply shared accountability. Although the most common and feared avenging spirits are deceased humans, animals can become *kunu*. For example, if a boa con-

17 Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an African American People* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002 [1983]); Rogério Brittes W. Pires, "Matar, morrer e crer em Botopássi, Alto Suriname," *Cadernos do LEPAARQ* 11, no. 22 (2014); Stuart Strange, "'It's your Family that Kills You': Responsibility, Evidence, and Misfortune in the Making of Ndyuka History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 3 (2018).

strictor is accidentally killed when a field is burned for agriculture, its spirit will attack the matrilineage of the responsible person. This kind of *kunu*, however, can be more easily domesticated by becoming one's familiar spirit.[18]

For Saamakas, preventing the creation of new *kunu* and placating the wrath of existing ones are constant concerns. Maroons claim that *kunu* force them to measure their actions and develop close ties to their families. Most Saamakas I know explicitly state that the existence of powers such as avenging spirits are the primary forces in lineage solidarity.[19] That is, because they share the same *kunu,* everyone in a *bee* must remain united. People who are burdened by the same afflictions must live in harmony to frustrate these spirits in their appetite for lineage destruction. Whenever close matrilateral kin quarrel, they help the *kunu*'s attempt to cause harm, creating an opportunity for it to attack. In various matters of customary law, members of a single *bee* are seen as interchangeable, and they are targeted by the same vengeful spirits on the same principle. Thus, they must "live well" (*libi bunu*) together and keep track of each other's actions, sharing the fruits of their labor, and ensuring the well-being of all their relatives. After all, an evil that affects one, affects all.

Kunu create relations of dependency in several ways. The kin of an aggressor must make periodic sacrifices, libations, and visits to their deceased victim (mediated through his spirit-medium), and its *bee*. The more serious the crime was, the greater the gifts must be. Much effort and significant resources go to appeasing these spirits. However, the *kunu* also seem dependent on these offerings to "cool their heart" (*koto hati*) and rest, at least temporarily.

There are numerous avenging spirits for each tribe, clan, or village, meaning that each lineage probably has an ancestor that is acting as *kunu* of any other given lineage that they interact with. The result of this is a sort of generalized reparative exchange in which debts are multilateral, unequal, and eternally off-balance, as deaths are never fully equivalent. Such gifts never fully revoke the cause of revenge, but they do mitigate the ghost's anger and transform relationships between groups into ones of debt, not enmity. This produces negotiable, even if asymmetric, relations. These payments, together with the fear of creating more *kunu*, prevent obligations from developing into vendettas. The result, therefore, is a knot of interdependency

18 On animal *kunu* and the broader inter-species ethics among Guiana Maroons, see Stuart Strange, "Vengeful Animals, Involuntary Mourning, and the Ethics of Ndyuka Autonomy," *Cultural Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (2021).

19 There is another supernatural power, a mostly impersonal force, called *fiofio*, which also acts as a bulwark of Saamaka morality. It is a curse that strikes those who act dishonestly and disloyally, particularly toward friends and family. A man once told me it is a sort of an internal control within the family, which makes people live well with each other. Strange, "Vengeful Animals, Involuntary Mourning, and the Ethics of Ndyuka Autonomy," compares the ethical implications of oracular diagnoses that attribute responsibility for misfortunes to either *kunu, fiofio* or witchcraft (*wisi*).

rather than a spiral or pendulum, as described in Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's classic portrayal of Tupinambá revenge.[20] Psychologically and existentially, avenging spirits seem to hold a vast authority to ascertain truth, in particular regarding what and who is to blame for their own deaths, entailing the ability to determine what really happened in decisive events and who was morally responsible for them. This can also be negotiated, as the alleged guilty party can search for alternative versions for the given event. However, if the *kunu* is right, it will continue to do harm, and there will be no point in bargaining, as the family will continue to suffer.

In multiple ways, people are dependent on *kunu* to define what really happened in important events and to assign them their identity. According to the overwhelming majority of Saamaka with whom I have spoken, being affected by the same set of vengeful spirits is the most important determinant of belonging to a *bee*.[21] Consequently, to be a Saamaka is to be affected by *kunu*, insofar as tribal belonging depends on lineage membership—it is not possible to be a Saamaka and not have a *bee*. I have heard this precise line of reasoning used as an argument used against a Pentecostal Saamaka who claimed that he had no *kunu*. Another man (also a Christian, but of the Moravian denomination, which has a longer history in the region) replied that, if he did not have a *kunu*, he also did not have a matrilineage (*mama bee*), and therefore, he was not a Saamaka person (*Saamakasembe*).

Similar statements about the aggregating capacities of vengeful spirits led an earlier generation of anthropologists studying Guiana Maroons to analyze the *kunu* as a structuring principle within Maroon societies. *Kunu* have been described in the literature as "an upholder, albeit a very strict one, of the moral order,"[22] providing "the central symbol and social charter for *bee* solidarity,"[23] the element that establishes the corporate identity and responsibility of lineages and the ritual relationship between them,[24] an idiom for expressing collective responsibility and culpability, a "very important mechanism of social control,"[25] and "the clearest ideological embodi-

20 Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Vingança e temporalidade: os tupinambá," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 71 (1985).

21 Some Pentecostal Christians are exceptions, but not all of them. I have heard Pentecostals saying that they simply did not believe that *kunu* existed at all, while others said that they could perhaps exist, but they had no actual powers over the living. However, there are Saamaka Pentecostals who absolutely fear the *kunu* while understanding that their aggression should be averted not through sacrifices and prayer to the dead, but through the protective power of Jesus.

22 André Köbben, "Unity and Disunity," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 123, no. 1 (1967): 18. Talking about the Cottica Ndyuka.

23 Price, "Avenging Spirits": 96. Talking about the Saamaka.

24 John Lenoir, *The Paramacca Maroons: A Study in Religious Acculturation* (Ph.D. diss., New York: New School for Social Research, 1973): 108. Talking about the Pamaka.

25 Edward Green, "Winti and Christianity," *Ethnohistory* 25, no. 3 (1978): 271. Talking about the Matawai.

ment of the corporate nature of the localized *lo* [clan]."[26] Olívia Cunha indicates that extra-human agencies have always had a presence in Guiana Maroon studies, although little attention has been paid to the theoretical and methodological implications of their presence.[27] I agree with her recommendation to take these agencies seriously, following the concepts, categories, and cosmopolitical attachments proposed by Maroons.[28] This means following Maroon assertions concerning the agency of the dead (and other nonhumans) rather than subsuming these agencies under individuals and/or corporations (as supra-personal individuals). Doing this should be sufficient to reframe the ethnographic description and resulting theories.

According to the Saamaka, a *kunu* is an evil agent that produces positive consequences: it generates internal and external unions in lineages. Unity, or "living well together" (*libi bunu makandi*) is among the highest ideals for Saamakas. However, avenging spirits are malevolent, so their agency *indirectly* encourages this intralineage solidarity. In this long causal chain, it is ultimately the malicious or careless actions of a person that generates pain, death, and vengeful spirits; consequently, their violent actions affect a *bee* as a whole, which finally produces caution and mutual protection in the lineage. Subsequently, solidarity forms as the direct result of reciprocal, supportive actions between people (living and dead) who seek to mitigate the harmful effects of earlier destructive acts. However, living well depends on compensation for supernatural destructive potencies (which is always insufficient). It is a counter-effect, an attempt to restore unity to a world that is always in danger of destruction by violent action of humans and nonhumans.

Ironically, immortality, the main attribute of corporations as defined by Maine, plays a central role in the Saamaka theory of matrilateral groups. However, this is only in an oblique way. Maine insists that, by treating their members as morally and legally interchangeable, "corporations never die" and are "perpetual and inextinguishable";[29] therefore, they ensure the continuation of family authority following the death of its individual members, preventing groups from disbanding after the death of a leader. The historical continuity of a society and its internal arrangements hang

26 Kenneth Bilby, *The Remaking of the Aluku* (Johns Hopkins University, 1990): 147. Talking about the Aluku.

27 Olívia M.G. da Cunha, "Introduction," in *Maroon Cosmopolitics*, ed. Olívia M.G. da Cunha (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 12.

28 There are no monographs about the Kwinti, but Dirk van der Elst, "The Coppename Kwinti: Notes on an Afro-American Tribe in Surinam," *New West Indian Guide* 50, no. 1 (1975): 113–22, mentions the importance of *kunu* among them. Apparently, the Afro-Surinamese Creole (Black, non-Maroon people from Suriname), do not recognize the existence of, or do not place much importance on, vengeful spirits, which may be considered a major difference between Creole and Maroon cosmologies. See, however, Charles Wooding's *Evolving Culture: A Cross-Cultural Study of Suriname, West Africa and the Caribbean* (Washington: University Press of America, 1981) for an analysis of *kunu* and *mekunu* among the Creole of the Para region.

29 Maine, *Ancient Law*: 111–13; 164–66.

on the fictional perpetuity of the corporation. For the Saamaka, however, it is the threat of annihilation (*kaba a soso*) of a matrilineage through the malevolent and perpetual agency of the *kunu* that encourages its members to act with other members' well-being in mind. Ultimately, this is what keeps the *bee* from falling apart. Put differently, a desire for the perpetuation of lineages (and, therefore, society) is necessary for the continued existence of the lineages. However, this desire depends on a spiritual threat to its members, stemming from a past unjust death. Violence begets violence, destruction begets destruction, and danger begets danger—but they also elicit, by counter-effectuation, unity, permanence, and security. Disorder is primary, and order is secondary. Could this be some kind of Afro-Amazonian Hobbesianism?

4 Patrilaterality, Spiritual Godparents, and the Structure of the Saamaka Person

The picture becomes even more complex in view of the way that Saamakas conceive patrilaterality. As indicated here, it is through one's *bee* that people inherit land, political positions, vulnerability to a set of *kunu*, and, perhaps, membership in an exogamous corporate group. When I write generically of an individual's *bee,* I am referring to their *mama bee*, the mother's matrilineage. However, there is also *tata bee*, the father's matrilineage.

Almost 50 years ago, Richard Price highlighted the importance that fatherhood has among the Saamaka, noting that, while their descent is matrilateral, their filiation is bilateral.[30] Among the Cottica Ndyuka, Köbben sees "some slight patrilineal elements" with, however, "no indication [of] double descent."[31] My own perception, developed while living in Upper Suriname, was that duties toward the *tata bee* are not nearly as intense as those to the *mama bee*. In questions of land tenure and the transmission of political offices, authority is invested in the maternal uncle (*tio*) or in the elders of the mother's matrilineage. Publicly and politically, it is expected that an adult take the side of their *mama bee* over their *tata bee*. People are, first and foremost, part of the mother's lineage.

However, the father's side is important. To begin with, fathers expectedly have an active role in raising their children. An ideal paternal relationship is marked by voluntary care and affection, while the mother's brother acts as an authority figure. The father's support is considered an important element in a person's life, and he is expected to bestow wisdom and strength. The father also takes an active role in rites of passage to adulthood: he should gift his sons their first loincloths (*kamisa*) and shot-

30 Richard Price, *Saramaka Social Structure* (Rio Piedras: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1975): 51–54.
31 Köbben, "Unity and Disunity": 39–43.

guns (*goni*) and provides his daughters with their first aprons (*kojo*) and skirts (*koosu*). Even after his death, a good father continues to support his children, appearing to them in dreams or whispering advices when needed. The involuntary attachments that make up a person and their belongings are primarily matrilateral, but they are supplemented by strong, emotive, personal, and voluntary patrilateral bonds. As described in classic Africanist literature, the mother's brother is a source of authority, while a father is voluntary and intimate.[32] In addition to the expected development of bonds with one's father and the paternal family, some elements are involuntarily transmitted through the paternal side. From his *tata bee*, a man often inherits emblematic masculine skills, such as hunting, carving, basketry, and rhetoric. Certain maladies—such as alcoholism and mental disorders—are considered particularly transmissible from the father's side. Following the saying "spider monkeys cannot beget howler monkeys" (*kwata an ta pali babunu*), children are expected to always resemble their parents. Notably, Saamaka claim that "a father's children carry [his] taboos" (*tata mii hoi tjina*).

Saamakas whom I know tend to speak of themselves as belonging to their father's group as well as to their mother's. If someone's mother is from the village of Tutubuka, but their father is from Botopasi, they may say they are a "Tutu person" (*Tutusembe*) and "Botopasi person" (*Botopasisembe*). One whose father's clan is notorious for their sorcerers (*wisima*) can expect to hear jokes insinuating that they themselves may be a witch. Similarly, someone whose father comes from a village famous for its musicians or football players may be expected to have the same aptitudes. This works with a segmentary logic: if mother and father are from the same village, the lineage functions as the diacritical element; if the parents are from different villages, the village belonging is considered; and if they are from different clans or ethnic groups, this difference is the most relevant.

A crucial aspect for this complementary belonging is found in the protective functions of the *tata bee*. When someone slips and loses their balance, stubs their toe, or is frightened, it is almost instinctive to call upon the name of the father's matrilineage in an act of protection called *djula*. Slipping on a mossy stone in the river, someone whose father is of the Bodji lineage may shout "Bodji!" as if to ask their *tata bee* to keep them from falling, much like a person from the United States might cry out, "Jesus Christ!" This also works segmentarily; when a person's father belongs to another clan, instead of swearing *djula* with the name of the *tata bee*, they call the name of the father's clan (*lo*), as an extension of the paternal matrilineage. In addition, when a *kunu* attacks, the persons in a better position to help are the children of the men of the targeted *bee* (*paipai mii*)—for they are related to the lineage but are not vulnerable to the same vengeful spirits and thus can carry out tasks dangerous for members of the afflicted *bee* (i.e., their own *tata bee*). Similarly, in a funeral cycle,

32 Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function*: 15–31.

another dangerous occasion, people from the deceased's father's matrilineage play a prominent role.

Incest is often dealt with pragmatically in Saamakaland. Conflicts among husbands, wives, and in-laws are quite common, and therefore, marrying within one's lineage entails an increased risk of the kinds of struggles that create *kunu*. I was told that the main issue with marrying someone from the same *mama bee* (the main exogamous group) is that the children of such an incestuous relationship would have no *tata bee* to whom they could *djula*, in case of a problem; in addition, the children would not have people to assist them in the case of a *kunu* striking at them (people in the position of *paipai mii*). In addition to the deprivation of several economic and emotional benefits that are brought about by complementary filiation, someone with no *tata bee* has no one to turn to in the case of misfortune.

It is often through the paternal matrilineage that a key component of Saamaka personhood is endowed. This is the *neseki*, which we may translate as either "supernatural genitor," "namesake," or "spiritual godparent."[33] When a child is in infancy, a *neseki* chooses them to make them *sprout* (*nasi*) and *grow* (*goo*), in a process analogous to the development of a plant. A *neseki* is someone who is already dead, most often from the child's family, and likely from their *tata bee*.[34] In other words, a *neseki* is a deceased individual who holds special affection for a child and chooses to be reincarnated in her. Their soul (*akaa*), the very principle of their individuality, becomes a part of the child's person, lending it physical, spiritual, and emotional characteristics. If the *neseki* is stingy, playful, or impulsive, the child shares these characteristics. Physical features, mannerisms, and physiognomy also match people to their *neseki*. Supernatural genitors likewise transmit their *tjina*—personal food taboos—to the one in whom they sprout. This relationship is recognizably similar to the paternal relationship in Saamaka.

The soul (*akaa*) forms the most unique element of the Saamaka self. It is what makes people act the way that they do. The *akaa* is what is reincarnated in the child, inside whom it dwells for a lifespan. This does not indicate that the child and its *neseki* are seen as the same person or that their lives will be similar. However, the child necessarily inherits aspects of their supernatural genitor. The *neseki* connects the living with an ancestor (sometimes more than one)—bodily and spiritually. This spiritual "godparent" can help its "godchild" however it can, trying to make sure that this new body can lead a good life. As with the *kunu*, the volition of the dead is at stake:

33 Because each highlights a different aspect of the *neseki* and none is necessarily a better translation than the others, I will use all these terms as synonyms, while also occasionally maintaining the original Saamakatongo. See Pires, "A Masa Gadu konde": 269.

34 Much like animal *kunu*, the possibility of nonhuman *neseki* also exists, as hunting dogs, *apuku* (forest deities) and other spiritual entities can sprout children, Price, *First-Time*: 45; Pires, "A Masa Gadu konde": 268, n. 184.

the deceased person chooses who they will sprout. Of course, there is the crucial difference here that good rather than vengeful sentiments direct the choice.

The wide-ranging relations of a matrilineage are actualized in the composite body of its members. A person's body is largely an iteration of the matrilineal substance, but assemblages such as the *neseki* and the *tata bee* broaden the bodily composition beyond any repetition of the corporate group. *Tjina* and other characteristics, which are commonly acquired from the father's and the *neseki*'s side, are among the most intimate elements of personhood. These principles make each person distinctive in their genealogical formation, making them unique and composite at the same time. Something that we could call *lineal androgyny* constitutes the voluntary element of embodiment. A *neseki* establishes a unique personal relationship that joins the living and the dead and elicits the individuation of a living person through a connection of his or her bodily and spiritual development to a dead person. No one is self-contained: a child only becomes fully human once its body is assembled (sprouted and developed) by a tutelary entity.

To be who and what they are, people depend on these spirits—in such a case, the relationship is one-way because *neseki* do not require gifts or sacrifices from the living. Although this is asymmetrical and has drawbacks, it is not seen as an imposition. Everyone is simply and necessarily influenced and determined by another. People rely on and need their spiritual godparents.

My Saamaka interlocutors maintain that each person can only have one *neseki*, although this is different from Vernon's findings among Ndyuka.[35] Meanwhile, in Botopasi, I heard a discussion on whether a single person can sprout more than one child. The most convincing argument was based on the analogy to vegetables: an elder said that, in the same way that several stalks can sprout from a single ear of corn, one soul can sprout several children. In any case, even if we believe that each person can have only one *neseki*, this does not mean that the *neseki* must act alone. A very loose sort of spiritual lineage may be understood as being established though one's spiritual godparents. For instance, Belfón Abóikóni—the Saamaka *gaama* (paramount leader) who died in 2014—had as his *neseki* a woman called Bôò, the mother of the former *gaama* Agbagó. Bôò had Lukéinsi as her *neseki*, and Lukéinsi was the spirit-medium of a very powerful, ancient forest deity. Belfón was directly linked only to Bôò but claimed an indirect link to Lukéinsi, augmenting his reputation for ritual power.[36] Additionally, two people with the same *neseki* will have a special relationship. When one dies, the other is at risk of being taken away to the land of the dead.[37]

35 Diane Vernon, *Les réprésentations du corps chez les noirs Marrons Ndjuka du Surinam et de la Guyane Française* (Paris: ORSTOM, 1992): 27.

36 Richard Price, *Rainforest Warriors: Human Rights on Trial* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011): 127.

37 Richard Price, *Alabi's World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990): 309, n. 10.

Köbben and Price mention that one of two people who share a food taboo (*tjina*) can disarm magic traps (*kanduu*) set up by one another without harmful consequences.[38]

Nevertheless, sets of people who share a *tjina* or *neseki* are not conceptualized in Saamaka as groups (as is the case in places where food taboos are linked to totems, for instance). In Upper Suriname, people often do not even know their neighbors' *tjina*, as this is sensitive information. The "spiritual lineage" that is established by a *neseki* is surely not a lineage in the sense of forming a corporate group but is rather a personal ancestry that one can trace from a specific position in a matrix of relations. Here, however, it is not the individual that is at stake. Vulnerability and protection are understood as embodied attributes of a person's spiritual and genealogical composition. They form markers of personal difference with respect to what we may call *dividuals*, denoting a person as an open unit or an assemblage that is composed of multiple, heterogeneous, collective, and personal attachments. As Strathern contends, bodily features are registers of the interactions composing a person's innermost attributes. Persons are "microcosms of relations," constantly in motion, as each of these relations can be built upon or taken apart. Each person is vulnerable to their bodily dispositions and to the wills and desires of others.[39]

5 Complementary Filiation, Destructuring, Spirits, and the Body

In 1975, Richard Price wrote: "The close identification of a man with his father's *lo* [and *bee*] reveals an important function of the Saramaka concept of paternity: to differentiate among the matrilineal kinsmen with whom most social interaction takes place."[40] Anyone familiar with classic British anthropology will likely notice the proximity of the concept of complementary filiation, as developed by Meyer Fortes:

> Since the bilateral family is the focal element in the web of kinship, complementary filiation provides the essential link between a sibling group and the kin of the parent who does not determine descent. So a sibling group is not merely differentiated within a lineage but is further distinguished by reference to its kin ties outside the corporate unit. This structural device allows of degrees of individuation depending on the extent to which filiation on the non-corporate side is elaborated.[41]

As we have discussed food taboos, we are even closer to Fortes, who argues that eating is an autonomous, individual activity that is particularly susceptible to voluntary

38 Köbben, "Unity and Disunity"; Price, *Saramaka Social Structure*: 51–52.
39 Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*: 131–32.
40 Price, *Saramaka Social Structure*: 53.
41 Fortes, "The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups": 33.

regulation because it literally incorporates elements of the person's external environment. Taboos would thus "serve as the material vehicles of transactions and relationships of binding moral and ritual force. [. . .] In short, eating lends itself uniquely to the imposition of rules."[42] This is an unmistakable example of groupist theory, in which sociality is described as essentially juridical: social phenomena would have, first and foremost, a regulatory function with respect to human lives and people as bundles of social roles and statuses.

Even if I have elsewhere highlighted the importance of rules (*weti*) in Saamaka political philosophy,[43] it would be absurd to boil Saamaka life down to obedience to or disobedience of social norms. Saamaka institutions that are related to complementary filiation can reasonably be described as the features that differentiate a person in their lineage. However, this has little to do with creating more precise legal identities. The issue with functionalist analysis is that it inverts people's ideas about themselves and the world that they live in. From a Saamaka perspective, the complementary relationship that one has with their *tata bee* does not relate to individuating or to creating natural persons in the legal sense. It is about assembling the person and the body. Similarly, food taboos do not concern the introjection of moral imperatives, after all, in this context, there is nothing immoral in eating your *tjina*, much in the same way that it is not immoral to eat gluten if one is intolerant. Morality thus excluded, these particular taboos manifest the way dietary peculiarities associate the living with the dead (or, rather, specific living and dead persons) who share the same vulnerabilities.

In classic anthropological theory, what I call a *functionalist inversion* was necessary for preserving a particular theoretical point: the idea that the forces structuring society are inherent in society. Anglophone Africanists maintained it, even when these very forces appeared to militate against cohesion. Antisocial phenomena were described as structuring devices, leading to increasingly paradoxical theoretical reasoning. As Wagner argued, concepts such as Fortes's complementary filiation or Gluckman's rituals of rebellion ultimately made functionalism collapse in on itself, by increasingly highlighting that the reality of social groups was not as self-evident as demanded by the sociocentric argument. Eventually, structural-functionalist theory began to crumble. Meanwhile, we must concede that its concepts had some measure of ethnographic adherence: they emerged from the acts and ideas of the peoples that these anthropologists worked with. "We might conclude that social anthropology was teased to become its opposite by the exigencies of dealing with its subject matter."[44] In Guiana Maroon ethnology, the once robust functionalist approach was silently

42 Meyer Fortes, "Totem and Taboo," in *Religion, Morality and the Person. Essays on Tallensi Religion*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 [1966]): 139.

43 Rogério Brittes W. Pires, "Funerals, Rhetorics, Rules and Rulers in Upper Suriname," in *Maroon Cosmopolitics*, ed. Olívia M.G. da Cunha (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

44 Wagner, "Are There Social Groups in the New Guinea Highlands?": 100.

abandoned, unlike what happened in Melanesian and Amerindian studies. Not even Richard Price, who radically shifted toward a historical-culturalist approach marked by ethnographic experimentation, bothered to criticize the theoretical models that he once advocated. Functionalism and structural functionalism gradually lost their relevance. In anthropology, the demise of this perspective was partially because of letting go of a focus on so-called "primitive" or "traditional" societies and the demand, brought in by decolonization, to pay closer attention to history. This forced Africanists to rethink their approaches. As seen, there were also new paradigms emerging from other ethnographic areas. In Caribbean scholarship, in which purely synchronic models and "the village tradition of the anthropological monograph"[45] had always been problematic, this demise was even more rapid.

Nevertheless, for certain aspects of Maroon life there may still be ethnographic adherence to some old-fashioned concepts, such as complementary filiation and corporate groups. However, if we are to use these, they must be subverted by reshifting the functionalist inversion.

It would be easy conceptualize the *kunu* as totems, in the Radcliffe-Brownian or Durkheimian sense:[46] social institutions functioning to symbolize cohesion among sociological units, reinforcing internal solidarity and external ties, thus helping assert that the universe has a cohesive moral and social order, fulfilling the necessary conditions for the continued existence of society. Because *kunu*, *neseki*, *tjina*, and other agencies have obvious sociocentric consequences, this was long the predominant view in Maroon ethnography and ethnology.

The following is the proposed reshifting, namely, that we make an effort to describe as real only what the Saamaka understand to exist. If we do that, different things are obviated. Thus, the cohesive capacities of vengeful spirits and *neseki* could suggest something that we might ironically call *spiritual-functionalism*. After all, nothing in Saamaka discourse resembles social structure. However, there are spirits who self-evidently serve a function, but not as ideology, mystification, or representation. Social units, at various levels—clans, lineages, and even looser bonds, such as those joining people who share a *neseki*—emerge *as a function of* virtual or actual (but real) supernatural threats.

Following Maroon interpretations, we could say particular supernatural agencies compel the members of a *bee* to "live well" (i.e., in harmony) with each other. They do so by connecting long chains of ethically relevant events with bodily and familial codependency.[47] In the fatalistic worldview of Saamaka, the need for solidarity is largely created by external forces that punish antisocial human behavior. The *kunu* and

45 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 34.

46 Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function*: 117–32; Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*.

47 Strange, "'It's your Family that Kills You'."

other destructive powers form a constant threat to destroy the world (*booko gonliba*), which means that, in Saamaka, "corporations" can, indeed, die, if its members do not protect each other. However, unlike what happens in the United Kingdom, in the Amazon (not only for Maroons), spirits are much more important for the composition of sociality than any legal apparatus. Hence, if there are corporate groups in Upper Suriname—and they seemingly have a stronger claim for existence there than in the New Guinea Highlands or native Lowland South America—their corporeality is less similar to the legal fiction of the corporation and more like a protective arrangement created in response to personal and collective threats. In other words, these collective bodies are constituted by its members' shared vulnerabilities.

With my quip about spiritual-functionalism, I intend to draw attention to certain continuities that join classical and contemporary anthropology while simultaneously following a descriptive turn toward literalism and symmetry. Swapping structure for spirit, we can grasp the extensive network of sociality that Maroons are a part of[48] and how it assigns a profound responsibility toward the living and the dead as well as humans and nonhumans. In Maroon cosmopolitics,[49] vulnerability, pain, grief, and violence are the motors of history and sociality, which create ethical links among diverse beings and bodies.[50]

Comparing the mother's (*kunu*) and the father's (*neseki* and *tjina*) sides, we observe different modalities of shared vulnerability. Matrilateral vulnerabilities are rooted in violent or unethical attitudes, and, as a side effect, a belonging to a well-delimited group is created. Patrilateral vulnerabilities are more personal and bear less moral weight; they are indexes of familiar and beneficial relationships. Each *kunu* forms a new predatory relation reinforcing a network of preexisting supportive relationships between the members of one *bee* and among different *bee*. Each *neseki* provides a novel dyadic relation of solidarity, reinforcing previous ties. From one's father's matrilineage comes food taboos (*tjina*), which are shared vulnerabilities that index, in their children's bodies, a relation of affinity between two corporate groups. In addition, the *tata bee* brings *unshared* vulnerabilities to light, against which patrilateral protection is necessary (*djula*, helping defend against *kunu*). None of these institutions is more important than the others.

Vengeful spirits are neither ideological superstructure nor sociological infrastructure. The *kunu* does not define lineages by itself; instead, history, genealogy, political offices, and land are just as central. As Strathern notes, "identifying a key institutional

48 Marilyn Strathern, "Cutting the Network," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 3 (1996).

49 Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques*, 7 vols. (Paris: La Découverte, 2003–2007).

50 Cunha, "Introduction"; Strange, "'It's your Family that Kills You'"; Strange, "Vengeful Animals"; Stuart Strange, "Spirits and Pain in the Making of Ndyuka Politics," in *Maroon Cosmopolitics*, ed. Olívia M.G. da Cunha (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Stuart Strange, *Suspect Others: Spirit-Mediums, Self-Knowledge, and Race in Multiethnic Suriname* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2021).

backbone is itself a theoretical residue from older anthropological analyses of 'social structure' as the bony articulation of 'life' and other processes."[51] Juxtaposing different *modi operandi* of the dead and assorted assemblages of matri- and patrilateralities, it becomes apparent that none of these should be considered more foundational than the others. No areas of life are more or less social.[52] At an infrapersonal level, *neseki* are as relevant as vengeful spirits are at a collective level. There is no autonomous social totality that hinges on more encompassing institutions to function. There are only modes of assembling the dead and living to compose people and groups, allowing them to work together as open units.

Consequently, Businenge ontology is surely not a kind of Afro-Amazonian Hobbesianism. Indeed, there are questions foundational to European political philosophy which are interesting to the Maroons as well, namely, those that concern social order and the ways that people can and should live together. Nevertheless, Maroons arrive at answers very different from Europeans, far from the oppositions of individual/society, contract/status, or volition/coercion. Classical anthropology—as an heir to social contract theories—has claimed that the only nonhuman persons that can really exist are corporate groups; these act as superpersons with the same interests and duties as the manipulating, market-driven individual. This is an intellectual move that transcendentalizes the idea of a group, and makes the social body immortal.[53] This is what I call groupism and group-centered theory.

It is not surprising that a Maroon people—the children of resistance to slavery—would be concerned with the potentially harmful effects of human action or would claim that mutual protection against violence is central to the existence of their communities. However, their ideas bear little resemblance to Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Their origin is not found in an independent, transcendent individual, that is only secondarily related to whatever is external to itself. Instead, people are always composed of other people, be it dead or living.

Some final words concerning the body and the person. I reported above that a great deal of criticism against corporate groups in anthropology is anchored in ideas of embodiment and corporeality. Following this idea and subverting the structural-functionalist model, it is possible to state that the *corporification* of Saamaka lineages and clans—what grounds their ability to act as units—largely resides in personal corporeality. *Neseki* are a matter of embodiment who play a fundamental role in the physical development of the child, as are avenging spirits, defining the main dangers facing a living person. The "bodies" of Saamaka "corporate groups" are open and defined against the agency of a supernatural entity, as are people's bodies. The limits of the body tend to be seen as universal, as the skin acts as physical and visible barrier,

51 Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*: 67.

52 Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*: 74.

53 Paraphrasing José Carlos dos Anjos, "Elites intelectuais e a conformação da identidade nacional em Cabo Verde," *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 25, no. 3 (2003): 590.

but bodies are always open, porous. Corporification does not delimit legal entities, individuals, or collective superpersons; it demarcates collective and personal compositions that are simultaneously material and immaterial.

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Marcelo Moura Mello

Transforming Bodies in Kali Worship, Guyana

1 Introduction

In the concluding remarks of his seminal text *Les techniques du corps*, Marcel Mauss boldly suggested, after highlighting the existence of a whole type of techniques of the body to be studied, that there are biological means *d'entre en communication avec Dieu* (of entering into communication with God).[1] While this suggestion could be read as an illustration of central Durkheimian concerns, namely, highlighting the social dimension of every human phenomenon, from the most "natural" acts of daily life, such as walking and sleeping, to suicide, Mauss was setting a research agenda to explore the complex relationships between the innate capacities of humankind and socially embodied skills.[2] Mauss's interest in techniques (as well as in technologies) is consistent with his conception of social beings as total men, with his endorsement of all-embracing ethnography.[3] Mauss conceived the techniques of the body as traditional precisely because they are taught, acquired, and transmitted, involving shared and learned practices, collective representations, and the generation of practical, rather than merely discursive, knowledge. The techniques of the body are efficient and meaningful. As such, an inventory of bodily techniques demands a study of symbolism.

1 Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950): chapter 6 ("Les techniques du corp"): 386.

2 The "Techniques of the Body" is Mauss's 1936 presidential address to the Société du Psychologie of Paris. Mauss refined the links between sociology and psychology, partly nuancing Durkheim's dualisms. Nathan Schlanger posits some important differences between Durkheim's and Mauss's approaches in detail. Nathan Schlanger, "Introduction: Technological Commitments: Marcel Mauss and the Study of Techniques in the French Social Sciences," in *Marcel Mauss: Techniques, Technology, and Civilization* (London: Berghahn, 2008): 1–30. For instance, "[w]hereas Durkheim saw objects acquiring their symbolic significance only at the outcome of some extraordinary rituals, Mauss on the contrary appreciated that it took perfectly ordinary practical undertakings for objects and practices to be infused with social efficiency and meaning." Schlanger, "Introduction": 21–22.

3 Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970); Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss," in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, auth. Marcel Mauss (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950): ix–lii; Schlanger, "Introduction"; Valerio Valeri, "Marcel Mauss and the New Anthropology," *HAU—Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3, no. 1 (2013 [1966]): 262–86.

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Mary Douglas's interpretation of Mauss's essay emphasized that the study of bodily techniques would necessarily occur in the context of a study of symbolic systems. Seeking to explore the relationships between nature and culture and the ways bodily techniques always come clothed in particular local histories and cultures, Douglas highlighted what she called the "vertical dimension" of bodily experience, i.e., "bodily control is an expression of social control."[4] However, as Talal Asad remarked, Mauss's primary interest was not emphasizing the cultural variation of bodily expressions. Instead, Mauss "aims to explore the dynamic constitution of embodied behaviour [. . .] as *apt* behaviour" (emphasis in original).[5] According to Asad, the body should not be simply viewed as the passive recipient of cultural imprints or as a vehicle for expressing meaning. As an "assemblage of embodied aptitudes, the body is a self-developable means for achieving a range of human objects—from styles of physical movement to kinds of spiritual experiences, including "entering into communication with God."[6] In summary, Mauss opened up the "possibility of inquiring into how embodied practices (including language-in-use) form a precondition for varieties of religious experience" and thinking of the "mutually constituting relationship between body-sense and body-learning."[7]

The acquisition of appropriate behavior (or of bodily competence) depends on forming embodied practices informed and evaluated by discourses over religious authority, legitimacy, and discipline.[8] Incorporating disciplines and normative religious values, which are constantly being contested,[9] occurs amid several relations among different beings whose powers, in Godfrey Lienhardt's understanding,[10] variously affect peoples' bodily and mental dispositions.

In religious traditions, such as the worship of the Hindu goddess Kali in Guyana, the embodying of spiritual beings—from Hindu deities to the spirits of colonial times—takes place where asymmetrical dependencies between humans and other-than-humans traverse communication and contact between such beings.[11] Although Asad

4 Douglas, *Natural Symbols*: 73.

5 Talal Asad, "Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 47.

6 Asad, "Remarks": 47.

7 Asad, "Remarks": 47–48.

8 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 1993).

9 Aisha Khan, *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

10 Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of Dinka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

11 The use of the term "other-than-human" is inspired by Sophie Chao's reflections on terms such as nonhuman, multispecies, and more-than-human. In a nutshell, using "other-than-human" avoids replicating hierarchies of worth rooted in colonial logic, anthropocentrism, and racialized constructions of the human. Catherine Price and Sophie Chao, "Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Nonhuman, Other-

accurately discards a strict symbolic analysis—remember that Douglas sought to explore, as the subtitle of her famous and controversial *Natural Symbols* makes evident, cosmologies—I argue that we must pay close attention to local conceptions of the body and how human and more-than-human persons can become permeable to each other. Religious practices and disciplines must be apprehended in relation to extra-human forms of agency and their (inter)dependence on humans.

Considerably, the remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: first, I briefly address the main characteristics of Kali worship in Guyana and its historical development. After describing practices involved in *devotion*[12] and offering an overview of how humans embody (or *manifest*, in local terms) Hindu deities, I present an ethnographic narrative. This narrative, along with all the data presented in this book chapter, is based on ethnographic research among Kali devotees. Most of my observations concentrated on two Kali temples—Bath and, especially, Blairmont (footnote 29). The concluding remarks turn attention to permeability and suggest some analytical possibilities.

2 Kali Worship

Transplanted to Guyanese shores by Indian men and women arriving in the colony of British Guiana[13] between 1838 and 1917 as indentured laborers, Kali worship involves the manifestation of Hindu deities (their "possession" of people), animal sacrifices, and healing practices. Weekly *pujas* (offerings) are performed in temples to several gods and goddesses (usually seventeen) whose *murtis*, sculptured images of the deities, are emplaced in altars. The main deity in Kali worship is Mariamma, a goddess who is associated with healing and with the Pan-Hindu goddess Kali.

Kali worship, or *Kali Mai Puja*, as it is locally known, is a heterodox Hindu sect of South Indian origin. From the early years of the indentured system, South Indian indentured laborers, the so-called *Madrasis*, were deemed inferior by their fellow counterparts of North Indian ancestry.[14] In a colony where Anglo-European values were

Than-Human: Reimagining Idioms of Animacy in an Age of Planetary Unmaking," *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (2023): 177–93.

12 In this text, words and phrases in italics refer to categories employed by my interlocutors.

13 The independence from Great Britain occurred in 1966. Since then, the country is named Guyana.

14 During the indenture system, laborers from India departed from Calcutta (Kolkata) in the north and Madras (Chennai) in the South. More than 85% came from the north of the subcontinent, while around 10% were from Madras (now Tamil Nadu) and Andhra Pradesh. Overall, more than 83% of the immigrants were Hindus, while 16% were Muslims. Christians represented <1% of the immigrants. Walter Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Raymond Smith, "Some Social Characteristics of Indian immigrants in British Guiana," *Population Studies* 13, no. 1 (1959): 34–39.

hegemonic,[15] Indian immigrants were labeled as pagans. The Victorian tendency to conceive religion as a metonym for culture and civilization played an essential role here, contributing to the racialization of the immigrants.[16]

Scholarship on East Indians in Guyana tends to stress the impacts of the indentured system and plantation regime on the immigrants' religious and cultural practices. I will not deal with this topic in detail.[17] In the final decades of the nineteenth century, more inclusive religious organizations emerged—such as Sanatan Dharma, a Hindu sect that was of self-proclaimed orthodox, Brahmin, and Northern Indian in origin. The rise of Sanatan Dharma was directly related to the efforts made by East Indian leaders to legitimize Hinduism in an asymmetric colonial setting based on (Protestant) Christian values. Sanatan Dharma members dissociated themselves from morally suspect practices, such as those related to possession and animal sacrifice, attributing them to the South Indians alone. Thus, some Hindu sects and religious practices were pushed to the margins of official Hinduism, as was the case for Kali worship.

While Sanatan Dharma gained legitimacy among Hindus in Guyana and in the Caribbean, over time, its religious practices transcended their linguistic and regional origins. Among South Indians, the Mother Goddess was and is primarily known as Mariamma—a village goddess who is popular across South India. As Stephanos Stephanides and Karna Singh demonstrated, in Guyana, the designation Kali worship (or Kali Mai Puja) superseded that of Mariamma in popular usage:

> In Guyana, direct contact took place among different groups who may not have been in direct contact in India. This created the possibility of new negotiations and translations of meaning. Although the forms of Mariamma and Kali were probably associated in Tamil Nadu, before 'Madrasis' arrived in Guyana, the Hindu goddess Kali (whose modern-day worship is especially popular in Bengal) is better known to the Hindu great tradition.[18]

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15 Brackette Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

16 Aisha Khan, "Islam, Vodou, and the Making of Afro-Atlantic World," *New West Indian Guide* 86, no. 1–2 (2012): 29–54; Aisha Khan, *The Deepest Dye: Obeah, Hosay, and Race in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

17 See Chandra Jayawardena, "Religious Belief and Social Change: Aspects of the Development of Hinduism in British Guiana," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8 (1966): 211–40; Sinah Theres Kloß, "Manifesting Kali's Power: Guyanese Hinduism and the Revitalization of 'Madras Tradition'," *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies* 41, no. 1 (2016): 83–110. Look Lai, *Indentured Labor*; Keith McNeal, *Trance and Modernity in the Southern Caribbean: African and Hindu Popular Religions in Trinidad and Tobago* (Miami: University Press of Florida, 2011); Steven Vertovec, '"Official' and 'Popular' Hinduism in the Caribbean: Historical and Contemporary Trends in Surinam, Trinidad, and Guyana," in *Across the Dark Waters*, eds. David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (London: MacMillan, 1996): 108–30; Paul Younger, *New Homelands: Hindu Communities in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji and East Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

18 Stephanos Stephanides and Karna Singh, *Translating Kali's Feast: The Goddess in Indo-Caribbean Ritual and Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000): 18. For the origins and development of Kali worship,

According to the Kali devotees who have the South Indian ancestry, the very designation of Kali worship was a means of communicating with North Indians. Although scholarly interest in the historical transformations of religious and cultural practices of Indian immigrants is extremely valuable, much less attention has been devoted to associations between different deities that are premised on the complex concept of *form*, which points simultaneously to the oneness and multiplicity of the divine.[19] For Kali devotees and other Hindus in Guyana, there is only one God, a primordial being that manifests in different forms. Ultimately, all Hindu deities are forms of this supreme being, or, as Louis Dumont aptly suggested,[20] Hindu conceptions of the divine are expressed through the operations of association and logics of extension; hence, the oft-repeated statement of Guyanese Hindus: *all the deities are the same*, or *the deities have different names but they are all the same*. That is, while the supreme being is one, other ontological states exist in its very essence, as virtuality. In other words, each divine form pre-exists in the supreme being as a possibility; the existence of each is a transformation of the Supreme.

Transformations do not cease to occur. For instance, among my interlocutors, God Khal Bhairo is considered to be a *dark form* of Shiva (see Fig. 1). Khal Bhairo is not singular and can take diverse forms: dark, ferocious, voracious, perverse, or, conversely, amenable. All deities (*deotas*) have terrible and benign forms, although some—like Khal Bhairo—are closer to one of these extremes. Khal Bhairo may sometimes assume a benign form, while Lakshmi, with a docile temperament, can take a malign form. Ultimately, each deity has some attributes that supersede others. Further, the deities are related in different ways. Some Hindu goddesses possess singular and individual names and are related to other goddesses considered their *sisters*. Some gods are *masters*, meaning, among other things, that they guard the boundaries of homes and temples. In the ritual sphere, each deity's primary attributes determine the offerings to be made and the sort of human problems that they *deal with*, as Kali members say.

The value of addressing historical changes in Hinduism in the Caribbean is undeniable. Because of the high stigmatization of Kali worship in Guyana (including by other Hindus), discourses on religious and ritual legitimacy are fundamental to Kali devotees. However, stressing only discourses and contests concerning religious legitimacy prevents a finer understanding of how Kali devotees consider ongoing processes of transformation. Attending to the ways Hindu deities' manifestation happens in Kali

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see also Kloß, *Manifesting Kali's Power* and McNeal, *Trance and Modernity.* Indeed, it is too simplistic to attribute Kali worship origins to South Indian alone.

19 R.L. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, Faculty of the Divinity School, 1978); Diana Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 [1981]).

20 Louis Dumont, *Une sous-caste de l'Inde du Sud. Organisation sociale et religion des Pramalai Kallar* (Paris: Mouton: 1957).

Fig. 1: Murti of God Khal Bhairo. Photo by the author.

temples, we can approach the emergence, transformation, and development of corporeal capacities in relationship with the powers of spiritual entities.

3 Doing Devotion, Preparing the Body

Kali devotees usually gather on Sundays for the religious service, which lasts the entire day. This *service*, which consists of offerings to all deities who are emplaced on altars, is followed by the invocation (*call up*) of certain healing deities who deliver oracular messages through the bodies of *marlos*, religious experts whose bodies become temporary vehicles of divine agency.

While many devotees *manifest* Hindu deities during the service, only some become marlos. As I have demonstrated elsewhere,[21] divine manifestations are not homogenous. They develop over time and can be more or less *pure*, *deep*, or *full*, depending on the constancy of the *devotion*, training, and restraining from meat, sex, alcohol, and drug consumption for the three days that precede the religious service. In other words, a person can only become a marlo if his or her body can be permeable to Hindu deities, to stand their power, *shakti*.

Attendance at a Kali temple implies engaging in a bodily discipline that prepares people to live specific religious experiences. Even experienced marlos with good reputations are expected to engage in all sorts of religious practices, from cleaning the gar-

21 Marcelo Moura Mello, "*Murtis* em movimento: relações entre pessoas, coisas e divindades em um templo hindu na Guiana," *Mana—Estudos em Antropologia Social* 24, no. 1 (2018): 103–30.

den to weaving *maalas* (garlands of flowers) for the deities. One becomes a marlo only after *doing devotion* for an extended period, for manifestation is a *gift*, a gift that the deities themselves can withdraw if the one who has been gifted is unable to *keep the devotion*.[22] A human depends on the gifts granted by the deities to manifest them.

Devotion is not a mental state, nor is it the equivalent of faith. It is a range of practices, including attending religious services, making offerings, focusing the mind on the deities, chanting hymns in their honor, and trying to live a religious life every day. To be engaged in Kali temples involves avoidance of contact with polluting substances from other persons. As such, devotion cannot be the result of individual acts. Actions and interactions are never entirely separated; they must change together. Devotion is a bodily discipline.[23] To incorporate divine agency, the body must become pure and permeable to *shakti*.[24] Through devotion, a Kali member (for instance, a person who begins training to develop the manifestation of a deity or someone who must perform rituals to praise the deities for several weeks) develops into an assemblage of embodied aptitudes.

In Kali worship, human bodies are essentially permeable to other beings, which may just be another way of saying that the bodies have capacities to affect and be affected by other bodies, to evoke Spinoza's classic definition. Thus, bodily care is fundamental, as it implies the transformation of bodily states and capacities. Different beings, some of whom are involved in disputes with others, take part in the constitution of individuals whose very existence is entangled with varying relations of depen-

22 Holding the position of marlo involves disputes among people, which are fueled by gossip. See Marcelo Moura Mello, "Devoções manifestas. Religião, pureza e cura em um templo da deusa hindu Kali (Berbice, Guiana)" (PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2014).

23 Asad, *Genealogies.*

24 Manifestation is also related to materiality. Thus, shakti irradiates itself from the murtis. In Kali worship, the boundaries between deities, persons, bodies, ritual objects, altars, offerings, murtis, sacrificed animals, clothes, and cooking utensils are not given. For matters of space, I will not detail the complex relationship between manifestation and materiality here but see: Sinah Theres Kloß, *Fabrics of Indianness: The Exchange and Consumption of Clothing in Transnational Guyanese Hindu Communities* (New York: Palgrave, 2016); Sinah Theres Kloß, "Embodying Dependency: Caribbean *Godna* (Tattoos) as Female Subordination and Resistance," *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 27, no. 4 (2022): 601–12; McNeal, *Trance and Modernity*; Mello, *Murtis*; Marcelo Moura Mello, "Materiality, Affection and Personhood: On Sacrifice in the Worship of the Goddess Kali in Guyana," *Vibrant* 17 (2020): 1–20; Marcelo Moura Mello, "Dançando com os karagam: corpo, materialidade e possessão espiritual em uma tradição hindu na Guiana," in *Espírito das Coisas: etnografias da materialidade e da transformação*. *Espírito das coisas: etnografias da materialidade e da transformação*, eds. Olívia M.G. da Cunha and C. Gomes de Castro (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da UFRJ, 2022): 53–79; McNeal, *Trance and Modernity*. Stuart Strange, *Suspect Others: Spirit Mediums, Self-Knowledge, and Race in Multiethnic Suriname* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021). I would add, inspired by Miho Ishii, that the relationships between humans and "things" should focus on bodily actions *with* things, not *through* things. Miho Ishii, "Acting with Things: Self-Poiesis, Actuality, and Contingency in the Formation of Divine Worlds," *HAU—Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 371–88.

dence. In a relational web that is marked by permeability and mutual processes of transformation of bodies, whether human or other-than-human, the boundaries between persons are porous and can dissolve.[25]

Kali devotees say that a person manifests a deity and a deity manifests itself in a person.[26] Ideally, if a manifestation is pure or deep, the manifesting person loses consciousness while manifesting. Marlos cannot remember the acts they have performed or the oracular messages delivered by a deity. They only *come back to senses* after the deities have left their bodies. In practice, marlos are graded individually because as it is frankly admitted, they may fake a manifestation and the manifestation of reputed marlos can be weakened, either due to *breaking the fast* (for instance, not following all of the restrictions imposed before attending a temple) or someone can be affected by malevolent spirits that can *cross the manifestation*, mimic Hindu deities, and deliver inaccurate oracular messages.[27] Relationships with other-than-humans beings can afflict and affect humans.

Chief among beings that afflict people and make them sick are the spirits of the first colonizers of the country—the Dutch. They are considered the *masters of the land* or *boundary masters* of the country's coastal region. These spirits still seek retaining control over properties once owned by Dutch settlers in the past, in particular where sugar plantations exist or once operated. These Dutch spirits carry memories of their violent acts, inflicting attacks on the living. They often have sexual relations with humans in dreams, causing illness, excessive desires, and mental confusion, even to the point of causing suicides. Thus, if humans are ontologically dependent on Hindu deities—present even in the most intimate moments of human existence[28]—their mental and corporeal states remain unstable. People must nurture relationships with the deities because, among other reasons, their bodies can be affected by the power of other beings. To elaborate, I now turn to a critical experience of a woman—Sally, a marlo in the Kali temple of Blairmont.[29]

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25 Janet Carsten, *After Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 109–35; McKim Marriott, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism," in *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchanging and Symbolic Behavior*, ed. Bruce Kapferer (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976): 109–42; Isabelle Nabokov, *Religion against the Self: An Ethnography of Tamil Rituals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

26 For instance, *Sally manifests Khal Bhairo*; or, *Khal Bhairo manifests itself upon Sally*, or even *Sally's manifestation of Khal Bhairo*.

27 Marcelo Moura Mello, "Mimesis, poder e dúvida: divindades Hindus e espíritos de colonizadores na Guiana," *Horizontes Antropológicos* 26, no. 56 (2020): 57–86. Marcelo Moura Mello. "Articulação oracular e pesquisa de campo," *Aceno, Revista de Antropologia do Centro-Oeste* 7, no. 1 (2020): 35–52.

28 Strange, *Suspect Others*.

29 Most of my ethnography was conducted during my doctoral research, between 2010 and 2012. I conducted ten months of fieldwork, especially in the region of Berbice. In 2018, I made further two short trips to Berbice, Guyana, which totaled 45 days. All names employed here have been changed.

4 Sally, the Temple, and the Boundaries

Sally was a marlo of God Khal Bhairo in Blairmont temple for many years. She received praise for being capable of *standing* a great deal of divine power (*shakti*), deeply manifesting Khal Bhairo. Nevertheless, her feet swelled, causing terrible pain while walking. For Sally and other members of the temple, the cause of the pain was easy to discern: as the deities dance and move intensely for hours on wet concrete (the Gods throw water on their human vehicles while manifesting), a person's body is eventually *affected* (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: A devotee manifesting Goddess Kateri (*Small Mother*). Photo by the author.

Sally was in her forties. The fact that she felt some pain after manifesting for so many years was considered normal. She was the *main marlo* of Khal Bhairo, i.e., the person who manifests the God more fully, performing this deity's *leading manifestation* during weekly pujas and festivals.[30] In 2011, her divine manifestation showed signs that it

30 In religious festivals, such as the Big Puja, several devotees simultaneously manifest the same deity. As I mentioned before, manifestations are graded. Main-marlos manifest more fully and are the leading manifestation of specific deities during the festivals. See Mello, "Dançando"; Stephanides and Singh, *Translating Kali's Feast.*

was weakening: Sally was moving slowly and could not stand Khal Bhairo for the long periods that she used to.

Some measures were taken to relieve Sally's pain. The Priest recommended her to manifest less often. For some weeks, Sally was *looked after* by Mariamma, who rubbed her feet with turmeric and sindoor, as well as bathed her with *dye water*, a mix of water, turmeric, sindoor, and leaves of the sacred tree neem. Sally was also fed with *prasad* (leftovers of the offerings placed at altars, which are invested with divine power) to *strengthen* her body, incorporating parts of the very essence of the deities.[31] Finally, following the recommendations of the Priest, temple members avoided invoking Khal Bhairo upon her. This measure intended to relieve her body and prevent her contact with the sicknesses and impurities carried by temple attendees.

Although many other marlos attended Blairmont, the temple members and visitors preferred to be healed by Sally's manifestation of Khal Bhairo. Thus, after a couple of weeks, she started ignoring that Priest's recommendations. As she remarked on several occasions to her temple fellows (during the Sunday service, Sally kept a prudent distance from the temple,[32] conversing with people for hours), she appreciated the concerns of the Priest and other temple members—as those of her husband—but she was a *true* devotee; her *love* for deities was *unconditional*, and she was *grateful* for the blessings granted by them. She desired to keep the position of the main marlo, even if it meant *sacrificing* herself. Ultimately, devotion centers on sacrifice, as her story made it evident.[33] Because Sally decided to *be on Mother's side*,[34] she made

31 During the religious service, Kali devotees place several offerings into the altars of the deities to glorify them and feed sculptured images of the deities—which consume, through the murtis, the "spiritual energy" of foodstuff. This divine consumption turns the leftovers *blessed* and *sacred*. Devotees always consume the leftovers at the end of the service, absorbing part of the very essence of the deities (Nabokov, *Religion against the Self*). Put otherwise, transactions between devotees and Hindu deities, in which visual interaction is fundamental (Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism"; Eck, *Darśan*; McNeal, *Trance and Modernity*), promote what Alline Torres Dias da Cruz calls "tactile encounters" sensory experiences that elicit other-than-human embodied perceptions and sensibilities. See Laurence Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 4 (1981): 387–401; Alline Torres Dias da Cruz, "Sobre dons, pessoas, espíritos e suas moradas" (PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2014); Eck, *Darśan*; Mello, "Murtis"; McNeal, *Trance and Modernity*; Nabokov, *Religion*.

32 Senior marlos are less prone to sudden manifestations, given that they develop the capacity to sense the burst of manifestation. They may even prevent it by pressing one of their fingers on their forehead. Even so, when a marlo's body is weaker or subject to the affection of maleficent forces, he or she keeps distance from ritual actions.

33 Kali members constantly remark that a good devotee must sacrifice himself/herself to obtain divine blessings. In Guyana and Suriname, notions of self-sacrifice and devotion are gendered. The goddess Sita, Ram's wife, serves as a role model for Hindu wives, the archetype of ideal womanhood, who shows proper (and respectful) religious devotion. See Kloß, "Embodying Dependency."

34 As is common among many Kali devotees, Sally had had another religious background before she *turned to Kali's side* after a health crisis. It is worth noting that there were some rumors that it was

many sacrifices. While the pain was severe, her interior and mind were *energized* each time she manifested. Devotion was a means of being healed.

Sally's husband—Bishop —agreed with the Priest, insisting that Sally should not *do the marlo* for some weeks. He believed she could keep doing *Khal Bhairo's work*, although her body required some rest. This was difficult, for many people sought divine assistance for small things—as he told me one afternoon:

> **Bishop:** You know, Marc [my nickname], everybody has problems. I only ask Mother's [Mariamma] help when I need it. I don't want to bother Her with small things. People go there [being looked after by a deity] and get confused: each deity has a different solution to a problem. Now, look to my wife: she's feeling pain really bad, man. But she's sacrificing herself for Mother and Baba [Khal Bhairo]. She feels pain now, but Mother will release her body from pain. [. . .] People become concerned for nothing. Sometimes they abuse.[35]

Within a few weeks, a situation arose. A family was facing all sorts of problems—domestic and financial. Before visiting the Blairmont temple, this family performed a costly *Sangani work*,[36] or a ritual toward the land performed to honor this deity by providing offerings (including animal sacrifices) to cause Sangani to *control the boundary*, i.e., settle his presence on a place, mastering the other spiritual beings that may live there. However, this puja did not result in improvement. In Blairmont, the family discovered, by means of oracular messages delivered by God Khal Bhairo, that the real cause for the family's problems was the *dropping* of their *family traditions*. They had ritual obligations to another deity—Argura—who was a form of Khal Bhairo.

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not only devotion that was at stake. In this period, a young man was developing his manifestation of Khal Bhairo. According to some, Sally feared he could take the position of main marlo from her.

35 Bishop's words were spoken in Creolese, the creole language of Guyana. Here, I opted to translate interviews and conversations into Standard British English. For a detailed account on Guyanese Creolese, see Jack Sidnell, *Talk and Practical Epistemology: The Social Life of Knowledge in a Caribbean Community* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005).

36 Work (or *wok*, in Creolese) can be synonymous with puja, but in the majority of cases, work refers to rituals performed outside of temples. Kali rituals toward the land are coextensive with the healing practices that are performed within its boundaries. Chief among the rituals toward the land performed by Kali members is the so-called *boundary work*, through which priests and ritual experts propitiate a deity to establish its power over a domestic unit. Living with spirits brings forth overlapping sovereignties, in which contested forms of co-habitation between humans and spirits are integral to the very definition of proprietary rights over land and bodies. J.B. Crosson "'What Possessed You?' Spirits, Property, and Political Sovereignty at the Limits of 'Possession'," *Ethnos—Journal of Anthropology* 84, no. 4 (2019): 546–56; Marcelo Moura Mello, "Dutch Spirits, East Indians, and Hindu Deities in Guyana: Contests Over Land," *American Anthropologist* 124, no. 2 (2022): 370–82; Stuart Strange, "Indigenous Spirits, Pluralist Sovereignty, and the Aporia of Surinamese Hindu Belonging," *Ethnos—Journal of Anthropology* 84, no. 4 (2019): 642–59. See also Brackette Williams, "Dutchman Ghosts and the History Mystery: Ritual, Colonizer, and Colonized Interpretations of the 1763 Berbice Slave Rebellion," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3, no. 2 (1990): 133–65.

Argura was worshiped by the family's late patriarch—John—while he was alive. This deity was *attached* to John, who previously manifested Khal Bhairo (he was a marlo of the deity) and Argura. Since his death—more than a decade ago—no puja had been performed to honor Argura. The deity was not happy and had no further reason to protect the family; he was forgotten. This also explains why this deity, which had no murti in Blairmont, began to possess or *take the body*[37] of Philip, a member of the family.

During this period, Philip, as well as his brothers Terrence and Carl, was developing a manifestation of two deities: Sangani and Khal Bhairo, deities which have altars and murtis in Blairmont. These deities, also known as *masters*, safeguard the temple's boundaries and deal with spirits and other maleficent forces. Philip was not yet a marlo and could only manage divine manifestations for a few minutes. Each week, he was *improving the manifestation*, as Kali members say (see Fig. 3). During a Sunday service, his body started moving in a frenzy. Philip fell on the ground, started rolling over, and wallowed in the mud like a pig. Some people around him were surprised: Philip had never acted like this while manifesting. They assumed that a spirit or another being could be present.

The Priest soon discarded this hypothesis. Knowing that Philip's father once made offerings to Argura, a deity that accepts pig sacrifices,[38] and remembering the oracular messages that the family had received some weeks before, the Priest determined that it was time for the family to investigate how they should proceed. The family needed to communicate with the two deities—Mariamma and Khal Bhairo—for applicable advice. Through Khal Bhairo, while the deity was manifesting himself in Sally's body, the family discovered that they lived in a contaminated place, where a Dutch spirit and the soul of a deceased child also lived, affecting all the family members. The Priest decided to perform a *family puja*, or *ground puja*, at their house. Sally's presence was indispensable for this: a different form of Khal Bhairo should be invoked, and only she could manifest it.

Family pujas are domestic rituals performed to honor and propitiate the deities who had been worshiped by the family's ancestors, either in India or on Guyanese shores. After consulting with the deities, the family gathered money to pay for this domestic puja, which lasted a whole day. Offerings to Argura and other deities were provided in the open space between the house and gate.[39] Two of the three brothers were married, so their wives also attended the ceremony. Moreover, Claire, their

37 The subtle differences in terminology matter here. If somebody says that a deity *took the body* or *possessed* a person, probably she or he means that the human person who impersonates a deity is not accustomed to doing it or did not develop the manifestation fully.

38 Pig sacrifices in Kali worship do not occur often while some deities demand them. This practice is highly stigmatized, even by some Kali members, for pigs are considered filthy animals, unproper to being sacrificed to Hindu deities.

39 Mello, *Devoções*: 253–62.

mother, was present, and she abruptly manifested. The ritual was performed by the Priest, two assistant priests, another member of Blairmont, and a sacrificer. Despite her pain and against her husband's advice, Sally attended the puja to manifest Khal Bhairo. Khal Bhairo and Argura are related, and both are masters. Proper procedure would involve invoking Khal Bhairo, given that no one in Blairmont fully could manifest Argura.[40] After all, Sally was an experienced marlo of Blairmont and was accustomed to manifesting Hindu deities in domestic spaces.

During the ceremony, Sally abruptly manifested after a goat sacrifice was performed.[41] Through Sally's body, Khal Bhairo spoke privately with all family members, including the two brothers' wives and children. The deity cleansed the bodies of the whole family with neem leaves,[42] rubbed them with turmeric and sindoor (powders that have the power to heal people), fed them with *prasad*, and gave them dye water to drink. At least three times, the deity exclaimed: *My child, this is the best puja ever done for me in this boundary*.[43]

Suddenly, Terrence's wife, Rose, also began to manifest too, but she could not stand it for long—she did not attend Kali temples often, and this was the first time that she had this experience. When she came back to her senses, Rose had a short dialogue with Khal Bhairo:

> **Rose:** Baba, I'm so scared.
>
> **Khal Bhairo:** Why this, me child?
>
> **Rose:** I'm not used to do it.
>
> **Khal Bhairo:** Listen to me. I'm the father! I'm in full control of you. Don't be scared. This is a gift [the manifestation] I'm giving to you. You should be a stronger devotee and go more often to the temple. Your husband needs you with him. Go in peace!

40 In the end, Bishop also attended this ritual. He was responsible for cooking three roasters and one goat sacrificed that day. The family also cooked the *seven curry*, an elaborate series of dishes offered to guests on occasions like this.

41 As Janet Carsten has demonstrated, blood has an "excess of potentiality." Blood is usually associated with impurity, vitality, instability, and danger among my interlocutors. For men and women, menstrual blood can affect rituals and bodies tremendously. Menstruating women cannot attend Kali rituals. I also note that when sacrifices occur, many people manifest, for some deities are attracted by blood and need nourishment. Janet Carsten, ed., *Blood Will Out: Essays on Liquid Transfers and Flows* (London: Wiley Blackwell/Royal Anthropological Institute, 2013). Mello, "Materiality."

42 The neem leaves are considered sacred by Kali devotees. They are not only used to heal but are employed by the deity itself, which takes the form of neem to heal.

43 Khal Bhairo considered that the family puja performed for Argura was also a puja in his honor, at least in some measure. Here, the concept of form provides a more fine-grained understanding: Khal Bhairo and Argura are closely related.

Several hours later, the food, which was cooked with sacrificed animals, was ready. Khal Bhairo ordered all people involved in the ritual to consume the meat—also called *prasad*; some people hesitated. The previous weekend, Mariamma demanded the presence of all those involved in the family puja, warning us that we should not consume the ritual meat because the place of ritual was contaminated. The Priest reminded Khal Bhairo of Mariamma's advice, but the deity authorized the consumption of *prasad* to strengthen the participants' bodies.

Immediately after Khal Bhairo departed, Sally had her body cleansed with limes, fire, and dye water. She was brushed with neem leaves (*jharay*). Marlos are always brushed after manifestation, but this measure was even more necessary here. Manifesting Hindu deities in domestic spaces is considerably suspicious and dangerous. For Kali members, temples are pure (and purified) places, and domestic spaces are necessarily impure and contaminated. Thus, in domestic spaces, the manifestations of Hindu deities are *less pure* or at the *lowest level* and *contaminated*. Sally was manifesting a deity where a Dutch spirit and the soul of one deceased child—who was full of sorrows—also lived. She was vulnerable and could be *deeply affected* by the Dutch spirit. Her body could *carry* something. In summary, the spirit could *cross* the divine manifestations; Sally could *adapt* the Dutch. Before leaving Sally's body, Khal Bhairo asked the Priest to tell Sally that she should try to remember her dreams because the Dutch could attack her in her sleep.

Fig. 3: Devotees manifesting Khal Bhairo during the service. Photo by the author.

A week later, Sally received healing treatments at Blairmont temple. Because her manifestation of Khal Bhairo was deep, she could also be affected deeply, manifesting Khal Bhairo as well as a Dutch spirit. On the same day, Argura was invoked to mani-

fest himself in Philip's body for the first time. The deity soon manifested, and immediately, an assistant priest asked if the puja that was performed in the previous week was proper. The following indicates the dialogue reconstructed between them:

> **Priest:** Baba, we need to know if them [the family] has any obstruction. The place was contaminated.
>
> [Argura shows no reaction for a while. Then, he falls to the ground, yelling like a pig].
>
> **Priest:** Baba . . .
>
> **Argura:** [Stuttering] Pujarie [priest] . . . I am very satisfied . . . I am very powerful, Pujarie . . . That's why I should leave the body of this man [Philip] early. He can't stand my power . . .

From this point, there was no doubt: the family puja was successful. All of the members of the family members felt energized, and one of the brothers found a new job. As for Sally, she was feeling much better, with no pain in her feet, thanks to the constancy of her devotion and to healing treatments performed on her. She commented on this to me in Creolese: *Manifestation is not a simple thing, Marc. That is why we should keep our devotion*.

5 Closing Remarks: Transforming Spiritual (and Human) Bodies

I could obtain a finer understanding of how body capabilities are formed among Kali devotees through relations of (asymmetrical) dependency because I did not restrict my fieldwork to religious ceremonies in Hindu temples, which is common among many scholars that studied Kali worship.[44] Relationships with deities do not depend on beliefs. Although Kali devotees consider that devotees should *focus their minds on deities* and *think on them*, devotion is not understood as a mental state but a set of embodied practices. Devotees and religious experts depend on deities for their well-being or to solve issues and develop embodied aptitudes, as developing the capacity to focus on the deities or becoming a *trainee*, i.e., someone who engages in religious practices to be prone to deity manifestation. Among other things, the impersonation of a Hindu deity implies that the person doing so loses consciousness while manifesting.

44 Dennis Bassier, *Kali Mai Worship in Guyana: An Overview* (Georgetown: University of Guyana, 1977); Stephanides and Singh, *Translating Kali's Feast*; Karna Singh, *Kali Mai Puja: A Study of a Guyanese East Indian Folk Cult in its Sociocultural Context* (Georgetown: University of Guyana, 1978); William Fenton Guinee, "Suffering and Healing in Trinidadian Kali Worship" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1992). For more comprehensive approaches about Kali worship and its connections across spaces and times, see Kloß, *Fabrics*, and Strange, *Suspect Others.*

Manifestation comes from beings much more powerful than human beings. It only emerges when exchanges occur through diverse offerings (from food and chants to sacrifices and prayers). Such exchanges establish bonds of cooperation and are always asymmetrical and ranked. For instance, when deities consume the spiritual matter of the fruits and sweets—placed on the altars—through the *murtis*, these offerings become leftovers energized with divine power. Devotees themselves eat these fruits and sweets (*prasad*). Thus, deities are "givers" and humans are "takers." The exchanges are ranked and related to the transformative capacity of those who transact them, given that divine substances are more capable of generating transformations.[45]

Devotion includes making offerings but is much more than that: other bodily practices are fundamental to the very emergence of manifestation. Manifestation takes time—as my interlocutors say—for it is not easy to endure divine power. Participation in rituals, engagement in religious discipline—which includes living a religious life, and avoiding polluting substances and persons—and exchanges with Hindu deities create bonds between beings who become permeable to each other. Humans must transform their bodily capacity of being in touch with divine worlds. These practices are prerequisite for religious experiences. Therefore, the mere description of ritual episodes of spirit possession is insufficient for understanding the coconstitution of human and spiritual bodies across different spaces. Temples and private houses are sites of transformation. Human corporeal states are affected by Hindu deities and spirits differently, depending on the places where they interact, for instance inside and outside of the temples.[46]

Describing the embodied practices that are involved in manifestation requires more attention to be paid to the permeability of humans and other-than-human persons in Kali worship. In this regard, it would be productive to draw lessons from monographs based on fieldwork in India, although these studies have attracted no attention in Caribbean scholarship since the 1960s. It would be necessary to investigate this inattention in more detail.[47] As I suggested elsewhere,[48] a main reason for this is that the heterogeneity, complexity, and historicity of the Caribbean prevented, from

45 Marriott, "Hindu": 110–11.

46 Originally, the area on which Hindu deities were worshiped in Blairmont was a "Dutch spot," i.e., a place owned by a colonial spirit. Over time, through continuous offerings to the Hindu deities, and the emplacement of them in altars, the deities replaced the Dutch. Phantomic landscapes stimulate affects and quotidian intimations of a conflict between the present and past. People respond to landscapes and the things that populate them variously. See Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

47 See, however, N. Jayaram, "The Metamorphosis of Caste among Trinidadian Hindus," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 143–73; Aisha Khan, "Juthaa in Trinidad: Food, Pollution, and Hierarchy in a Caribbean Diasporic Community," *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 2 (1994): 245–69.

48 Mello, "Materiality."

very early on, the applicability of gatekeeping concepts.[49] In addition, the emphasis on the description of how (highly diverse or plural) societies are held together in contexts of power relations, colonial legacies, social stratification, and the hegemony of cultural symbols have gained prominence, preventing scholars from capturing, in more detail, "how ongoing processes of transformation" are "experienced, controlled, and interpreted by people through their own concepts, categories, and cosmological engagements."[50]

Studies that involve fieldwork in India—often engaging in theoretical discussions concerning the very category of personhood—are highly fruitful to this case because of focusing on the transfer of essences and bodily substances between human and other-than-human persons ranked hierarchically. As McKim Marriot suggested,[51] what happens between actors is connected to the processes of mixture and separation between them, indicating that their particular natures are conceived as the causes and outcomes of particular actions. In addition, transformations within actors involve transactions between parts of actors, whereas transactions between actors can lead to the transformation of these actors. However, transformations and transactions must be understood as part of a single process. In transactions, actors and their actions constantly change through a recombination of their parts. Actors and their interactions are never separate from each other; they change together. As Cecilia Busby suggests, these substances always refer to people from whom they originated: they are a manifestation of persons rather than of the relationship that they create.

49 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 19–42.

50 Olívia M.G. da Cunha, "Introduction: Exploring Maroon Worlds on the Move," in *Maroon Cosmopolitics: Personhood, Creativity and Incorporation*, ed. Olívia M.G. da Cunha (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 1–32. Recent and classic studies with Maroons and Amerindians in the Guiana region could offer interesting clues to Caribbean scholarship through a more sustained investigation about how bodies (and worlds) are made and recomposed through a multitude of relations with other-than-human powers. See, among others, George Mentore, "Of Vital Spirit and Precarious Bodies in Amerindian Socialities," in *Passages and Afterworlds: Anthropological Perspectives on Death in the Caribbean*, eds. Maarit Forde and Yuminique Hume (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018): 54–79; Peter Rivière, *Individual and Society in Guyana: A Comparative Study of Amerindian Social Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1984); Rogério Brittes W. Pires, Stuart Strange and Marcelo Moura Mello, "The Bakru Speaks. Money-Making Demons and Racial Stereotypes in Guyana and Suriname," *New West Indian Guide* 92, no. 1–2 (2018): 1–34; Rogério Brittes W. Pires, "A Masa Gadu Konde: morte, espíritos e rituais funerários em uma aldeia Saamaka crista" (PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2015); Silvia Vidal and Neil L. Whitehead, "Dark Shamans and the Shamanic State: Sorcery and Witchcraft as Political Process in Guyana and Venezuelan Amazon," in *In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*, eds. Neil Whitehead and Robin Wright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004): 51–82.

51 Marriot, "Hindu."

These remarks provide space for considering the permeability of persons to bodily substances (and powers) that originate from other persons.[52] As João de Pina-Cabral has noted, unlike theoretical models centered on the modes through which individual entities form part of something without losing their essence and individuality, what is at stake is the constitutive character of mutual participation "in which things and beings can be related without necessarily possessing clearly defined limits, even when they share some kind of essence."[53] The boundaries of human bodies are permeable to substances and the powers of other beings. That is, and to evoke notions of Kali devotees, humans can be affected by spiritual beings.

Engaged in and exchanging material substances that move between bodies and persons can, intentionally or not, recreate something of themselves in other bodies. As mentioned above, the incorporation of divine power is always partial, limited, subject to instability, and ranked. Persons are not bounded individuals who have singular identities but are coconstituted through the relations with beings that are also ranked. Thus, if a Dutch spirit can affect a marlo, divine power can subdue maleficent forces, if the devotion is maintained and the relations (some of them of dependency) with deities are maintained. If substances refer to the persons from whom they originated, they are, in many ways, a result of the relations that are established between deities and humans, including ties of (a)symmetrical dependence. In Kali worship, bodies are sites of transformation and ontological differentiation.[54]

52 Cecilia Busby, "Permeable and Partible Persons: A Comparative Analysis of Gender and Body in South India and Melanesia," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3, no. 2 (1997): 261–78. Busby provides a comparative analysis between South India and Melanesia. Brazilian scholars also engaged with scholarship about Melanesia, drawing lessons to think that personhood and bodies are produced at the level of personhood. Although I do not have enough space here, I suggest that Caribbean scholarship could benefit from these initiatives. See, among others, Anthony Seeger, Roberto DaMatta and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "A construção da pessoa nas sociedades indígenas brasileiras," *Boletim do Museu Nacional* 32 (1979): 2–19; Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Aparecida Vilaça, "Dividualism and Individualism in Indigenous Christianity: A Debate seen from Amazonia," *HAU—Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 1 (2015): 45–73; Roy Wagner, "The Fractal Person" in *Big Men and Great Men: Personifications of Power in Melanesia*, eds. Marilyn Strathern and Maurice Godelier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 159–96.

53 João de Pina-Cabral, "Modes of Participation," *Anthropological Theory* 18, no. 4 (2019): 435–55. João de Pina-Cabral, "My Mother or Father: Person, Metaperson, and Transcendence in Ethnographic Theory," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 25 (2019): 303–23. See also Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Miho Ishii, "Playing with Perspectives: Spirit Possession, Mimesis, and Permeability in the *buuta* Ritual in South India," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 795–812. Nabokov, "Religion."

54 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectival Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Equivocation," *Tipití—Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 2, no. 1 (2004): 3–22.

Human and other-than-human persons can affect and be affected by human and other-than-human powers. Taking a cue from Spinoza, we could say that the human body is affected in several ways by other bodies. The human body may be involved now in this way and now in that, and consequently, it may be affected by the same object differently at different times. In any case, we may lack a more precise conceptual language here, especially for understanding what a (human or spiritual) body is or can become.

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Luis Bastidas Meneses

Bodies and Souls: The Assimilation of Victims Through the Cult of *Benditas Ánimas* in Colombia

1 The Dead of the Magdalena River

Every Monday, Ofelia Ramírez—a 51-year-old high school teacher—visits the cemetery of Puerto Berrío, a small Colombian municipality on the banks of the Magdalena River. She wipes one of the gravestones with a damp cloth in the charity area of the cemetery. She fills a transparent disposable cup with water and leaves it with a small bouquet of plastic flowers at the corner of the grave. Next, she sits on the ground before the grave, makes a cross sign, and starts praying.

There is nothing unusual about this scene except that *profesora* Ofelia—as her students call her—prays not to a relative or friend but a stranger. She does not know who the person is, how they looked, their name, or how old they were when they died. No one in town knows about it. However, she is sure that the person she is praying to was murdered. She believes that the person had been stabbed, or shot, or their throat had been slit. She knows that the body in the grave was found in an advanced state of decomposition and is most likely not complete, having been decapitated or dismembered, with the head and limbs perhaps not found.

There are many other graves in the Puerto Berrío cemetery: victims of paramilitary groups that operated in the southern part of the Magdalena Medio region between the 1980s and around the mid-2000s. In the towns upstream, paramilitaries threw the bodies of their victims into the Magdalena River; many were retrieved in Puerto Berrío by the municipal mayor's order in the early 1990s and taken to the charity area of the cemetery where they became objects of veneration. Such unidentified bodies, which are not claimed by any family member, friend, or acquaintance, are known in Colombia as NN (no name, derived from the Latin *Nomen Nesci*o, literally translates to "I do not know the name.").

In Puerto Berrío, many believe that the souls of the dead can work miracles, and they ask the souls of NNs for help in different areas of their lives, such as economic

Note: A partial version of this text was presented in German in the proceedings of the Congress of the German Sociological Association in September 2022 at the University of Bielefeld, entitled "Von Opfern zu Seelen. Die Rückkehr von Gewaltopfern in die Gemeinschaft durch den Kult der Seelen des Fegefeuers in Puerto Berrío, Kolumbien." This chapter incorporates some results of a doctoral research project funded by the DAAD Research Grant for Doctoral Students 91686744. I thank the inhabitants of Puerto Berrío for the information they kindly provided through interviews and everyday conversations. I also thank the research group Marking Power: Embodied Dependencies, Haptic Regimes, and Body Modification of the University of Bonn, Tom Kaden, and María Papenfuss, for their comments.

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stability, health, and interpersonal relationships. This desire for help has led some believers to adopt, as they say, one or another of the NNs found in the river and to take care of the grave. Until 2021, when the bone remains began to be removed for identification,[1] the charity area of the cemetery was distinguished by its graves that were turned into small shrines by people seeking help from the souls in the afterlife (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Some NN Graves of the Puerto Berrío Cemetery, November 2019. Photo by the author.

This study examines an aspect of the coexistence of violence and religion during armed conflict in Colombia—the assimilation of victims by the civilian population. In particular, this chapter addresses how civilians address victims of violence through the cult[2] of *las benditas ánimas* (the holy souls) in purgatory. It also focuses on the concurrence of two narratives: secular—stigmatizing the victims of violence as negative agents—and religious—evaluating the victims differently. This chapter is divided into four parts: violence in the Colombian Magdalena Medio region and the social perception of victim status are briefly addressed. The next section describes the belief in

1 Through Resolution 023 of 2020, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the transitional justice tribunal arising from the peace agreements between the government and the FARC in 2016, ordered the exhumation of bodies in 356 points of the cemetery of Puerto Berrío, where there would be at least 400 skeletal remains that may belong to people reported missing. "JEP ordena proteger más de 400 cuerpos del cementerio de Puerto Berrío (Antioquia)," *El Espectador*, 19.10.2020, https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/jep-y-desaparecidos/jep-ordena-proteger-mas-de-400-cuerpos-del-cementerio-de-puerto-berrio-antioquia-article/ [accessed15.03.2021].

2 The term *cult* is referred in this document in "its neutral sense to denote a collective of devotees [. . .] a community loosely cohered by belief in a particular folk saint." Frank Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): ix.

the *ánimas* in purgatory as well as how it came to Puerto Berrío and was transformed. Subsequently, a concrete empirical case is presented, detailing the adoption of NNs. The final part addresses the experiential and material conditions of the cult and concludes the chapter, proposing that the victim's status loses importance and is replaced by the status of *ánima*, as for believers, the *ánimas* are directly connected to the sacred and transcendent.

2 Violence in the Southern Magdalena Medio and Puerto Berrío

In Colombia, the Magdalena Medio region is known, among other things, for being an epicenter of armed conflict. Between the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, this region was settled in large part with no or only a precarious presence of state institutions.[3] In the southern subregion, in the mid-1960s, the guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo[4] (FARC-EP) took advantage of precarious state institutions to impose their own rule. They helped peasants to colonize new lands and regulate everyday conflicts, which earned them recognition as a kind of guardian of order.[5] FARC punished people accused of infringing their prohibitions with the death penalty, and it even organized groups of people to strengthen vigilance against what they defined as external threats,[6] such as murder, sexual abuse, and theft, especially cattle theft, "which they practically eradicated in the region."[7] The reduction of crime was accompanied by moralizing discourse and social change, which enabled them to maintain good relations with civilians.[8]

3 Alejandro García, *Hijos de la violencia. Campesinos de Colombia sobreviven a "Golpes" de paz* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 1996).

4 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army.

5 Carlos Medina Gallego, *Autodefensas, paramilitares y narcotráfico en Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1990); Gloria Estella Bonilla Vélez, "Puerto Berrío," in *Un mundo que se mueve como el rio. Historia regional del Magdalena Medio*, ed. Amparo Murillo (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de antropología, Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación, Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1994): 141–70; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El estado suplantado. Las autodefensas de Puerto Boyacá* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2019).

6 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El estado suplantado*.

7 Medina Gallego, *Autodefensas*: 134. Original text in Spanish. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in Spanish were translated by the author.

8 Francisco Gutiérrez and Mauricio Barón Villa, "Estado, control territorial paramilitar y orden político en Colombia," in *Nuestra guerra sin nombre. Transformaciones del conflicto en Colombia*, eds. Francisco Gutiérrez, María Emma Wills and Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Norma, 2006): 152–75.

However, by around the late 1970s, FARC began to take on the role of criminals themselves—they increased their economic demands on civilians to the point of carrying out an "indiscriminate campaign of kidnappings and extortions,"[9] They became part of the problem that they claimed to have fought against. They described their victims as threats to the community. In the end, they were also perceived as threats. In 1982, this growing discontent was used by some cattle ranchers and landowners in the southern municipality of Puerto Boyacá (approximately 100 kilometers from Puerto Berrío) to create a new paramilitary group (with the help of army officers) with the supposed objective of combating a communist guerrilla threat.[10] They further intensified the practice that had been inaugurated by FARC of eliminating those who they considered damaging to the community, creating and enhancing the perception of their victims as "negative agents."

Although paramilitary control had been prevalent in Puerto Berrío since the early 1980s, with army members and civilians acting under the label of "La Mano Negra"[11] group engaged in social cleansing—the paramilitary group formed in Puerto Boyacá marked a milestone of violence.[12] As they rapidly expanded to other locations (Fig. 2), *Muerte a Secuestradores*[13] (MAS) or *Los Masetos*—as they were colloquially known among civilians—launched a violent onslaught against anyone allegedly a member or sympathizer of the guerrillas.[14] To get an idea of the magnitude of the violence, it may suffice to note that in 1982–1983, paramilitary groups carried out 25 massacres in southern Magdalena Medio, each involving 4–14 victims.[15]

In Puerto Berrío, MAS attacked their victims at any time and place and in open view of anyone. A report in the *El Tiempo* newspaper, published on August 22, 1983, noted the following:

> Hit men shoot in the cafeterias. They break down doors and take people out of their homes. They stop them in the middle of the street, put them in a pickup truck and it is possible that they appear downriver. Most of them are taken to the bridge [. . .] which became a gallows. There, they shoot them three times in the head, disfigure their faces, and throw them into the water.[16]

Claiming that they were defending the region from guerrillas and other threats, MAS killed and disappeared hundreds of civilians. Between 1970 and 2013, at least 590

9 Andrea Dávila Saad, *La violencia en el Magdalena Medio. Análisis de la dinámica espacial* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2009): 29.

10 Medina Gallego, *Autodefensas*; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El estado suplantado.*

11 The Black Hand.

12 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El estado suplantado.*

13 Death to Kidnappers.

14 Medina Gallego, *Autodefensas*; Mauricio Barón, "Apogeo y caída de las autodefensas de Puerto Boyacá: Del paramilitarismo a los señores de la guerra en el Magdalena Medio" (Master's tesis, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011).

15 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El estado suplantado.*

16 German Santamaría, "Puerto Berrío: Miedo y terror," *El Tiempo*, 22.07.1983: 3A.

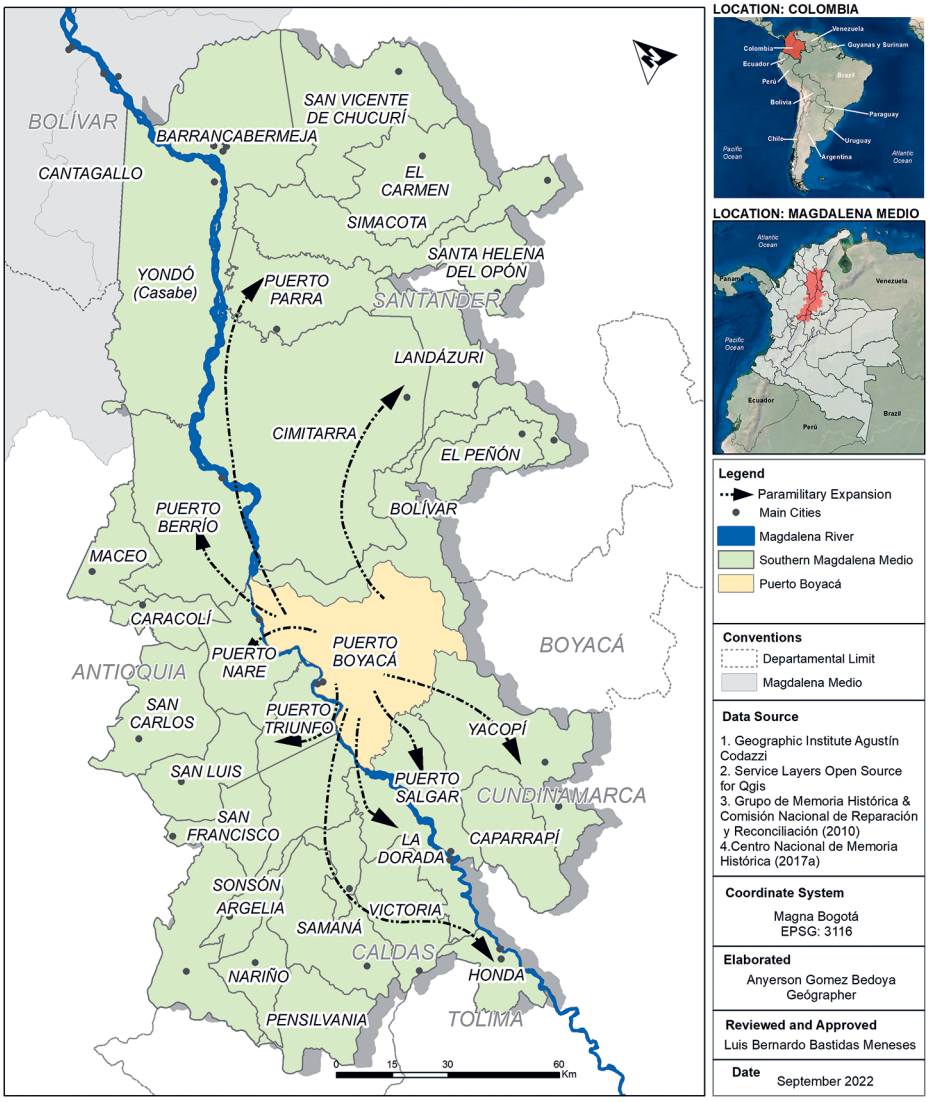

Fig. 2: Paramilitary Expansion during the 1980s in the Southern Magdalena Medio. Map created by Anyerson Gómez Bedoya.

cases of forced disappearance were registered in Puerto Berrío alone, making it the site with the second largest number of such cases in that period.[17] The violence only spread over time, becoming an everyday occurrence. As an interviewee noted in a

17 A total of 2,627 victims of forced disappearance were registered in those 10 municipalities. Notably, the number may be higher, as dozens of cases feed the sub-registry never reported. Centro Nacional

conversation, "people learned to live with that situation, to assume a behavior, people assimilated that as the daily routine of saying I am going to get dressed, I am going to take a shower, I am going to eat, I am going to work, today I am going to see people killed"[18] (Interviewee. Puerto Berrío, December 9, 2021).

Like FARC, MAS punished civilians whom they identified as a threat to the community, such as alleged sexual abusers, thieves, drug sellers and users, and, in some cases, even members of the LGBTQ+ community, along with anyone who did not follow their orders.[19] MAS also murdered people labeled with the generic label of communists, including, besides members of FARC, left-wing political parties, and "a diverse set of social sectors, among which are included unions, peasant associations, and, in general, those who demand vindications to improve their living conditions, for which reason they must be combated."[20]

During the mid-1990s, MAS began experiencing internal divisions that led to its dissolution, but the violence focused on people with certain "negative characteristics" did not stop. MAS was replaced by another paramilitary army: the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC),[21] dominant in Puerto Berrío through the Bloque Metro, and then the Bloque Central Bolívar.[22] Continuing the logic of MAS, this paramilitary group murdered anyone who disobeyed or opposed their orders, including alleged communists, criminals, and enemies of the community—until 2006—when AUC paramilitaries were demobilized resulting from a peace agreement with the Colombian state.[23]

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de Memoria Histórica, *Memoria de la infamia. Desaparición forzada en el Magdalena Medio* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2017).

18 All interviews were conducted in Spanish. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Spanish are by the author.

19 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El estado suplantado*; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *Ser marica en medio del conflicto armado. Memorias de sectores LGBT en el Magdalena Medio* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2019).

20 Renán Vega Cantor, *Injerencia de los Estados Unidos, contrainsurgencia y terrorismo de estado en Colombia* (Bogotá: Ocean Sur, 2016): 18.

21 United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia.

22 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El Bloque Central Bolívar y la expansión de la violencia paramilitar. Tomo I. "Mataron a la gente por matarla": El BCB en Antioquia y el Eje Cafetero* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2022). The *Bloque Central Bolívar* was the most powerful *bloque* of the AUC. It operated through nine fronts (i.e., groups of men) in eight departments. With about 8,000 combatants in total, the *Bloque Central Bolívar* left at least 14,000 victims in Colombia. "Los tentáculos del Bloque Central Bolívar," Verdad Abierta, 01.11.2011, https://verdadabierta.com/los-tentaculos-del-bloque-central-bolivar [accessed 27.02.2021].

23 After the demobilization of the paramilitary groups, new illegal armed groups (remnants of paramilitarism) related to different illegal economies have begun to operate in some parts of the region, maintaining the logic of violence. Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *Grupos armados posdesmovilización (2006– 2015). Trayectorias, rupturas y continuidades* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2016). As an example of the current violence, we can note that according to the National Police, in 2020, there were 43 homicides in Puerto Berrío, followed by 35 cases in 2021 and 41 in 2022.

Considering that "whatever does not connect with the order must be eliminated,"[24] paramilitary groups killed people whose characteristics met a specific profile and imposed a narrative justifying violence against certain civilians, labeling them as negative agents.[25] Although the aforementioned armed groups no longer exist, violence by other actors and the narratives about the victims persist. At present, if someone is murdered or disappears, inhabitants of Puerto Berrío frequently speculate that the victim was involved in something that led to their death. In this regard, a Puerto Berrío man I spoke to regularly had very illustrative views. During a conversation, he did not hesitate to emphatically state that in Puerto Berrío, "someone is killed, and then people say, even if they don't know him, 'what was he involved in?', 'he was selling drugs for sure'" (Interviewee. Puerto Berrío, November 9, 2019).

As Mauricio Barón has shown, assuming that victims were killed because they were doing something "wrong" derives from the order imposed by armed actors, who punished certain behaviors:

> Despite the brutality and arbitrariness of "paramilitary justice" in the Magdalena Medio region, the population accepted it because they valued the security service provided by self-defense groups. In any town in the Magdalena Medio where there were self-defense groups, it was common to hear any resident endorsing the presence of paramilitaries saying, "the advantage is that we can live in peace, you leave the car with the doors open and here nobody steals anything, in the farms the same thing, nobody takes anything from anybody, because you know that here the self-defense groups punish that."[26]

In many cases, people not only reproduced the self-justifying discourse of violence but also accepted the regulatory power that was also exercised. Many, for example, complained to the armed groups seeking solutions to certain problems, accusing others of being criminals or of engaging in behaviors that disturbed the peace. Thus, in southern Magdalena Medio, "the social acceptance of paramilitarism [became the reason] that not a few civilians were involved in unjustified accusations against their neighbors that ended in crimes."[27]

Many victims of these accusations ended up floating in the Magdalena River. Although the disposal of bodies in rivers is not a practice exclusive to paramilitaries, the groups operating in the south of Magdalena Medio made it part of their mark. From the 1980s onward, seeing floating corpses from different towns became custom-

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This is quite a high number if we consider that there are no more than 40,000 residents in the urban area. Even today, the river is still used as a large cemetery. Policía Nacional de Colombia, "Estadística delictiva," Policía Nacional de Colombia, 05.01.2023, https://www.policia.gov.co/grupo-informacion-criminalidad/estadistica-delictiva [accessed 10.01.2023].

24 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *Limpieza social. Una violencia mal nombrada* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2015): 16.

25 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *Memoria de la infamia.*

26 Barón, "Apogeo y caída de las autodefensas de Puerto Boyacá": 88.

27 Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *El estado suplantado*: 21.

ary. Many of these were victims of forced disappearance (meaning that their relatives, friends, and acquaintances did not know with certainty what happened to them); therefore, when they were pulled out of the river in Puerto Berrío, they were classified as NN.

However, due to the belief in purgatory, those anonymous corpses were not left alone or forgotten in Puerto Berrío. Some people took care of their graves and prayed for their eternal rest. Before I examine this aspect, in the following section, I briefly discuss the framework of beliefs that nourish the cult of the souls in purgatory and how such beliefs came to this Colombian town and shaped a particular devotion.

3 Cult of the *ánimas* in Puerto Berrío

According to Puerto Berrío mayor's office, there were 35 non-Catholic Christian churches in Puerto Berrío in 2022—the Catholic church is still the hegemonic religious institution. Catholicism is fervently followed in two parishes that promote various devotions, such as the Divine Mercy, Saint Marta, and the Lord of the Miracles. However, the best-known devotion is associated with the belief in holy souls in purgatory, or *benditas ánimas*, as they are known in the Catholic tradition. According to field accounts, these devotional attitudes were promoted in Puerto Berrío since the 1960s by Catholic priests, especially Father Bernardo Martínez—who was in charge of the parish Nuestra Señora de los Dolores between 1963 and 1970—Father Alberto Castaño—an assistant priest during the 1970s—and Father Luis Carlos Arbeláez—parish priest from 1971 to 1979.[28] These religious leaders helped create a tradition nourished by celebrating the holy mass in the cemetery chapel every Monday and carrying out specific activities every November in the cemetery, such as the praying of the novena[29] of *las benditas ánimas* and the daily celebration of the mass in the cemetery chapel over 9 consecutive days—November 2nd–10th—since according to the Catholic tradition November 2nd is the day of the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, known as All Souls' Day.

The Church promulgates the belief that the souls of the dead require the prayers of the living to hasten their passage through the purifying flames of purgatory for ad-

28 Names and dates were confirmed in a personal communication with a priest from the Diocese of Barrancabermeja.

29 The novena is a traditional prayer in Catholicism, which is prayed for 9 consecutive days. In Colombia, almost all the known saints have their own novena, as well as the different advocations of Jesus Christ and the Holy Mary. As expected, the *ánimas* also have their own novena. Luis Bernardo Bastidas Meneses, Tom Kaden and Bernt Schnettler, "The NN's Souls-Cult: A Case Study of Catholicism and Popular Religion in Colombia," *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik* 1 (2021): 31–52, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-021-00075-z.

mission to heaven.[30] In Latin American contexts, this belief has undergone a degree of transformation. In several countries, people pray to the *ánimas* in purgatory to help solve their earthly problems. Believers believe that souls in purgatory who are prayed will reward their prayers by granting miracles or favors or interceding with God or the saints to grant those miracles.[31] In several cases, devotion has even transformed the status of a particular *ánima* into a folk saint, such as Antonio "Gauchito" Gil and Difunta Correa in Argentina or Julio Garavito and Leo Kopp in Colombia, among many others.[32]

Following this framework, in Puerto Berrío believers ask the *ánimas* in purgatory for help in various worldly matters. In addition to praying to their family and friends,[33] many pray to the *ánimas* of the NNs rescued from the waters of the Magdalena River. Devotion to these NNs is partially based on the belief that their *ánimas* need prayers more than others. Many of those found in the river were also victims of forced disappearance, which implies that it is not known for certain that they were murdered. This fact is linked to the widespread belief that "nobody prays for them. Hence, the nameless souls need prayers more than others and, therefore, more effective in granting miracles."[34] I argue that devotion is partially based on this belief since, as I will address in the following, experience and materiality play critical roles.

Since the 1980s, the inhabitants of Puerto Berrío observed bodies floating down the Magdalena River. However, in 1992, according to Henry Escobar—mayor at the time—his administration took action to remove the bodies from the water before they sail away neglected.[35] At Escobar's request, the town's only funeral home began removing the bodies, placing them in a rustic wooden crate, and bringing them to the charity area of the cemetery. Because of the lack of identification, the bodies were buried with generic NN labels. It is unclear when devotion to NNs began. One day during the 1990s, a rumor spread that the soul of one of the bodies granted miracles. Eventually, believers approached the cemetery searching out NNs. NNs' graves were painted with different colors by the believers, who named them—*Escogido NN Mariela*, *Escogido NN Gilberto*, etc.—and wrote the word *escogido*[36] on the tombs to indi-

30 Elena Sánchez de Madariaga, "Cultura religiosa y sociedad: las cofradías de laicos," *Historia Social* 35 (1999): 23–42, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40340711 [accessed 10.01.2023].

31 Eugenia Villa Posse, *Muerte, cultos y cementerios* (Bogotá: Disloque Editores, 1993).

32 Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion*; Luis Bernardo Bastidas Meneses, Daniela Díaz Castellar and Valentina Villamarín Mor, *Entre la Calle y el Cementerio. Prácticas, Rituales y Religiosidad de las Trabajadoras Sexuales Transgénero del Barrio Santa Fe* (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2018).

33 Although not all the dead people in Puerto Berrío were victims of paramilitary violence, many are victims of them or of some other criminal group.

34 Bastidas, Kaden and Schnettler, "The NN's Souls-Cult": 47.

35 In March 1991 Escobar won the elections that were called to find a replacement for Mayor Fernando Zuluaga Tamayo, who had been elected to govern in the 1990–1992 period but was assassinated. Henry Escobar was elected mayor again for the 1997–2000 and 2004–2007 terms.

36 Chosen.

Fig. 3: Grave NN. The plaque reads "Thank you NN for the Favor Received. Rest in the Peace of the Lord," November 2019. Photo by the author.

cate that a given body already had a mourner, and whoever wanted to obtain favors from purgatory would have to look for another one. When the miracles began to be granted, the tombs also displayed a plaque or a sign of gratitude (Fig. 3).

In Puerto Berrío, hearing stories of the favors granted by NN *escogidos* is common; believers, in gratitude, pray for their rest and clean their graves, similar to *Profesora* Ofelia. Her life story, like many working-class Colombians', is marked by social inequality, effort, hard work, and sacrifice. She was the first in her family to finish high school and attend university. After she received her teaching degree, she was very happy because she could aspire to find a better-paying job. However, as time passed, her happiness turned to anguish. After seeking and failing to find employment in schools and other municipalities of Antioquia, she had no choice but to return to her parents in Puerto Berrío, without a stable job.

Ofelia took the national merit exam twice to attain a position at a public school but had no positive results. She was unemployed for over a year until the Ministry of National Education announced a new merit exam. Believing she needed knowledge other than her field to pass the examination, she sought help from the dead. She followed the advice of a friend, who suggested that she choose an NN, and went to the cemetery, chose a grave, gave it a name, and prayed for that soul's eternal rest. She went to mass every Monday and prayed the novena at the cemetery and home. She regularly visited the cemetery and left flowers to adorn the tomb of that anonymous body. After several months of her exam, the results were declared, and Ofelia passed the examination that would allow her to work in a public school in Puerto Berrío. She

mentioned to me that she does not visit the cemetery regularly anymore, but she will always be grateful to the *ánima* for granting her a teaching position.

Like many other believers, Ofelia says that she can feel the presence of the *ánimas*. One day, she explained, a friend asked her to look after his home while he was away. She spent a night there with her daughter and had one of her first encounters with an *ánima*. She said, "At night, we felt that coins were ringing, so those things are usually scary.[37] We wondered with fear, well, what's happening? When we told [him] he told us, "Ah no, those are the *ánimas*" [. . .] No one can tell me they don't [exist], because . . . I heard them!" (Interviewee. Puerto Berrío, November 23, 2019). In Puerto Berrío, many believers report having had such experiences. I also saw evidence with my own eyes one night in the local cemetery. I was there with others, and one of them took a picture focused on the cemetery chapel, arguing that the phone had taken a picture of an *ánima*. Others then claimed that they could see *ánimas* too. Several people noted shadows moving on the wall of the chapel, and some recorded videos of them. They were shared via WhatsApp along with photos as evidence of this collective encounter with *ánimas*.[38]

These are not isolated events. Many believers report seeing shadows in their homes, hearing noises, or feeling a presence, such as what one feels when lying down and someone else sitting on the bed. Some even told me that *ánimas* communicate with them in their dreams. What people consider being, and the experiences described indicate that in Puerto Berrío, devotion to the *ánimas* is strongly connected to everyday life. In the following section, we look at these connections and the role that this existential basis plays in certain religious beliefs.

4 *Ánimas* as a Lived Experience and Materiality of the NN Cult

The cult of souls in purgatory in Puerto Berrío has an important basis nourished in the experiences of the world. Believers ask *ánimas* for help in mundane matters related to the present. Thus, devotion to NNs can be addressed through the approach of lived religion, according to which religion is not only limited to the traditionally religious spaces—such as churches, temples, and other places of worship and pilgrimage

37 The original expression in Spanish is *entonces a uno siempre le da como susto*.

38 In this regard, a more detailed observation can be found in Luis Bernardo Bastidas Meneses, "Producción y circulación de imágenes y videos en el culto a las ánimas del purgatorio en Puerto Berrío, Colombia," in *Geografías y Memorias de lo Sagrado en Espacios Regionales*, eds. María Andrea Nicoletti, Cristina Teresa Carballo, Fabián Claudio Flores and Ana Inés Barelli (Bariloche: Teseo Press, 2022): 179–98.

—but also has a place in other spaces—such as workspaces and domestic spaces.[39] Lived religion is the one that ordinary people follow in their everyday lives, no matter how faithful they are to the teachings of formal religious institutions, which does not necessarily exclude the operation of formal religious institutions.[40] It is the religion experienced and practiced by ordinary people, functioning not only in the realm of belief but also in the physical world where it is continuously expressed.[41]

Additionally, the NN cult features these characteristics. People may embrace the teachings of institutions that traditionally claim religious authority, moving beyond them to link, share, and adapt diverse beliefs and practices.[42] The NNs cult is made possible in part by a transformation of the teachings of the Catholic Church and their adaptation to a concrete local reality. This adaptation is expressed in terms of what people do and experience, i.e., in their ritual practices and in other experiences of the everyday world where sensory perception is involved.

The lived religion approach identifies the most evident connection between the real body and spirituality in ritual practices. These practices can evoke other social senses in their production of certain sensations linked to specific moments and the experiences of believers.[43] The reality of the ritual act is confirmed through bodily sensations. For example, images, sounds, and smells can evoke remarkable religious experiences.[44] In Puerto Berrío, believers pray at the graves, and people commonly talk to the graves, narrating their problems in a way that one might confide secrets to a friend. People often say they feel more relieved and relaxed after this communion with the dead. However, during rituals and other moments, the senses play a determining role in experiencing religion, thus exerting an important effect on the cult of the souls.

People can also feel the cult of the *ánimas* in their own flesh when they find employment, solve a personal problem, or experience relief from an illness. It is also real to them when they interpret certain visions, sounds, or dreams. These experiences and sensations contribute to people's definition of the sacred and to their endorsement and reinforcement of belief, as each of these elements shows them (and others) that the *ánimas* exist. The plausibility of the influence of the *ánimas* is so powerful that it is difficult for priests to explain whether certain everyday events

39 Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Everyday Religion. Observing Modern Religious Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices* (New York: New York University Press, 2021); Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

40 Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion.*

41 McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion.*

42 McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion*; Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

43 McGuire, *Lived Religion.*

44 McGuire, *Lived Religion.*

result from the intervention of such souls. In this regard, a Catholic priest in Puerto Berrío said to me:

> How do I tell people that it is not like that, knowing that people pray, and the miracle is granted? How do I tell a lady who took the tomb, painted it, put a beautiful tombstone on it, "Carlos NN," and 2 days later she bought a house or won a *chance*[45] or got a job? Explaining the situation is very difficult for me.[46] (Interviewee. Puerto Berrío, November 5, 2019).

As Nancy Ammerman suggests, people assimilate, classify, and convert supernatural experiences and sensations into narratives (such as that the souls of the dead exist and can grant miracles) because such experiences are only the material sustenance of that existence.[47] Here, rather than a dichotomy between beliefs and practices, we form a convergence, a direct (and probably dialectical) connection between the spiritual and the mundane. For the *ánimas* cult, this connection is expressed in experiences and concrete physical spaces. The importance of examining a material-physical dimension lies in the fact that spaces and objects "can participate in the production and encounter with the sacred."[48]

Let us examine this more closely, beginning with spaces. Certain spaces were (ideologically) created for certain purposes; among many examples, we can refer to playgrounds, restaurants, and cemeteries. The space is potentially experienced in specific ways through particular images and symbols. However, once individuals (culturally) appropriate a space, they may redefine its uses and the practices that take place there.[49] This creates local knowledge associated with the use of certain spaces that evoke certain lived, conceptualized practices.[50] For example, people are expected to stay silent in libraries, and there is a convention in support of this. For certain spaces, associating certain practices that constitute socially shared knowledge and are typified, standardized, and sedimented over time is possible.[51] Therefore, certain practices can be taken for granted in certain spaces.

The Puerto Berrío cemetery features sedimented knowledge concerning the relationship with the deceased, as reflected in practices like the care of the graves that are turned into small altars and the celebration of masses every Monday, along with the performance of different rituals that involve offering flowers to the graves or

45 *Chance* is a well-known Colombian legal daily gambling program. The gambler bets a number of three or four digits. The value of the bet is also chosen by the gambler, and the prize is paid in proportion to the money wagered.

46 The original expression in Spanish is *me queda de patas arriba explicar a mí la situación.*

47 Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion.*

48 Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion*: 99.

49 Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005).

50 Knott, *The Location of Religion.*

51 Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

lighting them with candles and praying in front of them.[52] The cemetery has a common grave, which is used for burying the skeletal remains of bodies that have not been claimed by anyone or have not been identified. Further, the common grave is excluded from religious practices at the cemetery, making it an abandoned space (Fig. 4). An important question arises here. Before every Monday mass, priests note that believers pray for "*all* the faithful departed." Believers say that they are usually devoted to the *ánimas* in purgatory. If so, why does the common grave receive no attention? In other words, why is the knowledge of certain religious practices only linked to identified and unidentified graves (NNs)? Are the *ánimas* of the bodies in the mass grave not in purgatory? Answering these questions requires the examination of the second dimension of the cult materiality: the objects themselves.

Fig. 4: Mass Grave at the Puerto Berrío Cemetery, November 2021. Photo by the author.

Studying objects is important because, as David Morgan points out, certain practices of using them "make up religions in one way or another. [Objects] participate in making and sustaining a life-world."[53] Similarly, objects remind and provoke stories as

52 It is worth noting that, in keeping with the lived religion approach, the cult of the *ánimas* transcends the typically religious spaces and is also installed in people's homes, as believers commonly have small altars in their homes that include flowers, candles, glasses of water, images of saints, and photos of the deceased (when the deceased is not a NN). However, for the purposes of this chapter I focus on the cemetery.

53 David Morgan, "Material Analysis and the Study of Religion," in *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, eds. Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie (London: Routledge, 2017): 14–15.

well as evoke notable religious experiences.[54] The NNs' bone remains have the qualities of objects but are not the same as religious ornaments. They are not objects, but their physical and material conditions have an effect on the religious configuration of the cult of the *ánimas*.

The cult does not operate in the abstract: it is oriented to particular *ánimas* and not to *ánimas* in general. Unlike the cult of official and folk saints to which people pray in front of a statuette or an image that evokes the saint, in Puerto Berrío, people go to the cemetery to pray in front of the mortal remains once inhabited by the *ánima* to which they are praying. Those mortal remains evoke the *ánima* and remain part of the *ánima* somehow. These bodily remains denote place and may even be a conduit for interactions with a given *ánima*. Thus, having "exclusive" access to the mortal remains is a precondition for the development of the cult. People pray in front of the NNs' graves and establish a relationship with them, discussing their problems and hoping for a solution; as a tribute, they decorate the grave and make offerings to it. This "vis-á-vis" relationship facilitated by the materiality of (deceased) bodies cannot be carried out before a common grave. In other words, having a relationship with a multitude of *ánimas* gathered in a common grave is impossible, because *ánimas* are being approached individually.

If objects provoke storytelling, for example, if images and statuettes of saints can speak of certain virtues present in their lives,[55] then in Puerto Berrío, anonymous skeletal remains connect with issues that people can be certain about and are related to certain experiences. People know that the bodies that appeared floating in the Magdalena River are those of people killed by the MAS or AUC paramilitaries. They also know that they died violently, as the bodies show clear signs of violence: stabbing, throat slitting, or dismemberment. It is also known that most victims were ordinary civilians. This is all certain because people from Puerto Berrío experienced the same paramilitary violence, having been under paramilitary rule for decades. The skeletal remains evoke a history of violence that people can relate to, including in terms of narratives that see the victims as negative agents responsible for their deaths. At the same time, the skeletal remains evoke a sacred superhuman power.

5 Conclusion

In Puerto Berrío, armed actors have had a great influence on configuring social order. In the 1970s, FARC severely punished criminals, arguing that it was defending the region from external threats. Next, since the 1980s, paramilitary groups undertook a campaign of violence against alleged transgressors of the order imposed by those

54 Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*.

55 Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion.*

groups, such as those labeled as guerrilla collaborators (communists) and criminals. By persecuting civilians who had certain characteristics, the armed groups stigmatized their victims as supposed negative agents who deserved punishment due to their alleged harmful behavior.

In the 1990s, we have also seen how the unidentified bodies of the victims who had been thrown into the Magdalena River were pulled out by the local government's orders and buried in the cemetery as NNs, along with how they became veneration objects in the frame of the cult of *ánimas* of purgatory. How does this cult influence the assimilation of the negatively valued victims of the armed groups? This can be answered by three important elements: beliefs and practices based on Catholicism, believers' experiences, and cult materiality. Thus, the victims are approached as souls, become assimilated by civilians, and are provided a new status that is stripped of any negative connotation.

Although the belief that souls are in purgatory comes from Catholic doctrine, the Puerto Berrío cult is distant from the Church because it involves practices and beliefs that escape Church control. However, it is adapted to the symbolic structure of Catholicism, following the pattern of the cult of the saints: believers pray, make offerings, perform specific rituals, attend Catholic mass, and ask for favors or miracles. Thus, the cult of the souls is expressed as that of individualized souls, not of souls in general, similar to believers orienting their devotion to a particular saint.

The possibility of addressing the cult with an individual approach emerges from the material conditions of the believers. It is not Catholic doctrine or social theories about religion that define the sacred but the people who experience the miraculous power of the *ánimas*. People refer to different bodily sensations as proof of the potency and existence of the *ánimas*: they see them, hear them, feel their presence, and even speak with them in dreams. Similarly, believers attribute to them the achievement of certain events in earthly life, such as getting relief from an illness, getting a job, or resolving a personal problem. The cult expresses its materiality in the cemetery, as it constitutes the space in which the bodies lie that the *ánimas* once inhabited. The skeletal remains act as relics, which demonstrate the existence of the *ánimas* and evoke a sacred meaning that is superior to the mundane characteristics attributed to the victims of violence.

The cult allows victims whose bodies have been classified as NNs to regain their dignity. In Puerto Berrío, they are no longer anonymous: they once again have a name and are considered for their humanity, regardless of the stigma to which they have been subjected. In this sense, people compensate for the damage the armed actors have caused to the bonds of solidarity. The cult reconciles the radical separation between the living and the (dead) victims. The status of a victim is earthly and a container of all the sins that a person can commit to deserve death supposedly. However, the *ánima* status confers a different position on the deceased ones and strips them of all guilt. According to Catholic doctrine, if purgatory purifies the souls of all the dead who pass through it to allow them to leave and enter heaven, in the case of Puerto

Berrío, purgatory purifies the victims of paramilitary violence of all accusations against them. Consequently, the status of the victim loses importance. The *ánima* status purifies even those supposedly involved in some forbidden, illicit, or reproachable activity during their lifetime. The *ánima* is not only close to the living for having been part of the same community and intervening in their experiences, but also finds a place among the transcendent. The *ánimas* are not saints or gods but are closer to them than other mortal humans, which is sufficient to cleanse the victim's honor and keep their memory alive.

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Agustina Altman and Alejandro M. López

Bodies of Salvation: Embodied Powers among the Moqoit People of the Argentinean Chaco

1 Introduction

In this chapter, we explore the complex ways that Moqoit bodies have been and continue to be the locus of connections with nonhuman powers.

The Moqoit are an indigenous group, originally hunter-gatherers, living in the Argentine Chaco. Their interactions with Spanish conquistadors, the Argentine state, and various Christian mission endeavors led to changes and continuities in terms of their experiences of bodies and relationships with powerful beings. The reinterpretations of Pentecostalism that the Moqoit have created play a key role in their social dynamics. In this chapter, we demonstrate that, from the time immediately preceding their first interaction with Europeans until the present day, the Moqoit have considered the cosmos to be inhabited and shaped by multiple human and nonhuman societies that are interconnected through asymmetrical relations of power.

Bodies play a key role as manifestations of the power scale of beings and as the locus of their action. They are unstable and must be permanently recreated and sustained. In this context, a human being is experienced as an intersection of complex arrangements of intentions, desires, and asymmetric relationships with human and nonhuman bodies. These embodied experiences indicate the importance of border management and the need to regulate incoming and outgoing flows. Taking all of this into account, our main goal is to present one of the most pivotal moments in the Moqoit's historical redefinition of hegemonic modernity. We examine how they reinterpreted Pentecostal Christianity and introduced changes to their conceptions, developing a contemporary Moqoit version of modernity that is anchored in their bodies.

The fieldwork discussed in this chapter was carried out between 1999 and 2023 in four rural communities (Colonia Cacique Catán, Colonia Juan Larrea, El Pastoril, and Colonia Aborigen Chaco) and one urban (San Bernardo) community, all located in the Chaco province. In 1999–2009, this fieldwork was conducted by Alejandro López in

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the context of his combined research on ethnoastronomy (working with the research team he founded with Sixto Giménez Benítez at UNLP) and anthropology of religious change (the latter in the framework of the Equipo de Antropología de la Religión led by Dr. Pablo Wright, ICA, UBA). In 2009, Agustina Altman began her fieldwork on the dynamics and history of evangelical Christianity among the Moqoit, which was also within the framework of the Equipo de Antropología de la Religión. Her work continued until 2023. Most fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2023 was done cooperatively.[1] On average, stays of 15 days were undertaken at different times of the year. This was complemented by short stays (of 1 week) for special events and some long stays (of 1 month).

2 Historical and Geographical Context

The Great Chaco region is located in central South America. It partially covers southern Bolivia, western Paraguay, and northern Argentina. It is a sedimentary plain covered with subtropical savannas. The Argentinean part of this region extends across 12 provinces, in whole or part (Fig. 1). At present, this section of the Great Chaco is inhabited by various indigenous groups and nonindigenous population, mostly the descendants of Spanish colonists *(criollos)* and immigrants from other European countries *(gringos).* One of these indigenous groups is the Moqoit People (Mocoví in Spanish),[2] who live mostly in the southwest portion of Chaco province and the northern and central Santa Fe province. In 2008, the Moqoit population included 17,339 and 671 people living in the Argentine provinces of Chaco as well as Santa Fe and the rest of the country, respectively.[3]

1 A wide variety of ethnographic techniques were employed: participant observation, structured and semistructured interviews with a large number of community members (men and women, children and youth, adults and the elderly, leaders, ritual specialists, and others who do not play central roles in the community's leadership networks). We also carried out archival research adopting an anthropological perspective, especially in the archives of the Mennonite Church in Floresta, a neighborhood of Buenos Aires (Argentina), and Goshen and Elkhart, cities located in the state of Indiana (United States of America).

2 In Moqoit *la'qaatqa*, the Moqoit language, the term *Moqoit* refers to the group that is currently called *Mocoví* in Spanish. Because it is the most widely used today, A. Buckwalter's alphabet of Moqoit will be used for the transcription of Moqoit terms. See Alberto Buckwalter, *Vocabulario mocoví* (Elkhart: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1995). When transcribing Moqoit or Qom/Toba words collected by other authors, however, we will retain spellings using those authors' chosen alphabets.

3 INDEC, "Encuesta Complementaria de Pueblos Indígenas (ECPI) 20042005—Complementaria del Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas 2001," http://www.indec.mecon.ar/webcenso/ecpi/pueblos/ampliada_index.asp?mode=09 [accessed 12.06.2008].

Fig. 1: Map with the location of most of the Moqoit people in Argentina. Created by the authors.

The Moqoit belong to the Guaycurú linguistic group, so do the Qom (Tobas),[4] Abipones, Pilagás, and Caduveos. These groups should be conceived as part of the same ethnic chain.[5] Using this term, we—along with most Argentinian anthropologists who have conducted research in Chaco—refer to a cluster of ethnic groups whose lan-

4 The term that the members of this group use to designate themselves in their own language is *Qom*. We will use that word when referring to them in our own text, but if quoting other works, we will keep the other author's term and add *Qom* in brackets.

5 José Braunstein, "'Indios' and 'Cristianos': Religious Movements in the Eastern Part of the Wichí Ethnic Chain," *Acta Americana. Journal of the Swedish Americanist Society Special Issue: Missionaries and Amerindians* 11, no. 2 (2003): 19–42.

guages and cultures are seemingly connected to each other, forming a sort of chain, along which a gradual series of variations occur. In such a pattern, spatially contiguous groups are relatively similar—for example, speaking mutually intelligible dialectal variants—whereas groups that are further apart in the chain would present notable differences; for example, they might speak mutually unintelligible dialectal variants. Before the arrival of *criollos*, Moqoit were organized into groups of related families who traveled while hunting and gathering.

During the colonial occupation of what is now Argentina by the Spanish crown, from the beginning of the sixteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the portion of that territory including the Chaco was seen by the Spanish as a border area or a void in their domination of the land. Although the inhabitants of the area were politically independent from the colonial government, many types of exchanges took place between these indigenous groups, the *criollos*, and the European populations, from trade to military conflict. As a consequence of these complex exchanges, the indigenous groups in the area underwent several changes during this period.[6] For example, in the seventeenth century, the Moqoit adopted horses and cattle. In addition, European intervention produced redefinitions of social groups, borders, and ethnonyms of the indigenous peoples. In 17th–18th centuries, Jesuit missionaries were active in the region and founded missions among Moqoit and other related groups. These missions played an important role in the reconfiguration of the material and symbolic worlds of the Chaco groups.[7] The missionaries' presence gave rise to an intense dialogue between the Moqoit cosmos and the cosmos that the missionaries had brought. The worship of saints and prayers for the dead, as well as the presence of medals, crucifixes, and other powerful objects, constituted windows of interaction between the worldviews.[8]

Following the wars of independence and subsequent civil wars in what would become Argentina (1810–1862), the new nation sought to effectively control the indigenous populations, their territories, and their natural resources. The Chaco region was, along with Patagonia, one of the two main sites of indigenous resistance to this. Through a series of military campaigns (1870–1917), the indigenous peoples of the Chaco were progressively forced to become sedentary and to be incorporated into the labor market, performing harvesting or weeding tasks at logging camps and ranches of the *criollos* and European migrants who were being encouraged by the state to settle in the area. These abrupt transformations increased tensions in the region.[9] To-

6 Alejandro M. López, "La Virgen, el árbol y la serpiente. Cielos e identidades en comunidades Mocovíes del Chaco" (PhD diss., Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2009): 111–21.

7 Alejandro M. López, "La Virgen, el árbol y la serpiente": 116–284.

8 Alejandro M. López, "La Virgen, el árbol y la serpiente": 288–89.

9 Gastón Gordillo, "Procesos de subsunción del trabajo al capital en el capitalismo periférico," in *Antropología Económica II. Conceptos fundamentales*, ed. Hugo Trinchero (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1992): 45–80.

ward the beginning of the twentieth century and within this context of exploitation, the Moqoit led several uprisings (San Javier, 1904; Florencia, 1905; Napalpí, 1924; Zapallar, 1933) that included an important cosmological component, culminating in fierce repression.[10] The leaders of these movements claimed to be able to communicate with powerful nonhuman beings that could provide them with different forms of power that were sometimes materialized in objects, such as sticks. These indigenous leaders claimed that when all of the members of their group possessed such objects as bearers of the ancestors' power, a new era would begin, and the indigenous people would be rich like the *criollos* and would rule the region.[11] In addition, they would no longer have to fear the *criollo* authorities, as their weapons would be ineffective, and their bullets would turn into mud or would not penetrate the indigenous bodies.[12]

Beginning in the initial decades of the twentieth century, with the arrival of Protestant missions, the indigenous people of the Chaco carried out an intense process of reappropriation of Pentecostal Christianity. While Pentecostalism closed the windows that the Moqoit had with the catholic articulation of Christianity, it opened new possibilities of dialogue through the relevance to Pentecostalism of ecstatic experiences and its decentralized structure. This encounter led the Moqoit to reconceptualize the Pentecostal experience from within the framework of their existing worldview, understanding Christianity to carry the possibility of making *pactos* or *nañam* (pacts) with a new powerful being: the Holy Spirit. By the end of the late 1970s, the presence of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal Christian churches (Iglesia Evangélica Unida, Iglesia Cuadrangular, etc.) began to gain importance in the Moqoit communities.[13] This gave place to a local resignification of Reformed Christianity, which is currently of utmost importance in the organization of many Moqoit communities. This implied changes and continuities in Moqoit worldview that are discussed below.

3 Moqoit Cosmology: A Topology of Power

From before contact with Europeans to the present, the groups residing in the Chaco —including the Moqoit—have always considered the cosmos to be inhabited by multi-

10 Edgardo Cordeu and Alessandra Siffredi, *De la algarroba al algodón. Movimientos milenaristas del chaco argentino* (Buenos Aires: Juarez Editor, 1971); Carlos Salamanca, "Revisitando Napalpí: Por una Antropología Dialógica de la Acción Social y la Violencia," *RUNA—Archivo para las ciencias del hombre* 31, no. 1 (2010): 67–87.

11 Leopoldo Bartolomé, "Movimientos milenaristas de los aborígenes chaqueños entre 1905 y 1933," *Suplemento Antropológico* 7, no. 1–2 (1972): 114.

12 Cordeu and Siffredi, *De la algarroba al algodón*; Alejandro M. López, "La Virgen, el árbol y la serpiente": 297–99.

13 Agustina Altman, "Historia y conversión. El evangelio entre los Mocoví del Chaco Austral," *RUNA —Archivo para las Ciencias del Hombre* 31, no. 1–2 (2011): 127–43.

ple human and nonhuman societies, that have their own intentions,[14] bound together by asymmetrical power relations.[15] This socio-cosmos is shaped by the power relations among these agents. For Moqoit, space is a social field, as understood by Pierre Bourdieu, possessing a geometry shaped by trajectories, capital, and social relations among its inhabitants (human and nonhuman beings).[16] In this social dynamic of spatial relations, a dominant element is *quesaxanaxa*, or power, in the general sense of capacity for action. Power is not merely or primarily possessed by human beings: it is particularly abundant in the nonhuman beings, who are the inhabitants of the space-time of cosmos's origins—a space-time particularly full of power. Herein, we refer to the powerful beings—*quesaxanaxaic*—who are accountable for abundance and fecundity and with whom it is essential to relate; they are deemed especially fertile, abundant, and immoderate because of the scale of their power. Arguably, power is at the core of the economy of the Moqoit universe. Herein, "economy" is understood in a broad sense, which follows Bourdieu's concept of the "general economy of practice."[17] This perspective does not assume that agents make purely rational actions, a teleology, or an overly economistic view, rather it indicates that the dynamics of social actions are driven by the behaviors of agents occupying different positions across various social fields, in which they strive to acquire and retain diverse materials and symbolic goods. Within this socio-cosmos, the human existence implies the deployment of various cosmopolitics that organize human relations in their and other societies, whether human or nonhuman.

The concept of a cosmopolitics was posited by Isabelle Stengers to account for the multiple and divergent human and nonhuman worlds and their mutual articulations.[18] Bruno Latour has noted that in this expression, the prefix "cosmos" removes the politic dimension from an exclusively human sphere, and the suffix "politics" eradicates the notion of a stable list of relevant entities from the idea of the cosmos.[19]

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14 We refer to intentions as mental states in which agents commit themselves to a course of action linked to the fulfillment of their desires or interests. We use the term to account for the Moqoit ideas regarding these agents.

15 Sixto Giménez Benítez, Alejandro M. López and Anahí Granada, "Suerte, riqueza y poder. Fragmentos meteóricos y la presencia de lo celeste entre los Mocovíes del Chaco," paper presented at the 51st Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Chile, 2004; Anatilde Idoyaga Molina, "Modos de clasificación de la realidad en la cultura Pilagá" (PhD diss., Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1983); Florencia C. Tola, *Les conceptions du corps et de la personne dans un contexte amérindien. "Je ne suis pas seul(ement) dans mon corps" Indiens Toba du Gran Chaco Sud-Américain* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009); Pablo G. Wright, *Ser-en-el-sueño. Crónicas de historia y vida Toba* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2008).

16 Pierre Bourdieu, *Las reglas del arte. Génesis y estructura del campo literario* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2005).

17 Pierre Bourdieu, *Razones prácticas. Sobre la teoría de la acción* (Barcelona: Anagrama: 1997): 160.

18 Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques VII—Pour en finir avec la tolérance* (Paris: La Découverte; Le Plessis-Robinson [Hauts-de-Seine], 1997).

19 Bruno Latour, "How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies," *Body & Society* 10, no. 2–3 (2004): 254.

Other authors, such as Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, use this concept in a similar way.[20] Our use of this term is more related to that of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, which can be linked with his comments on Amazonian shamans.[21] According to Viveiros de Castro, Amazonian shamans are characterized by their ability to "deliberately cross bodily barriers and adopt the perspective of [other] subjectivities [. . .] in order to manage the relationships between these and human beings."[22] He sees this as a "political art, a diplomacy."[23] In this direction, we understand Moqoit cosmopolitics as a set of practices and theories on the power relations among diverse human and nonhuman social collectives that structure the Moqoit world. Herein, the Moqoit distinction between *ỹaqaỹa* (my brother, my friend, or familiar to me) and *ỹoqa'a* (foreigner or strange to me) is relevant as a classifying mark of the social "we" and of those "others" (many of them nonhumans) with whom negotiating or antagonizing is necessary.[24]

Interacting with these powerful beings is essential for humans as they provide the resources human life depends on. Among the powerful nonhumans are the *neloxoỹac* (owners, caretakers, or guardians) of diverse spatiotemporal spheres and vital resources, who grant or deny human access to the latter. Interactions with them must be regulated, as these beings are immoderate, anomalous, and *ariscos* (untamed). Thus, the way to build a bridge to the nonhuman world, which is dangerous but fecund, is to make a pact with the *neloxoỹac*.

The corporality of the beings who inhabit the world is linked to the scale of their power: the greater the power, the greater is the variety of bodily regimes available to a being. Herein, the term "bodily regimes" was chosen to emphasize the notion that the corporeality of a singular entity can assume different forms connected with different modalities of body production in the framework of power relations. This diversity of modalities implies that the entity in question manifests in different ways concerning the sensory apparatus of other beings and that it adopts distinct physiological and sensory apparatus, movement capabilities, material properties, and, in general, a different habitus in each case. This concept of "bodily regimes" has roots in Michel Foucault's idea of disciplinary regimes.[25] Exploring Moqoit conceptions of the body and the cosmos, this category is valuable because it allows us to integrate the role that

20 Marisol de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond Politics," *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2009): 273–311; Mario Blaser, "Is Another Cosmopolitics Possible?" *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 4 (2016): 545–70.

21 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio," *Mana* 2, no. 2 (1996): 119–20.

22 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem e outros ensaios de antropologia* (São Paulo: COSAC & NAIFY, 2002): 358. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the authors.

23 Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem*: 358.

24 See analog ideas for *Qom* people in Wright, *Ser-en-el-sueño*: 133.

25 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

power plays in creating legitimate modes of corporality, along with Moqoit ideas on the capacity of living entities to shape time, space, and physicality.

Considerably, our discussion of bodily regimes is in dialogue with Florencia Tola's use of this term in the Qom case;[26] however, it explicitly recovers the Foucauldian note to show how the Moqoit conceptions implies a true political economy of corporalities.[27] Thus, a bodily regime would be the result of the stratification—owing to being immersed in power relations[28]—of the flows, speeds, and intensities occurring in a fluid materiality,[29] giving rise to what could be understood as an assemblage[30] or a specific temporary arrangement of flows whose hierarchization results from specific practices of power.[31] Therefore, the greater the degree of power that an entity possesses, the broader the array of available possibilities for bodily regimes. Thus, during the time of origins, a time of great power, beings could choose from among various body forms: animal, anthropomorphic, or meteorological, among others. All of these regimes were accessible to them, and beings could travel through the most diverse cosmic spheres. However, according to Moqoit mythical narratives, following the primordial cataclysms that gave rise to the present human society, human beings and many animals saw their scale of power and the number of bodily regimes accessible to them drastically reduced. Despite this, some powerful humans —such as the *pi'xonaq* (male shamans) and *pi'xonaxa* (female shamans)—still have the ability to manifest themselves in animal or meteorological shapes.

A contemporary example of this is found in the testimony of one of our Moqoit interlocutors, a woman in her 50s living in a rural community located in the southwest of the province of Chaco, who belonged to an evangelical church. In 2013, she told us the following:

> It was the time of elections and the politicians brought food to distribute and there were several *pi'xonaq* among the people. Then my stomach started to hurt so I went to the town, to the hospital and then to vote in the elections. When I finished, one of those *pi'xonaq* men touched my arm and said: Why don't you say hello? At that moment I fainted and fell to the ground and dreamt. All this happened because that man was a *pi'xonaq*. And I dreamt that the man who touched me was a toad and that that toad was clinging to my arm and that toad was the hand of the *pi'xonaq*. They took me to the hospital and I was more dead than alive and I saw the man in a vision and he told me that he had more power than the Christian god and he showed me his power, the power he had because of the little bags he carried.

26 Tola, *Les conceptions du corps*: 46–47.

27 Qom and Moqoit are strongly related groups.

28 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: 26.

29 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 153.

30 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: 74, 90.

31 Elisabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism. Theories of Representations and Differences* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): 167–68.

Certainly, there are humans, animals, and plants that can usually assume only one shape, but even they can take on other appearances in the particularly powerful realm of dreams or ecstasy. If somebody has a "humanoid form," therefore, or a body form similar to us, *la'aashaxaua*, this is no guarantee that the being in question is one of "us" (*ỹaqaỹa*). In addition, a human can experience "nonhumanoid" forms (for example, animal forms or *isecỹac*) if they possess sufficient power. Beings with "nonhumanoid" appearances can be "people" (*qom*), that is, living entities that have intentions, desires, language, and social life but also "other people," strangers (*ỹoqa'a*).[32]

In recent years, studies of corporality, personhood, and the classification of living beings have flourished in Chaco.[33] These have taught us a lot concerning the fluidity and porosity of the limits of the body, relevance of fluid exchanges, and the ways in which it carries the intentions and desires of the participants in that exchange. In addition, the notion of "embodied person" proposed by Tola describes the need to go beyond the body-mind dualism to account for the notions of person and corporality of these groups.[34] In particular, this allows us to account for the ways that the person is collectively shaped in and by one's corporeality. For example, our Moqoit interlocutors comment that one must be very careful with one's bodily fluids, nails, or hair clippings. If another person takes them, they can be used to gain access to their source and affect that person in various ways: generating ailments or sensations, thoughts, fears, and desires. For instance, consuming the meat of a certain animal during sensitive states—such as pregnancy—can cause the features or the behavior of the animal to be adopted. Further, contact with shamanic objects can make the powerful entities, which are part of the shaman to manifest in us as well.

As with the *Qom* case,[35] some of the main components of the Moqoit human embodied person are *lqui'i'*, their image; *la'al'*, their shadow; *nachaalataxac*, their life or walk; *lquesaxanaxa*, their power; *lacat*, their breath; *loshicmaxa*, their skin; *lauelese'* their entrails; *la'at'* their flesh; *leenaxat*, their name; *la'deenataxanaxac'*, their thought; *la'qaatecpi'*, their words; *napaxaỹaxa*, their heat; and others such as *lliguiñi*,

32 For a comparison with the Qom case, which presents similarities and differences in terminology, you can see the debate between Tola, *Les conceptions du corps*: 54, 65, 83 and Wright, *Ser-en-el-sueño*: 133, 139.

33 Celeste Medrano, "Devenir-en-transformación. Debates etnozoológicos en torno a la metamorfosis animal entre los Qom," in *Gran Chaco. Ontologías, poder, afectividad*, eds. Florencia Tola, María Celeste Medrano and Lorena Cardín (Buenos Aires: Asociación Civil Rumbo Sur, 2013); Celeste Medrano, Mauricio Maidana and Cirilo Gómez, *Zoología Qom. Conocimientos Tobas sobre el Mundo Animal* (Santa Fe: Ediciones Biológica, 2011); Cintia N. Rosso, "Compilación y análisis preliminar de la fitonimia de la flora leñosa de comunidades mocovíes del sudoeste chaqueño," in *Léxico y categorización etnobiológica en grupos indígenas del Gran Chaco*, eds. Cristina Messineo, Gustavo F. Scarpa and Florencia Tola (Santa Rosa: Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, 2010) 251–71.

34 Tola, *Les conceptions du corps*: 47–49.

35 Tola, *Les conceptions du corps*: 169–91; Pablo G. Wright, "Fronteras del corazón shamánico: Azares y dilemas Qom," *Avá*, no. 16 (2010): 8.

their footprints; *lahita*, their smell; or in general bodily fluids (*leuo'*, blood; *nqo'xonaxat'*, urine; *la'tec'*, feces; etc.); *linachi'*, the nails; and *laue*, the hair. The shamanic nonhuman companions of a human are part of the Moqoit embodied person, and many of them inhabit inside the limits of the human skin in different parts of the body, in particular in the heart.

Beyond their rich ethnography and interesting analyses, several recent studies of corporality and personhood in Chaco groups have adopted a vision that is strongly influenced by a set of recent models—each with its own particularities—that have been elaborated by specialists in Amazonian groups and have been proposed as general frameworks for approaching "Amerindian thought," such as Viveiros de Castro's[36] perspectivism and Philippe Descola's animism.[37] We consider that the models built based on Amazonian ethnographies have limited relevance to the Chaco groups. The dialogue with Amazonian studies can provide interesting elements and suggestions. However, as general interpretative models, Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism and Descola's animism are not sufficient to account for what is shown by Chaco ethnographies. One key limitation lies in their lack of engagement with political anthropology and, in particular, with the geopolitics of knowledge. These models thus struggle to address the intricate relationship between knowledge as a source of power and the intricate involvement of power in producing and managing knowledge. This issue is particularly relevant in examining Chaco cosmologies, in which power relations play a pivotal role and remarkably influence bodily regimes.

As noted for the present case, the defining element in the Moqoit is power. This relates to the power scale of a being that seems to define a variety of bodily regimes that it is enabled for. This shows why the beings who are from the time of origins, filled with power, can equally adopt animal, plant, human, astronomical, and atmospheric shapes. All of these regimes are accessible for them, and they can pass through the most diverse cosmic spheres. Celeste Medrano called attention to the centrality of metamorphosis in Qom classifications of animals, and we consider that this observation is also crucial for the Moqoit.[38] We add, following a long tradition of studies in the Chaco,[39] that power forms the backbone of such transformations and their possibilities. For this reason, any classification is circumstantial and relative, so long as what is observed is not organized in relation to the perspective of the *quesaxanaxa*

36 Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem*: 358.

37 The term "animism" has a long history in anthropology, but here we are referring to Descola's use of the term: Philippe Descola, *Más allá de la naturaleza y la cultura* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2012).

38 Medrano, *Devenir-en-transformación*: 77–101.

39 Silvia Citro, "Creando una mujer: Ritual de iniciación femenina y matriz simbólica de los géneros entre los Tobas Takshik," in *Mujeres Indígenas en la Argentina. Cuerpo, trabajo y poder*, ed. Silvia Hirsch (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2008): 12–36; Gastón Gordillo, "The Bush, the Plantations, and the 'Devils': Culture and Historical Experience in the Argentinean Chaco" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1999); Edgardo J. Cordeu, "Los ropájes de lo insólito. Dualidad de las cosmovisiones e ideas del 'poder' en tres mitos Tomaraxo," *Scripta Ethnologica* 20 (1998): 7–29; Wright, *Ser-en-el-sueño*.

(power) at stake. As Medrano noted, the references to humans/nonhumans or humans/animals/nonhumans/nonanimals that are common at present should be understood to be merely approximate.[40] We should add that this approximation does describe, to a certain extent, the state at certain scales of power, in which everything is more static. However, when power increases, everything becomes more fluid, and the divisions setting these categories apart vanish.[41] Something similar takes place across the cosmos as a whole, including time and space.

In this context, human beings are constantly seeking to increase their power and their self-construction. This can be achieved through the incorporation of powerful entities and the avoidance of the loss of parts of their own being (for example, preventing the escape of the *lqui'i'* or "image" resulting from fear in an encounter with a powerful being) or avoiding others' malevolent manipulation of their own materiality. It is important to prevent other agents from entering their own bodies.

The imagery of the body as a container that is filled by power, similar to a fluid, is often used by Qom[42] and Moqoit to illustrate the prevention of other intentions from entering. In fact, the Moqoit term usually translated as "body" is *loshicmaxa*, skin. A body that is filled with power provides no space for other things or entities that seek entry. Where one's own power diminishes, the body as it were deflates, and this empty or drained body makes room for potentially harmful entities to enter and take control.

For example, a middle-aged bilingual Moqoit teacher living in a rural community located in the southwest Chaco province—discussing the concept of being healthy and strong—conveyed that the Moqoit expression denotes that this state is *ra'ñi nachalataxac*. This expression is connected with *ra'ñichigui*, signifying that something is full from within. Moreover, *ra'ñi* indicates that something is hard or firm, whereas *nachalataxac* refers to something's "life, walk, or standing upright." The expression for an individual's state of health implies that their life or existence is full and their body is completely stuffed or firm. Similarly, weakness is associated with *co'chigui* or *co'chiichigui*, signifying emptiness within. This hydraulic understanding of power is linked to two fundamental techniques employed for healing by *pi'xonaq* (shaman): blowing and sucking. As stated by young Moqoit from the El Pastoril and Tolderias communities of the province of Chaco who have experienced shamanic healings, blowing—known as *pe'tevec*—is used in less severe situations. For some of them, when the *pi'xonaq* blows, the location of the problem within the afflicted person can be discerned by the *pi'xonaq*. For others, this technique seeks to expel what is causing the illness; however, it is only effective when the power involved is not excessive strong. All of these Moqoit agree that the most potent

40 Celeste Medrano, "Los no-animales de los Qom del Gran Chaco argentino," paper presented at II Jornada sobre Etnociencias, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2016.

41 We can think of this using the metaphor of a substance heating up and melting, that is to say that the higher the energy, the more fluid the limits become.

42 Wright, "Fronteras del corazón shamánico": 61–79.

technique is sucking—referred to as *noqo'xogshiguim* or *nqo'xogshiguim*—that is, extracting with the mouth—*ya'gui'ña*. In such a case, the *pi'xonaq* extracts the power entity inside the person that causes the illness. Upon extraction, it manifests as a small stone, shell, or bone, spit out by the *pi'xonaq* onto their hand for display, after which they usually ingest or preserve it to incorporate it into the shaman's inner arsenal. Consequently, the *pi'xonaq* empties the patient of the power entity, removing it from the sender *pi'xonaq* and incorporating it. One of these young individuals—an intercultural teacher from El Pastoril—mentioned that, when the *pi'xonaq* sees people who have lost their *la'al'* or *lqui'i'*,[43] they say that the person is *co'chiichigui* (empty). Thus, *pi'xonaq* must seek the lost element and bring it back. Subsequently, the person is well and healthy; this is expressed using the term *no'qaachigui*, which literally means "complete or full inside."

A young teacher told us the following in an interview:

> There were individuals who were empty, *co'chiichiguit*, and later they recovered, as if they were filled with spirit, soul, and everything else. Then people said about these individuals: "Bueno, *qaiỹeme ma'shi' no'xagui* [he/she is full] *quena' nanchaxana* [of different things]," meaning "they are filled with spirit, filled with soul." It can also be expressed as "*mashi Qaigueme no'xagui* [he/she is full] *quena' nanchaxana* [different things]," signifying "they have finally filled with something spiritual." And now [that person] will return anew, akin to being reborn or living again.

Thus, the human person is conceived by the Moqoit to be at the intersection of complex arrangements of intentions, desires, and asymmetric relations together with other bodies, which makes border management very important. In this sense, the porous nature of body's borders implies the need to pay constant attention to incoming and outgoing flows. As noted, humans can increase their power through pacts and exchanges with more powerful beings. Such exchanges often involve encounters with entities or objects that are part of their materiality and have their intentions and will. From such pacts, individuals can incorporate objects, fluids, words, and chants that act as the materiality that carries the presence of the entities that have now become part of the person. As a result of this dynamic, the unity of the person is intricate, and it forms an inherently unstable structure. The acquisition of power is experienced by the subject as an intense emotion, often referred to as *gozo* or *netoonaxac*. This emotion is frequently referred to as an internal fire or high temperature. Tola mentions for the *Qom* that body heat (*napaxaỹaxa*) is a component of the human body, and it is linked to human vitality.[44] It can be stolen or diverted by shamans and nonhumans using objects that take heat from a person's body by contact, which is why this type of object is kept inside the house at night. Among the Moqoit, this heat is called *npa'ỹaaxa* (related to *pa' ỹaxat*: heats it up), and is also associated with sexual desire. One aspect that should be taken into account among the Moqoit is that the sky beings

43 As noted, these terms refer to some of the forms or components of the human person.

44 Tola, *Les conceptions du corps*: 178–79.

live in a region of the cosmos where heat behaves differently than it does on Earth. Thus, for example, the fire of a bonfire there does not heat.

Each "unit" (whether the cosmos as a whole, a territory, a powerful being, a human person, or an animal) is in fact a partially encompassing or overlapping set whose members may divide. In addition, the components may also belong to other units and may even exist separately. Thus, all "units" are unstable, and they require continual recreation to be sustained.

Notably, the human community is one of these units whose integrity must be continuously rebuilt. Myths concerning its constitution during the origins present us with a human society made up of two halves. On the one hand were men who lived on Earth and had animal and anthropomorphic body regimes during origins. On the other hand, there were women, who were inhabitants of the sky, linked to fertility, power, and abundance. Out of curiosity, women descended to Earth and stole food from men to take with them. Men's violent action cut the connection between the sky and Earth, forced some of the celestial women to remain on Earth, broke the teeth of their toothed vaginas, and made copulation and human reproduction possible. This forced domestication of the feminine, giving rise to the human community, is considered unstable. Women, who are beings of great power, can return to their original immoderate state. Considerably, this is the framework in which the Moqoit attitude toward menstruation (and, in some cases, toward pregnancy) can be understood, which traditionally forced women to remain indoors, not approach sources of water or the bush, and avoid eating raw food. Two dangers should be noted when this prohibition is broken: the anger of the *Nanaic a lo*—a powerful serpent that uses wells as windows through which it observes the Earth and that cannot tolerate the smell of menstrual blood. If it is nearby, it can unleash a dust storm and bury the nearby human community. The other danger is that a woman who approaches such places or eats raw food in this state can become a cannibal (*nesogoy*)—powerful and immoderate, ready even to devour her relatives. These hazards indicate that women, particularly during powerful states such as menstruation and pregnancy, could potentially disrupt the forced domestication by engaging with sites of high power or interconnection in the layers of the world, such as water wells and bush. Similarly, participating in activities that are reminiscent of ancient times, such as consuming raw food, trigger a return to the original space-time, leading to the dissolution of the human community.

One of the privileged forms assumed by this pondering process constituting the experience of living for the Moqoit People is the cosmographic activity, the process of making of that we can call "topologies of power."[45] This implies a hermeneutic or in-

45 Alejandro M. López, "Las texturas del cielo. Una aproximación a las topologías Moqoit del Poder," in *Gran Chaco. Ontologías, poder, afectividad*, eds. Florencia Tola, Celeste Medrano and Lorena Cardín (Buenos Aires: Asociación Civil Rumbo Sur, 2013): 106.

terpretation, in a social key, of the textures of the cosmos, which seeks to untangle what the environment manifests as a trace of the intentions of the entities inhabiting it. Taking the original use of the term "topology" in mathematics into account, by "topology of power," we understand a qualitative characterization of the geometry of a space-time that is modeled by the power of the various agents that inhabit it. Therefore, the Moqoit topology of the world maps power relations in a world that is inhabited by beings who have intentions and desires. To recognize the textures of these territories is to perceive the tensions that are generated by links with those others for carrying out a true mapping of the social space that includes the experimentation of the limits between human and nonhuman beings.

It is essential to note that cosmologies and worldviews are not complete or static systems; instead, they are inherently historical and incomplete, even in the context of indigenous peoples. The dynamic process of historical change involves continuities and ruptures. The more abrupt the historical and social processes impacting the communities are, the more pronounced these ruptures become. However, it is crucial to avoid assuming complete detachment from the past, as the fundamental logics often persists and provides the basis for the reinterpretation and reformulation of the new elements.

The Spanish conquest, the subsequent advancement of the Argentine state, and Christian missionization undoubtedly brought considerable changes for the Moqoit and for other Chaco indigenous groups. Nevertheless, ethnohistory and ethnography show that these changes did not erase pre-existing beliefs and values. On the contrary, important underlying logics endured, and the communities creatively reinterpreted the elements that were imposed by colonial actions.

Considering that bodies play a key role in exercising power, we present—paying close attention to the roles of and ideas concerning bodies—a pivotal moment for the Moqoit in the redefining hegemonic modernity historically. We examine how the Moqoit, following their previous logic, reinterpreted Pentecostal Christianity, creating a distinctive version of human relations with the Holy Spirit. Thus, they transformed this conception into a "Moqoit path,"[46] a local adaptation of hegemonic modernity. This process also implied changes in the Moqoit ideas concerning bodies and the relationship with nonhuman powers.

4 Protestant Missions and Indigenous *Evangelio*

By the end of the nineteenth century, the liberal Argentine government sought to organize the country according to modernity projects drawn from Central and Northern European Anglo-Saxon and Germanic powers. Consequently, Argentina welcomed the

46 Agustina Altman, "El camino del evangelio. Cristianismos y modernidades entre los Mocoví del Chaco Austral" (PhD diss., Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2017).

arrival of immigrants from those regions with the hope that, once settled, they would convey their cultural *habitus* to the local population.[47] As part of the opening of the liberal state to this immigration and owing to policies providing for greater religious tolerance, several Protestant groups began to settle in the Chaco in the 1930s. The objective of these ventures was, to "civilize" the population, or to bring them "soup, soap, and salvation."[48] The financial support of their mother churches enabled these groups to found churches, schools, orphanages, clinics, and hospitals.[49] From the missionaries' perspective, such institutions would allow them to teach rational and critical thinking to the locals, as well as concepts of progress and rules of hygiene and sanitation.

In addition to the intentions of the missionaries, the indigenous people adopted certain elements from evangelical Christianity—especially Pentecostalism—and reinterpreted them. This interchange gave rise to a novel effervescence of cosmological creativity, entailing, for example, the emergence of indigenous pastors who began to preach to other indigenous groups in the absence of the missionaries.

Consequently, this generated transformations in the Moqoit conception of the cosmos and bodies. Despite the impetus provided by missionary activities, these changes followed the usual mechanisms of change in these societies. Moqoit conceptions, similar to all historical constructs, undergo alteration, and while maintaining certain lines of continuity, they show differences over time.

Contextually, many Moqoit gathered to sing together, led healing sessions, granted spirits and baptized their kin. By the mid-1950s, some missionaries—including the Mennonites—realized that they had to accept indigenous Christianity and work with it. Therefore, in 1955, the Mennonites dissolved their traditional mission to turn primarily to the translation of the Bible and literacy campaigns.[50]

The indigenous religious effervescence emerged from the complex interactions between Pentecostal missionaries and indigenous groups—in particular among the Qom, as the first missions were founded near their communities—leading to a religious experience that later became referred to as e*vangelio* (Fig. 2).[51] For the Moqoit,

47 Altman, "El camino del evangelio": 100–107; Hilario Wynarczyk, *Ciudadanos de dos Mundos. El Movimiento Evangélico en la Vida Pública Argentina 1980– 2001* (Buenos Aires: UNSAM EDITA, 2009).

48 James Pankratz, "Gandhi and Mennonites in India," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 30, no. 2 (2012): 139.

49 César Ceriani Cernadas, ed., *Los evangelios chaqueños: misiones y estrategias indígenas en el siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Rumbo Sur/Ethnographica, 2017).

50 Agustina Altman, "The Dissolution of Nam Cum in Perspective: Global Contexts of the Mennonite Mission in the Chaco, Argentina," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 94, no. 3 (2020): 347–80.

51 Cesar Ceriani Cernadas and Silvia Citro, "El movimiento del evangelio entre los tobas del chaco argentino. Una revisión histórica y etnográfica," in *De indio a hermano. pentecostalismo indígena en América Latina*, ed. Bernardo Guerrero Jiménez (Iquique: Ediciones Campus, Universidad Arturo Prat y Ediciones El Jote Errante, 2005): 111–70; Elmer S. Miller, *Los Tobas Argentinos. Armonía y Disonancia en una Sociedad* (México: Siglo XXI Editores, 1979); William D. Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argen-*

Fig. 2: Argentine Chaco. A Baptismal Service. Courtesy of Mennonite Church USA Archives. MC USA Archives Elkhart, MBM—Information Service Audiovisual, Box 28, Folder 14.

the initial encounters with the *evangelio* occurred around 1960, though connections with the Qom preachers who visited their communities.

The *evangelio* is one of the ways in which the Moqoit have been giving new meaning to hegemonic projects of modernity using their own logics in a certain scope of maneuverability. Thus, this experience, such as in their involvement in politics and in the health and educational system can be conceptualized as locally constructed alternatives to being indigenous and being modern in the contemporary world.[52] In the following, we examine how this process of constructing a Moqoit version of modernity can be reflected in the realm of relationships with nonhuman entities that are mediated through the body. The *evangelio* is a native, polysemic category, referring to the socio-religious experience that arises from contact with a broad range of Protestant denominations. In particular, at the present time it alludes to the set of churches grounded in indigenous organization, such as the *Iglesia Evangélica Unida* or IEU (United Evangelical Church), and to other denominations where indigenous people are active participants, even if they do not have control over the institution itself, such as with the *Iglesia Internacional*

tine Chaco: An Interpretive Report (Elkhart: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1954); Patricia Vuoto, "Los Movimientos de Pedro Martínez y Luciano: Dos Cultos de Transición entre los Toba-Táshek," *Scripta Ethnologica Supplementa* 10 (1986): 15–46.

52 Altman, "El camino del evangelio"; López, "La Virgen, el árbol y la serpiente."

del Evangelio Cuadrancular or IC (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel). In this sense, recognizing oneself as an *evangelio* or a believer indicates more than a religious affiliation, extending to an entire ontological condition.[53] This involves means of acting, thinking, perceiving the world, conceiving relationships with humans and nonhuman beings, and constructing the everyday experience of dwelling.

One crucial characteristic of Protestant Christianity that is resignified by the Moqoit refers to the organizational structures of the evangelical churches, which reinterpret the idea of congregation as equivalent to that of a network of related families that constitute a political unit. For example, the characteristic scheme is the conversion of a Moqoit leader of an extended family followed by most of his kin.[54] This can be seen in the testimony made in 2013 by a middle-aged Moqoit woman who lives in a rural community located in the southwest of the province of Chaco:

> And there they gather between brothers, relatives, they communicate with each other, talk, they like it and so they surrender [convert]. They give themselves [. . .] Those who came to listen, they enter [convert]. They came from [the community of] Lote 3, someone came to visit their relatives [. . .], they listened how it was going, how they were living and they surrendered too.

The native churches emerging from this process are not simply local versions of an imported religion but constitute a new socio-religious reality. This phenomenon has creatively combined, not without contradiction, elements of shamanism and evangelical Christianity. In addition, direct and personal communication with the numinous were understood in terms of pre-existing logic concerning the means of managing relationships with nonhuman beings. From the Moqoit perspective, a human group's success or ability, just as that of an individual, depends on the pacts it has made with the numinous entities that have greater influence in the world. Thus, the *criollos*' success in dominating the Moqoit and other indigenous groups, along with their territories, accumulating wealth and goods, is understood to be the outcome of a successful pact with a nonhuman being that was previously unknown to the Moqoit: the Holy Spirit. The possibility of establishing a pact with this nonhuman being and its coexistence between pacts with shamanic owners are a common topic of discussion among the Moqoit. In this sense, and well beyond the provisional conclusions reached by each individual Moqoit, these debates illustrate the ways that the indigenous people understand the idea of God in Christianity. For them, the existence of the Christian God and even the option of connecting with Him does not imply the nonexistence of other powerful nonhuman entities but rather signifies a choice to seal a specific pact. What is under discussion is the requirement of exclusivity that such a powerful entity would make.

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53 Pablo G. Wright, "'Ser Católico y Ser Evangelio'. Tiempo, Historia y Existencia en la Religión Toba," *Anthropológicas* 13, no. 2 (2003): 61–81.

54 Agustina Altman, "El camino del evangelio"; Alejandro M. López, "La virgen, el árbol y la serpiente."

Worship services are important spaces for socialization, and they constitute a key religious experience in the *evangelio* (Fig. 3). They have a variable duration and consist of alternating singing, prayers, preaching, testimonials from believers and pastors, readings from biblical texts, dancing, and healing. The emphasis on singing and praises here comes from their reality as a privileged means of experiencing *gozo* or *netoonaxac* (joy) as a bodily and emotional experience of an ecstatic nature. *Gozo*, which supposes a fullness of happiness and power that is linked to contact with nonhuman powerful beings, allows believers to articulate the pre-Hispanic shamanic ways with the Pentecostal emphasis on the active presence of the Holy Spirit.

Fig. 3: Moqoit Worship Service, Province of Chaco. Photo by the authors.

Similarly, the Bible is conceptualized by the Moqoit concerning the dual perspective of words as potent action and as objects of power (*nqolaq*). This can be observed in the healing sessions that take place during worship services—in which the Bible is read for the therapeutic capacity of its words—and praise movements—in which the believers tie the Bible to their bodies to obtain power.

Another important area of resignification of Pentecostalism is related to health and illness. Being healthy or sick are indicative of the interrelation between the individual and powerful beings that structure the world. Moqoit generally think of disease states as being the result of the action of an intentional human or nonhuman agent seeking to harm the sufferer. Consequently, health is not understood to be a natural or given state, instead requiring a bond with other powers. Therefore, the ill-

ness of a pastor is often interpreted as a weakness that manifests problems in his pact with the sacred power.

In the Moqoit version, the discernment of spirits, which is a crucial mechanism in the management of the Christian charism, is a "total social fact" that shows their conception of the relationship with nonhuman powers at work.[55] For example, the debates surrounding the identity of powerful beings and their intentions, in spite of being expressed by Christian theological categories, are crossed by the role of emotions and the experience of *gozo*. These work as a barometer of the relationship with nonhumans and the determination of their intentions. In this way, if emotions sprout and there is *gozo*, then a powerful being is possibly involved, and knowing its identity, intentions, possible benefits, and whether they are compatible with those of the Moqoit believer is necessary. This subjective, sensory, and corporeal nature of the discernment of whether a person's experience is of God is not an individual act, as it undergoes the congregation as a whole. This can be seen in the following extract from an interview that we conducted in 2013 with a middle-aged Moqoit woman living in a rural community located in the southwestern Chaco, who is an *evangelio* believer:

> A married couple came here and asked about the *Evangelio*, they said they were evangelists. I told my husband: "there is something odd about them." So my husband didn't accept them. At first, everyone was angry with my husband. That night, a brethren was taken by God's Spirit and accused the couple of being deceivers and not being of God. God also revealed to them and those who were angry at first, later realized that they were not of God.

In this narrative, the woman emphasizes the sensations that she and her husband experienced the moment they met the visiting couple, indicating how their uneasiness toward the visitors was reinforced by the revelation of the Holy Spirit that was experienced by another member of the church. Face-to-face interactions among the group of believers initially led to anger due to their attitude against the visitors; however, eventually a consensus was reached that the visitors were indeed "not from God." When this performance leads to certain decisions, those involved tend to reinterpret previous situations as divine manifestations that—anticipating the decision made—have the function of arguments that reinforce it. One example of this can be seen in how a dream that was experienced by the narrator's husband is reinterpreted as a divine revelation foreshadowing the negative nature of the visiting couple:

> I remember the time . . . God revealed it. My husband, who was celebrating here at the church at that time, said two days before: "A couple will come, but they are not from God, so be very careful." It was like a dream. Well, three days later the couple showed up, and when my husband saw them, he was shocked. "Those are them" he said. He felt something. And that night, oh they spoke in tongues, as if to say they were used by God, but they weren't of God! And he didn't give them the opportunity, and they [the church assistants] got angry.

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55 Agustina Altman, "El discernimiento de espíritus en los cristianismos periféricos: Modernidades y regulación del poder entre los Moqoit del Chaco Austral," *Revista Protesta & Carisma* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1–36.

Here, a dream revelation to the narrator's husband is reinterpreted as the origin of the feeling that leads him to speak out in the church. Thus, we can observe the key role that emotional states play in discernment, not limited to distinguishing between ideas or reasons but also concerning being able to account for embodied emotional experiences. The knowledge obtained during the dream allowed her husband to discern. Once it was put into play in face-to-face interactions and performances at the worship service, and a consensus was built, the dream is revisited, and it acquires the role of a *seña* (sign).[56]

Thus, we can observe that for the Moqoit, it is important to define who is who in the world of nonhuman beings. However, the criteria and practices that are employed follow distinct logics. In fact, for the Moqoit, the *evangelio* facilitated a pact with the Holy Spirit. In addressing Moqoit debates regarding whether to connect with this power, we observed that accepting such a relationship does not negate the existence of other powerful nonhuman entities. On the contrary, it implies the choice of one pact over others, involving discussing the terms of this arrangement. It represents a genuine political economy of salvational goods. Could it be true that it is impossible to establish pacts with other powerful beings while following the *evangelio*?

5 Conclusion

We explored the key role of bodies in the conceptualization and experience of reality among the Moqoit, with particular attention to the changes and continuities in their connections with Pentecostal missions. The Moqoit perceive life as an ongoing cosmo-political process in a world structured by asymmetrical relationships in a diverse array of human and nonhuman societies. Power, which is linked to abundance and fertility, is a crucial characteristic of these Moqoit conceptions, predominantly expressed through bodies. The entities that shape this cosmos possess multiple bodily regimes that correspond to their scales of power. Their bodies are signs of their positions in this complex and shifting hierarchy. However, these bodies, like all bodies and other unities in the Moqoit cosmos, are unstable, porous, and fluid, created through the temporal assemblage of materialities that carry diverse intentions and wills. Thus, materialities and volitions come together temporarily, separate, and connect with others, linking every entity to each another and to the environment. Consequently, in the Moqoit cosmos, bodies are symbols and sites of encounters, pacts, and struggles among human and nonhuman beings. For each Moqoit individual, living entails a daily exercise of a cosmo-political art, regardless of whether shamans are privileged actors in this practice.

56 López, "Las texturas del cielo": 124–25.

Nevertheless, these ideas, concerning the cosmos and bodies among the Moqoit, are not static or timeless. Instead, they are historical constructions that have changed over time, especially after the sudden and consequential encounter with Europeans and *criollos*. Nonetheless, these conceptions have not changed randomly or completely. The underlying logics of the Moqoit conceptions, as we have described them, are capable of reinterpreting and resignifying many elements imposed by modernity projects. In addition, they have created their versions of modernity in the scope allowed by the global order.

Thus, the second part of this chapter explored a primary path taken by the *evangelio*. We have discussed ways in which the congregational structure of Pentecostal churches proved assimilable to Moqoit kinship logics, which facilitates the incorporation of entire groups. However, to provide a glimpse of the trajectories of the Moqoit *evangelio*, we focused on exploring the specific ways that the body and relationships with powerful beings are articulated. For instance, the ecstatic body and its *gozo* as a sign of being inhabited by the Holy Spirit are the most recurrent expression of Moqoit evangelical engagements with the potent. The Holy Spirit, understood as a new powerful nonhuman being emerging on the Moqoit scene, plays as remarkable a role in the contemporary order as the humans who first presented it to the Moqoit—the Europeans and *criollos*. The success of these groups in dominating the Chaco and Moqoit is the main reason that the Moqoit do not pay attention to pacts with the conquerors' nonhuman entities. However, the exclusivity demands that the missionary insistence on associating with the pact with the Christian God is questioned by Moqoit. Further, we explored how health is perceived as an evidence of a successful covenant with the God of the Bible, and its lack signifies problems in that relationship. We also discussed the discernment of spirits among the Moqoit evangelicals as a device that condenses many logics of bodily resignification and cosmopolitics. On the one hand, we noted the transformation of the Christian devices brought by missionaries, such as incorporating dreams as a real space to interact with the potent, the role of community performance in constructing living hermeneutics, and the subsequent elaboration of signs justifying the decisions made. On the other hand, we discussed the ways that Moqoit conceptions are modified through new technologies for engaging with powerful beings (reading biblical texts, new systems of positions, and the role of "preaching").

In summary nutshell, this chapter explored Moqoit conceptions, practices, and experiences of the body, personhood, and cosmos as a dynamic and active fabric capable of confronting the dynamics of a world that is characterized by changing relationships with others—human and nonhuman.

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André Demarchi

“We Don’t Grow Up Alone”: Therapeutic Paintings among Ge Indigenous Peoples

1 Introduction

We don’t grow up alone;
we grow up with a genipap paint
and the ornaments made by our mothers.[1]
(Ruth Mebêngôkre)

In the fragment quoted above, Ruth, a renowned expert in the art of body painting, reflects on the action and effects of the genipap ink and of the graphics and ornaments on the bodies of the children of the Mebêngôkre people, also known as Kayapó. In this context, she highlights that body painting is a feminine art and denotes the importance of mother’s knowledge concerning this activity for the healthy growth of Mebêngôkre children. Likewise, Ruth expresses an understanding of how body paint acts on the bodies, ensuring their full and healthy development.

In this contribution, I precisely characterize how, among the Mebêngôkre and other indigenous Ge peoples of Central Brazil,[2] body painting assumes a therapeutic, prophylactic, and even protective dimension in bodies in seclusion, such as in cases of postpartum, pregnancy, childbirth, illness, and mourning.[3] Body painting is essential for fortifying the body’s boundaries and minimizing susceptibility to spirits and natural entities in the lives and cosmos of these peoples. The surfaces of the body, including the skin, are reconstituted using annatto (*Bixa Orellana*) and genipap (*Genipa Americana*) inks.

Furthermore, body painting prepares and protects children’s bodies, enabling them to hold ceremonial adornments that are made with parts of other beings, such as teeth, feathers, and beads, which can also act on the body and cause illness. Here, as we likewise see below, body painting is a mediator of the relationships that extend

1 Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Portuguese have been made by the author.

2 The Ge peoples are divided by cultural and linguistic criteria into three large specific groups: the Northern Ge (Mebêngôkre, including the Xikrin people, Krahô, Canela, Apinajé, Krikati, Gavião, Suyá, and Panará) the Central Ge (Xavante, Xerente, and Xakriabá) and the Southern Ge (Xokleng and Kaingang). The Northern Ge and the Central Ge have long inhabited the central Brazilian *cerrado*, and their indigenous lands are the largest contemporary reserves of this important biome.

3 I would like to acknowledge some people who helped me with this text. My partner Suiá Omim, my life advisor Alex Moraes, my English teacher Maria Eduarda Ferraz, and the many indigenous women from whom I learned about body painting: Ruth Kayapó, Moetyk Kayapó, and Mrynòy Kayapó (in memoriam); Cawê Gavião; Creuza Prumkwoi Krahô; Nhiró Apinajé, Diana Apinajé, and Kaukama Avá-Canoeiro.

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between humans and nonhumans, ensuring a certain control of the relationships on the part of the humans.

This study began among the Mebêngôkre people while I was researching for my doctoral thesis.[4] The collected data supported the presented comparative exercises. This contribution extends my thesis's theoretical and methodological proposal to other indigenous peoples who—like the Mebêngôkre—are classified in the ethnology of the Amerindians as Northern Ge peoples, such as the Gavião, Krahô, Canela, and Apinajé, living in the ethnographic region—Central Brazil—featuring the predominance of the Cerrado Biome and forming a transition area to the Amazon rainforest.

Methodologically, I follow the comparative proposal that made the Ge peoples prominent in the Amerindian ethnology that was inaugurated by Claude Lévi-Strauss's study on dualistic societies,[5] in which he compares forms of social organization among the Ge peoples, demonstrating the similarities and differences among them. This approach was later followed by researchers of the Harvard-Museu Nacional Project, which was also a comparative project.[6] Other researchers, such as Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Vanessa Lea, took this comparative approach to the extreme in a detailed comparative and bibliographic study developed by Marcela Coelho de Souza,[7] who reread the studies of the Ge peoples in the light of theoretical developments in Amazonian ethnology, from the Amerindian perspectivism.[8] Moreover, Carneiro da Cunha summarized this tradition of comparative studies by stating that the societies created by the Ge peoples were "close enough for us to be sure that we are dealing with comparable phenomena, [. . .] at the same time sufficiently diverse for us not to always fall back on the same phenomenon."[9]

Herein, I propose to shift away from the classical approach to body painting seen in the pioneering works of Terence Turner and Lux Vidal in her classic book *Grafismo Indígena*.[10] The approach narrowly focuses on the symbolic and sociological aspects

4 André Demarchi, "Kukràdjà nhipêjx/fazendo cultura beleza: Ritual e políticas da visualidade entre os Mebêngôkre—Kayapó" (PhD diss., PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2014).

5 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Les organisations dualistes existente-elles?" in *Anthropologie Structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1974 [1952]).

6 David Maybury-Lewis, ed., *Dialectical Societies: The Gê and Bororo of Central Brazil* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

7 Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, *Os mortos e os outros* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1978); Vanessa Lea, "Nomes e nekrets Kayapó: Uma concepção de riqueza" (PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1986); Vanessa Lea, *Riquezas intangíveis de pessoas partíveis: os Mebêngôkre (Kayapó) do Brasil central* (São Paulo: Edusp, 2012); Marcela Coelho de Souza, "O traço e o círculo: o conceito de parentesco entre os Jê e seus antropólogos" (PhD diss., Museo Nacional da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2002).

8 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem e outros estudos de antropologia* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2002).

9 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os mortos e os outros*: 48.

10 Terence Turner, "The Social Skin," in *Not Work Alone: A Cross-Cultural Study of Activities Superfluous to Survival*, eds. Jeremy Cherfas and Roger Lewin (London: Temple Smith, 1980); Lux Vidal, "A

of body painting. This novel theoretical and methodological shift allows a particular emphasis on the inherent agency and pragmatic dimensions of body painting. My theoretical approach centers on the transformations in the study of Amerindian art[11] and the anthropology of art over the past 3 decades.[12] This shift is marked by the emergence of a praxiological approach grounded in the agency of art and its materials, artifacts, and subjects, notably influenced by Amerindian perspectivism.[13]

In their book on graphisms and figuration among Amerindian groups, Els Lagrou and Carlo Severi, in direct dialogue with the innovative initiative present in *Grafismo Indígena*, state the following:

> The thirty years that separated the two books witnessed a marked shift in the theoretical approach to the subject: from an emphasis on art as a communication system to a praxiological approach highlighting the centrality of agency (a revealing proposal for this turn can be found in Gell, 1998).[14]

This turn coincides with the production of several ethnographies of Northern Ge peoples that directly or indirectly address their body painting from this perspective, including my study on Mebêngôkre,[15] Ferreira Rolande's work on Canela,[16] Melo's research on Gavião,[17] Morim de Lima's on Krahô,[18] and Giraldin's on Apinajé.[19] These studies have overcome a view on body painting as eminently representational and social, which is also summarized by Terence Turner's famous expression "social skin."[20]

The proposed exercise employs this ethnographic material, applying developments in the praxiological approach to the comparative cases of annatto and genipap body painting, focusing on the relationships among blood, skin, and spirits. Thus, I

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pintura corporal e a arte gráfica entre os Kayapó-Xikrin do Cateté," in *Grafismo indígena: Estudos de antropologia estética*, ed. Lux Vidal (São Paulo: Edusp-Studio Nobel, 1992): 143–89.

11 Els Lagrou, *Arte indígena no Brasil: Agência, alteridade e relação* (Belo Horizonte: C/Arte, 2009).

12 André Demarchi, "Armadilhas, quimeras e caminhos: Três abordagens da arte na antropologia contemporânea," *Espaço Ameríndio* 3, no. 2 (2009): 177–99; André Demarchi, "Figurar e desfigurar o corpo: Peles, tintas e grafismos entre os Mebêngôkre (Kayapó)," in *Quimeras em Diálogo: Grafismo e Figuração na Arte Indígena*, eds. Els Lagrou and Carlo Severi (Rio de Janeiro: Sete Letras, 2013): 247–66.

13 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

14 Els Lagrou and Carlo Severi, eds., *Quimeras em diálogo: Grafismo e figuração na arte indígena* (Rio de Janeiro: Sete Letras, 2013): 11.

15 Demarchi, "Figurar e desfigurar o corpo"; Demarchi, "Kukràdjà Nhipêjx/Fazendo cultura beleza."

16 Josinelma Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos: A ornamentação na prática canela de construir corpos bonitos e fortes* (São Luís: Editora Oikos, 2022).

17 Maycon Henrique Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele: Nominação e decoração corporal Gavião (Amazônia Maranhense)" (PhD diss., Universidad Federal de Maranhão, 2017).

18 Ana Gabriela Morim de Lima, "Brotou batata para mim: Cultivo, gênero e ritual entre os Krahô (TO, Brasil)" (PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2016).

19 Odair Giraldin, *Pinturas corporais Apinajé* (Palmas: EDUFT, 2018)

20 Turner, "The Social Skin."

agree with Els Lagrou and Alfred Gell that body painting forms at the same time as a symbol and an agent.[21] I discuss the functions or possible functions of body painting and how and for what reasons the women of these different indigenous peoples make use of it while painting their and their relatives' bodies. For this, learning how they understand the body parts that extrapolate it—such as the blood, skin, soul, and spirits—is important.

2 Blood, Skin, and Spirits

An essential characteristic of a body for different Ge peoples is its noncorrespondence between a physical or biological body and the body's own totality. Here, the body is defined as a plurality of parts.[22] Lea—a central ethnographer of the Mebêngôkre people—defines it as the "detachable body."[23] Meanwhile, Roy Wagner conceived the body as "fractal."[24] In such a case, "the body is not a whole, but made up of parts that are not part of a whole; their parts, in a sense, are more real than the whole."[25] It should be understood as those parts that extrapolate, or should I say "explode," this so-called totality of the body? In addition, how do body paintings, in their inks, smells, graphism, and colors, relate to these parts?

One such part is the blood. For these peoples, blood is what sustains the body[26] and spirit (*karon*).[27] If, for the Krahô, "a bloodless body gets all shriveled up," for the Mebêngôkre, bloodless people are considered weak. For them, it is relevant that the quantity and quality of blood in the body must be balanced because it is considered a strong and dangerous element. In her ethnography, Isabel Vidal Giannini states that

> blood (*kamrõ*) and water are elements contained in the flesh. They are formed during gestation and are subsequently strengthened by breast milk and diet. Blood circulates through the body, in the flesh, and in the organs, with the liver and heart possessing a significant amount of blood.

21 Els Lagrou, "Caminhos, duplos e corpos: uma abordagem perspectivista da identidade e alteridade entre os Kaxinawa" (PhD diss., Universidad de São Paulo, 1998); Els Lagrou, *A fluidez da forma: Arte, alteridade e agência em uma sociedade amazônica* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 2007); Gell, *Art and Agency*.

22 Anthony Seeger, Roberto DaMatta and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "A construção da pessoa nas sociedades indígenas brasileiras," in *Sociedades Indígenas & Indigenismo no Brasil*, ed. João Pacheco de Oliveira (Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ-Marco Zero, 1987 [1979]): 13.

23 Lea, *Riquezas intangíveis de pessoas Partíveis*: 244.

24 Roy Wagner, *A invenção da cultura* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2010): 124.

25 Odilon Morais, "Dahâimba-alma/corpo: Notas para um dicionário intercultural Akwẽ-Xerente/Português," *Espaço Ameríndio* 15, no. 1 (2019): 6.

26 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os Mortos e os Outros*: 101.

27 Various Ge peoples have different spellings for the term "*karon*." In this chapter I use "*karon*" for spirits in general, encompassing animals and cosmic beings, and "*mekaron*" for spirits of the deceased. This spelling is commonly found in ethnographies on these peoples.

> Blood is considered a solid element and must be maintained in the right quantity. If an individual has too little blood, they become weak (*rerekre*) and yellow, unable to sustain the *karon*. If they have too much blood, they become lazy (*kangare*).[28]

Here, Giannini provides many characteristics of blood as understood among the Mebêngôkre, resembling the ethnographic descriptions of other Ge peoples that are compared in this contribution. For example, Cesar Gordon adds that

> women are considered less 'hard' (*töjx*) than men because they have more blood (*tàb*, which can be translated as 'soaked,' and is precisely the same word for raw). Throughout their lives, women do not undergo successive scarifications and other hardening processes like men do. On the other hand, the elderly, after many years of giving and caring for their relatives (children and grandchildren), will be 'dried up' and with little blood in their bodies—they will be physically 'weak' (*rerekre*), but with 'dry' or 'hard' skin (*töjx*). This condition persists until a moment when the detachment of their *karõ* occurs, ultimately leading to death[29]

The amount of blood in the body forms an important operator in differentiating bodies according to gender and age. Elders have less blood and are considered dry, and children also have less blood, but for the separate reason that their bodies do not yet have the quantity and quality of blood that are found in an adult's body. Men consider women to be slower because they have excessive blood from menstruation. Men are subjected to scarification to remove the excessive blood from the body. Women, by contrast, use medicinal plants (such as annatto) to reduce menstrual blood and even to stop menstrual bleeding. Both practices provide more lightness and agility, which are fundamental attributes for Mebêngôkre warriors. Ultimately, differences in the amount of blood define differences between human beings.

The blood quality defines the differences between humans and nonhumans. The relationship between the blood and *karon*, which is a constitutive part of the body, is notable. For these peoples, the blood is what carries the *karon.* It is its material support,[30] its vehicle, thus a dangerous contamination vector. Therefore, contact with the blood of other beings, primarily animals but also other humans, can cause disease and even death. Among Mebêngôkre (and other Ge peoples), illness can also be caused by the action of alien spirits (dead, animal, and nonhuman), along with the soul's evasion of a body whose surfaces are weakened.

Karon, the spirit or soul, is an attribute that exists practically in all beings. Thus, by transporting the *karon*, the blood also transports the very perspective of that being. Thus, contact with the blood is dangerous: it can provoke transformations in

28 Isabelle Vidal Giannini, "A ave resgatada: a impossibilidade da leveza do ser" (Master's thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 1992): 151.

29 Cesar Gordon, *Economia selvagem: Mercadoria e ritual entre os Índios Xikrin-Mebêngôkre* (São Paulo: Unesp-ISA; Rio de Janeiro: Nuti, 2006); Giannini, "A ave resgatada"; Roberto DaMatta, *Um mundo dividido: Estrutura social dos Indios Apinayé* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1976).

30 Giannini, "A ave resgatada": 151.

the state of the body, leading to illness and death. As noted, contact with any blood—including one's own—entails becoming contaminated. For example, the menstrual blood, blood from giving birth, and blood of a wounded person can all be dangerous for those coming in contact and nearby. Postpartum and menstrual blood are also considered exogenous, without necessarily belonging to the person who purged them. Therefore, as Carneiro da Cunha says, for the discussed Ge groups "different bloods cannot be mixed."[31] Evidently, this is only a warning, and there are many situations with mixing and exchange of blood and, consequently, *karon*. In such situations, the body is weakened, and these people seek seclusion, precisely aiming to separate discrete natures or different bloods carrying *karon* (spirits).[32] From this, Carneiro da Cunha concludes different cases of seclusion: "to be directly involved in the bloodshed is to expose oneself to be penetrated by it [the blood]."[33]

Seclusion highlights the relationship between the blood and skin. The skin requires violation for exogenous blood to penetrate the body, which causes alteration and imbalance. Among the Ge peoples examined herein, ethnographers are unanimous in reporting that the ill, newly born, and secluded have weak and soft skin. A necessary procedure for illness and seclusion situations that has rarely been discussed relates precisely to the re-establishment of the border between the blood, *karon*, and skin—that is, the frontier to the external world, which is effectuated via body paintings made with annatto and genipap.

For Mebêngôkre, the word for the skin, *ká*, means "wrap."[34] Carneiro da Cunha records similar meanings for *khö* among the Krahô and concludes that all of these "could be condensed into the notion of limit or frontier [. . .]. The skin is conceived as the border of the organism."[35] Turner proposes a similar conclusion in positioning: "the surface of the body as a common boundary between society, the social self and the psychobiological individual."[36] Among these different characteristics of the skin, I underline its ability to envelop the individual's blood, retaining the blood and soul in the body, putting into question the idea that body painting forms a social second skin. Indeed, the painting is the skin itself.

Luisa Elvira Belaunde explores the relationship between the skin and blood in seclusion situations in her proposal of an Amazonian hematology in *El recuerdo de Luna*.[37] Belaunde finds that, "although bleeding is in principle defined as a female at-

31 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os mortos e os outros*: 103.

32 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os mortos e os outros*: 106–7.

33 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os mortos e os outros*: 106.

34 Vidal Giannini, "A ave resgatada": 152; Lea, "Nomes e nekrets Kayapó": 117; Coelho de Souza, "O traço e o círculo": 574.

35 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os mortos e os outros:* 107.

36 Turner, "The Social Skin": 112.

37 Luisa Elvira Belaunde, *El recuerdo de luna: Género, sangre y memoria entre los pueblos amazónicos* (Lima: Editora Caap. 2005). Belaunde's extensive and little known research is crucial for understanding blood and its epistemological and ontological implications for Amerindian cosmologies.

tribute, shedding blood, for both genders, leads to a change of skin/body."[38] She approximates the case of protection to moments in which it is necessary to "change the skin" or reconstitute the wrapping through which the blood escapes or penetrates. I argue that, for different peoples compared herein, body painting provides the continuous reconstitution of the skin, delimiting a process of restitution or figuration of the body that aims to control the dangers related to these moments of fragility.

In the following, I discuss the effects of annatto and genipap paintings (Fig. 1), beginning with annatto.

Fig. 1: Red annatto and black genipap. The mother is painting her son's face red with annatto. Detail of the black ink of genipap on the mother's hand and the child's face, Môjkàràkô village 2010. Photo by the author.

3 Annatto: The Red of Humanity

The effects of annatto body painting were described by Curt Nimuendaju, a pioneer of Ge Indigenous ethnology, regarding the use of this ink among the peoples who are compared here, such as the Krahô, the Canela and the Gavião, as follows:

> Red annatto, the most common, at once attracts every visitor's notice by its omni-presence. The Indian himself and everything he owns are more or less red with *urucu*. Whatever they take hold of turns red, as does anyone living among them. The *urucu* stain on an article is not conceived as dirt, but as an embellishment. Any trace of earth on prepared food is removed by scraping and washing, yet no one dreams of attempting this with the imprint of the cook's ten

38 Luisa Elvira Belaunde, "A Força dos pensamentos, o fedor do sangue: Hematologia e gênero na Amazônia," *Revista de Antropologia* 48, no. 1 (2006): 217.

> digits. The Indians grow irritated if civilized people voice disparaging comments about the use of *urucu*; any person or article reeking with the pigment is a thing of beauty. [. . .] *Urucu* is not only beautiful, but also useful, being credited with antiseptic and prophylactic virtues.[39]

Although it was written more than 7 decades ago, Nimuendaju's description remains unquestionably contemporary. It attests that the annatto specialties are a symbol of humanity and beauty. This is so much so that, for example, the Gavião people call themselves *Pyhcop catiji* (*pyh.* = annatto, *catiji* = people),[40] an ethnonym that places annatto as the origin of the word that names the people. If we consider ethnonyms to be cosmological pronouns and, in other words, a people's means of differentiating themselves from other inhabitants of the cosmos and of asserting that they are more human than others, being painted with annatto defines the perspective of the Gavião and their peculiar way of being in the world and presenting themselves to themselves and others.[41]

This characteristic that the Gavião brings to their own name can be expanded to the other Ge peoples who are compared here. Among the Mebêngôkre, the annatto and the red it produces express vitality and humanity. As Vidal suggests, being painted with annatto indicates beauty and well-being in a healthy body.[42] Its absence, however, indicates illness or seclusion. Among the Krahô, when one expresses that a person is beautiful and healthy, he or she have "the color of annatto," which demonstrates the way that this ink "is linked to beauty and has a protection agency in the construction of beautiful, strong and healthy bodies."[43] For the Apinajé, as reported by Giraldin, annatto is found in the main stages of the production of the body, such as birth, marriage, and death.[44] At all of these stages, it concerns preparing a beautiful and healthy body with the skin painted red.

Annatto ink is removable and not indelible like genipap ink. Water and soap are sufficient to remove the red from the skin. Recipes for preparing annatto ink are very similar across Ge peoples, varying mainly in terms of the liquid added to the final product before applying it to the body. A Gavião specialist describes how this ink is to be produced in de Melo's "O nome e a pele" as follows:

> To make annatto ink, first break all the fruit, make a heap, thresh it, and take all the seeds into a large gourd. Then take a stick and crush it [on the pestle] until all the flesh is removed, then place the vessel to sieve, then crush it again, remove all the flesh, add a little water until you wash the seed well. Then remove the seed and leave only the water with its meat to cook. It's not just any kind of wood they use, it's *jatobá* bark, which is thick and hard on the fire, we only take

39 Curt Nimuendaju, *The Eastern Timbira* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946): 51–52.
40 Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele": 148.
41 Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da alma selvagem*.
42 Vidal, "A pintura corporal e a arte gráfica entre os Kayapó-Xikrin do Cateté."
43 Morim de Lima, "Brotou Batata para Mim": 163–64.
44 Giraldin Odair, *Axpên Pyràk: História, cosmologia, onomástica e amizade formal Apinajé* (Campinas: Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2000)

> the meat and it thickens, put it on the fire and it starts to boil. You take the foam and separate it, and people who have a bad eye can't touch it otherwise, it won't work. Then stir until thickened, leave only the meat, remove the foam. When it thickens, take *babaçu* coconut milk and put it to come out very red, with coconut milk it turns very red. Then put it to dry on a cloth, make a ball, cut it, use it and keep it.[45]

Among Mebêngôkre,[46] Apinajé,[47] and Krahô,[48] the same process is used, except that *babaçu* milk is not added at the end. Among Ramkokàmekrà, *babaçu* milk is added during painting: "when painting, first the *babaçu* coconut is chewed, to mix the milk with the annatto paint to apply on the person."[49] Unlike other peoples, *babaçu* oil is mixed on the annatto "ball" and rubbed on the skin. On occasions when there is no ready-made annatto dye, it is customary among all peoples, to do as the Canela do: "crush the seed in your hands and apply the dye to the body with *babaçu* oil."[50]

A strong relationship exists between annatto ink and the fabrication of children's bodies from birth to their preparation for ritual occasions. Among Mebêngôkre, annatto is already present at birth. Immediately after giving birth, the new mother must drink an infusion of the seeds of the annatto plant to stop the bleeding. As soon as children are born, they are given a layer of annatto ink on their bodies, and this practice supposedly launches the newborn's kinship process, beginning to establish its humanity. Among Gavião, as Melo notes, this potency is also present in the custom of children receiving a layer of annatto "around one or 2 years old, specifically, when they start to walk on their own, when they start to get 'tough.' [. . .] As they say, this annatto painting is to make the body 'healthy,' without diseases, in other words, there is a therapeutic and prophylactic dimension in the use of annatto."[51] Furthermore, the Canela people (Ramkokàmekrà) consider the ink and the "smell of annatto" as increasing "the body of the children, making it hard and strong."[52] This reminds us of Nimuendaju's reference to the smell of annatto, which, to the Ge people, refers to beauty and health. We can also remember that one form of contamination occurs through the odor of the blood, which can transmit *karon*. The smell of annatto ink on the body protects the individual from this possible contamination through its ability to overcome the odor of the blood. Franscisquinho Tephot says to Ferreira Rolande that "the annatto painting gives health, fortify and makes it grow, without it, there is no protection. Then one might get sick or might get taken by *mekarõ* [spirit]."[53]

45 Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele": 344.
46 Demarchi, "Kukràdjà Nhipêjx/Fazendo Cultura Beleza": 184.
47 Giraldin, *Pinturas corporais Apinajé*.
48 Morim de Lima, "Brotou Batata para Mim."
49 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 53.
50 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 53.
51 Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele": 349.
52 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 55.
53 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 59.

Although the black genipap is the main protector against spirits in these peoples, the annatto appears to have a prophylactic action. Morim de Lima states that, for the Krahô, "annatto ink is suitable for protecting and camouflaging themselves from the gaze of the spirits: a vertical line on the belly, at the level of the navel, and a horizontal line connecting the corners of the mouth to the ears."[54] The Gavião, in turn, protect themselves from "bad things" by rubbing annatto on the face, legs, arms, and trunk.[55]

Another important characteristic in the use of annatto points regards its initial effect on the reconstitution of the skin, as it is used before the application of genipap, and prepares the body to receive it. As noted in the introduction of this chapter, phases of seclusion are moments in which the surfaces of the body must be reconstituted. Thus, Vidal describes a recurring pictorial structure occurring among the Mebêngôkre people when they emerge from the situations of protection:[56] The first procedure that the body undergoes is marked by the application of annatto to the skin, in which the use of annatto can be understood to form a first action in reconstituting this limit—which is the skin—giving human shape and color to the newborns and secluded people.

4 Genipap: The Black against the Spirits

The ink that is extracted from genipap is known for its ability to remain on the skin, even after being washed, and has long been used by indigenous people. The permanence of this ink on the surface of the body varies between 8 and 15 days, depending on the quality of the ink. This is remarkable because the (semi-)permanence of the skin contributes to the understanding among Ge peoples that genipap ink is more robust than annatto ink.

Among the Ge peoples that are compared here, there are different means of producing genipap ink and enhancing its effects. However, certain elements in common to the two can be extracted from the following comparison. As with annatto, the knowledge and techniques involved in the production and application of genipap ink are eminently gendered, and women are generally mainly involved in its production and use, although some men can be seen handling it as well.

A second fact in the production of ink is that it is invariably produced with unripe fruits, preferably those of reduced size. A third constant is the use of brushes that are made of *babaçu* palm splint in the application of the pigment to the body, in addition to the use of the hands. However, differences begin to appear in this regard. While among the Apinajé, Ramkokàmekrà, Gavião, and Krahô, women use a brush made of

54 Morim de Lima, "Brotou Batata para Mim": 207.

55 Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele": 353.

56 Vidal, "A Pintura corporal e a arte gráfica entre os Kayapó-Xikrin do Cateté."

this material but with a small piece of cotton or fabric wound on the tip, Mebêngôkre women do not use this last method, using only the brush, which they refer to as a toothpick.[57]

The production of ink follows greater differences. If, in all cases, the pulp of the green genipap is grated or crushed in a container, among Mebêngôkre, charcoal black powder (*bori pryn*) made from tree bark is added to this mixture, along with saliva because during the making of the ink, one or more fruits—generally those considered the best—are chewed, and their pulp is spat into the container in which the ink is being produced.[58] Women say that this custom enhances the paint, making it last longer and come out even blacker, and the same takes place with the charcoal used to give the mixture a darker color and to facilitate the production of designs on the skin. Among Ramkokàmekrà, as Ferreira Rolande tells us, "the fruit is grated when it is still green, the juice is mixed with water and then heated until it turns black. The [strained] liquid is stored in containers to be used when convenient."[59] Among Gavião, genipap paint is prepared as follows: "peel everything, grate it, it will release a liquid, grate it until it fills a bucket, put it in the sun for the paint to set, after that, squeeze it all in your hand to remove the bagasse from it and the paint comes out, when you fill the bucket with this paint, put it in the sun again and then it is ready to use."[60] Apinajé prepare it in the same way as Krahô.[61]

While the recipes are different, there is a confluence among people in understanding the application of black painting made with genipap as a potent protector against the spirits of death. Its prophylactic effect can be found in other ethnographic regions, such as among Ashuar and Kaxinawa, as well as among Ãwa (Avá-Canoeiro do Araguaia). Among Krahô, Carneiro da Cunha has recorded since the 1970s that "during various rituals, those who are most vulnerable to attacks by the *mekarõ* [spirits] will, as a precaution, draw black stripes on the corners of their mouths and chests."[62] Recently, during a ritual, Morin de Lima noticed that the singer of the ritual used a specific design: "two horizontal stripes made of black genipap paint, running from the corners of his mouth to his ears. He told me that this painting protects against the *mẽcarõ* and, in fact, I observed that people usually use it in funeral rites,

57 Vidal, "A pintura corporal e a arte gráfica entre os Kayapó-Xikrin do Cateté"; Demarchi, "Kukràdjà Nhipêjx/fazendo cultura beleza."

58 Demarchi, "Kukràdjà Nhipêjx/Fazendo Cultura Beleza": 183.

59 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 54.

60 Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele": 343.

61 Giraldin, personal communication.

62 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os Mortos e os Outros*: 117.

after the recent death of a relative and in the rite of the end of mourning."[63] Further, Ferreira Rolande recorded a similar habit among the Ramkokàmekrà: "this painting makes the *mekarõ* afraid of the living, as they appear to have a very large mouth and look scary in the eyes of the *mekarõ*."[64] Among Gavião, Melo records that "the black of the genipap, when it covers the whole body, scares the souls (*karõ*)," making "humans 'invisible' to the *karõ*."[65] Among Mebêngôkre, Lea recorded that "the spirits of the dead fear the black ink of genipap."[66] For all these peoples, the black genipap ink has a prophylactic and protective action, preventing spirits and nonhuman agents from affecting the body, camouflaging it, and making it invisible or dark for the spirits. Thus, genipap painting prevents other *karon* (or the *karon* of others) from penetrating the interior of the body.

Notably, the act of painting bodies in black to protect against spirits is even more crucial for bodies that, as Carneiro da Cunha noted, are "more vulnerable to *mekarõ* attacks," such as children or those in reclusive situations.[67] It is not by chance that, among all Ge peoples, children are painted the most frequently, as their skin is considered to still be soft and therefore more vulnerable to attacks. In this way, people who are coming out of seclusion, especially those who are mourning, have the entire body (including the face) painted black (Fig. 2). As noted, this is meant to reconstitute the skin that has weakened during this period, protecting it from the action of spirits.

Another constant theme among Ge peoples in relation to genipap body painting relates to the previously mentioned idea that this paint hardens the body, fortifying it and preparing it for specific ritual contexts. A Gavião clarifies this as follows:

> The Gavião paint to look really beautiful, however they paint to protect themselves from diseases, when they paint they seem healthy, young. The genipap itself is the same as medicine, it pricks the skin, enters it and starts to give that little itch, a heat in the body, then it is already taking effect.[68]

Genipap acts on skin hardening, which composes the body's production regarding all these peoples. The emphasis on toughness as an ideal refers to the construction of bodies prepared for war and instilled with abilities such as agility, strength, and bravery, which are acquired in the rites of initiation and seclusion to which young people are subjected. In extreme cases of producing toughness and bravery as a masculine ideal, a war against wasps is waged by young Mebêngôkre, who are incited by their elders to destroy the largest wasp house in the area. After exterminating this enemy,

63 Morim de Lima, "Brotou Batata para Mim": 273.

64 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 118.

65 Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele": 349–50.

66 Vanessa Lea, "Gênero feminino Mebêngôkre (Kayapó): Desvelando concepções desgastadas," *Cadernos Pagu* 3 (1994): 97.

67 Carneiro da Cunha, *Os Mortos e os Outros*: 117.

68 Roberto Gavião (Poh'croc – Governador Village, 2014) in Franzoi de Melo, "O nome e a pele": 346.

Fig. 2: A man with his whole body painted with genipap in a ritual coming out of mourning, *Môjkàràkô* village 2010. Photo by the author.

the young men are warriors whose bodies have been hardened during combat. In such moments, they can use certain strong graphics that their bodies could not stand before the war, as the painting type *kran ôk* can only be used by adult men.

Among Ramkokàmekrà, Ferreira Rolande witnessed complaints from older men regarding the inappropriate use of certain painting patterns by younger people. These complaints referred to patterns that should be restricted to those who have completed the appropriate rituals of initiation and seclusion.

> José Pires Cahhàl warned me about the adequacy of certain adornments to age groups. When observing a painted boy, he stated that the adornment was not suitable for him, as he was still very young, and that the painting was only to older people, good runners and warriors. He added that, in order to be allowed to use a certain painting, it would be necessary to participate in the Ketuwajê and Pepjê rituals,[69] because during these events the bodies of runners, warriors, workers, shamans, hunters are built.[70]

For Mebêngôkre, this procedural dimension begins in childhood, regardless of the child’s gender. From my ethnographic data, I identified a procedural pattern initiated at birth, when the child receives a first painting of annatto. Subsequently, during the initial years, the child undergoes a series of genipap paintings of solid black, without

69 Both are initiation rituals designed for the young people to comprehend the knowledge that has been transmitted from the elders.

70 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 35.

any particular design, because the body is not yet prepared to receive designs. The child can only receive a beautiful painting (*ôk' mejx*) after its body is hardened with black layers of genipap. The same sequence that children receive is reproduced in those who are secluded: a red painting with annatto, followed by solid black painting with genipap and painting with designs.

Among Krahô, where "the black, 'in the color of the genipap,' is a sign of hardness and resistance," a similar process occurs: the body is painted red with annatto and black with genipap.[71] Among Ramkokàmekrà, Ferreira Rolande, quoting Nimuendaju,[72] states that "children are the most painted in black on their entire body, with the aim of favoring growth."[73] In another passage, the author states that "secluded people, whether due to illness, or women who have given birth, as well as their respective husbands, are painted with small traces similar to jaguar spots, since those traces, passed lightly with the fingers, indicate that these bodies cannot receive a more elaborated painting."[74] These examples show that paintings with graphic forms depend on the bodies that support them because they are considered dangerous for bodies that are not ready to use others' skins on their own.

Moreover, among Mebêngôkre, something similar occurs with the names and rituals with which they are confirmed. For these different peoples, gradually preparing the body—"hardened" to withstand the "weight" and "danger" of names and their moment of ritual confirmation, which is also in the context of transformation—is necessary. The Ge societies discussed here share an understanding that names and ceremonial adornments are taken by shamans from nonhuman beings, such as spirits and animals. Naming rituals form the context of reconnection with the original owners of names, producing a resubjectivation. When they are "again reconnected to their original owners, they become animalized again and, therefore, become truly beautiful."[75] Therefore, the beauty of the name and ceremonial objects relates to their foreign character, i.e., to their previous belongingness to other beings. This element of otherness in names and ceremonial ornaments is the source of their beauty and their danger (Fig. 3).

To receive a name during the ritual, the body—whether of a man or a woman—must be properly prepared, with the skin hardened by the countless layers of paint received by children during childhood. The body painting of genipap forms an important hardener and protector for the skin, accustoming the child to withstand the agentive "weight" of the names in the ritual, so that the dangerous substances present in

71 Morim de Lima, "Brotou Batata para Mim": 333.
72 Nimuendaju, *The Eastern Timbira*: 60.
73 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 33.
74 Ferreira Rolande, *Moços feitos, moços bonitos*: 37.
75 Gordon, *Economia selvagem*: 318.

Fig. 3: Girls adorned with the utmost *Mebêngôkre* beauty during the *Menire Bjôk* (Festivity of the Painted Women) nomination ceremony, Môjkàràkô village 2010. Photo by the author.

ceremonial adornments do not violate the body under the skin. To avoid contamination, the skin must be properly painted with the black of the genipap.

5 Conclusion

I emphasize the importance of the therapeutic uses of body painting and the knowledge involved in this fundamental activity in the existence of Ge peoples. I have highlighted the relationship between different body paintings with the blood, skin, and spirits, their therapeutic uses in situations of protection, and strengthening and protecting children’s bodies for rituals. However, an unexplored dataset concerns the use of painting in the context of war and political confrontation, which I believe will be a fruitful path for further analyses.

Drawing on the mentioned examples, for all of the peoples compared herein, genipap painting has a prophylactic and therapeutic effect in three different ways. First, it protects against spirits, allowing people who are painted with them to camouflage

themselves. Second, it is a powerful hardener of the skin, acting on the bodies. When used without any graphic design, it imparts hardness to the skin of very young children and people on guard, preparing to participate in rituals. Finally, it protects bodies from contamination with the blood, *karon*, and active parts of others that make up the adornments, blocking the possibility that the skin will contact exogenous blood and, consequently, spirits. In other words, the black genipap painting is a therapeutic art that, as Ruth Mebêngôkre said, makes sure that children "do not 'grow up alone.'"

The striking similarities and nuanced differences across cultures—which comparative analysis has highlighted—show the potential to expand the scope of comparison by, for example, including peoples in other linguistic branches and ethnographic areas. Similar uses of body painting can be found among peoples such as the Achuar of Ecuador[76] and the Kaxinawa of Acre.[77] More data are required to better comprehend the widespread use of these two inks by peoples throughout South America.

Finally, these therapeutic characteristics of body painting are being constantly updated, as occurred recently in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, I received reports from several indigenous lands that genipap body painting was being used as a form of protection against this novel disease.[78] In some Apinajé villages, as Diana Apinajé reported, the practice of body painting was strongly resumed during the pandemic, even in villages that had previously practically abandoned its daily use, emphasizing even more on its healing and protective power. Paintings were once again being used for creating sanitary barriers to control the flow of people and things in the Apinajé indigenous land during the pandemic. Young warriors, who remained at the sanitary barrier, always had their bodies painted with genipap and annatto (Fig. 4).

76 Philippe Descola, *As lanças do crepúsculo: Relações Jivaro na alta Amazônia* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006).

77 Lagrou, *A Fluidez da forma: Arte.*

78 André Demarchi et al. "Luta, Vida e Pandemia na Terra Indígena Apinajé," Plataforma de Antropologia e Respostas Indígenas à COVID-19, 17.02.2022, http://www.pari-c.org/estudo/1 [accessed 23.07.2023].

Fig. 4: Young warriors of the Apinajé people protected with black *genipap* paint during an action on the sanitary barrier in their territory, *Pyka Méx* village. Photo by Diana Apinajé.

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Marcony Alves and Cristiana Barreto

Shamanism, Transformation of the Body, and Predation in Ancient Amazonia

Ancient Amazonian art is usually considered inferior to the Amerindian "great styles" from Mesoamerica and the Andes. This is partially due to misconceptions concerning the environmental limitations of the moist tropics as reified in museum exhibitions, catalogs, mass media, and even scholarly research.[1] However, this stereotypical view of the Amazon as a pristine forest harboring atemporal native cultures has now been widely debunked by rigorous interdisciplinary research showing that current forest configurations are the result of thousands of years of Indigenous management.[2] Archaeological studies show that the lack of monumentality ascribed to the Amazonian past is misguided. Hundreds of earthworks were discovered beneath the canopy, showing how Indigenous societies flourished in the largest rainforest in the world.[3] The portrayal of the Amazonian past as impoverished is also rooted in preservation bias. Most ancient Amazonian dwellings and artifacts were constructed with perishable materials and rapidly vanished in the acid soils of the region. The imagery that has survived in nonperishable materials represents an unparalleled source for studying ancient cosmology.

Herein, we argue that pre-Columbian iconography is based on historically rooted ontological notions such as those of body metamorphosis and predation that have persisted until present-day in native Amazonian societies. Without written sources, the direct historical approach is used to develop hypotheses concerning depictions and unveil structural continuities and diachronic disruptions in cosmologies and ritual practices.[4] Contrary to criticisms, ethnographic analogies do not necessarily project present-day concepts backward into the past. Ethnological models and theories offer

1 For decades, the mainstream assumption was that the Amazon was a dramatically limiting environment (poor soils, low availability of protein) where no dense population could ever emerge. Because the environmental determinist approach flourished in Amazonian archaeology, the region became less appealing from a global perspective. The focus on the environment did not leave room for the study of iconography. For this perspective see: Betty Meggers, *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971).

2 Eduardo Neves and Michael Heckenberger, "The Call of the Wild: Rethinking Food Production in Ancient Amazonia," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48 (2019): 371–88.

3 Jonas Gregório de Souza, Denise Schaan and Mark Robinson, eds., "Pre-Columbian Earth-Builders Settled along the Entire Southern Rim of the Amazon," *Nature Communications* 9 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-03510-7.

4 Vernon Knight Jr., *Iconographic Method in New World Prehistory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111662251-008

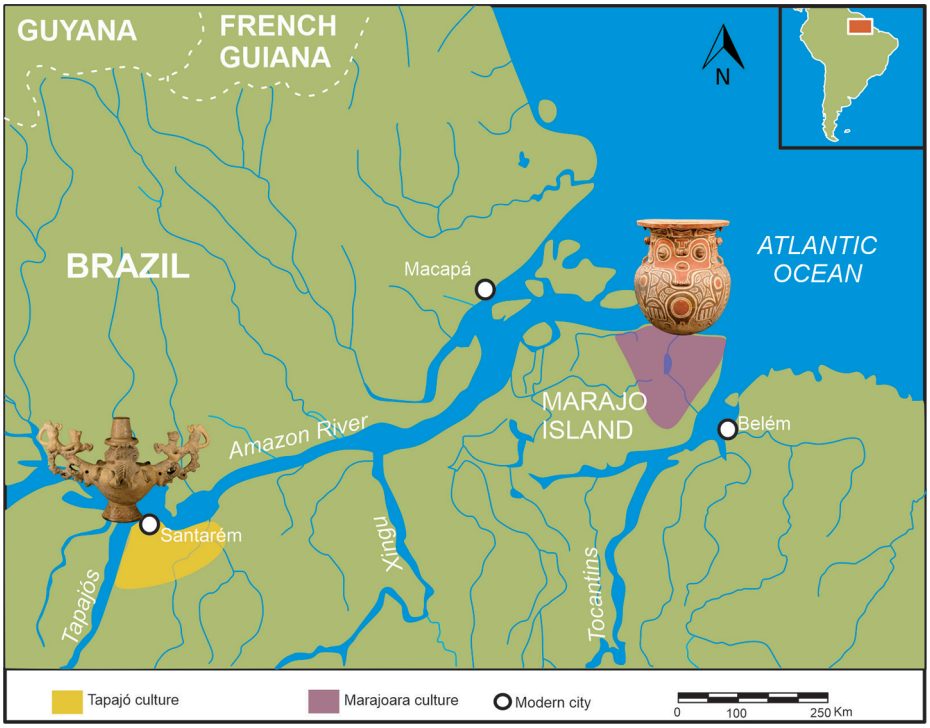

Fig. 1: Geographic distribution of Tapajó and Marajoara culture in the Lower Amazon and Estuary. Map created by Marcony Alves. Photos by the authors, Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi.

means of avoiding the pitfalls of Western naturalistic views of images and their agency, not providing anachronistic versions of an inaccessible past.[5]

Our focus is on the production of composite and multiscale images and their relationships to cosmic positions and predatory agencies. We propose that the relative size of the depicted beings presented an ontological difference of asymmetry between supernatural or superlative beings and ordinary creatures in pre-Columbian Amazonia. The vast range of Amazonian iconography is still poorly known; thus, we focus on two of the more studied ceramic styles: Marajoara (400–1300 CE) and Tapajó (or Santarém) (1000–1650 CE) (Fig. 1). Dated to similar periods at the mouth and lower regions of the Amazon basin, these styles developed during social and demographic changes associated with an intensification of ritual practices and interregional interaction. Large collections of vessels of the Marajoara and Tapajó styles are conserved

5 Cristiana Barreto, "Meios místicos de reprodução social: Arte e estilo na cerâmica funerária da amazônia antiga" (PhD diss., University of São Paulo, 2009).

in Brazilian, North American, and European institutions, mainly gathered by looters and amateur archaeologists and lacking information concerning their provenance.

1 A Deep-Rooted Tradition of the Tropical Forest

The effects of European diseases and rapid depopulation during the Great Dying are central to questions about the continuity between pre- and post-Columbian history.[6] The first two centuries of the colonization of the Amazon are poorly documented. The earliest European accounts of native populations in the Amazon basin have been heatedly debated in recent decades, in part because they describe hierarchical societies and populations of thousands, which are in stark contrast with the present situation.[7] Recent research has found that epidemics, territorial displacement, enslavement, and missionization have promoted drastic populational and cultural disruptions in the centuries following the first colonial encounters. The Great Dying affected the transmission of knowledge and the maintenance of cultural practices in the Indigenous Amazon.[8] On the other hand, it is possible to see still present today a remarkable similarity shared across Indigenous cultural practices and cosmologies throughout the region, despite the existence of many unrelated languages and varied environments.

The widespread similarities across native Amazonian societies originating in different regions and speaking different languages suggests a possible ancient common substrate that was probably inherited thousands of years ago and entangled by continuous interaction.[9] Donald Lathrap called this set of shared practices the Tropical Forest Culture.[10] Following Lathrap's historical approach, we argue that Indigenous ontologies are the historical products that are derived from a millenary dwelling in Amazonian landscapes with all forest entities. We propose a comparative correlation between the cosmological principles described in ethnological studies, including those derived from novel approaches to material culture and art, and a pre-Columbian stylistic repertoire of graphic conventions and imagery.

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6 Michael Heckenberger, *The Ecology of Power: Culture, Place, and Personhood in the Southern Amazon A.D. 1000– 2000* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 19.

7 Neil Whitehead, "The Ancient Amerindian Polities of the Amazon, the Orinoco, and the Atlantic Coast: A Preliminary Analysis of their Passage from Antiquity to Extinction," in *Amazonian Indians from Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Anna Roosevelt (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994): 33–53.

8 Alexander Koch, Chris Brierley, Mark Maslin and Simon Lewis, eds., "Earth System Impacts of the European Arrival and the Great Dying in the Americas after 1492," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207 (2019): 13–36.

9 Peter Roe, "Of Rainbow Dragons and the Origins of Designs: The Waiwai Urufiri and the Shipibo Ronin ehua," *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal*, 5 no. 1 (1989): 4–5.

10 Donald Lathrap, *The Upper Amazon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970): 45–67.

Amazonian cultural traditions are rooted in ontological principles distinct from Western thought and manifest in unfamiliar regimes of practice and transmission. These ontological differences can be observed during rituals and in everyday activities, such as planting crops or hunting animals. In one way or another, life is lived based on certain premises concerning bodies, souls, and powers that control the universe. Amazonian ontologies are denominated animist because they are based on a discontinuity between beings' interiority (soul) and their exteriority (body).[11] They are also called perspectivists because the world is perceived through the properties of different bodies.[12]

Amerindian mythologies regarding the creation of beings and the world are central to understanding animist and perspectivist ontologies. Mythic narratives ground temporality and ontological principles that organize native experiences in the tropical forest.[13] Most narratives are centered at body metamorphosis and construction, cosmic layers, predation, commensality, and distinctions between humans, animals, and other-than-humans (spirits, supernatural beings, monsters, or demiurges) across a gradient. Amazonian myths portray a primordial time when all entities were similar, shared a human condition, and were incorporated into a continuous flow of communication and ceaseless bodily transformation. By contrast, in postmythical times, bodies were understood as more stable, although their differences were not completely fixed. The actual state of beings—their perspective—is relative to their bodies. Thus, jaguars can see themselves as humans and the blood of their prey as manioc beer consumed in feasts. Shamans can shape-shift and alter their bodily forms to mediate the relationship between humans and other-than-human entities.

In the mythic narratives of these Amazonian regions, animals, humans, and plants were created through craftsmanship—such as artifacts—by other beings or events.[14] In general, some demiurge was responsible for making humans using raw material like clay, wood, or wax. The attributes of animal bodies and technologies have been derived from mythical events, and their traces can still be seen. Thus, Amazonian cosmologies are constructional: all entities are built from previous materials, and even the first being constructed itself.

The myths recorded in different Amazonian language families are organized around an opposition between prey and predator[15] in a cosmic food chain. This con-

11 Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

12 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, no. 3 (1998): 469–88.

13 Peter Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote: Cosmology in the Amazon Basin* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982): 4–5.

14 Fernando Santos-Granero, "Introduction: Amerindian Constructional Views of the World," in *The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood*, ed. Fernando Santos-Granero (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009): 4–5.

15 Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism": 470.

ceptual pair functions as a model used to describe relationships among the living and the dead; humans, spirits, and animals; and internal groups and enemies built on predation. Although most pre-Colombian Amazonian societies practiced agriculture, their conception of the world was nonetheless based on a hunting mindset.[16]

Many native Amazonian languages distinguish powerful, giant, and archetypical predators from mythical or present-day animals and aspects of present-day life.[17] Mythical predators—such as jaguars, harpy eagles or anacondas—are considered as prototypes of ordinary beings from the forest. Acting as "spirit owners" or masters, these powerful beings are largely invisible at present; however, they control and protect animals, rivers, plants, raw materials, and all types of human productions. Hunters, fishers, or women planting crops, for example, must avoid disrespecting the master animal of their target species. Animal masters are distributed in vertically connected flat cosmic layers (*axis mundi*). The most powerful among these have great control over the underworld layers, earthly plane, and sky, as well as several layers within each section of the universe.[18]

In present-day, postmythical times, shamans are the only humans who can experience metamorphosis and see primordial beings,[19] having developed the skills needed to transform themselves into the other-than-human, giving them the capacity to communicate with different entities and to travel across cosmic layers. Entheogenic substances (snuff powders, tobacco cigars, or liquid *ayahuasca*) are commonly used by shamans to reach different realms of the universe and different perspectives.[20] Dreams provide another pathway to reach other perspectives and engage with invisible predatory entities. Different types of ceremonial gestures, attire, and paraphernalia are used by curing specialists to visualize and avoid pathogenic agents. Shamans often have spirit helpers or doubles who guide them in their journey. The main goal of shamanic rituals is to negotiate with other entities to cure illnesses caused by evil spirits, witchcraft, or jealousy.[21]

16 Carlos Fausto, "Feasting on People: Eating Animals and Humans in Amazonia," *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 4 (2007): 498.

17 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Esboço de cosmologia Yawalapíti," in *A inconstância da alma selvagem e outros ensaios de antropologia*, ed. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (São Paulo: Cosac-Naif, 2002): 25–86.

18 Roe, The *Cosmic Zygote: Cosmology in the Amazon Basin*: 127–36.

19 Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism": 482.

20 Johannes Wilbert, *Tobacco and Shamanism in South America* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1987).

21 Aristóteles Barcelos Neto, *Apapaatai: Rituais de máscaras no Alto Xingu* (São Paulo: Edusp, 2008).

2 Depicting the Invisible

Native Amazonian visual arts materialize cosmological principles derived from ontological predation and shamanism. They derive from a "generative impulse"[22] that is unrelated to the pursuit of physical correspondence with a referent found in Western naturalism. Most of the graphic motifs were received or copied from a powerful master of animals. One common narrative, for instance, concerns geometric patterns and colors being copied from the Anaconda's skin.[23] Thus, geometrical patterns and depictions are a way of making invisible forces visible by inducing visions, and transforming bodies and contexts.[24] Shamans are intermediaries that introduce patterns and forms to the visual arts belonging to powerful, predatory entities.

Throughout Amazonia, traditional Indigenous arts are characterized by intricate geometric patterns that cover the surfaces of human bodies, ceramics, basketry, masks, and so on. Many geometrical motifs may refer to animals or their body parts, such as the design of snake skin. Indigenous visual arts also make figure and background ambiguous, developing a tension between visible and invisible parts, promoting the beholder's active engagement. The beholder must learn to see virtual images that are mentally projected out of the graphic field and are sometimes hidden in figurative schemes.[25]

Although rare, iconic images are not absent in Amazonian traditional arts. One of the best examples of this is a polychrome-painted wooden disk made by the Wayana people for the ceiling of a community house (Fig. 2). This artifact is conceived across three combined graphic and cosmic scales. Based on shape, the first and most general is a mythical Stingray.[26] An intermediate scale is formed of painted figures of monstrous spirits—Two-Headed Caterpillar and Dwarf-Fish.[27] Both figures are hybrid and exhibit attributes of more than one zoomorphic referent. At a small size, forest animals (including maguari stork and swallow-tailed kite), chickens, and white men are depicted. Their relative size of the images indicates their predatory potency—the Two-headed Caterpillar measures "about 10 to 15 meters."[28]

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22 Carlos Fausto, *Art Effects: Image, Agency, and Ritual in Amazonia*, trans. David Rogers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020): 21.

23 Barcelos Neto, *Apapaatai*.

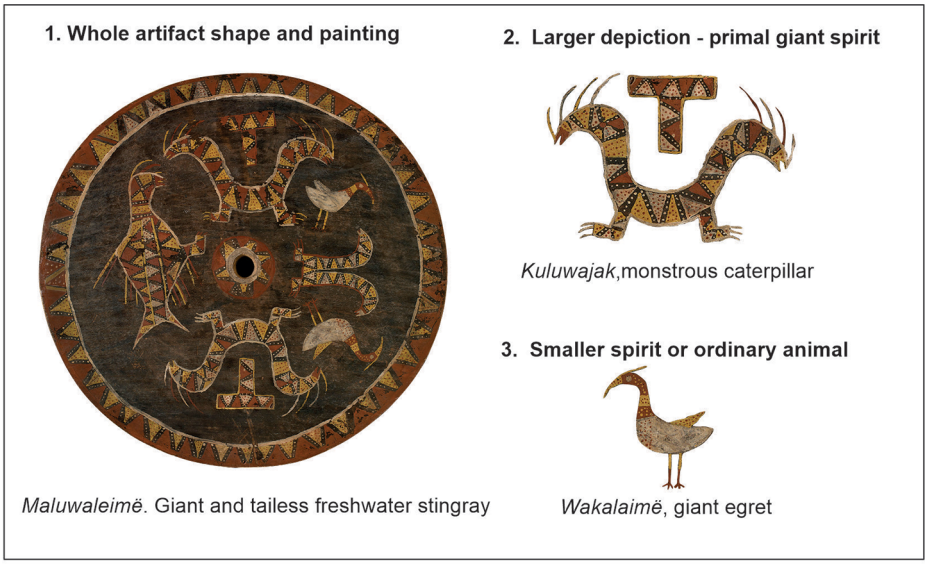
24 Els Lagrou, "Podem os grafismos ameríndios ser considerados quimeras abstratas? Uma reflexão sobre uma arte perspectivista," in *Quimeras em diálogo: Grafismo e figuração nas artes indígenas*, eds. Carlo Severi and Els Lagrou (Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2013): 67–110.

25 Lagrou, "Podem os grafismos ameríndios ser considerados quimeras abstratas?": 76.

26 Lúcia van Velthem, *O belo é a fera: A estética da produção e da predação entre os Wayana* (Lisboa: Assírio e Alvim, 2003): 302–3.

27 Renzo Duin, "Maluwana, Pinnacle of Wayana Art in the Guyanas," *Baessler-Archiv*, 54 (2006): 128–30.

28 Duin, "Maluwana, Pinnacle of Wayana Art in the Guyanas": 130.



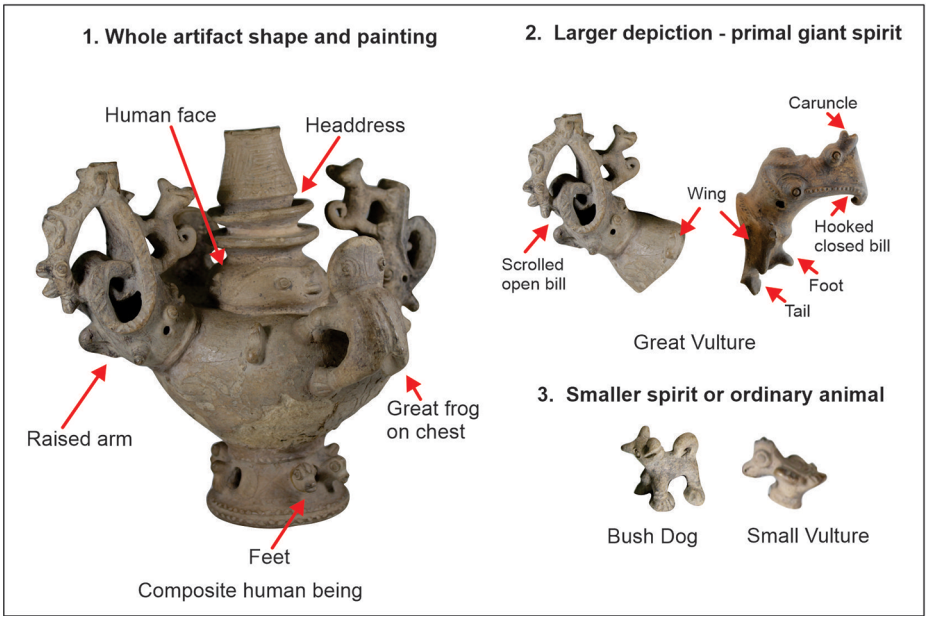


Fig. 2: Iconographic and Cosmic Scales in Amazonian ethnographic and archaeological artifacts. Top: Wayana wooden disk, malwana, and the different scales of depictions (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum/Claudia Obrocki). Bottom: Tapajó necked vessel and its scales of depiction, vessel height: 6.5 cm (Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi/Marcony Alves).

The figurative and most geometric motifs in the Amazonian arts exemplify what Carlo Severi called chimeric depictions.[29] In the figurative images, composite, synthetic, and symbiotic beings combine visual indexes of diverse creatures, whose suggestive parts allow the beholder to project a larger image that lies beyond the visible realm. Geometric motifs, in their turn, are "abstract chimeras,"[30] in that they "intensify an image due to the mobilization of its invisible aspects."[31]

Abstract patterns or very conventional depictions catalyze ritual visions and perceptions. In other words, they make visible to shamans what most humans overlook and enable them to travel to the spiritual world. Amazonian Indigenous art forms created in the ethnographic present originated in the "transformational flux characteristic of other-than-human beings. Thus, it involves generating the most complex and paradoxical images possible, images with multiple referents, recursively nested, oscillating between figure and ground."[32] These chimeric formal principles are mnemonic devices that reveal the relations within the mythical, spiritual, and invisible worlds. Depicting the invisible, Indigenous artists bring knowledge of primordial times to the present, creating a vector of ritual maintenance or change of perspective.

Today, most Indigenous arts are "abstract chimeras," which contrasts with the more figurative depiction modes of pre-Columbian artifacts and imagery. We argue that these differences are best understood as a conjunctural change within deeply rooted Amazonian traditions that greatly depend on contextual histories and arenas of image recognition and sharing.[33] An analysis of iconography from late precolonial period in Tapajó and Marajoara ceramics shows that they are conceived in terms of the same formal principles of contemporary Indigenous Amazonian arts.[34]

29 Carlo Severi, "O espaço quimérico: Percepção e projeção nos Atos do Olhar," in *Quimeras em Diálogo: Grafismo e figuração nas artes indígenas*, eds. Carlo Severi and Els Lagrou (Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2013): 25–64.

30 Lagrou, "Podem os grafismos ameríndios ser considerados quimeras abstratas?": 67–110.

31 Severi, "O espaço quimérico,": 25.

32 Fausto, *Art Effects: Image, Agency, and Ritual in Amazonia*: 21.

33 Barreto, "Meios místicos de reprodução social": 25.

34 Here, we do not refer to the recent art movement called "Indigenous Contemporary Arts" produced to integrate contemporary art museums and exhibitions. Indeed, this movement seems to also make use of figurative modes of representation, as it is intended to a broader and non-Indigenous audience.

3 Tapajó

The Tapajó ceramic style—also called Santarém or Tapajonic—is among the most elaborate ceramic styles in pre-Columbian Amazonia. At the confluence of the Tapajós and Amazon rivers, the contemporary city of Santarém was built on top of two large areas of Amazonian Dark Earth patches—the archaeological sites Aldeia and Porto.[35] Hundreds of whole ceramic vessels were obtained from the former. The available contextual data indicate that these intact vessels were buried in votive caches containing other artifacts and that food remains related to feasting events.[36] Finely carved greenstone pendants (*muiraquitãs*) and the debris of their production have been recovered from these sites. No confirmed or indisputable human burials have been identified to date, which resonates with early European accounts of mummification practices and the ingestion of cremated bodies. In addition, archaeological sites associated with these assemblages of Santarém city are found up to 70 km south of the city in the uplands.[37] The frequency of elaborate artifacts in Santarém and its unparalleled settlement size indicates that, in the past, this area could have served as a regional ceremonial center.

The chronology of the Tapajó culture can be interpreted in two ways: a local early development around 900 CE[38] or even as early as 500[39] or 600 CE,[40] and a more punctual event occurring around 1300 CE.[41] The consensus holds that the end of this ceramic style occurred during the early colonial period (1600–1650 CE). The seventeenth-century colonial accounts preserve a record of Tapajó cultural practices concerning trade networks, warfare, marriage rules, shamanism, and burial.[42] The dramatic effects of colonial violence interrupted the transmission of many Tapajó cultural practices, such as pottery-making.

35 Denise Gomes, "Politics and Ritual in Large Villages in Santarém, Lower Amazon, Brazil," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 27, no. 2 (2016): 4.

36 Gomes, "Politics and Ritual in Large Villages in Santarém, Lower Amazon, Brazil": 6.

37 Per Stenborg, "Towards a Regional History of Pre-Columbian Settlements in the Santarem and Belterra Regions, Para, Brazil," in *Beyond Waters: Archaeology and Environmental History of the Amazonian Inland*, ed. Per Stenborg (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2016): 11.

38 Denise Schaan, "Discussing Centre-Periphery Relations within the Tapajó Domain, Lower Amazon," in *Beyond Waters: Archaeology and Environmental History of the Amazonian Inland*, ed. Per Stenborg (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2016): 25.

39 Anna Roosevelt, "The Development of Prehistoric Complex Societies: Amazonia, A Tropical Forest," *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 9, no. 1 (1999): 23 [Special Issue: *Complex Politics in the Ancient Tropical World*, eds. Elisabeth A. Bacus and Lisa J. Lucero].

40 José Iriarte, Stephen Elliott and Shuichiro Maezumi, "The Origins of Amazonian Landscapes: Plant Cultivation, Domestication and the Spread of Food Production in Tropical South America," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 248 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2020.106582.

41 Gomes, "Politics and Ritual in Large Villages in Santarém, Lower Amazon, Brazil": 4.

42 Nimuendajú, "The Tapajó": 1–25.

Tapajó fineware assemblages are primarily small, easily portable vessels, and without any burial urns. The ceramics are richly decorated using incisions, appliqué, and polychromic painting. In association with ceramic figurines and whistles, fineware was probably used in rituals such as those described in the early colonial period.[43]

Most ceremonial Tapajó vessels take the form of three-dimensional effigies of humans, animals, or composite beings. An entire vessel can be structured as a single body, often composed of appendages (head, torso, arms, and legs). The base of the vessel can be replaced by an animal's body, legs, and tail. More intriguing are vessels in the form of a body that depicts one particular character, while the neck or base suggests other being(s). Conversely, some pieces exhibit zoomorphic modeling in the base that sustains another large figure. This juxtaposition of a whole body and bodily parts resonates with what Fausto calls the principle of "quantitative indeterminacy" commonly identified in Amazonian ethnographic contexts.[44]

Some elaborate Tapajó vessels present symmetrically displayed appendages and applied strips. In contrast with vases emphasizing one or a few figures, some vessels articulate mirrored identical figures along one or several axes of symmetry. The caryatid vessel best exemplifies such symmetrical configuration. This vase exhibits an hourglass-shaped base, featuring three symmetrically opposed female appendages that sustain a carinated bowl with three or four pairs of avian figures (Little Vulture theme).[45] In these vessels with multiple characters, none compose unified scenes. The association between characters and action in scenes is restricted to a small number of visual themes in Tapajó iconography and is absent in most ancient Amazonian arts.

The so-called neck vessel features the most complex iconographic configuration of Tapajó ceramics. This type uniquely combines an effigy-like structure along with symmetrically opposed appendages. This configuration resembles the one found on Wayana's wooden disk or *maluwana*.[46] Similar to this ethnographic artifact, the necked vessel displays depictions of beings at three cosmic scales (Fig. 2). First, it portrays an anthropomorphic figure in its entirety, with a well-delineated face, a ring-shaped headdress, raised zoomorphic arms, a protruding chest, and feet that are either made up of complete animals or are absent. Unlike the effigy vessel, the necked vessel has its front and back mirrored on opposite sides. At the second scale, we can identify two larger appendages. The pair of arms recall the Great Vulture theme,

43 Denise Gomes, "O lugar dos grafismos e das representações na arte pré-colonial amazônica," *Mana* 22, no. 3 (2016): 686.

44 Fausto, *Art Effects*: 398.

45 Cristiana Barreto and Marcony Alves, "Birds of Prey in Ancient Amazonia: Predation and Perspective in Ceramic Iconography," in *The Art and Archaeology of Human Engagements with Birds of Prey, From Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Robert Wallis (London: Bloomsbury, 2023): 160.

46 van Velthem, *O belo é a fera:* 302–3.

made up of elongated bird-like heads including schematized wings, feet, and a tail. On both sides, four-legged frogs adorn the center of the chest. The third scale corresponds to small modeled animals appearing above the head of the Great Vulture head (small vultures, humans, bush dogs, and/or frogs) and, occasionally, a human face that replaces one wing. A single small quadruped or a pair of them can appear at the base or on the feet of a larger composite human figure. The complexity of this configuration conforms to the formal principle of recursive nesting and fundamental quantitative indeterminacy.

The sharp difference between primordial beings and ordinary animals, as depicted in the necked vessel, can be found in Tapajó iconography. This difference in scale prompts a new interpretation of how Tapajó iconography encodes mythical narratives.[47] We interpret the difference in the relative size of zoomorphic figures as symbolizing the distinction between powerful primordial beings and ordinary animals, using analogies with ethnographic figurative depictions and the characterization of animal masters and spirits as superlative or giants. We argue that the small human figure associated in scenes with primordial beings, such as the Great Vulture, represent different frames of a single narrative, as identified in some visual themes of Wayana.[48]

The main character of the Tapajó narrative is possibly a relatively small, Seated Female in a headband with pointed adornments (possibly *muiraquitãs*). The Seated Female appears on the tail of the primordial Cayman and Jaguars or on the top of the Great Vulture's head, with other creatures. The same character is depicted in a complete sequence of body metamorphosis or a "fusion" of the human figure with the Small Vulture (Fig. 3). A sexless standing figure with a human head and a vulture torso explicitly depicts the bodily transformation, such as the fusion of the Small Vulture and the Seated Female (Fig. 4).

The Seated Female does not depict an ordinary human being, as she can shapeshift and interact with primordial beings. She is probably a shaman and cultural hero who, in mythical times, was responsible for creating elements of present life. The different scenes depicting the Seated Female may represent segments of her mythical exploits and adventures. A possible parallel to this figure can be found in Tukano mythology from the Vaupés River. According to this group, the main demiurge is *Yeba bëlo*—the Grandmother of the Universe. This cultural hero created herself and used

47 Denise Gomes suggested that some vessel types represent cosmic layers or specific mythic themes found in ethnographic sources, but neither author identifies specific themes of the kind we propose here. A full demonstration of this narrative cannot be present here due to space restrictions.

48 Van Velthem, *O belo é a fera:* 325–29. For the "narrative approach" see Jeffrey Quilter, "The Narrative Approach to Moche Iconography" *Latin American Antiquity*, 8 no. 2 (1997): 113–33.

Fig. 3: Seated Female in Tapajó iconography in different narrative "frames": a. Detail of the Seated Female on Cayman's tail; b. Seated Female on Cayman's tail; c. Detail of the Circular-mouth Jaguar "licking" the Seated Female; d. Detail of the Female in a process of bodily metamorphosis with a Little Vulture; e. Pregnant female figurine wearing the diagnostic headdress with zoomorphic adornments (possibly *muiraquitãs*), a–b, d–e: Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia, University of São Paulo/Marcony Alves; c: Museu Nacional, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

the cigar smoke to make the first man.[49] To do so, she sat on a stool and smoked a cigar, using the same paraphernalia that shamans use in postmythical times.

In the native Amazon, most shamans are men. Male shamans depicted in Tapajó effigy jars are easily identified by their gourd rattles, which are used in curing sessions, and seated position, sometimes on a stool.[50] Other figures, depicted as human with bulging cheeks and protruding tongue, are likely shamans chewing tobacco. Female shamans are uncommon in Amazonian societies; however, their existence cannot be ignored.[51] The Seated Female seems to represent a case of female shamanism

49 Stephen Hugh-Jones, "The Fabricated Body: Objects and Ancestors in Northwest Amazonia," in *The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood*, ed. Fernando Santos-Granero (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009): 36.

50 Otto Zerries, "Atributos e Instrumentos Rituais do Xamã na América do Sul Não-Andina e o Seu Significado," in *Contribuições à antropologia em homenagem ao Professor Egon Schaden*, eds. Tekla Hartmann and Vera Penteado Coelho (São Paulo: Museu Paulista, 1981): 319–60.

51 Anne-Marie Colpron, "Monopólio masculino do xamanismo amazônico: O contra-exemplo das mulheres xamãs Shipibo-Conibo," *Mana* 11, no. 1 (2005): 118.

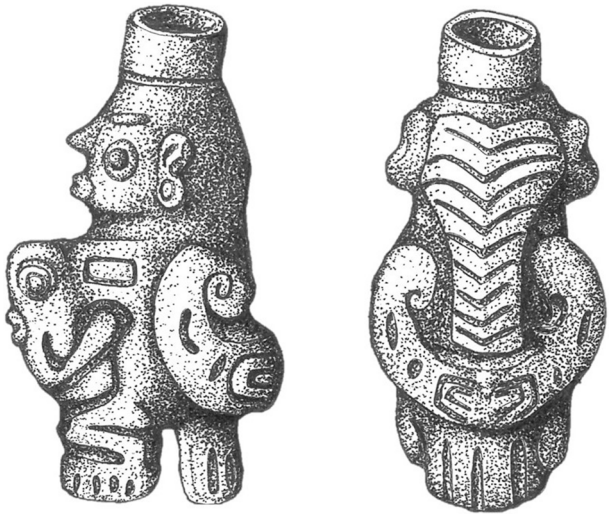


Fig. 4: Tapajó shaman shapeshifting into a king vulture. Former Rose and Robert Brown collection, current location unknown. Redrawn by Marcony Alves from Helen Palmatary, "The Archaeology of the Lower Tapajós Valley, Brazil," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 50, no. 3 (1960): 171.

in Amazonia. The centrality of this character in different scenes in the Tapajó iconography echoes certain ethnohistorical accounts of the seventeenth century. Consistent information tells of a high-ranked Tapajó female, who acted as a soothsayer or "oracle."[52] The Seated Female can be interpreted as exhibiting a similar mythical character, a counterpart of the described diviner.

Thus, the iconographic repertoire of the Tapajó is composed of three-dimensional modeling of forms that are often iconic and chimeric. The ambiguity of these images are also reflected in composite figures shown in different stages of metamorphosis.[53] At the mouth of the Amazon, similar graphic principles characterize the contrasting Marajoara style, which is exhibited in large jars and intricate polychrome painting.

4 Marajoara

Marajoara is the best-known pre-Columbian ceramic style in the Amazon. From the nineteenth century onward, hundreds of pieces have been collected for museums and private collections. The Marajoara style is characterized by complex graphic art,

52 Nimuendajú, "The Tapajó": 1–25.

53 Barreto and Alves, "Birds of Prey in Ancient Amazonia": 161.

which has attracted the attention of looters, collectors, and researchers.[54] The Marajoara culture emerged in the central-eastern portion of Marajó Island, the largest island of the Amazon estuary. This region is covered by Savannah vegetation, is seasonally flooded by the Amazon, and includes small rivers and the large Lake Arari. Marajoara culture exhibited elaborate techniques used to manage the landscape and water resources, taking advantage of strong tidal movements to create massive fishponds. Earth mounds were built for the purposes of habitation and ceremony. Ceramics are found in numerous groups of earth mounds.

The chronology of Marajoara culture shows a local long-term sequence that began in the fifth century CE, followed by continuous complexification and a decline in mound building beginning around CE 1300. This much debated decline coincides with an increase in precipitation and flooding, as well as the arrival of the producers of Aruã ceramics. However, the continuity of the ceramic style can be identified in the next period following the Cacoal culture (CE 1300–1600), which endured until the beginning of the European invasion of the island.[55] Most of the exquisite Marajoara ceramics currently known and some of the best-studied mounds relate to the so-called "classic" period (CE 700–1100). The presence of green stone pendants (*muiraquitãs*) and ceramic imitations indicates chronological overlapping and social interaction among Lower Amazon cultures, such as the Tapajó and other estuarine cultures.[56]

Earth mounds were built along the streams on ellipsoidal platforms up to 12 m high and >1 km long. Ceremonial and habitational mounds differ by size, presence of human burial, and frequency of decorated pottery. The largest mounds are full of burial urns and decorated pottery; the small ones tend to have less decorated pottery and inhumations. Mounds frequently appear in clusters aligned to riverbanks, suggesting that villages with linear layouts seem to be associated with one larger cemetery or ceremonial center. Artificial pounds and dams for fish enclosures are found next to the mounds.[57]

The funerary practices of Marajoara culture include primary and secondary inhumations and cremation, depending on the period.[58] Most burials are closely situated in ceremonial mounds, and grave goods are found inside and next to funerary jars. Most well-preserved ceramic vessels, stone pendants, necklaces, and stone axes are found inside or next to burial urns. Some artifacts exhibit clear use-wear traces. Fu-

54 Systematic research started with Betty Meggers and Clifford Evans, *Archaeological Investigations at the Mouth of the Amazon* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1957), followed by Anna Roosevelt, *Mound-builders of the Amazon: Geophysical Archaeology on Marajo Island, Brazil* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1991) and Denise Schaan, *Sacred Geographies of Ancient Amazonia* (London: Routledge, 2012).

55 Schaan, *Sacred Geographies of Ancient Amazonia*: 34.

56 Cristiana Barreto, "O que a cerâmica marajoara nos ensina sobre fluxo estilístico na Amazônia?" in *Cerâmicas arqueológicas da amazônia: Rumo a uma nova síntese*, eds. Helena Lima, Cristiana Barreto and Carla Bentancourt (Belém: IPHAN, Ministério da Cultura, 2016): 123.

57 Schaan, *Sacred Geographies of Ancient Amazonia*: 50.

58 Schaan, *Sacred Geographies of Ancient Amazonia*: 42.

nerary practices do not suggest a high status differentiation but rather a whole burial complex that emphasizes the connection among individual and collective burials. The high frequency of grave goods in Marajoara burials may be related to rituals that serve to facilitate the transformation of human souls into forest spirits or to end a period of grief among the living, as appears in many Amazonian societies.[59]

The repertoire of ceramic artifacts is vast but consistent: vessel shapes include cups, bowls, plates, bottles, and various sizes of jars, sometimes displaying carination and pedestals.[60] Most pieces in museum collections are highly decorated; however, undecorated vessels predominate in domestic contexts, in which shards of cooking-pots, drinking bowls, and storage jars are frequently found. Ceramics fulfilled many important functions in daily life and rituals. In addition to vessels, other ceramic items include stools, spindle whorls, rattles, figurines, body adornments, and triangular pubic covers (*tangas*).

The graphic art of Marajoara displays intricate geometric and figurative motifs that combine a large number of decorative techniques that use contrasting tones of red and black painting over white slip, modeled appendages, and incising and excising to produce designs in relief. Graphic patterns, especially curvilinear and squared spirals, create complex alternations of reflection, repetition, and enchainment, causing labyrinthine visual effects.[61]

These complex iconographic structures use geometric designs and elements from human and animal bodies to produce intricate, eye-catching motifs and endless variations based on core themes. Animals such as double-headed snakes, scorpions, lizards, turtles, and birds are frequent, and they often compose larger, human figures, following Amazonian constructional principles.

A unique interplay between decorative techniques and the juxtaposition of geometric, geometrized, and iconic depictions can be observed. Schematic images are commonly mixed with figurative representations in jars, bowls, and pubic covers, and they seem to synthesize several themes in conventionalized forms. This is the case, for example, in the composite human reptile being found as an iconic figure modeled on some funerary urns and painted in geometrized figures on ceramic pubic covers.[62]

The tension between the figurative and the abstract is evident in the Marajoara repertoire, which is primarily used in recursive nesting. Ceramics are covered with superimposed faces in appliqué and painting, and macrofaces are built through a combination of anatomical parts derived from other themes. For example, large human faces are composed of smaller feline faces and reptilian bodies.[63]

59 Barreto, "Meios Místicos de Reprodução Social."

60 Roosevelt, *Moundbuilders of the Amazon*: 59–73.

61 Barreto, "Meios místicos de reprodução social": 144–54.

62 Emerson Nobre, "A sintaxe dos corpos compósitos: Agência e transformação na iconografia das tangas cerâmicas Marajoara," *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas* 15, no. 3 (2020): 1–27.

63 Nobre, "A sintaxe dos corpos": 1–27.

The fluid boundary between geometric and figurative elements in Marajoara art contrasts with the rigid distinction between modeled depictions and abstractly incised and painted bands in the Tapajó ceramics. The pinnacle of graphic designs in the Marajoara style provides a glimpse into an ancient Amazonian matrix from which the present-day abstract chimera and the most iconic depictions of the Tapajó style represent variations of an underlying continuous principle.

The outstanding anthropomorphic urns of Marajoara, sometimes reaching a height of 1 m, are clear examples of composite and multiscale imagery associated with a shamanic and transformational ontology. Although not understood, they present stylistic variations in Marajoara repertoires that may suggest chronological, geographic, and/or some sociopolitical distinctions.

Fig. 5: Marajoara funerary urns with hybrid or composite depictions. Top: Front and profile of Human-bird Marajoara funerary urn, height: 84 cm, Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi. Photo by C. Barreto. Bottom: Front and profile of Marajoara woman body-shaped funerary urn, height: 65cm, MArqE/UFSC. Photo by L. Bueno.

The two well-known Marajoara funerary urn types reflect two contrasting ways to fabricate the body (Fig. 5). The first is made up of globular jars featuring everted rims having human-bird attributes painted in black and red on a white slip (Fig. 5). The second is modeled as a human body in a more cylindrical shape, covered by white slip and fine incisions, and filled with red paint. The first type is common in the Anajás River, and the second type is most commonly found east of Lake Arari.[64] A chronological difference is also suggested, in which the second type appears after the first.

The globular urn represents a humanized bird or a body in transformation. It displays a Human-bird entity, with its front mirrored on its back (Fig. 5). The main element is a modeled appliqué face on the neck of the jar, composed of large, round eyes and a mouth framed by nostrils, eyebrows, and ears, decorated with plugs and pendants, and a cylindrical chest ornament, possibly an inhaler. The heart-shaped face suggests the harpy eagles' double crest or owls' facial discs, whereas the typical harpy-eagle talon is shown as the foot—an important element indicating the superior predatory capacities of this bird. The globular body has painted folded arms or wings around either a circular element—possibly an egg—or another small face (a baby). At the bottom, a small rectangle may occasionally appear that could indicate a vulva.

Split representation is a graphic technique that is used to build a two-faced being in many Marajoara pieces. The enchainment of a two-sided reflection can sometimes create a third figure. In this case, on each side of the neck on which the two faces join, an appendage appears in the shape of a small zooanthropomorphic figure that displays varied body positions and adornments. Barreto compared these to the many rattle figurines that are also found in Marajoara contexts and could represent a shaman's aids. Small, anthropomorphic spirits are a common vision in shamanic trances, and figurines often act as visual aids for facilitating communication with helper spirits or can become repositories or receptacles for them.[65] The size difference between the large Human-bird and the small zooanthropomorphs seems to depict a relationship between the shaman and the auxiliary spirits, as is seen in present-day Marubo people[66] and in the pre-Columbian gold ornaments from Colombia.[67] In some urns, these small lateral characters also display a smaller bird above the head, implying a third relationship.

The two-scaled iconographic configuration of these urns, featuring a large entity formed of smaller beings, seems to materialize a cosmic relationship that differs from the hybrid figure identified in the Tapajó necked vessel.

64 Schaan, *Sacred Geographies of Ancient Amazonia*: 92.

65 Cristiana Barreto, "Figurine Traditions from the Amazon," in *The Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Figurines*, ed. Timothy Insoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 417–40.

66 Delvair Montagner, *A morada das almas: Representações das doenças e das terapêuticas entre os Marúbo* (Belém: MPEG, 1996).

67 Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Orfebrería y chamanismo: Un estudio iconográfico del Museo del Oro* (Medellín: Editorial Colina, 1988).

Thus, several elements lead us to interpret the Human-bird urns as depicting the shaman's body metamorphosis. Birds of prey, due to their predatory power, are usually associated with shamanism in Amazonia; sometimes, they serve as vision guides to shamans due to their extraordinary sight or ability to transfer their prowess through feather adornments. The cylindrical chest pendant strongly suggests a bone snuffing tube, as has been identified in Marajoara collections,[68] for aspirating entheogen powders. Ceramic inhalers and snuffers are frequently used in Marajoara contexts and attest to the use of entheogen substances. The facial features of the Human-bird indicate bodily reactions to psychoactive drug use, such as half-opened eyes, curved-down lips, open mouth, exposed teeth, and protruding tongue. Some of these Human-bird urns display bulging cheeks and a protruding tongue that suggest the chewing of tobacco[69]—an element also found in Tapajó style. The same pieces have a bird-headed figure replacing the nostrils which could also be related to shamanic flight and avian auxiliary spirits, as identified in other Amazonian styles.[70] In sum, the Human-bird themes, similar to the Hopi Thunderbird chimera, "incorporate heterogeneous elementary forms into one paradigmatic form."[71]

Fig. 6: Marajoara figurine depicting a shaman in body metamorphosis through chewing tobacco. Special features of this figurine are the protruding tongue and the mouth full. Height: 35.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Lisbon, Portugal. Right: front of the figurine. Photo by Carlos Ladeiro. Left: back of the figurine. Photo by Laura Guerreiro.

68 Barreto, "Meios místicos de reprodução social": 165.

69 Wilbert, *Tobacco and Shamanism in South America*: 19–20.

70 Marcony Alves, "Revisitando os Alter Egos: Figuras Sobrepostas na Iconografia Konduri e sua Relação com o Xamanismo," *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas* 15, no. 3 (2020): 1–30.

71 Carlo Severi, "The Arts of Memory: Comparative Perspectives on a Mental Artefact," *HAU—Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 473.

The depiction of bodily transformation is also present in other ceramic materials from the Marajoara culture. Anthropomorphic figurines were produced in different phallic shapes and sizes, transferring to the human body the capacity of the male genitalia to change and grow. One particularly large figurine even depicts a human (phallic) body in what appears to be a shaman undergoing body transformation, with bulging cheeks, protruding tongue, and drop shaped-eyes, in a seated position, holding a probable rattle in one hand (Fig. 6).

In contrast with the relative standardization of the Human-bird urn, the other type of urn is built around a seated human female, who is depicted in varying compositions and poses (Fig. 5). Many show a complete human figure, including the front and back, modeled arms, legs, breasts, and appliqué navel and vulva. However, other pieces seem to have adapted that body to a split-representation graphic convention of many Marajoara designs, which display a two-faced figure, similar to Human-bird urns. In such a case, other beings are also present but only as parts of this larger body, with snakes and vultures' heads forming the folded arms and protruding shoulders. The heterogeneous parts are easily identifiable.

Here, the relationship between the larger female figure and the smaller other-than-human beings that make up the body does not allude to body transformation, such as in the Human-bird urn, but rather to the principle of qualitative indeterminacy. In this case, body composition probably encoded ontological knowledge concerning the fabrication of the body and relations with predatory animals. Similarly, cylindrical urns from the Polychrome Tradition, using the same type of multicomposed bodies, are found throughout Central and Upper Amazon, where a pan-Amazonian funerary pattern is easily identified.[72] The same animals, snakes, and birds, also appear as body parts and perhaps illustrate a common ontological matrix, even if these are manifest in different distant regions.

5 Discussion

Ancient Amazonian imagery materializes complex conceptual schemes by formal principles of recursive nesting and multireferenciality. These graphics principles depict bodily transformation, asymmetries of predatory capacity, and the ontological difference between ordinary, primordial, and/or shamanic entities. Some multiscale figures, such as the proliferous Tapajó necked vessel, appear to encapsulate many characters unfolded from one source. Other asymmetrical relationships are depicted between transformed shamans and smaller spirits found in Marajoara burial urns.

72 Erêndira Oliveira, "Corpo de barro, corpo de gente: Metáforas na iconografia das urnas funerárias polícromas," *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas* 15, no. 3 (2020): 1–22.

Shamans and bodily transformation are portrayed differently between the Tapajó and Marajoara arts, albeit with some core commonalities between these two distinctive styles. The most striking commonality is the centrality of birds of prey in place of the jaguars, which are often found in contemporary Amazonian mythologies and many archaeological contexts from the Andes and Mesoamerica.[73] A second thematic similarity refers to the metamorphosis of a female into a bird, which is especially visible in the Tapajó repertoire but only suggested in the Marajora urns.

In contrast with other contexts in North and South America, where humans with avian attributes—or "birdmen"—are found, there is a female bird figure from the late precolonial period in the Lower Amazon and Amazon Delta.

In both Marajoara and Tapajó assemblages, there is evidence of shamanic practices. The bulging cheek motif related to chewing tobacco is found in funerary urns, bowls, and figurines on Marajó Island. In addition, ceramic snuff inhalers are commonly found in Marajoara contexts. In Tapajó contexts, the evidence of the consumption of entheogen substances is not frequent, but bird-shaped whistles are frequently found, which are linked to the contact to avian spirits and shamanic flight. The chronological overlapping attested by the participation in the ceremonial exchange of green stone pendants, some of them bird-shaped, attests to the sharing of sociocosmological principles.

The standardized iconographic repertories of the Tapajó and Marajoara may have acted as mnemonic devices to transmit and share narratives of the mythical times, and their associated cosmological principles are materialized in motifs and themes. This is marked in particular by the variants of the Seated Female theme as a culture hero in Tapajó imagery and of the Human-bird of Marajoara urns. The complex narratives of mythical times create a repertory of knowledge that is learned by oral transmission and embodied in body modification and in the continuous production of and exposure to visual art. For many Amazonian peoples, such as the Yekuana in the Venezuelan-Brazilian border, making and displaying graphic motifs are ways of learning about origin myths and how demiurges and spirits affect everyday life.[74]

Furthermore, ancient imagery from the Amazon is related to body fabrication, acting as "supplements"[75] to human capacities. Artifacts and images have agency, as do the harpy-eagle feathers or the jaguar claws, whether employed in feasting regalia, modifying human bodies, or catalyzing predatory potency. "[H]e might 'become' jaguar putting a jaguar fang or claw around his neck, wearing a belt of jaguar skin

73 Peter Furst, "The Olmec Were-Jaguar Motif in the Light of Ethnographic Reality," in *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on the Olmec*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1968): 143–78.

74 David Guss, *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol, and Narrative in the South American Rain Forest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 124.

75 Fausto, "Feasting on People": 497–530.

around his waist, or imitating a jaguar's growl."[76] Considerably, the complex composite figures found in Marajoara funerary urns likely depicted the whole spirits, acting on the deceased body and soul. In the Tapajó vessels, the imagery could have acted as containers for transforming substances and their consumers. Images carry part of the depicted beings, along with their body parts.

The study of Marajoara and Tapajó imageries has been central to debunking the ahistorical environmental determinism prevalent in Amazonian archaeology in the latter twentieth century.[77] However, if the complex technology and iconography of ancient ceramics have been at the center of the debate over social complexity in the tropical forest,[78] criticism of environmental determinism resulted in interpretations of iconography incompatible with the main principles of Amazonian Indigenous sociocosmologies, creating a huge gap between the pre-Columbian past and the ethnographic present.

Roosevelt and Schaan argued that Marajoara and Tapajó imagery reflects the emergence of social inequality and complexity. Roosevelt believed that intensive agriculture led to the "prominence of humans" in iconography, in detriment to "accessory" animal depictions.[79] For the Tapajó art in particular, Roosevelt considered that naturalistic depictions of elite persons indicated a decrease in animal spirits in rituals as hunting became a minor source of subsistence. In this functionalist scenario, Schaan argued that iconography could display a "greater valorization of human over nature"[80] and would be a part of a strategy to legitimize elite power and control of fertile lands and esoteric knowledge.

Pre-Columbian and early colonial artifacts from the Amazon commonly depict humans and animals, in contrast with the predominantly abstract art of the ethnographic present. Anthropologists who have worked on Indigenous Amazonian arts have shown that some formal principles, such as multireferentiality and recursive nesting, are related to shamanistic transformational ontology. Denying the disjunction in the arts between pre- and post-Columbian times, highlighted by Roosevelt, is impossible.[81]

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76 Peter Furst, "Crowns of Power: Bird and Feather Symbolism in Amazonian Shamanism," in *The Gift of Birds: Featherwork of Native South American Peoples*, eds. Ruben E. Reina and Kenneth M. Kensinger (Philadelphia: The University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1991): 102.

77 Meggers, *Amazonia.*

78 Cristiana Barreto, "Cerâmica e complexidade social na amazônia antiga: uma perspectiva desde Marajó," in *Arqueologia Amazônia 1*, eds. Edithe Pereira and Vera Guapindaia (Belém: Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, 2010).

79 Anna Roosevelt, "Interpreting Certain Female Images in Prehistoric Art," in *The Role of Gender in Pre-Columbian Art and Architecture*, ed. V.E. Miller (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988): 4.

80 Schaan, *Sacred Geographies of Ancient Amazonia:* 136.

81 Lagrou, "Podem os grafismos ameríndios ser considerados quimeras abstratas?": 67–110.

Herein, we have identified equivalent formal principles found in contemporary Indigenous art in Tapajó and Marajoara material culture, thereby undermining the iconic symbolism of the durable ceramics in pre-Columbian times. Such iconography is likely related to the social, demographic, and ecological effects of European colonization and Indigenous resistance and agency. A more codified graphic system that required embodied knowledge and educated perception allowed for the maintenance of shamanic-related practices, even in face of colonial violence and depopulation.[82] Amazonian transformational ontologies persist throughout the region across various genres of visual art.[83] Figurative depictions are used in contemporary Indigenous art for the external public in museums and galleries globally, suggesting such depictions are used to communicate ideas that cross cultural boundaries. In ancient Amazonia, the preponderance of iconic graphic art could have supported the maintenance of extensive interactions as part of a pan-Amazonian imagistic language.[84]

Even if a model concerning the centrality of animals being replaced by one with a stress on humans holds for other global regions and can be used to correlate sociopolitical and iconographic change, this picture does not seem to fit in ancient Amazonia. Our analysis of a vast corpus of the Marajoara and Tapajó arts shows that most depictions are of animals or humans in very conventionalized forms, zooanthropomorphic figures, and beings experiencing body metamorphosis. At the confluence of Tapajós and Amazon rivers, the ethnohistoric sources mention the existence of a class of "nobles"[85] as different social hierarchies documented in the ethnography of some Amazonian regions.[86] Thus, if it is not possible to exclude the importance of asymmetrical power relations across ancient Amazonia, it is also clear that there is no evidence of "anthropocentrism" or elite ideology in either the Tapajó or Marajoara art. Indeed, there is a remarkable continuity and persistence through changes in graphic and cosmological principles between ancient and recent Indigenous Amazonian art.

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