THE ONE AND THE MANY: HOHODENE ANCESTORS AND SORCERY

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The One and the Many: Ancestors and Sorcerers in Hohodene Worldview

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Abstract:
This chapter explores the meanings of “Body” in relation to one of the most important spirits in Hohodene cosmology, the “Owner of Sickness and Sorcery”, Kuwai. In my interpretation, I seek to unravel multiple layers of meaning related to this figure by utilizing native exegeses that connect narratives, graphic representations (including petroglyphs), shamanic cures and visions, sacred geography, and sacred chants. I hope to show that Hohodene notions of Person, Cosmos, Ontology, and History are intertwined in an all-encompassing multiplicity of living entities into one material and spiritual Body. Sonic imagery, directly connected to sacred places; sorcery and shamanic powers; and a rigorous ethic of resistance to pain are among the principal features of the enigmatic being of Kuwai, the first ancestor of humanity and the body of their Universe.

“I am Kuwai, you [pointing to step-son] are Kuwai, you [pointing to me, the researcher] are Kuwai” (José Cornelio, 1976)
The research on which this chapter is based has been conducted over a period of 3 decades among the Hohodene peoples of the Aiary River in the Northwest Amazon. An Arawak-speaking people, the Hohodene are one of several phratries that comprise a hypothetical ‘people’ called by outsiders the “Baniwa”. This name is not an ethnonym though it has been used by outsiders since early colonization in the 18th Century and today is accepted by the native people as their ethnic identity.

The Northwest Amazon region has been compared to a “Tower of Babel” because of its linguistic diversity. The more than 22 ethnic groups who consider themselves as distinct socio-political units are grouped by linguists into three major language families: northern Arawak, eastern Tukano, and Maku. Despite their linguistic diversity, all peoples share in a number of cultural patterns and institutions, among them the sacred rites of passage involving the ancestral flutes and trumpets which are considered to be the Body of the first ancestral being from which came all human ancestors. These flutes and trumpets are considered extremely sacred, for which reason they are generally hidden, wrapped in leaf bundles and buried along the riverbanks in places that only the adult men know.

There is a large bibliography of works by anthropologists, scientific travellers, missionaries, and government officials about the sacred flutes in the NW Amazon. Much of this literature tends to be sensationalistic and distorted by the authors’ own biases. Catholic and evangelical missionaries, for example, have for over a century hunted and persecuted native beliefs in the sacred flutes and masks which they labeled as demonic, “Satan”. For that

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1 See, for example, Hugh-Jones (1979); Reichel-Dolmatoff (1996); Wright, (1998)
reason, many communities no longer celebrate the rites of their ancestors, having lost all beliefs that at one time played a major role in their inter-tribal relations, as well as intra-tribal identities.

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

Among northern Arawakan societies, ‘phratric exogamy’ is imperative to social inter-relations; i.e., women marry out of the phratry into which they were born and into a phratry with whom their families wish to establish or continue alliances. The tabu on outsider women seeing the sacred ancestral flutes of their husbands’ phratry has little if anything to do with a supposed dread of ‘incest’ (which does not exist in Baniwa mythic narratives) and more with the potential dangers of an "external Other" becoming an "insider", and discovering the source of the phratry's ancestral power. This represents a great risk expressed in the mythic cycles of the primordial

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2 Sib: a set of communities who consider themselves to be agnatic siblings and descendants of one common Kuwai ancestor, and one common ‘historical’ ancestor. ‘Phratry’ is a set of sibs ranked according to the order of emergence of primordial ancestors from the holes of the (now) rapids of Hipana on the Aiary River.
world, in which the Creator and his kin are always opposed to the "other peoples", non-kin, affines, animal tribes, generally the enemy tree-animals who are portrayed as the primordial sorcerers.

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

The women are intermediaries with the outside world just as shamans are intermediaries with the Other World of the great spirits. Both therefore are locked in a kind of complementary opposition that is the moving force or dynamic of reciprocity and exchange, implying both marriage and sorcery. Ancestral power embodied in the flutes and trumpets thus distinguishes one phratry's collective identity from another. Since the law of exogamy (marital exchange) is a centrifugal force through which the external world (in-marrying women, non-indigenous peoples) penetrates the internal world of the sib/phratry, there is an extreme taboo on showing the flutes to the
women, which we interpret to be an adaptive mechanism to preserve intact the *internal* continuity of phratric identity against the threatening powers which outsiders represent. This assertion, we argue, underlies statements made by important shamans about not giving up the traditions, for then the enemy will take over and the people will be ruined. (Wright, 2013, Chapter 1) One hopes that the pioneering protection of the “Yurupary” established by UNESCO through the Colombian government will be extended to Brazil and Venezuelan peoples who still observe the traditions.

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

In the sacred narrative of *Kuwai*, as soon as the child was born, the men hustled him away and hid him in the forest because of its strange appearance and extremely violent acts - jaguar teeth, a placenta that had the form of a stingray, the child’s uncontrollable thirst for milk. **His Body is totally different from human bodies today, for it was completely perforated and, from the multiple holes, sounds and melodies associated with multiple animals, birds, and fish were produced.** The Sun father was astonished that his child had such a strange form. The child was so “ashamed” of his strange appearance, it is said, he violently sucked dry the breast of a sloth ‘wetnurse’. Fearing that his child would wreak havoc in the world, the Creator sent him away to live hidden for a long time. Kuwai was his child, the “soul of his father the Sun”, with all the shamanic knowledge and power of his father but also was the incarnation of sorcery and sickness.

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3 A lingua geral (trade language of the area) term to refer to the ancestral being whose body gave rise to the sacred flutes and trumpets. Each ethnic group has a different name for this spirit, so missionaries since the 18th Century reduced this cultural diversity to a single battle against the “Yurupary”, which actually is a Tupian demiurge of the forest.
One 98-year old jaguar shaman narrated the birth of Kuwai as follows:

“At Kuwai’s birth, he was hidden away. Kuwai was taken to Kuwai ifakahruakan. (place where he was nursed by a sloth mother) The men showed Amaru a stingray, called, “niamaru”, saying that the only thing that was born was just placenta. Before Kuwai was born, his mother Amaru went looking for a place to give birth. She went to the Uaupés, later the Íçana – the place called Tsépan – and she lay down there. Later, Puwedali, on the Ucaiali (Uaupes), and went to lie down there. Later, Uapui, and she stayed there. After Kuwai was born, he was hidden from her at a place downriver below. At Dumalipekwa, three places below. Thuruapekwa, Thiripidapekwa. Nhiãpirikuli went after him.”

The child’s real mother "knew" that the men had taken her child away, and she wanted her child back. Throughout the story, the men deceive the women fearing that they would take the dangerous powers embodied in Kuwai away, which would leave them helpless to defend their phratric identities from outsiders. This dread of being without an identity and inability to do anything at all is also used as a justification for the secrecy.

In the following discussion, I seek to show systematically how the Body of Kuwai was transformed into all the sacred flutes and trumpets. For each instrument, I ask: what cultural categories are being highlighted? What view of ‘the world’ is communicated through the body and sounds that Kuwai makes? By combining all the features of the individual instruments together, we come to a deeper understanding of Hohodene ‘worldview’. For, it seems, Kuwai embodies both a concept of Multiple beings-in-One, and the One Being-in-Multiplicity that is the Universe.
Inside and Outside, Open and Closed: Duality in Kuwai’s Body

To begin, the principal (and perhaps only) Hohodene drawing of what Kuwai looks like was made by a Hohodene jaguar shaman Luiz Gomes, a distant cousin of Manuel da Silva, the subject of my recent book (2013). The anthropologist/linguist Dr. Omar González-Ñánez who has worked for 4 decades among northern Arawak-speaking peoples, requested that Luiz draw Kuwai, also known as Kuwai-ka-Wamundana, the “Guardian of Sorcery and Sickness”, a sacred name referring to Kuwai’s principal animal soul identity as “the black sloth shadow-soul.” (see Fig. 1, p. ; and Ch. 4 of my book).

All Baniwa ancestral flutes and trumpets are considered to be parts of the Body of Kuwai. His Body is totally different from human bodies today, for it consisted of multiple parts each being an ancestral form of an animal, bird, or fish. Most of the flutes come in pairs, replicating the long bones of Kuwai’s body. The exceptions are the single flute called Mulitu, said to be his penis; and the triple flutes called Waliadoa, ‘Young Sister initiate’ corresponding to the three claws on one of its paws. Each pair of flutes has a sacred name corresponding to a primordial, ancestral being, whose body had the shape of a long flute or trumpet. Several of these ancestral beings had appendages—wings, legs and arms, added to the long bones, claws, and appendages of “Kuwai’s Body”. Considered altogether, the graphic representations of these primordial beings, chiseled in the boulders of many rapids in the Northwest Amazon, comprise a cultural memory of the primordial world, how it came into being, and the events that made the contemporary world the way it is. (Wright, 2013; Xavier Leal, 2008;

4 The numbers of pairs varies with the knowledge of the narrators; Luiz Gomes named 16 pairs, most other narrators named fewer.
Gonzalez-Ñánez, 2006) This cultural memory is, I hope to show, also a social history. For, the elements comprising Kuwai’s body orient the Hohodene today as to who their kin and allies, as well as their affines and enemies, are.

The Body of Kuwai in the drawing below consists: firstly, of a complex combination of sicknesses and remedies concentrated in both a central internal axis inside and the external covering outside his body; and secondly, numerous holes in his body through which a variety of animal sounds are made that, following Kuwai’s ‘death’ in a world-transforming fire, became material ancestral flutes and trumpets of existing phratries, as well as the defining features of Hohodene Personhood. To understand this, I shall analyze the elements of sickness and sorcery in Kuwai’s Body first, followed then by the notion of ancestrality.

The body parts of Kuwai considered to be sources of both sicknesses and remedies are: (a) the crown of his head (Kuwai ithipale), (b) throat (liweda) (c) the heart (ikaale) and (d) the umbilicus (hliepuhle). All of these are key points of soul passage from the crown of the head down to the umbilicus. These critical points link Kuwai to the knowledge and powers of the sorcerer and the shaman, as well as to the principal points of entry and exit of all souls at birth, coming-of-age, sickness, and death. Though not shown in this drawing, two other points of soul passage are the eyes and the mouth.

Around the crown are clustered various icons of sicknesses that shamans attribute to Kuwai: hair, said to be tucum fibre, from the moriche
palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*), also known as buriti, associated with sicknesses produced by a sorcerer’s poison, *manhene*; a white stone “that gives headaches”; a snake that produces a painful sickness called *hiuiathi*.

The “heart/soul” concentrates in the form of darts, four major sicknesses that the shaman must learn how to cure first during his/her apprenticeship: the *yooping*, spirits of the environment; the *walama*, darts that come from shamans, whether human or not; the *haikuita*, pieces of wood; and sicknesses of the blood, such as hemorrhaging.

Finally, the umbilicus which is said to contain the most powerful remedy (*tápe*) against sorcerers’ poison – “our umbilicus”, the connection between the first ancestors of the phratry and all their descendants. The umbilical cord constitutes the very first ‘soul’ of every person which enters a body in This World at birth. It is also the first of several souls to leave a person at death and return to the Other World, where all the souls of the deceased from the beginning of time are located. For the shaman Luiz, it is from the umbilicus of *Kuwai* that the shaman takes out medicine for *ifiukali*, a grave sickness of the digestive tract that makes one thin, anemic, wasted away. This sickness, like all others mentioned, has its origins in the stories.

The internal axis of sickness and health, as we might call it, in *Kuwai’s* body consists of the major sources of sicknesses, which are

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5 Shamans say that in *Kuwai’s* village in the Other World, there is a plantation of buriti palmtrees the greatest of which is the “Jaguar Kumale”, which is covered with thorns.
6 The *Yoopinai* spirits have their own shaman, a declared enemy of humans, whose material bodily form is the lizard (*dopo*).
7 An anaconda impregnates the Creator’s wife who betrayed him by having sexual relations with the anaconda; the resulting chaotic situation was the origin of the sickness *ifiukali*, which people today get from eating raw or rotten fish/meat.
nevertheless the sources of remedies that shamans can use to cure the same sickness. This double-sided feature of the powers contained in Kuwai’s body is as essential to understand as it is to know how each type of sickness and remedy came into being, by whom, and why.

As one elderly shaman narrator explained,

“After Kuwai had gone away, Nhiaperikuli filled a pot of manhene (poison) and then, a friend of his drank the plant poisons called hfero, lixupana. He began to have diarrheia. Nhiaperikuli took the ceramic pot to his house and left it there in order to keep it from others’ wanting it. He ordered his people the Kuwaikere⁸ to make sure that no other people could come and take away the poison. The Eenunai, however, succeeded in tricking them and stole the poison. Eenunai iketsuali ikurumanhene.” (Matteo P., 1998)

The hair (Kuwai liidzu) of his body is considered one of the most potent types of poison which a true shaman must obtain from the Body of Kuwai in order to cure a patient in This World. Kuwai’s body was covered by hair or fur, which seems like a paradoxical mixing/merging of the features ‘open’ and ‘closed’ used to describe his body and, as we shall see, the universe. Similar to the sloth’s (wamu) body, which harbors innumerable kinds of fungae that live symbiotically in its pelt, Kuwai’s fur was full of bugs and poison. Similar also to the sloth’s habits, Kuwai was most of the time “closed”, with great control over his digestive orifices, which is appropriate for the fasting period he imposed on initiates. When his body

⁸ Kuwaikere is one of several names referring to the spirit people with whom he lived. There are also Kuwainyai, bee-spirit keepers of potent medicine, their honey that helps “bring back the soul” of an unconscious person.
'opens’, it is either to emit creative sounds, or to allow fluids to fall like rain on the earth. It is important to understand how these sound emissions are modulated throughout the narrative (e.g., a melody sung in harmony vs a chaotic bellowing of sounds; a diet of ripe forest-fruits vs a cannibalistic devouring of flesh).  

**Viscera, Body Fluids and Their Significance**

*Kuwait’s viscera* (specifically, his liver) contained **poison** that was absorbed by certain **plants** after his death; these plants have the shape of a liver. Larvae associated with rotten wood are said to be the “bile of Kuwait” (*lidanhe*), part of his poisonous animal-form associated with rot. Or, better stated, in the perspective of Kuwait, the larvae are “his heart-soul”, while to humans, they are the bile that spoils the meat of a freshly-killed animal.

One of the most important fluids of Kuwait’s **body** is his **blood** which is identified by the shamans as “parikā” (*dzaato*), the psychoactive that shamans inhale in its dried out form as snuff in order to “die” and return to the Other World of the deities and spirits; this “blood” nourishes the shaman’s own heart/soul, *ikaale*, which means both the material organ and the spiritual source of life-supporting energy in the blood that can be vital to cures.

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9 How can a body covered by fur be full of holes at the same time? If we look at photos of a sloth’s fur, there are numerous places of discoloration as a result of the fungae, white spots that – from a distance – could very well be seen as ‘holes’. It is plausible that these spots are perceived as the ‘holes’ in Kuwait’s body fur.

10 These plants are used in Brazilian popular culture to ward off evil spirits (“Espada de São Jorge”, for example)
Kuwai’s saliva, liahnuma, can be both a creative, seminal fluid which regenerates the physical world, but can also be used in sorcery. One example of liahnuma in the normal world is the life-giving sap that drops from the trees as though, Hohodene say, a larger tree is feeding its young saplings. The ‘other side’ of liahnuma is used in sorcery, where a sorcerer will cast a spell embodied in his spittle left along the trail where the victim will walk. Sorcery produces a condition of physical, spiritual “open-ness” in its victims in which an excess of fluids is involuntarily expelled from the body (vomiting, diarrhea).

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

Besides the animal, bird, and fish parts of his Body, Kuwai can transform into various spirit-Others who are considered to be powerful and dangerous “enemies”. (–puunda: Inyaiman.11 an extremely dangerous, cannibalistic ogre, a transformative spirit of death, is known as the “Other Kuwai” (that is, Kuwai can transform into this ‘Other’ demonic being):

11 The name Inyaime literally means: negative other (Inyai, other; me, neg.)
Yoopinai, sickness-transmitting spirits of the forest, rivers and riverbanks; the White Man, yalanawinai, who, it is believed, was generated from grubs of a rotten, slain enemy Anaconda.

The kind of spirit called inyaime is said to become embodied in a living sorcerer’s “heart-soul”, for a sorcerer by definition is someone who has transformed from a cultural “person” into an “enemy other”.

The kind of spirits called yoopinai are embodied in almost any plant, bush or shrub, as well as the countless kinds of insects, bugs, and spiders which can be invoked to give sickness and pain to humans. These came into being (“were born”) from Kuwai’s ashes at the moment of his spirit’s departure from This World. Most importantly, at the moment of his burning in fire, he lets loose from his body all of these spirits which then spread throughout the world. Kuwai embodied all sickness and sorcery; he is their “owner”. His fur, it is said, “ran and entered the body of the black sloth”, Kuwai’s shadow-soul today (Kuwai idanamini wamu) and the avatar of sorcery.

If an initiate breaks the restrictions imposed on all who are participating in the Kuwai rites, it is believed that a catastrophe will ensure. For, the other Kuwai has the power to destroy life, through violence, chaotic and loud sounds like the crashing of thunder, and by unleashing sickness and sorcery which take on numerous forms throughout the world.

_Kuwai and Growth: the Ancestral Heart/Soul (ikaale) of the Sun Father_

The story of Kuwai tells of how he came into the world and develops through an entire life-cycle: conception, pre-birth, baby/infant, adult, old man, and post-mortem body/soul. During the story, an initiate is instructed...
on the multiplex relations between humans and Other beings. Kuwai was eventually ‘killed’ at the end of the first initiation rite when his father pushed him into an enormous fire and, following the fiery transformation, his Body became ancestral trumpets/flutes. Precisely at the same place where Kuwai was born, Hipana, a gigantic paxiuba palmtree, shot out from the ground, connecting This World and the Other World where Kuwai lives eternally. The paxiuba palmtree (which is naturally hollowed out) was the materialized form of all the apertures and long bones of Kuwai’s Body. It was the source of all the sacred flutes and trumpets. Recalling that Hipana is considered the “World Center”, the “celestial umbilical cord”, the sacred flutes and trumpets are therefore the material umbilical connection between primordial ancestors and all their descendants.

These are the ancestors of the Hohodene phratry. Their names are remembered for the events and processes that occurred in primordial times and that are significant to the social reproduction of the phratry, as well as of the Baniwa/Kuripako-speaking peoples as a whole. Thus we may say that the knowledge embodied in Kuwai consists of the cultural memory of the phratry, all of the life phases and transitions that people will pass through, as well as the principal characters in the drama of cosmic history.

As in the story, the sounds of the flutes and trumpets played in initiation rites today are what make initiates and fruit-bearing palm trees today grow, along with the whips that were part of Kuwai’s body. The sounds plus the whips break open the initiates’ skin and penetrate the initiates’ heart/soul. With these sounds, in sum, there is growth and expansion; with Kuwai’s whips, plus the ‘fire’ of sacred pepper,
the initiates ‘dry out’, that is, they become immune to the potentially harmful ancestral spirits (Kuwainai).\textsuperscript{12} Initiates are taught to control bodily needs by fasting and to become fully cultural beings by recognizing and experiencing the music of the sacred.

When Kuwai’s melodies are played, today as in the beginning times, they are accompanied by the sounds of whips slashing the bodies of the participants. In resisting the pain of the whips (not demonstrating pain through crying or even flinching), all life grows “with force” (quickly) and strength. This is why the men play the flutes and trumpets during the time of the ripening of the forest-fruits, at the base of the fruit-trees – in order to make them grow in abundance, as food for the initiates and whoever is “seeing Kuwai” (Hugh-Jones, 1989, P. Maia, 200; Vutova, 2013).

Sacred Sounds and Growth

The apertures, “holes”, in Kuwai’s body were externalized and materialized after his sacrifice in the great fire. The sacred flutes were then measured and cut from the paxiuba tree; once the tree was broken into pieces and fell to the ground, the Creator fashioned them in such a way as to replicate the melodic sounds of the original Body of Kuwai. After he finished producing all of the instruments, the Creator declared that they, the “people can take these, and play them.”

Following this, narrators may continue by telling how each of the phratry’s ancestral flutes and trumpets “were born”, emerging from the holes in the Rapids of Hipana, the Center of the World. Each emerged and was sent to live on a specific piece of riverfront land, as though the One single

\textsuperscript{12} Just as an unripe fruit is difficult to open because its shell is still “wet”, so the initiates have to be the right age for the opening of their skin to occur.
source had multiplied in order to be dispersed in multiple communities over a large geographical area.

The sounds of these flutes and trumpets penetrate and “open up” initiates’ bodies today making them grow into mature, ‘ripe’ adults. *Kuwai’s* thorax became the great trumpets that bellow out the “Jaguar Bone” song that “opened up” the world, making it expand like a balloon to its present-day size. With these sounds, there is physical growth. The sounds are always accompanied by *Kuwai’s* whips, an integral part of the “Body of Kuwai” that, according to Hohodene elders, stimulate growth and demonstrate resistance to the stinging pain.\(^\text{13}\)

The shaman’s drawing below positions the apertures in *Kuwai’s* body in such a way as to indicate an order, on both sides of the body, of named flutes and trumpets (each stick or oblong shape representing a long flute). From the meanings attributed to each of the flutes, we come to understand (1) what features or attributes of primordial ancestrality are considered central to Hohodene worldview, (2) the meaning of the ancestral world and its powers which were transmitted to all future generations, (3) the Hohodene understanding of their Creator’s reproduction of their cultural memory.

By “reproduction”, I mean not merely biological reproduction, nor the physical “body” in the narrow sense which Reichel-Dolmatoff gives to the flutes (1995, 1996). For, besides their being parts of *Kuwai’s* primordial memory.

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\(^{13}\) In the rituals when the sacred flutes and trumpets are played, the adult men and women whip each other often with such force in their strokes that they leave red welts on the back or chest. When it is an initiation ritual, the elders whip the initiates three times, then immediately step down on the initiates’ feet while stretching the initiates’ torsos by lifting up their arms at their bent elbows. This is to “make the initiates grow quickly”, the elders say.
Body, the **flutes and trumpets** represent the nature and qualities of the Person, as understood culturally, of collectivities or the collective “Self” (sibs and phratries), and of collective “Others” or Alterity.

Ancestral powers of fertility, reproduction and growth, coupled with the catastrophic powers of sickness and sorcery, are embodied in the sacred flutes and trumpets. In This World as a whole also, for, everywhere there are ancestral souls (*Kuwainai*), there will also be spirits of enemies, sickness and sorcery. The idea of all that we call the “natural world” and anything ‘non-Baniwa’ are imbued with these seemingly paradoxical powers.

**Kuwai-ka Wamundana: By Parts**

What I shall now do is demonstrate how each of the pairs of sacred flutes and trumpets refers to an attribute of cultural Personhood, in both individual and collective senses of ancestrality, as well as attributes of Alterity. The inter-relations of the parts are articulated through transformative processes of ‘becoming Other’. This becoming Other is effected by externalizing and materializing that which is internal and powerful, or by internalizing powerful meanings that are imbued in materially external forms.

*Kuwai’s* Body may be divided into four parts: left and right sides, upper and lower parts. Internal and external parts of the Body constitute the linkages embodied in *Kuwai* between collective Self-identity of the phratry with attributes of Alterity.

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

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

![Diagram of Maaliawali](image)

Maaliawali

The name Maaliawali recalls the primordial initiates of the story, for they are named Maalinali-ienipe. The first pair of long flutes Maaliawali mimics the sound of a rattle being shaken followed by a high-pitched song of a white heron in flight “Tsatsatsa, Tseytsemtseytsem.”

2) Waliadoa: a group of three long flutes meaning “Young Sister”. In the story, Waliadoa is the first daughter initiated by the first woman Amaru. “Young Sister” is the female partner of Maaliawa, corresponding to the ritual relations of kamaratakan, “like a marriage” the Hohodene say. For, evidently the meaning of the first 2 pairs is related to the category of marital relations, conceived of as an exchange.

The body of Waliadoa is drawn in the petroglyphs at Ejnipan (Jandu Rapids) where it is believed the first initiation rite took place, showing a complex form (Fig. ). The body of Waliadoa is sectioned in three parts,
corresponding to 3 long flutes, each of which is marked distinctively, perhaps corresponding to the parts of each material flute: the first on the left is sectioned in 3, while on the right is in 2, and the middle in 4 parts. The head portions of each flute comprise a single head with sockets for 2 eyes and 2 ears.

The three ancestral flutes of Waliadoa correspond to the thumb, index finger, and middle finger of Kuwai’s left hand. They sing a sad melody which consists of three distinct phrases; “Eeteytumdeee Nupita’mta’mdee Nupita’mta’mdee” sung in such a way as to equalize or balance the couplet—rising at the end of the first, and descending at the end of the second. The word “nupita” may signify “I weep, I weep”. Kuwai’s tears are said to be the rains, the time for scheduling the initiation rites.

It is said that, when Kuwai came into the world, he wept at his own grotesque shape: with the teeth of a jaguar, with holes all over his body, consisting of multiple parts all somehow integrated into one being. He was ashamed (-paymaka) and his father astonished at the strangeness of his body. His father sent him away to the forest and then to the sky. He (Kuwai) was not wanted except by his mother whom the men tricked into thinking that nothing had been born except a stingray placenta. Kuwai became an outsider because of his dangerous powers, but the idea behind the Creator bringing him into being was to be able to transmit all the knowledge he had about shamans, sorcery, and how the world is.
3) **Mulitu the Frog:** The small figure in the center of the petroglyphs at Ejnipan (Jandu Rapids) is the frog *Mulitu*, said to be *Kuwait’s* penis, which is the only flute played singly. The single toot “*Muu*” mimics the song of the frog. (see Hill, 1993, for a discussion of this flute and correlation with ecological cycles). It is said that this single short-flute responds to women’s questions about the sex of their yet-to-be-born babies.

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

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

They were primordial sorcerers, among the Creator’s principal enemies. The Night Monkey ipeku especially is considered a descendant of the Dzawikwapa, a harbinger of death, an omen if the monkey appears at dusk singing in the trees or sitting on the ground at the outskirts of a village. Kuwai’s animal avatar (-ndana, ‘shadow’) is the “Black Sloth”, Wamu, which is the primal animal “guardian of sorcery” (manhene iminali). The furry coats of the Black Sloth and its ‘helper’, Tchitamali, the “White Sloth”, are filled with poison, manhene, which came directly from Kuwai’s fur as it burned in the Great Fire that “killed” [i.e., marked the end of,] Kuwai’s passage from This World. As one elderly narrator and jaguar-shaman, Matteo, recounted:

“Tchitamali thádua is the mother of the chief of poison. Tchitamali is Kuwai’s pet (ipira). Uamu is Kuwai’s pet (ipira). In the story of Mawirikuli, linupa (the stench of the dead that brings on sickness)
began. In the end, Mawerikuli went to ‘Paradise.’ The dead arises, is beautiful, for his/her place, lidzakalekwa, in Paradise has already been prepared, in the city of the dead. His/her body has become all White. Nhiãpirikuli wrapped up the manhene that he recovered in a leaf bundle, and threw it on top of a range of hills in Venezuela to keep it guarded.” (Fieldnotes. MP -01/2001)

The Eenunai lost their overall primordial unity, after the ‘death’ of one of their chiefs, Witháferi, who lived inside a sieve and was carried around by two land ‘animal’-helpers, the anteater and the paca, a rodent. (see illustration below) As the stories tell, the Eenunai and Itchirinai (mostly ground animals such as Tapir, Anteater), and the Umawalinai (aquatic spirits which came into existence with the killing of the primordial Anaconda) were affines and enemies of the Creator who constantly plotted to “kill and eat” him by predatory sorcery.

The Creator outsmarted them for the most part by spying on them, preparing superior traps, undergoing transformations, and other artifices; but they caused enough damage as to have killed one of his younger brothers, and almost “killed off” all of the Creator’s people, forcing the Creator to burn the entire world and then flood it, which made the enemy spirits flee to the mountaintops and the deep, interior of the forest and rivers. Drawings produced by shaman apprentices in 2010, at my request, illustrate the corporeal anomalies of many of these spirits, many of them being predators of humans (see my URL). Others are harmless and often serve as auxiliaries to the shaman in his quest to retrieve the souls of the sick.
5) **Jaguar Bone**, *Dzaunáapa* is the thorax of *Kuwait*, or ribcage, *iwarudali*, the longest and most powerful of the trumpets (*botutos*) that propitiate transformation in whomever or whatever the Jaguar Bone song is intended to change. The song of the celestial jaguar-shaman that *Kuwait* becomes, always consists of several prolonged bass notes: ‘**Heeeeee Heeeeee**’ like the jaguar. These trumpets are extremely secret and hidden, as they are the secret power of growth in the world. In the narrative
and the drawing of Kuwai-ka-Wamundana reproduced below, the 2 trumpets are contrasted with the wasp sound (Aini), produced by play instruments made by the first children initiates, and which were considered to be a “false kuwai, nonsense”. Kuwai himself contrasted these buzzing wasp flute imitations of the children with the truly powerful sound of Jaguar Bone that made the world grow and culture be reproduced.

6) Phratric Ancestors: Hohodene and Walipere-dakenai.

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

These two phratries have maintained affinal (marital) relations since at least the 19th Century as oral traditions relate (Wright, 2005). In Hohodene drawings of the cosmos (in Wright, 1998, 2013), the ancestral deities who raised the 2 phratries’ ancestors out of the emergence hole at Hipana were related as ‘brothers’. In the historical relations of the two phratries, after a long period of warfare which led to near-extinction, they came to be united through marriage, trade and alliance. Affinal relations, however, are marked

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14 Gonzalez-Nanez (pers. comm. 2011) has conducted research on an island named Tuwinirrin where there are also important sacred petroglyphs. Besides photos of Tuwinirrin, there is a study based on Gonzalez-Nanez’ research along the Guainia but which was signed by the Colombian anthropologist Francisco Ortiz.
by competition, treachery, and duplicity, unlike agnatic sibling relations or kin of common descent; sorcery by poisoning is a formidable characteristic of affinal relations, setting them apart in spite of the agnatic ancestrality that ideally brings them together.

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

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

The category of ‘bird-ancestors’ is not exhausted by social historical connections, however, for two other pairs of flutes refer to shamanic bird auxiliaries, the *Kawawiri* and the *Idzadapa* hawks, both of which have an important place as sentinels in the Hohodene drawings of the Universe (see
One might suggest that these shamanic auxiliary bird ancestors occupy an important place as the principal opponents of the primordial monkey species *Eenunai*—the *Chichi* and the *Ipeku*—who were constantly seeking to destroy the Creator. They are the Creator’s sorcerer enemies, kept in check by the shamanic hawks which craftily overcome the monkeys by trickery. The conflicting relations of shamans vs sorcerers is indeed a fundamental part of Hohodene primordial history, as it is of recent history of the disputes between kin and affines.

Two other categories of animal avatars are present in the collection of ancestors: the ancestral fish and land animals. One large fish embodied in the trumpets is *Iniri*, the traira, an enemy of the Creator, which consumed the Creator’s younger brother. Before being devoured, the younger brother prepared to defend himself with various shamanic items, using these as he sat inside the serpent’s belly until reaching the mouth of the river where, with the help of the birds, they killed and opened the belly of the serpent. The man, practically dead from the poison of the fish, made a long return journey home during which, with the remedies of the bee-spirits (called *Kuwainyai*) and nectar of the fruits, he was able to revive, “exchanging his life for another.” Here, the fish ancestor is a predator of humans but was defeated, and pieces of his body became a wide variety of aquatic animals (turtles, various kinds of fish). This story is the basis for a very powerful shamanic chant to “bring back the heart/souls” of those who have suffered some terrible accident and are unconscious. Sometimes the chant is used as a defense against the White Man’s sicknesses (Hill, 2013). Another chant, considered more powerful and secret, acts against the sicknesses coming from the original female ancestress, mother of *Kuwayi*, who, after the women lost their power over the sacred flutes, was sent by the Creator on mission to

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*Taali*, or surubim, [aracu] is not only highly prized for its meat but also, as a flute, is considered an emblem of identity for the Baniwa and Kuripako. (see J. Hill 1993, 2013, for more details on the Surubim [ARACU] fish flute and restrictions related to its fabrication) In real life, these fish swim in large numbers at the time of spawning, producing a deep, buzzing noise underwater, comparable to the humming of the *Kuway* trumpets. In one of the first historical notes about Baniwa ceremonial life, in 1823, the traveller Johann Natterer mentions a great dance of the surubim flutes in the large Baniwa town at Tunui Rapids. The flutes are painted white in intricate designs, ornamented with a white hawk feather, and are explicitly mentioned in the story of the primordial child (*purakalinyai*) who disobeyed his father’s warning not to eat raw fish. The child began ‘wasting away’, losing all aspects of human-ness, becoming other; he heard the buzzing of the white *Kuway*, and the white surubim fish *Taali*.

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the outside world where she married and became Mother of the Whites. Historical consciousness is deeply embedded in these shamanic chants which work to keep updated the ancient forms.

Kuwai’s body, in short, in life consisted of a multitude of specific animal, bird, and fish avatars, whose namesakes the flutes and trumpets bear today, altogether as one collective being. At critical moments in the narrative, Kuwai’s body manifests itself as distinct animals or different forms of others: the White Man, The demonic Inyaine, the big-bellied guariba monkey (known for its appetite for certain kinds of tree-fruits and nuts).

**Body Adornments: Bird Feathers, Girls’ Hair, Animal Fur, Fish Scales**

Unfortunately, space limitations prevent us from discussing in detail two other aspects of Kuwai’s being that merit attention: the adornments attached to each flute or trumpet that identify the instrument with distinctive “maka”, ‘skin covering’ in the forms of the fur, feathers, or fish scales of the ancestral entity. Adornments complete their personhood; while each is distinctive, all nevertheless share in the essence and powers of their unique source. The coloration, texture, or other outstanding characteristics of these adornments are the basis for their ‘spirit-names’. (see Hill 1993; Wright, 1993-4) Makkim is the concept of the external layer of the Body that is "like a shirt" the Hohodene said. Ornaments then are spirit-coverings derived from different sources: caraiuru (red vegetal dye, body paint), feather crowns (the owl-feather crown, pupuli-pe, is or was used in funeral rituals). These spirit-names are invoked by the elder chanters at the pepper blessing, the most significant phases of the initiation rite.
Connections to Sacred Geography

The second important aspect mentioned only in passing here is the connections of the sacred flutes and trumpets with places, sacred spaces in the “mythscape” (Wright, 2013) of Kuwai. Elsewhere, I have shown how specific geographical features (e.g., a hill, cave, or riverbed) are poetically invoked with metaphoric references to the Body of Kuwai. (1993/4) The chants sung at the pepper blessing during initiation re-member the Body which is spread out over an enormous territory in the Northwest Amazon, corresponding to the area of northern Arawak-language speakers.

Furthermore, key places mentioned in the narrative of Kuwai are generally sites with numerous, extraordinary petroglyphs, the placement of boulders which must not be disturbed, and other features of the ecology that re-member the details of the story. Each ‘sacred site’ is ‘blessed’ by chanterst to protect newly initiated adults from any potential sickness or harm associated with that place. Ancestral flutes belonging to specific sibs are kept hidden in a stream near the village site (often a site of historical settlements by the ancestors). This confirms the indelible link between the Body of Kuwai and a notion of ancestral territory that the phratry must guard against any outside intrusions.

Conclusion

After the entire process of reproducing his son’s Body is complete, the Creator then declares, “people [meaning the new generations] can take these, …and play them.” In other words, the key notion of the continuity of Kuwai’s body is made a concrete, material reality. The makers of the Body, satisfied with their work, entrust the result to future generations (walimanai)
to care for, remember in rites, and teach to new generations until the end of time.

In this interpretation of Kuwai’s Body, we have brought to light numerous key meanings based entirely on exegeses the elders made to explain the ancestral power embodied in the “heart/soul” of the Sun Father, Creator of Baniwa society. We may summarize these as follows, bearing in mind that the same icon or entity may have double-meanings:

1. Sicknesses, Sorcery, and Remedies: sorcerer animals vs shamanic bird sentinels; paradoxical duplicity of shamanic power and knowledge;
2. Growth, Fertility, Resistance to Pain: the Whips teach resistance; one or more trumpets are transformative agents of growth and reproduction;
3. Agnatic sibling ties, transmission of values between Ancestors and Descendants; bird ancestral flutes and trumpets include all sib-members of a phratry;
4. Sacred Body and Notions of Territory, place-marking; ancestral instruments connect sacred flute bodies of ancestors with actual territory, or part of riverfront lands;
5. Exogamy, historical relations of alliance between phratries; opposed by the treachery of affinal ‘other peoples’;
6. Other-becoming: transformations occur by internalizing the Other, externalizing the Self;
7. Cultural Memory and Social History: ancestral instruments symbolize historically-formed relations of marriage and political alliances;
8. Replicability of Ancestral Identity, the ‘heart/soul’ of the Sun Father, a key to the meaning of Kuwai’s life.
9. Categories of Person, Sib, Phratry, and ‘People’ are intertwined with categories of birds, tree-animals, land animals, fish, and those in-
between species that are combined (e.g., open/closed features). Kuwai is the totality of these categories, a basis for his secrecy, unwillingness to show himself in public, and highly dangerous qualities.

Figure 1: The Body of Kuwai-ka Wamundana
Fig. 2: Author’s Composition of the Great Spirits and Deities of the Baniwa Cosmos. The drawings were made on separate sheets of paper by a jaguar shaman’s apprentice. Beginning from lower left to lower right, upper right, upper left, and in-between, these are: Dzuliferi, the “Spirit of shamanic Power”; Nhiaperikuli, the Creator at his island home of Warukwa (Ig. Uarana); Kuwai-ka-Wamundana, the great spirit guardian of sorcery and the
ancestral powers; *Amaru*, the First Woman, whose spirit today lives at the “edge of the world”; three of the forest spirits: “Long Arm”; the “chief of the animals”; the half-furry/half-smooth-skinned deer); and the Spirit of Death, *Mawerikuli*, the first person to die at the hands of the tree-living *Eenunai*.

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Fig. 3: The Other World that the pajés see in their soul journeys. Above the human village are the great Spirit of Power *Dzuliferi* and his three auxiliaries
the jaguar- shaman- spirit- others, Dzauî malinyai.

Fig. 4: detail of Kuwai’s heart/soul and navel, with sickness-giving spirits and darts and wooden pieces stuck in the heart (ikaale); the navel is associated with the “bleeding sickness” – when the umbilical cord becomes infected and swollen with blood.
Right Side of Kuwai’s Body:
Left Side of Kuwai
Fig. 5: Petroglyph at *Hipana*: a body full of holes, a head-shape with two eyeholes, whip, and long tail.
Fig. 6: Petroglyph at Enukwa, rapids immediately below Hipana, showing the framework of the body of Kuwai, with two symbols of the sounds emitted from his body.

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