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# A Return to Dark Shamans: Kanaima & the Cosmology of Threat

Tarryl Janik

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

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A RETURN TO DARK SHAMANS: KANAIMA & THE COSMOLOGY OF  
THREAT

by

Tarryl L. Janik Jr.

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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at

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May 2018

## ABSTRACT

### A RETURN TO DARK SHAMANS: KANAIMA & THE COSMOLOGY OF THREAT

by

Tarryl L. Janik Jr.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018  
Under the Supervision of Professor Ingrid Jordt

Kanaima in Amazonia has been theorized within anthropology as “assault sorcery,” “dark shamanism,” and “anti-structure.” Among the Patamuna Indians of Guyana kanaima have been theorized as “cultural expression” of “hyper-traditionality” in response to an encroaching state, its industry and development, evangelism, and modernity (Whitehead; 2002). Kanaima is a mode of terror and violence, of healing, enhancing power, and performing masculinity—a symbol that operates in Patamuna mythology, cosmology, and place-making. Kanaima is intimately entangled with jaguar identity and the wildness of the Pakaraimas, functioning as the ultimate symbol of terror and control over the Patamuna and outsiders. The threat of kanaima is directed both inside and out, its dual nature as a practice of healing and killing unifies its mythology and it describes the world of the Patamuna as one of constant threat—one that in its broadest condition shapes the arrangements of violent reciprocity. The violence of kanaima is invisible, an open secret, done by unknown individuals and this assassination aspect is present because kanaima is a weapon of the weak. Terror is used when open power relations cannot be directly challenged. In this thesis, I explore how terror is operationalized as a repertoire for personal power enhancement and as a collective assertion by the Patamuna that ties their identity

to the jaguar, the wild hinterland, and as masters of violence. Terror, invoked by the threat of uncanny violence, shapes the landscape of Paramakatoi and the relations of Patamuna with each other and with others outside their society through practices of rumor, boasting, veiled threats, personal comportment, practices of defense and unexplained deaths. An art program I offered at the bequest of Patamuna leaders, as a way of giving back to the community, became a diagnostic for exploring contemporary ideas about the living jaguar, Patamuna mythology and folktales, and ideas about kanaima as were-jaguars, supernatural purveyors of terror. I argue that kanaima is a means of enhancing personal and collective power by destabilizing asymmetrical power arrangements. This thesis engages the work of Neil L. Whitehead and entangles the biographies of ethnographers and the Patamuna in the discourse on terror, violence, and death.

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For Neil L. Whitehead

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## **Introduction:**

“To be violent is clearly a capability we all possess, but why we should choose to be violent, or how we can be induced to act violently will obviously differ culturally and historically. This contingency suggests that it is the intractable nature of the definitions and concepts we employ, rather than the impossibility of understanding violence as such, that is the major obstacle to better anthropological explanations.”

–Neil L. Whitehead

### **Kanaima:**

“As I got off the plane in Paramakatoi in 1992, I had not a thought of kanaima in mind.”<sup>1</sup> Neil L. Whitehead (1956-2012) was considered one of the foremost experts on the kanaima and what he called the “poetics of violence,” by which he meant “the way in which the meaning of a violent death cannot be entirely understood by reference to biological origins, sociological functions, or material and ecological necessities but has to be appreciated for the way in which it is also a cultural expression of the most fundamental and complex kind,” which involves “competence in the manipulation of signs and symbols” and “how those signs are used performatively through time.”<sup>2</sup> Whitehead’s seminal work on the “poetics of violence” became central to his work to explain the cultural and historical context of violence and terror among the Patamuna and which is “part of the cultural repertoire of a number of Amerindian groups.”<sup>3</sup> Whitehead explains that kanaima “refers both to a mode of ritual mutilation and killing and to its

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<sup>1</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, *Dark Shamans: Kanaimà and the Poetics of Violent Death* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, ed., *Violence*, 1. ed, School of American Research advanced seminar series (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press [u.a.], 2004), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 1. *Kanaima* is a Carib word that translates into (secret assassin).

practitioners,” and that it “can allude to a more diffuse idea of active spiritual malignancy, in existence from the beginning of time, that consumes the assassins.”<sup>4</sup> Whitehead went on to say that, “Kanaima as an ethnographic issue is complex to research because it is a discourse that operates at a number of levels, referring simultaneously to the dynamics of the spirit world, physical aggression by individuals, the tensions and jealousies between villagers and family members, and the suspicions of distant enemies and outsiders,” that kanaima “is a daily subject of conversation and closely influences the decisions that people make with its vision of a cosmos filled with predatory gods and spirits whose violent hungers are sated by humans.”<sup>5</sup> The numerous accounts of kanaima I collected over the course of the two months I spent in Paramakatoi are in line with Whitehead’s description of kanaima in *Dark Shamans* in which he observes that kanaima are not simply a “textual remnant from colonial days,” but also “earnest testimony of living individuals.”:

In both the colonial literature and contemporary native oral testimony, kanaima refers to the killing of an individual by violent mutilation of, in particular, the mouth and anus, into which are inserted various objects. The killers are then enjoined to return to the dead body of the victim in order to drink the juices of putrefaction.<sup>6</sup>

Kanaima, as I too found out, is woven deeply into the fabric of everyday contemporary Patamuna life. Patamuna suspected of kanaima, like the three men reported to me as being kanaimas in Paramakatoi by numerous interlocutors, live on the outside of village sociality. Two of these suspected kanaimas live on the outskirts of the village, and as I was told, only travel at night which is not normative Patamuna behavior. They also seem to be feared and treated cautiously by many people within the community. The term “kanaima” can also be used to delineate ethnic boundaries between Amerindian groups from other regions and vice versa. For

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1–10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14–15.

as many interlocutors told me, the “Akawaio of Region 7 are kanaimas,” and when Patamuna go to Akawaio villages they are called kanaimas. This distrust between groups is a remnant of a structural negative reciprocity earlier enacted in tribal warfare (see Whitehead 1996).

Kanaimas perform kanaima upon their victims, which are said to be men who venture into the bush or other regions of Guyana alone, and women and children because they are less capable of defending themselves than men who usually are armed with a shotgun or machete. This is part and parcel to the nature of terror, attacking a helpless or unsuspecting victim. A kanaima attack can also be directed at an intended victim’s relatives. The pastor from the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist Church in Paramakatoi related the following:

A 40-year-old man was attacked by kanaima when he went to Kurassubai in Region 9. They thought he was a kanaima so they attacked him. He came back spitting blood, had a fever, and black and blue marks all over his body. He also had blood all over his butt. He died. I was skeptical of kanaima at first, but now I am starting to believe. I am ninety nine percent sure of it now since the 40-year-old man died. I saw the body firsthand. The black and blue marks and the bloody trousers on his backside. People in Kurassubai thought he was a kanaima and in turn kanaima’d him.

I also interviewed the *tushau* or captain of Kanapang a very small Makushi village by the Brazil border:

Kanaima is a criminal with evil in him. There is a whole village in Region 7 of kanaimas. Forty to fifty people come down at once to terrorize Region 8. My uncle knows more. The kanaima has evil powers. You should come to Kanapang, we would be glad to have you take interest in us. We have caves with bones in pots that go back to Carib warfare too. My father would kill up to three kanaima a day. Cause once you kill one, they never stop coming. The village of kanaimas is an Akawaio word for satellite, *chi chi* or something is the name. Even children are being taught kanaima in this village. My uncle shot a kanaima at point blank range when he was climbing a tree to hunt late at night.

Nurse & Missionary Doris Wall of Paramakatoi defines kanaima as:

Known in all Amerindian tribes in Guyana. A person gives himself to do evil and uses evil charms for strength and speed. He can separate his spirit from his body and travel long distances to kill. He will meet an unsuspecting person and injure him. The person will go home and not remember or tell of the meeting until just before he dies. Death is rapid from the meeting, usually the same night. Almost all Patamuna and Akawaio deaths are explained by kanaima. I can usually find a scientific reason for the death.

### **Binas and the Kanaima Complex:**

The act of kanaima also involves the use of *binas* or charms which is a common personal ritual practice throughout Amerindian communities in Guyana and *binas* can be myriad things; plants (such as *mimosa pudica* “the sleeping plant” or *e'molong* in Patamuna), tattoos, various substances like ginger or *koumi*, and even large black stinging ants. These are physically applied either upon the body or to things that will come into contact with the body, such as bed linens and clothing.

*Binas* are also used in *taleng* (ritual blowing), a wide-spread practice of Amerindian folk medicine that is believed to heal or cause harm. The use of *binas* in kanaima was described to me by numerous interlocutors in Paramakatoi, one of the more graphic accounts was given by the *tushau* of Paramakatoi's wife, who is also the pastor for the Full Gospel church:

Kanaima put pepper stuff on your clothes. You can wash off the pepper stuff with plant slime. You can use a mixture of bleach, shampoo, soup powder and laundry soap. Kanaima kill and use an armadillo tail in anus for fun. They tie up intestines with a stick. Dogs bark different when a kanaima is around. If someone is in the bush prowling around at night, dogs bark different. Kanaima kill dogs and children. Anyone can come into Paramakatoi at night. Gideon left his hat in the farm one night, he came back the next day to get it and put it on. Suddenly he got sick, he was coughing, sneezing, a kanaima put something in his hat. Kanaimas use all kinds of *binas*, they are passed down from father to son, from mother to daughter. Kanaima can be a woman too.

Odessa Paul, the head teacher at the Paramakatoi secondary school not only named suspected kanaimas, but also elaborated for me the ways of the kanaima:

They squeeze a plant in their eyes to make themselves nocturnal. They use a plant to make you sleepy. There used to be a cone house by Bamboo Creek that was used for *aleluya*. A *piya* is a healer. Sipio of Tuseneng was the last *piya* and may be dead. He was the founder of Tuseneng. People fear kanaima, that's why you never go alone in the bush. They pierce you with fangs or bones of poisonous reptiles. Leave bruises. The kanaima will talk about what he did to kill a man and the stories of bodily harm on the corpse match up. You can never prove it, but you would think admitting guilt is proof and stories matching prove guilt. They usually kill people in other communities, not Paramakatoi. But revenge killings can happen. If someone dies from weird bites or stings or symptoms of kanaima then they say it was kanaima.

I also interviewed a few Kato police officers, one of whom gave this account:

Kanaima, obeah, *bina*, all black magic. Any sickness or death is kanaima. An officer I knew was staying in the guest house in Kato and a kanaima put something on the bed sheets and his clothes

that were hanging out on the line to dry. The man survived but had to leave due to illness. Witchcraft and black magic is prevalent all over, but can't prove anything because you can't tell what's real and what's myth or suspicion.

The notion about the kanaima returning to the grave of the victim to consume and disinter the body as part of the ritual complex of kanaima was also parsed out to me by one of my closest interlocutors, who is a member of the Church of Christ:

Kanaima buries the victim and the night after they sleep in caves. Anytime even a fly touch their body the kanaima can't come back into flesh. Their spirits go out and into animals...in night they come and open the grave and get a piece of bone by sticking a stick through the navel. It taste like honey after nine days. It smells sweet. They go back to the body and if they cannot eat or anything they go mad. They cannot drink *cassiri* until after a certain period of time. The Kopinan kanaima killed a lot of people. He died. He went mad. Crazy. Headache. He put ginger and pepper in nose. Kanaima are so smart, always watching their back.

Whitehead (2001; 2002; & 2004) argued, that this ritual consumption of the victim's *maba* or "honey" is part of a mythic model of Carib warfare and done in order to expel the spirit of *Kaikusi-yumu* or Lord Jaguar (through which the kanaima believes he then returns to his normal pre-killing state of consciousness), which otherwise if not done, as I was told by my interlocutors, causes permanent *sopai* (madness) and emaciating death. In *El Dorado, Cannibalism and the Amazons: European Myth and Amerindian Praxis in the Conquest of South America* Neil L. Whitehead argues that the invocation of Lord Jaguar is a contemporary "schema" now used to "invoke a spirit for revenge," that dates back to an ancient mythic model of Carib war. The Patamuna, prior to battle, would invoke the "Tiger-Spirit"<sup>7</sup> or *Kaikusi-yumu*, who would, "come to live in the hearts of the warriors so that they would be fierce," and then in order to purge oneself of *Kaikusi-yumu*, the possessed warrior "must be allowed to taste human blood and flesh." Whitehead goes on to say that, "the assassin, like the warriors of old, must

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<sup>7</sup> The Patamuna call the jaguar a "tiger" in English. I asked many villagers why this was, but no one seemed to know. I suspect that this is a lingual by-product of colonization. The Patamuna are aware that the big cat they call a tiger is indeed a jaguar. There are no tigers in Guyana, but the Patamuna told me there are many different types of jaguars.

invoke the Tiger-Spirit to achieve his purpose and so too, having performed the murder according the ritual prescriptions, must rid himself of this dangerous force,” which “may only be done by sucking the putrid juices of his victim’s corpse, which are said to taste ‘like honey’ – failure to do so leads only to madness.”<sup>8</sup>

And as Penard (1907) observes via Carib testimony:

I growl. I hiss, I swing the club just like he does when he crushes his prey with one blow of his terrible claws. And when I have killed my enemy I must also drink his blood and taste his flesh that the spirit that impels me to do this deed will be assuaged...When the Tiger is in the man, the man becomes like the Tiger.<sup>9</sup>

I too was told about the efficacy of using pieces of the victim’s body in kanaima by the vice *tushau* of Paramakatoi:

A group of kanaimas will attack a man, but mainly women. They do it for revenge, they don’t trouble outsiders. Alfred caught Gregory in the bush once, Gregory was drinking something strange, so he snatched it out of his hands. It was a piece of human anus, dried up, if you drink it with water, it is a charm to lure victims to you. That’s how he gets people to come to him in the bush. *E’molong* or sleeping plant, is the plant they use to put you to sleep. *Sopaineyeng* is a cave in the Yawong Valley wherein kanaimas will go until they get over the madness derived from killing. *Sopai* also means shapeshifter.

Whitehead’s work is also entangled in the work of kanaima and terror. And, he was aware of the social drama and new antipathy towards outside researchers created by a pamphlet he produced and distributed on behalf of the Walter Roth Museum. He writes:

Denis Williams suggested that I put the materials into order and that the museum would then print them up in pamphlet form for distribution as widely as possible among the Patamuna villages. The result was published in 1996, and I returned in 1997 to carry the 5,000 pamphlets up to Paramakatoi and help with their distribution...I had stirred up trouble between Paramakatoi and neighboring villages by having published, in the oral history pamphlet, Patamuna accounts of warfare that featured a well-known raid by the Kopinan on Paramakatoi.<sup>10</sup>

The vice *tushau* revealed something quite startling that I had not heard before vis a vis

Whitehead’s pamphlet:

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<sup>8</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, “El Dorado, Cannibalism and the Amazons-European Myth and Amerindian Praxis in the Conquest of South America,” WG Pansters, 1992, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 31–32.



Alfred was killed by kanaimas because of Neil's pamphlet *The Patamuna of Paramakatoi and the Yawong Valley: An Oral History*. He was killed because Neil named him as an *aleluya* man and he told things about the Akawaios that he wasn't supposed to. So, they came to Paramakatoi and killed him.

Alfred Edwin was one of Whitehead's interlocutors. The pamphlet stirring up power was marshaling the powers of the anthropologist against the other village and the violent reciprocity claimed in the death of Alfred Edwin elucidates how Whitehead's work was itself entangled in the production of power relations and contestations that would invoke kanaima.

### **Dark Shamans: Another Anthropologist Returns to Paramakatoi:**

Unlike for Neil, who exited the tarmac at Paramakatoi in 1992 with nary a thought of kanaima, I exited the plane in March 2017 and could think of nothing *but* kanaima. The purpose of my journey was to continue the work in Paramakatoi where my friend and mentor Neil L. Whitehead had undertaken fieldwork for his landmark study, *Dark Shamans: Kanaima and the Poetics of Violent Death*. Whitehead's descriptions of the kanaima ritual complex was graphic:

The Patamuna are certainly entranced by the symbolic force of Kanaima but I have also made video and sound recordings of detailed descriptions and direct observations of nine recent ritual assassinations, as well as interviewing Kanaima sorcerers and their shaman enemies (*piyasan*) directly. On the basis of this material, collected on several visits to the Pakaraimas between 1991 and 1997, and although clearly each performance has its special features depending on the characteristics of both victim and assassin, I attempt below to suggest a theory of Kanaima practice.

The intended victim will first become aware of an impending attack when the Kanaimas approach his house by night, or on lonely forest trails, making a characteristic whistling noise. As well as being encountered as were-jaguars in the forest, the Kanaimas can also appear as anteaters in the savannahs. Following these portents a direct physical attack might come at any point, even years thereafter, for during this period of stalking the victim is assessed as to their likely resistance and their suitability as 'food.' This conceptual framework assimilates the victim to the category of pre and so actively 'hunting Kanaimas' become jaguars tracking, sniffing, and touching the intended victim's footprints and spoor. The Kanaimas literally conceive of themselves as hunting for their food, and so use hunting *beenas* (charms) in just the way a peccary-hunter might. Kanaima initiation further replicates this notion, since the Kanaima adept and his initiate are conceived of as a jaguar and his kill. In some attacks the victims may have minor bones broken, especially fingers, and joints dislocated, especially the shoulder, while the neck may also be manipulated to induce spinal injury and back pain. This kind of attack is generally considered to be a preliminary to actual death and mutilation. My data differs from Audrey Butt Colson, in the

sense that Kanaima attacks intended initially only to injure the victim have the state of fear in which victim and kin are thus held as the actual objective; fatal attack will certainly follow but, informants stress, many months, or even a year or two, later.

When a fatal physical attack is intended, victims report that they are first confronted by a single Kanaima from the front, but then they are always struck from behind and physically restrained. A variety of procedures, intended to produce a lingering death, are then enacted. The victim has their tongue pierced with the fangs of a snake, is turned over, and either an iguana or an armadillo tail is inserted into their rectum so that the anal muscles can be stripped out through repeated rubbing. Then, pressing on the victim's stomach, a section of the sphincter muscle is forced out and cut. Finally, the victim's body is rubbed down with astringent plants, usually *koumi* (a ginger), and a thin flexed twig is forced into the rectum, so that it opens the anal tract. Packets of herbs are then rammed in as deeply as possible. This is said to begin a process of auto-digestion, creating the special aroma of Kanaima enchantment, rotting pineapple (*akaikalak*). The sweet odour of pineapple is therefore a sign of Kanaima attack for the victims, and the spoor by which their attackers will relocate their bodies after burial.

As a result of the completion of these procedures, the victim is unable to speak or to take any sustenance by mouth. Bowel control is lost and the clinical cause of death becomes acute dehydration through diarrhea. The interest of the Kanaimas in their victim does not end here, for they must also make a gift of their prey to the sorcerer who leads them and directs their attacks. In this exchange, the sorcerer becomes identified with the ferocity of *kaikusi-yumu*, Lord Jaguar himself (Whitehead 1990), who will only be assuaged by 'tasting the honey of the dead.' Therefore the Kanaimas will try and discover the burial place of their victim and await the onset of putrefaction in the corpse that usually occurs within three days. In this time the Kanaimas are understood to be magically vulnerable and can be intercepted and killed by the dead person's relatives as they try, literally, to smell out these first stages of putrefaction...

...The need to ward off the Kanaimas and protect the cadaver from further interference leads to a distinct type of burial of the victim's corpse from that usually practised. This may involve placing the corpse in a rock-niche, covering the grave site with large boulders, or in a sealed ceramic jar, and keeping the location secret.

If the grave site is discovered, a stick is inserted through the ground directly into the cadaver, then the stick is retracted and the *maba* (honey-like) juices sucked off. The juices of putrefaction are said to taste like honey because the grave is 'tasted' with the help of a stick, used in the same way as when eating honey from a hive. The effect of *maba* is both psychotropic and morphic: the satisfied Kanaima can, like Jaguar, now sleep sated and dream of being Man, but the dream is also a reality since tasting the *maba* thereby transforms Jaguar into Man again. So a Kanaima will not eat human food after a kill until he has tasted the divine food of the grave, and indeed he must taste *maba* if the dangerous divine force of Lord Jaguar is to be purged and this return to the domain of the human achieved.

If the corpse is indeed sufficiently 'sweet,' it will be partially disinterred in order to recover bone material and, ideally, a section of the anal tract. The use of previous victims' body parts is necessary to facilitate the location and killing of the next victim, since these gifts of death, from the Kanaima killers to their sorcerer, drive the unending exchanges between divine animals and mundane humans, in the guise of hunter and prey, which it is the aim of the Kanaima sorcerer to sustain. This key role in the creation and management of the predatory interrelation of humanity, animality, and divinity is why the Kanaima sorcerer is the source of powerful shamanic

techniques, in the same way that the divine gift of tobacco, carried by the *kumalok* (swallow-tailed kite), is the source of shamanic curing and prophecy.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of his research, Whitehead's own assessment, based on the situation in Paramakatoi in the 90s was that killings were infrequent, numbering about one death a year. By contrast, I was informed by Nurse Saigo, that in 2017, three kanaima-related deaths were reported. And, as I was told by the Paramakatoi medic:

I write a report about the cause of death and police won't bother to investigate further. I never write kanaima as a cause of death, which is normal. They wouldn't in the states either. The cause of death must be more specific, plus the Kato police are too skeptical of kanaima. I've never seen a kanaima, but I want to. I hear whistles at night outside the *benab* so I'll ready myself to fight, but I never see anything. I believe kanaima exists and I've seen some evidence, such as piercing and holes in victim's skin and under their fingernails and by the mouth.

While I was in Paramakatoi there was a death that was suspected by many of my interlocutors to be a kanaima death. In response to this rumored kanaima death during my stay in Paramakatoi the medic had this to say:

Baggot Paul's wife died in three days, she had a fever, then swelling by her ear and under her throat. I was there when she died. Her body did show signs of physical attack. It could be kanaima. The police come, but do not investigate, and they don't always come, because it depends on if they have transportation and when they come into the village the village has to buy their food and give them a place to stay in the guest house. So, police don't always come, they're not dependable. I write a report about the cause of death and police won't bother to investigate further. I'm on call 24 hours a day unless I take a day off. I get training in Georgetown, where autopsies do take place. There are no autopsies here in the hinterland. Baggot Paul's wife said she was struck in the side of the head where the swelling was, but it could have been an infection too. Her cause of death could have been from years of illness, but people say kanaima. I've seen evidence of kanaima, but her cause of death is unknown.

The bruising associated with joint and body manipulation and the strange whistling noises that the medic associates with kanaima Whitehead too described as symptomatic of kanaima:

The...victim will first become aware of an impending attack when the Kanaimas approach his house by night, or on lonely forest trails [*asanda*], making a characteristic whistling noise...a direct physical attack might come at any point, even years thereafter, for during this period of stalking the victim is assessed as to their likely resistance and their suitability as 'food.'...In some

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Rivière, Laura M. Rival, and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *Beyond the Visible and the Material: The Amerindianization of Society in the Work of Peter Riviere* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 238–240.

attacks the victims may have minor bones broken, especially fingers, and joints dislocated, especially the shoulder, while the neck may also be manipulated to induce spinal injury and back pain.<sup>12</sup>

### **Framing Research: Thinking Kanaima:**

Kanaima was on my mind because apart from Whitehead's very excellent ethnography, *Dark Shamans*, my own story and Whitehead's became entangled when we learned early into our friendship that we were both struggling with cancer. Neil would not survive. Many Patamuna expressed to me the belief that his death was the result of his kanaima research.

My remission of cancer, overcoming what seemed would be inevitable death, left me feeling a strange sense of obligation to continue courting danger and death. It was as though I had found in Neil a kind of mirror image to my life and his work—heroic, untamed, and adventurous. I thought, if anyone was man enough to face that darkness, it was me, and I vowed to return (for Neil as much as myself) to Paramakatoi.

My fieldwork in Paramakatoi was as much a journey to discover something in myself as much as it was an attempt to add to a twenty-year gap in anthropological knowledge of the poetics of violence among the Patamuna. Much like Marlow's journey into the interior in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, my journey too was as much an interior journey. I was trekking into the depth of my own unconscious, "revealed in all its darkness."<sup>13</sup> Whitehead's ethnography, death, and my own cancer experience became a running metanarrative that continued to play in the background over the course of the two months I spent in Paramakatoi and it profoundly affected my placement, identity, data collection, and relationships in the field.

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<sup>12</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 14–15.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. (S.l.: Digireads Com, 2016).

### **Preparation & Access:**

When I first began making contact towards gaining access to Paramakatoi I was met with a lot of dead ends, specifically months of unanswered emails from the state and empty promises from other Amazonianists. While there is WIFI in Paramakatoi, all state correspondence was still being done through hand written documents and radio. The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is the gatekeeper to conducting research in Amerindian villages in Guyana and making contact proved more difficult than I initially thought it would be. My first breakthrough came when I was introduced to George Simon, a Lokono artist and friend of Whitehead who had connections within the government and Ministry that allowed me to attain permission and access. Simon also liked the idea of examining the jaguar in Patamuna culture, and we even came up with a title for our proposed joint future research entitled “Luring the Jaguar,” which would be an art project that we would facilitate in Paramakatoi later in September. The goal of the art project would be to gather a group of Paramakatoi artists and have them paint the jaguar in a way that elucidates the broader meaning of the jaguar in Paramakatoi by telling jaguar stories. I incorporated this into my research proposal to both the Guyanese state and Paramakatoi village council. After a couple months I finally received a response back from the village council of Paramakatoi and its *tushau* (captain) Gideon John, who decided, after further consideration to allow me to visit. Initially, my request was refused out of the concern that I would be setting up cameras in the jungle in an attempt to film jaguars. Once I clarified that this was not my intention, that Simon and I intended only to paint jaguars and collect jaguar stories, I was given the stamp of approval to visit Paramakatoi.

George Simon and I conversed at length over the phone and through social media prior to entering the field and I quickly realized that I did not have a full grasp of the possible social

drama that was left behind from Whitehead's last visit in 1997. I was also worried about how my association with him might be received and how that would affect my identity and relationships with Paramakatoi residents while in the field. George had warned me that there might be some Patamuna who would view my arrival as that of someone who is coming to avenge Whitehead's death, which many villagers already knew about before I came. This was one of George's explicit fears for me as I prepared to journey to Paramakatoi by myself, so he agreed, as did my advisor Ingrid Jordt, that by asking about the jaguar instead of kanaima, I would be able to get the same data, but have the ability to use the jaguar as a kind of double meaning to protect myself and others from having to talk about a topic they might be uncomfortable pursuing.

It was with trepidation that I deplaned in Georgetown far away from my hometown of Coloma, Wisconsin. My family saw me off earlier that day. They were very worried about my welfare, not just because I was headed to Paramakatoi alone, but also because we had just gotten through fighting cancer together. Despite my boldness in search of danger I nevertheless took the precautions to procure insurance and a GPS tracking app lest I fall off the map. I double checked that my GPS and satellite phone worked, and I told my wife that I would text her every day to reassure her that I was alright. I even told Dr. Jordt, that if she suddenly did not hear from me that she should contact the U.S. embassy immediately and I gave her numbers of individuals in the Guyanese government who would come to my aid. Danger with limits. With each step that I drew closer to being in Paramakatoi, the greater my fear of kanaima grew. Kanaima, was no longer something read about from the comfortable distance and safety of my home, it had become a tangible threat prowling ever nearer. On the morning of my last day in Georgetown as

I made my way to the airport, kanaima loomed large in my imagination, worming itself intensely into my mind.

Once checked in for my small engine flight to Paramakatoi, I was approached by a small stocky Amerindian man with a baseball cap and mustache. He reached out his hand to me and said “Hello, Mr. Janik.” I was completely caught off guard but shook the man’s hand and smiled anyway. The man then introduced himself as Gideon John, *tushau* of Paramakatoi. He was the same man I had exchanged letters with just months earlier. We exchanged brief pleasantries, he told me he would be flying in on the plane with me, and then he went over to his family and took a seat. I felt thrown off guard, not because he did anything wrong, but because I was supposed to meet him when I got off the plane, not at the airport, so I was not ready to make any sort of formal introductions. I also wondered if his checking me out early was strategic, and I hoped I did not make a bad impression.

### **Into the Field:**

Adding to my reservations about what this early meeting meant, I was flummoxed when Gideon sat right next to me on the cramped small engine plane ride to Paramakatoi. For that hour, rather than enjoying the scenic view of the phantasmagoric landscape that is Amazonia, I instead was overcome with feelings of awkwardness and dread. I worried I was sweating too much. I tried to make light conversation and opened with, “So, what’s the plan?”—to which he responded—“to rest,” and promptly went to sleep. The plane landed roughly on the small gravel airstrip in the middle of the village, then turned around and parked by a small zinc roof shop and a crowd of people. As we prepared to disembark Gideon instructed me to follow the guest house caretaker who would get me situated after which he would come visit me. Once I exited the plane I met the caretaker and looked up the hill about five hundred yards to a small turquoise

building overlooking the airstrip that he was pointing to. I collected my heavy bags and followed Gideon's instructions.

I could feel the eyes on me from the people around the airplane and the shop, or maybe that was just my own insecurity, but carrying my rolling bags up the dirt road that ran the length of the airstrip and up the steep hill to the guest house both made me feel stupid and took my breath away. I was the only white man in sight. This was quite a different uncomfortable feeling than what I was used to living in small town Wisconsin, I smiled to cover my discomfort and kept moving. The *asandas* (walking trails) were thin and worn down to bare dirt, but the grass all along was long, "The perfect place for poisonous snakes," I thought. The caretaker was a Patamuna man in his twenties, he stood maybe five feet tall, and wore shorts and flip flops. He glanced up at me, over six feet tall, carrying over one hundred pounds of luggage, and wearing heavy jeans and hiking boots. He was clearly evaluating me and after a short polite exchange on matters relating to the room looked away in dismissive disinterest. I felt I had been measured and come up short. Immediately, a wave of distrust towards him came over me. I had just arrived, and I felt alone and miserable.

Whitehead also expressed his own doubts about how the Patamuna perceived him. In *Dark Shamans*, he relates how he had to leave Paramakatoi early because relations and emotions were getting heated up. Specifically, he described how some Patamuna were becoming less enthralled with his interest in kanaima and that he was attracting not only suspicion from the community about his intentions, but also the attention of suspected kanaimas, who harassed him at night and deposited coral snakes in his guest house through small spaces in the walls and cracks under the door:



Each night, I would clearly hear the approach of one person, maybe more, followed by the sound of a deliberate scratching at the doorframe and windows. I would call out but receive no reply. Then, once again, I would hear scratching that moved in a circle round the building, ending back at the doorway each time. I might have taken this as a (not very funny) prank by the young men had it not been that on each occasion I found afterward a *yamali-wok* (coral snake) somewhere in the house.<sup>14</sup>

Once I reached the guest house I tested my satellite phone and was relieved to find it worked. I immediately sent a text to my wife Linda to let her know I had arrived safe. The caretaker asked me if I wanted a self-contained room or if I wanted a cheaper room with access to shared community toilets and bath stall. I opted for the self-contained room. It cost me five thousand Guyanese dollars a night, the equivalent of twenty-five U.S. dollars. The caretaker gave me the key for my room and left. I dropped my bags and took a quick look around at what was going to be “home” for the next month.

My room in the guest house was large, with a full-size bed and mosquito net, a rack to hang clothes, and a small table. A second door lead to a toilet and concrete platform with a drain and bucket to take bathes. My eyes gazed over to the large gap under the door, by the toilet in the floor, and to other cracks which I quickly calculated would easily permit a snake entry as well as any other poisonous creatures. “No wonder they could put snakes in Neil’s room so easily,” I thought to myself. As I pondered my room’s security, the Air Services Limited plane started its engine and prepared for takeoff on the runway. I opened the door to my room, stepped out onto the deck, and watched as it flew away over the vast green space. I was alone. My stomach gripped, and I could feel the sweat bubble up on my skin.

I scanned the scene in front of me and began to notice the other inhabitants of Paramakatoi; large black wasps, small lizards, and free roaming chickens, horses, and cattle.

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<sup>14</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 30–31.

The roosters were plentiful and loud, and I would grow to hate them in short order. I began to feel disoriented and in my anxiety over where I would secure food and daily necessities lost momentary track of the local store I had walked past shortly after exiting the plane. Culture shock had left me completely discombobulated.

I watched as kids rode their bicycles up and down the airstrip, and observed motorbikes and small trucks driving down the dirt roads. I wondered how people could afford these vehicles or buy gasoline in a community that supposedly has no market economy and relied on subsistence farming and mining in the back dam (*garimpo* or the center of mining operations in the bush—where the mining pits, the sleeping camp, and the kitchen activities take place) to make do. I took out my pen and notebook ready to begin my ethnographic journey...as it turns out from the verandah, as I smiled thinking of Malinowski. My first notes were:

There are ATVs driving all over. Children are dressed in formal green and white school garb. Long pants and short sleeves. Long dresses and short sleeves. Villagers walk in groups on the *asandas* with umbrellas to escape the hot sun.

Evidence of modern technology, first impressed itself upon me. This was not the Paramakatoi I expected. For some reason I had the image of a society that would be still living in thatched roof *benabs* (houses), far removed from any sort of modern civilization. Not only were the *benabs* well-constructed out of palm wood with zinc roofs, but there were even outlets for electricity in the guest house, flushing toilets and faucets for running water that worked in conjunction with large rain barrels. Many of the villagers used solar power. Electronics of some kind, cell phones, western garb, satellite T.V. were all in evidence and abundance.

By 6 p.m. in the evening, I had still not been visited by the *tushau*. Feeling adrift and conspicuous I thought I would make an effort to win the friendship of the guest house caretaker. I offered him one of the flashlights I had brought. This had been one of George's ideas, to bring

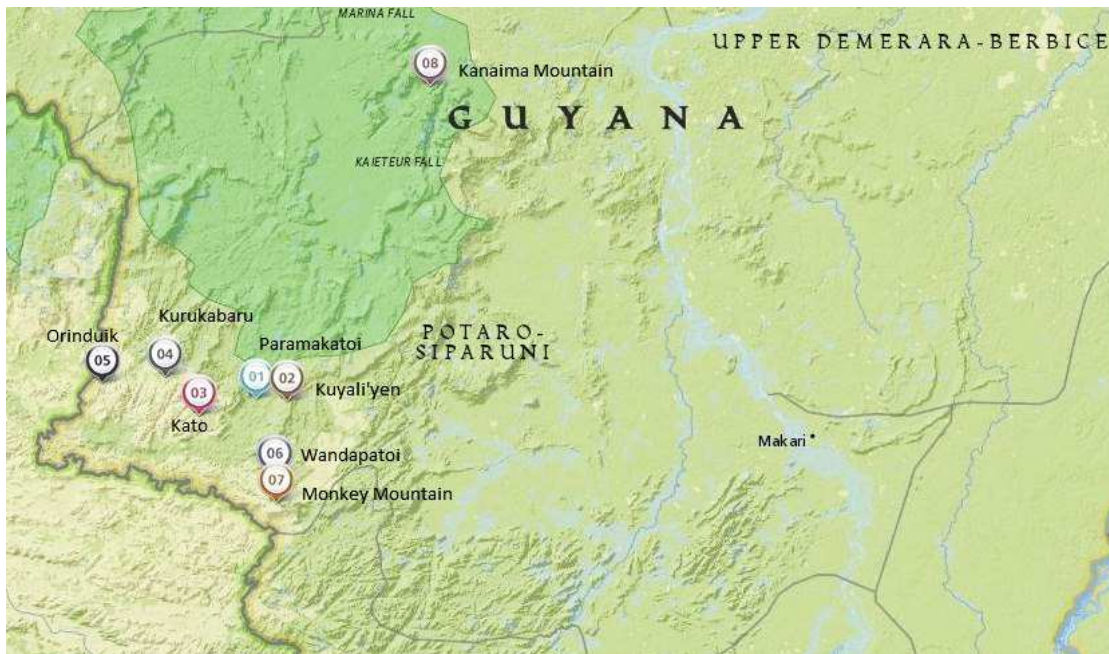
extra flashlights as small gifts to people I would come to have some friendship or favor to exchange. George said that he had done this when he was there years ago and that it seemed to be received well. The gift was calibrated to be insignificant enough so as not to cause schisms, but significant enough to not offend by having given too little. The caretaker seemed happy with the flashlight and smiled and then went back to sweeping the floor and ignoring me.

It was getting late in the afternoon and Gideon was yet to stop by. Nor did I see Matheson Williams, a local artist, former *tushau*, and friend of Simon and Whitehead whom George assured me would also greet me upon arrival. I began to wonder why. As dusk settled, loud Guyanese pop music began to be played. Dogs barked and fought loudly. I heard people laughing. The caretaker locked the door to the kitchen and bathrooms and then departed. The dark deepened and anticipation of nightfall fell on me in terror. I decided Gideon would not be coming and made my way to my room, locking the door behind me. Dreading the descent of mosquitoes, knowing they were worse at dusk and dawn, I hurried under the mosquito net, “I don’t want to catch malaria, yellow fever, or get bot fly bites,” I reasoned. (I later came to find out that none of these are common in Paramakatoi). As I laid in my bed under the mosquito net my feelings of uneasiness were exacerbated by unfamiliar noises. I thought again about all the holes and spaces in the walls and floor. I thought about kanaima, Whitehead, and turned over in my head all the reasons Gideon might not have come to see me.

Then, the whistling started. I clenched my machete in one hand and my flashlight in the other and stared off into the dark room with dread and panic overwhelming me. I began to regret leaving my family to come to Paramakatoi, I wondered if I offended Gideon and if kanaima would try to attack me. My emotions ran wild, as I imagined one terrifying scenario after the next, Whitehead’s vivid descriptions filled my thoughts, none of it felt theoretical anymore. I

cried quietly, fearful lest anyone could hear me and finally terror overtook me completely. I was paralyzed in fear.

(Below: Map of Paramakatoi and Yawong Valley Region 2017. Map made by author)



## **Chapter One:**

Into the Field.

### **Methods:**

Kanaima are a central preoccupation of the Patamuna Indians. Their significance existing in rumor and hearsay, signs and presentiments and in the living jaguar itself. The open secret of kanaima secrecy paradoxically reveals and hides the work of dark sorcery, its techniques, the identity of its ritual specialists, the interpretation of its effects. It's simultaneous omnipresence and absence became one of the central methodological problems of studying kanaima. I decided to study the jaguar animal as symbolically and representationally central to cosmological and practical meanings in the Patamuna world, "a predator animal double of the shaman and sorcerer."<sup>15</sup> My research proposal to the state and local governments sought to address the symbolic place of the jaguar in Patamuna life.

George Simon proposed that I give something back to the village in the form of an art program he suggested we call "Luring the Jaguar." He said that this title reflected the inherent methodological problem of studying kanaima. In addition to the art program I also gave a class in Gracie Jiu-Jitsu (an unexpected program that came at the request of Andy Williams who asked about Gracie Jiu-Jitsu after reading the writing on my t-shirt). Throughout my time in Paramaktoi, I conducted formal and informal interviews with Patamuna and other Paramakatoi villagers. I also conducted interviews in the surrounding villages within the greater Yawong Valley. I asked questions about jaguar stories, mythology, and encounters. I also asked

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<sup>15</sup> See *In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

questions about the history of the region and the significance of places and these led to deeper conversations about Patamuna historicity, religiosity, ecology, and sociality.

I followed Whitehead's practice of being guided by the concerns of my interlocutors and to give back, as an "ethnographic recorder," where I could. Whitehead describes how the priorities of the Patamuna drove his own ethnographic priorities:

My return to Paramakatoi was thus considered highly significant, both because it signaled a refusal to be intimidated by the possibility of kanaima and because I could be of definite use as an ethnographic recorder. In fact, it was my work on historical themes that proved the most important, as the textual recording of oral history was, for the Patamuna in Paramakatoi, the principal benefit of my presence... However, there was also strong support for bringing kanaima 'into the open,' to publish accounts of their practices, to 'collect' their ritual equipment, and to interview avowed kanaimas directly so that their 'reality' could finally be established in the minds of outsiders and so that their violent criminality, as it was then pictured, might somehow be curbed... I want to emphasize the active participation of Patamuna individuals, both at the outset of this project and in subsequent ethnographic investigations. I do so to indicate not only their interest in my work but also the way in which my research was shaped by their priorities.<sup>16</sup>

I also came to see how my fieldwork, like Whitehead's, became partial to particular individual priorities and interests over other's. He writes:

While this may sound ideal, it meant that my research risked becoming partisan as it became more closely identified with the interests and ambitions of certain individuals, albeit that they were legitimate leaders of the community. This is not to suggest that there can be any 'unpositioned' viewpoint; clearly any researcher is necessarily part of one kind of social network and therefore not another. However, the public authority of the individuals involved—or, later, their lack of it—became a particularly significant factor in the history of my fieldwork in the Pakaraimas between 1992 and 1997.<sup>17</sup>

My research in Paramakatoi especially focused on the young men and the people who were willing to talk to me because I had things to trade or gift or teach. I also conducted followup interviews with key interlocutors from *Dark Shamans* and people who were friends with or had aided Whitehead in the field.

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<sup>16</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 11–27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

Before entering the field, I contacted some of Whitehead's colleagues. One of them advised me to "stay away from kanaima":

Hi,

Yes, dangerous. My advice is steer clear of that in the field. Neil got very caught up in it, and a lot of that was other people there making their own moves, drawing him in.

He finished by saying,

"I will tell you what I told Neil—keep away from Kanaima."

### **How Kanaima is Theorized in the Literature**

In *Dark Shamans* Whitehead examines the historical emergence of kanaima or what he calls "dark shamanism" and argues that kanaima is an act of cultural expression in the face of successive modern colonizing forces—missionaries, loggers, miners, and development agencies—that kanaima has become an assertion of "hyper-traditionality" and native autonomy. In *Dark Shamans* Whitehead explores the ways in which kanaima mediates local, national, and international impacts on the Patamuna of Paramakatoi and considers the significance of kanaima in the contemporary discourse of shamanism and religion and theories of war, terror, and violence.

While in Paramakatoi, Whitehead co-produced a kanaima film with the Patamuna.<sup>18</sup> He filmed a short movie, with Patamuna actors, the premise being to perform how male kanaimas attacks female victims. This film, in conjunction with other data he collected, Whitehead argued elucidates an inherent link between violent masculinity and kanaima:

First, it is women who are attacked, and this is indeed seen as sexually suggestive. In the case of this filming, the woman and one of the 'kanaimas' were actually man and wife, and it was he who dragged her to the ground, at which she was unable to stifle her giggles. This film, along with the accounts of kanaima attacks or threat that involve sexual motives, suggests a consistent link between the construction of a violent masculinity and kanaima. Such violent masculinity in turn relates to the way in which kanaima families are often patrilocal—being composed of a man and

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<sup>18</sup> See Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*.

his sons—and therefore unlikely to wish to abide by the more general custom of matrilocal residence after marriage. The problems in getting a woman to marry into a family that so challenges the norm of postmarital residence are potentially overcome by the threat of *kanaima* against the woman and her relations.<sup>19</sup>

Whitehead collected testimonies from *kanaima* witnesses, victims, and avowed killers from 1992 to 1997. Besides understanding how *kanaima* played a central role in the creation and maintenance of sociality and cosmology, he also categorized *kanaima* as a form of dark shamanism—“to disaggregate our concept of ‘shamanism’ and to show how it has obscured important differences and purposes in the range of shamanic techniques.”<sup>20</sup> Whitehead also identified and problematized three forms of shamanic complexes within the Patamuna—*piya*, *aleluya*, and *kanaima*:

*Piya* shamanism, most often described in general anthropological literature, refers to individuals who have the power to cure and kill but who are primarily sought after for the former purpose. At the end of the nineteenth century a new form of shamanism, influenced by contacts with missionaries, was invented in the Guyana Highlands and involved a direct relationship with *Katu/Akwa* (God). The key ritual technique of this complex is the possession of chants; these chants make use of certain non-Patamuna words or phrases, such as the term *alleluia* for which this ritual practice is named. The nature and meaning of *kanaima*, a form of assault sorcery, and how it relates to these other shamanic complexes is the subject of this work.<sup>21</sup>

By examining the *kanaima* complex as a form of cultural performance Whitehead elucidated the full breadth to which *kanaima* is intimately entangled with the creation and maintenance of Patamuna identity, the enhancement of individual and collective masculinity, modernity as a symbol and assertion/performance of indigeneity, religiosity through ritual and engagement with Christianity, *piya*, and *taleng*, as a dynamic force in interpersonal conflict and asymmetrical power relationships, and linked to ancient Carib history and place-making—as owners and protectors of Patamuna cosmology and landscape (the *Pakaraimas*). Like

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



Whitehead, I do not think that a bio-determinist theory accounts for the kanaima complex which is better viewed as a cultural repertoire of violence, and that therefore we need to look elsewhere to make sense of and theorize about violence and the Patamuna.

### **How Audrey Butt Colson theorized and Described *Itoto* or Kanaima**

Audrey Butt Colson stated that Kanaima or *Itoto*:

...has been described in the literature as 'secret killer' and as 'one who kills suddenly.' They are terms which refer to a complex set of beliefs, constituting a conceptual system within the society and culture of the two Carib-speaking peoples of the circum-Roraima region of the Guiana Highlands, the Kapong (Akawaio and Patamuna) and the Pemong (Arekuna, Kamarakoto, Taurepang, and Makushi), whose lands are the border areas of Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela. The two terms are co-equivalent. Kanaima is a Pemong word, whilst *Itoto* (Idodo, Toto, Dodo) is used by the Akawaio. Of the two, Kanaima has a greater extension, being in use amongst neighbouring indigenous peoples, the Lokono (Arawaks) and Kari'na (Caribs), who sometimes attribute deaths to Kanaima action that comes from outside their own communities, often, it is believed, through the hire of Kapong or Pemong Kanaima assassins.<sup>22</sup>

Colson examined *Itoto* (Kanaima) as death and anti-structure. She argued that kanaima belief was strong among the Akawaio and that kanaima death, in the form of *Itoto*, "is synonymous with the death of particular sets of relationships and alliances, and by dissolving these it destroys a corporate unity, a polity."<sup>23</sup> Colson went on to say that, "individuals in mourning still experience the horror and implications of death by *Itoto* (Kanaima) as a destroyer of the fabric of life in its variety of facets."<sup>24</sup> Colson also described kanaima in detail:

There are two main methods of *Itoto* (Kanaima) attack. One is when he hides in the forest and assaults his victim from behind, when he or she is alone. The second, as portrayed in the story, is when he hides in the forest by day and at night enters the house of his victim, squeezing in through any small gap. He does not like light and is said not to come when there is moonlight or the house fires are burning. He avoids dogs because they bark and warn their owners. As a consequence, people try never to be alone, especially when outside their settlement, and at night they bar the doors of their houses, keep the fires burning and dogs near by. However, despite such precautions, no one can render this secret killer permanently inactive and most people eventually become his victims.

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<sup>22</sup> Rivière, Rival, and Whitehead, *Beyond the Visible and the Material*, 221.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

In the daytime attack in the forest, the victim is waylaid, knocked out with a club or clasped round the neck and thrown to the ground, losing consciousness. The base of the tongue is cut and poison inserted, or the tongue is pierced with snake fangs. This prevents the victim from later speaking of what happened. Itoto (Kanaima) then pinches and bruises the body, dislocates the limbs, breaks the bones, the back, and the neck. He may beat the body with a stick and, making small cuts near the armpits and genital regions, rubs in poisons (mura), which spread throughout the body. Then he may insert a forked stick in to the rectum, hook out the guts, tie them on a stick so making a tourniquet, and push everything back inside. After a time the victim regains consciousness, gets up and goes home, not knowing what has happened. He, or she, then falls ill and dies in agony within a short time, three days frequently being specified. In the night attack Itoto (Kanaima) creeps into a house and 'blows' (tareng); that is he invokes, or casts a spell, at the same time using special powders to send everyone fast asleep, including the dogs. He bruises and breaks the bones of his victim and he blows special poison powders up the victim's nostrils. He may also place special death-dealing substances in a crack in the house wall. In the morning his victim wakes, aching all over, falls ill, and dies within a few days. Apart from these characteristic methods of attack, Itoto (Kanaima) may cause death through daytime 'accidents', such as drowning or burning by pushing his victim into a river or a bonfire. He may attack in the form of an animal or snake. He can impose curses using lethal invocations.

As indubitable proof of this form of killing, relatives point to blue-black bruises which may be seen on some corpses, on the limbs and at the joints, and sometimes on the throat, back, and breast. These are believed to result from the man-handling received. People speak of the corpse of the victims of Itoto (Kanaima) as being ekilo, 'black' or 'dark.' In contrast, 'people who take a long time to die' and when the corpse is seen as 'white' (aimidi), are believed to have died of other causes, such as lethal invocation alone or the action of the Mawariton, the category of the vital forces of nature, including ghost spirits, often thought to be manipulated by an enemy shaman.

Although someone who is Itoto (Kanaima), is said to kill in his own person, he is also believed to be able to detach his vital force, or spirit, from his body and to perform his killing whilst disembodied. Akawaio and Pemong say that he can thus be seen as an ordinary person in one place whilst his spirit is a long way away in another place, carrying out the killing that his inherent evil, and 'bad mind' dictates. There are special plant substances (notably of the kumi species, which are reeds and coarse grasses) which enable Itoto (Kanaima) to travel many miles within a few minutes. This is consonant with a general belief that all material forms of life consist of a body and an indwelling vital force or spirit (Akawaio, akwalu; Pemong, ekatong). The vital force leaves its body temporarily during states of unconsciousness: in dreams, when fainting, or in a coma. A shaman deliberately detaches his spirit when hallucinated by tobacco. Itoto (Kanaima) can voluntarily detach his vital force and sent it to kill, but he may also send it into another creature, a dog, bird, jaguar, deer, and so forth, using its body as a disguise. This capacity is stressed in the concept of Itoto (Kanaima) as a ghoulish.

The substances used by Itoto (Kanaima) to kill are deadly and hot. After killing he is so inflamed that he may be driven to distraction, especially if he is a young, inexperienced killer. He therefore has to cool himself down, and this he does by changing himself so that his indwelling vital force leaves his body and enters an animal. In this guise he goes to the victim's grave and, inserting a hollow tube into it, he sucks up the juices of the decaying corpse. Some maintain that his spirit enters the earth to drink and eat the corpse. At such times he comes with big, glaring

eyes, and disappears very quickly if glimpsed. Unless he can cool himself down he will become mad (sobai), and in this state he will attack even old graves and ingest the bones, for decaying human remains 'smell sweet' to him. To further cool himself he will go into water and suck an anaconda snake, and if all fails he may drown himself, seeking the coldness of death. Akawaio try to thwart Itoto interference with new graves by burying poisonous substances with the corpse and they keep watch for three nights, lighting a fire near by.<sup>25</sup>

Colson provides a similar account of kanaima, equally descriptive as Whitehead's in terms of its rituals and violence, stressing the utility of kanaima in social relations in an inter-regional context. Colson states that kanaima is a form of indigenous "anti-structure," synonymous with the death of inter-tribal relationships and alliances. We learn how kanaima is a form of warfare exchange between communities or individuals in conflict, specifically as a method of secret revenge killing. Kanaima is as much productive of society as destructive or the Patamuna would not be using it as a powerful symbol in pageant performance during Amerindian Heritage Month (see conclusion). Kanaima also has dynamic creative force within indigenous identity making through the enhancement of personal power and masculinity. Kanaima structures interpersonal relations with insiders and outsiders beyond the scope of revenge killing, and its Carib historicity has been linked to ancient warfare.<sup>26</sup>

### **Forte's Kanaima accounts:**

In *Amerindian Testimonies* Janet Forte defined kanaima as:

A highly feared form of black magic widespread throughout the Amerindian peoples of eastern Venezuela and Guyana. Beliefs vary as to what a kanaima actually is, but most agree that it is a person turned into a monster, jaguar, snake, etc., who ruthlessly kills for revenge, hire, or just the pleasure of it.<sup>27</sup>

Forte collected numerous indigenous accounts of kanaima, Charles Holmes from Manawarin stated that:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 222–223.

<sup>26</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*.

<sup>27</sup> Janette Forte, Ian Melville, and Stephanie Correia, *Amerindian Testimonies* (Georgetown, Guyana: J. Forte, 1997), 230.

The belief in kanaima is very deep rooted among the Manawarin Caribs. They say that kanaima are people born with certain gifts or are children of kanaima who will learn the craft of kanaima and develop the ability to become kanaima themselves. The Caribs say that such a person or such a family is a spiritual person or a spiritual family, possessed of the ability to become invisible, let's say, and therefore able to attack you when you least suspect that there is someone close to you. According to Caribs, kanaima can see into the future and possess certain chants which give them supernatural powers.

The belief in kanaima has come under severe attack from the evangelical churches over the last decade. The pastors of these churches say that people who believe in kanaima or dabble in this form of superstition cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Under this sustained pressure I have noticed that the Caribs are less willing to continue with practices such as kanaima.<sup>28</sup>

Cleta Rodrigues, a teacher from Wallaba, gave an extensive testimony of kanaima:

When I lived in Wallaba the daughter of this same piainan stayed with me to keep me company. She gave me first hand accounts of Carib beliefs in general and especially about their strong belief in kanaima. She said that her father was not only a piainan. He was a practicing kanaima as well and could put his knowledge and powers to work for curing or for killing.

Lying in bed many nights I would hear what she said were kanaima whistles seeming to come from all round. She said that you could tell the difference between a bat's whistle and kanaima because the latter would only whistle two or three times. Whereas if a bat is flying about it would whistle a lot more. After a while you would hear the sound dying away; maybe the kanaima would be going somewhere else. Especially on rainy nights I used to hear this whistling.

From all that she told me I tended to believe in kanaima myself. As I said we were close friends and she shared many secrets with me. At nights, she said, when her father was about to leave to perform a kanaima act, he would make himself invisible before their eyes. In order to become invisible, she said, her father had to first locate and kill a land camouidie. He would then leave it to rot on the ground and on every bone of this snake a little plant would spring up without anyone having planted it there. Her father would then choose some of those plants and make a special preparation with them by putting them in some sort of oil. In addition to using this preparation he would burn other things and rub them on his body in order to transform himself into a kaniama. Of course he would repeat special chants or formulae at the same time. He'd be in front of them one minute and when they looked again he would be gone.

My friend said that after her father was transformed into a kanaima he could go as far away as the Waini or Barama, kill someone there, and get back before morning. He didn't need any form of transportation—he only had to will himself to go and he could get there.

Generally kanaimas would not attack people of their own tribe. They would go to some other community and when they located the victim—the person they intended to kill—they would make that person dumb so that he (or she) would not be able to relate what happened to him if the person did not die that very night. In this invisible form, the kanaima would approach the person from the back, press his knee into the intened victim's neck, beat the person all over and maybe break one or more bones in his or her neck or back. One sign the relatives might have the next

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 173.

morning that a kanaima had been there would be the presence of leaves in the victim's mouth or in his anus.

I treated all of these accounts as if they were only stories at first but once my friend told me that her parents had had a quarrel and that her father in anger had mader her mother blind. He let her remain blind for four days and only after he felt that she had had enough did he make her regain her sight.

While I was still living among them he left Wallaba with his entire family—daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law and so on—and opened up a new settlement which they called Surnup about two and a half miles away, off the Kumaka-Kwebanna Road. I went to visit them there. The settlement was in the middle of very high bush, no farms or any clearings around. He took his people there because he felt that he was getting old and he wanted to train one of his sons to take over his work as a piaiman/kanaima when he died.

What really made me believe that my friend was telling the truth was the way her father died. Her mother died suddenly and the family suspected that it was a kanaima who had killed the old lady. Some may have felt that it was the lady's husband but nobody was sure. However if Caribs suspect that kanaima killed a person, they would secretly pour some poison into the dead person's mouth before burial. They believe that if kanaima is responsible, then that kanaima would go to the grave afterwards, use something from the bush to extract the blood from the dead body and drink some of that blood. Then the kanaima would celebrate around the grave. But if the dead person was buried with poison in the mouth, then the kaniama would die a month after he had drunk the blood.

Well in this case my friend's father died exactly one month after her mother. Nor was he ailing or anything of the sort. So people said that he had killed his wife and that the family in turn had brought about his death.

Santa Rosa people generally do not like to admit that they believe in kanaima but hey don't take chances if they can help it! Nobody for instance wants to go alone to farm when there is talk that kanaima are about. Recently I heard that some kanaima were operating on Koko Island. Santa Rosa Arawaks believe that kanaima are persons from another tribe and from other areas and that they are usually in search of somebody specific.<sup>29</sup>

Of the kanaima accounts Forte collected, she also spoke with a few Patamuna. Lucillina Torres from Waipa near the Ireng River in the North Pakaraimas said that:

The Patamuna people from villages like Paramakatoi, Kurukubaru and Kato say that the Ireng River people are kanaima. However I've never seen a kanaima. Nobody knows who is kanaima—nobody at all. But you will never find Waipa people calling another village kanima. Never yet.

You can know if somebody is a kanaima by that person's behavior. If a kanaima kills somebody he will carry on as if he is mad. He would call that person's name as if that man were coming towards him. I have heard that a kanaima can jump in the river and when you think he has

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 185–187.

drowned, next thing you know the man is lying down in his hammock. Things like that—things to prove something is really strange.

Every time a kanaima kills somebody he really can't eat anything from a stranger. For example if I make cassiri and I get my menstruation just after—well some men can't drink it because of the fact of my menstruation. And if you are a sickly person like that, you could get mad. When I say mad, you would behave like a deranged person—throw up—things like that. To avoid that kanaimas don't drink anything from other people.

When kanaima kill somebody they say that the body is black and blue. Well, after knowing that Paramakatoi people say that Waipa people are kanaima, and that their people are always dying from kanaima, I always tell myself they stupid because they have nurses and they could easily prove whether something like that happened. But they don't try to follow up or trace what it is. So I always say most deaths are not related to kanaima.

The only time I tend to believe in kanaima is when the whole skull is soft as if somebody has beaten it out. Sometimes you find that indeed. Sometimes also the arm can turn right round in its socket which really is not supposed to be—the same thing with the leg. And sometimes the person bleeds through the nose, the eyes even—one hears all sorts of things.<sup>30</sup>

Joy Ethel Isaacs, from Paramakatoi told Forte that:

The Patamuna have a strong belief in kanaima but I don't believe in those things myself. They think that a kanaima can be a Patamuna person or from some other Amerindian tribe. The distinctive whistle of the kanaima is what gives him away. It sounds like a bat's whistle though Amerindians know the difference between a human's whistle and a bat's. People say that kanaima was responsible for a death if they hear that special whistle after the burial.<sup>31</sup>

Patti Simon, wife of former Paramakatoi *tushau* Gordon Joe stated:

Our great great grandfather was a kanaima. My great uncle told me about his grandfather and about kanaimas in general. To become a kanaima they used some binas. Some binas are gingers, some are lilies, some are from the rhizome family. They would rub some of the binas on their skins and they would drink some in order to transform themselves into kanaimas. They would also disguise themselves in the skins of tigers or ant eaters and then go after the person they intended to kill.

The first experiment they would do before they killed a person would be to try out the strength of the bina by killing a lizard. They would catch a lizard, pull the intestines out of the rectum and then make a cut. They would then release the lizard and wait for it to die. If the lizard dies they would feel a certain way, successful like, and then they would kill a person.

They did not kill people face to face; they have to ambush the intended victim. Sometimes they would rub the bina on their footprints and walk along a track. The poor person who goes along that track after them would fall asleep on the way. Then they would follow after. Sometimes they would push a stick or a bush rope into the person's rectum and twist it about a bit. Or they would pull out the intestine, tie it into a knot and then push it back in. They would then release

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 113–114.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 121.

the person who would not know what had happened to him or her. The person would eventually die after that experience.

I think that these binas that they use must have the same effect on them like marijuana. For instance if a kanaima is jealous of somebody doing something, if that person has more things than them, they would become so jealous that they could even kill their own families, their sisters or brothers. They could do anything when they use those binas; they have no feelings for anybody.

Long ago kanaimas would join together in a grouping called kwayow; something like a troop of soldiers. Villages were smaller then and they would surround a village at midnight and shoot fire arrows into the palm-thatched roofs. They used a kind of club with zigzag points called taigik. Some people would be killed, some would be carried away as slaves or to be wives of these kanaimas.

My great great grandfather was eventually killed by the villagers when they couldn't take any more killings.<sup>32</sup>

Forte's ethnographic account offers a definition of kanaima and valuable insight into the subjectivities of kanaima as a cosmology of threat. In Charles Holmes' testimony we see how kanaima is central to interpersonal relationships and the politics of evangelism. Cleta Rodrigues' account demonstrates a deep engagement with Carib history and makes visible how kanaima can be mobilized against outsiders as a cultural script of violence—a pattern of killing linked to shamanism, war, and masculinity—passed on intergenerationally. In finality, through the testimonies of Lucillina Torres, Joy Ethel Isaacs, and Patti Simon we see how kanaima is used to delineate ethnic boundaries between Amerindian tribes, how *sopaney* (madness) as vehemence can be used as a mode of interpreting and validating violence, and how the sounds and rituals used in kanaima are strategic, in that they can be used to foment terror in both kin and others to attain power and fame. We also learn that kanaima terror will only be tolerated by the community at large for so long, before a suspected kanaima is killed. Kanaima terror is most deeply felt within the imagination, hence the extended stalking of the victim and the use of

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 130–131.

whistling noises. In Forte's accounts we learn that if enough people come to fear *kanaima*, a *kanaima* will be killed primarily to extinguish its terror.

### **Kanaima in the *Watunna*: An Orinoco Creation Cycle:**

Jean-Marc de Civrieux describes the story of Kadahiawa, the *huhai*, the one who brought the bad spirits back:

They set Kanaima on people. Those Kanaima aren't spirits, but men. They stick the bad spirits in them. Then they let them loose in the jungle. The Kanaima take different forms. They'll come like jaguar, snakes, any animal that'll hurt you. They run around like crazy people, strangling and eating everything they see. When they look at someone, they make them crazy. Even if they escape, that look's enough to drive them crazy right away. Then they start running all over looking for other people to attack. The Kanaima just keep growing and growing. Every day there's more of them.

That's how Kanaima began with the *so'to*. Kadahiawa looked at one. He didn't know how to defend himself. He lost all his power and wisdom. He went crazy. He began running all over the mountains. Iahena Waitie's sons saw him. They turned into Kanaima and started to run. The people were afraid. Kadahiawa came to the Yekuhana houses on the Merevari and the Arakasa. Right away, the Yekuhana looked at him and went crazy. Now those Kanaimas started running all over like the wild animals, eating people the way the Matiuhana do. The trails were all covered with human bones. Now the Kanaima ran through the Emekuni, the Kanarakuni, the Erewato, the Antawari. The *so'to* didn't have a *huhai* now. They didn't have any Waitie to defend them.

Now the Kanaima wanted to go in to where the Kaliana (Sape) live on Mount Kueki hidi. Those people hadn't lost their *huhai*. They still had plenty of power. They drove the Kanaima out. Their chief went up to heaven, to the house of Setawa, the maraca spirits. He got a maraca and came back down to earth. The maraca was Medatia's. That's how the Kaliana *huhai* got Medatia's power. They drove the Kanaima out with his maraca. We call maraca Setawa Kaliana now, in memory of those people. The Kaliana kept the wisdom. Kadahiawa lost it.

The Yekuhana Kanaima ran all over. They went down to the lower Ventuari where the Dekuhana used to live. There were lots of people there then. They had no protection. There wasn't any *huhai* because of Kadahiawa. The Yekuhana came and started eating them. Then they crossed the river to where the Maku live. They had a powerful *huhai*. "How will I protect my people?" he thought. Then he sent them to get the Dekuhana's bones. They brought them back. The Maku *huhai* drove the Kanaima out with the power of those bones. The Maku weren't hurt but almost all the Dekuhana died. There aren't any of them left in the lower Ventuari now.<sup>33</sup>

Through the *Watunna* narrative we see how the terror of *kanaima* continues to do its work to maintain a cosmology of threat both physically and mentally—sustaining a world in

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<sup>33</sup> Jean-Marc de Civrieux and David M. Guss, *Watunna, an Orinoco creation cycle* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1980), 187–188.



which everyone, even outsiders, are subject to becoming a or succumbing to kanaima assault sorcery. In the Watunna, kanaima are wild, terrestrial, and supernatural. They are shapeshifters, men with bad spirits inside who are capable of driving other people insane. The threat of kanaima is everywhere and everyone is vulnerable to its madness and subsequent bloodthirst except the *huhai*, a shaman who had not lost their power, they are the only ones capable of driving the kanaima out. The fear of kanaima is especially highlighted in the text, and through its transmission as a malignant force we learn that kanaima both determines and structures individual actions, interpersonal relationships (between communities), and identity (who is a kanaima and who is or is not vulnerable to becoming a kanaima).

Within my own work, specifically a painting of my own demise via jaguar (see conclusion), we can also see how cultural repertoires blend myth, masculinity, threat and the cosmos of the forest into a cultural repertoire capable of including myself in the painting because cultural repertoires are generative and functional. In the case of Bedford Sandwell's painting, it functioned to scare me and to establish in the painting dominance over me.

## **Chapter Two:**

Situating Kanaima vis a vis Christianity, *Piya, Aleluya, Taleng & Binas*.

### **Piya & Kanaima:**

A *piya* or *piyaiman* (also spelled *piai*, *piaiman*, or *piyaichan*) is what vice *tushau* Jimmy James called a “person with direct contact with the supernatural.” The *piaiman* is a Patamuna “oracle or prophet,” an eminent man (*kayik*) who is well known throughout the region as a “medium to the spirit world.” The *piaiman* contacts the spirits through the nasal ingestion of green tobacco juice, trance seances, and spirit possession. He is also believed to have the power of an exorcist and the ability to cast out evil spirits. The *piaiman* throughout history in Patamuna culture is represented as having the knowledge to both cure and kill and the practice of *piya* is present all throughout Guyana and across the neighboring borders of Brazil and Venezuela. *Piya* in Paramakatoi, in recent years, Jimmy told me has waned. The last well known *piaiman*, Sipio from Tuseneng recently passed away and I was told that there is only one known *piaiman* left in Region 8 at the village called Monkey Mountain.

In *Dark Shamans*, Neil L. Whitehead argued that *piya* is one part of a three-part Patamuna shamanic complex and that the role of the *piya* is both an intermediary to the spirits and inherently ambiguous, for the *piya* can also be a kanaima and vice versa. Thus, the *piaiman*'s knowledge can be used for both curing and cursing although he is primarily sought out for the former.

Whitehead elaborated on the intimate and ambiguous connection between *piya* and kanaima, he said that, “*Piya*, whatever the differences in ritual practice with kanaima, is still fundamentally oriented to a world of spirit entities whose beneficence or maliciousness sets the terms for their intercession,” and that “this is why kanaima *'san* may well be also an

accomplished *piya*.<sup>34</sup> Whitehead also described an attack by a *piya* on *kanaimas* that he himself witnessed. The purpose of the attack he said was, “not to directly assault the killers themselves but rather to ‘cut down the ladder of *kalawali*’ up which the *kanaima*’san had climbed in order to protect his pack of killers.”<sup>35</sup> Whitehead went on to say that:

The attack began in the manner of other *piya* sessions, inside a small *benab*, which was very dark inside, although it was still possible to see a little. The *piya* had already laid out before him three cups of tobacco juice and two anthropomorphic figurines—one made of bone, the other from a mirror—and a diamond. These were his ‘spirit-masters,’ with which he intended to assault the *kanaima*’san while the *kanaima*’san was guarding his band of killers.<sup>36</sup>

After the attack was finished Whitehead describes how the experience affected him:

He told us, unexpectedly, that the *kanaima*’san himself was actually dead, killed as his *kalawali* had been cut down by the ‘blades’ of the diamond. He then said that we were to go to Koniayatoi Falls on Maikparu Creek and look under the cascade, where there would be a small hole or cave. In there we would find the physical body of the *kanaima*, *Talinaku*, who would be brought there from *Ulupelu*. In fact, we did investigate this suggestion. I cannot offer forensic evidence, but as we approached the spot we could see birds circling and smell something truly awful, if a little sweet, and the thought of ‘rotting-pineapple’ came into my mind. At the actual spot indicated, there was indeed a small hole under the cascade, about four feet in diameter, with something in it, but it appeared quite impossible to actually get to that spot without climbing equipment. I must confess that I in fact had no wish to get there and have remained quite shaken by this experience, the meaning of which is still not entirely clear to me.<sup>37</sup>

*Patamuna* seem to seek out a *piaiman* for myriad reasons (health, love, relationships, conflict, etc.). Jimmy James told me that he used to visit the *piaiman* in *Tuseneng* while he was still alive on many occasions, and that this *piaiman* named *Sipio* was very beloved within the community. Jimmy said that he would “seek out the aid of this *piaiman* after prospecting for minerals near the *Siparuni* river.” Jimmy said that when he would find a promising “shout” (location of gold or diamonds)<sup>38</sup> where he suspected rich minerals would be located, he would then go to the *piaiman* who, for a small price, would call down the spirit owner of the desired

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<sup>34</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 163.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 165–166.

<sup>38</sup> For more information on the mining milieu in Guyana see Terence Roopnaraine, “Freighted Fortunes: Gold and Diamond Mining in the *Pakaraima* Mountains, Guyana” (University of Cambridge, 1996).

minerals to speak with him and make a deal. To do this, Jimmy said the *piaiman* would snort green tobacco juice and call out to the spirit owner of the minerals through séance. The spirit owner would then “climb down the spirit ladder” and “possess the *piaiman*’s body.” Jimmy went on to say that, “once possessed, the spirit owner would speak through the *piaiman* and request payment for the desired minerals which would usually consist of black tobacco and bottles of High Wine (Guyanese alcohol).” Jimmy finished by saying that “this is a spirit world and it is more real.” Jimmy’s testimony suggests that nature is not just connected to, but owned by the spirit world. This seems to augment the notion of the jaguar as a predator animal double of the *kanaima*.

Forte similarly defines a *piaiman* (sometimes *piaiwoman*) as a shaman who “possesses supernatural powers,” both “visionary and magical.”<sup>39</sup> Jimmy James also told me that *piaiman* have the power to transform into jaguars, as do *kanaimas*. This notion of shapeshifting (*weytupok*) into jaguars is similar to the jaguar shamans of the Guarani, or the *kaho hadi* “Light Ones” in Hoti culture. For like the *kaho hadi*, in order to become a jaguar, the *kanaima* or *piaiman* must allow oneself “to be dominated by the animal soul [jaguar] and the desire to eat raw meat.”<sup>40</sup> Jimmy went on to say that, if the *piaiman* wanted, he “could have brought the spirit of the jaguar to do evil to you.” This notion further elucidates both the *piaiman* and *kanaima*’s innate ambiguity and power.

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<sup>39</sup> Forte, Melville, and Correia, *Amerindian Testimonies*, 232.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Storrie, “The Politics of Shamanism and the Limits of Fear,” *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 4, no. 1 (2006): 223–246.

## *Aleluya & Kanaima:*

As Christianity took hold in Paramakatoi, beginning with *aleluya* (a syncretism of Christianity and Patamuna animism) around the 1870s and 80s, followed by the short-term visits by the Jesuits of the Roman Catholic Church and then the long-term mission by the Pilgrim Holiness Church in 1950 (four years after their first arrival). The role and power of the *piaiman* (as well as the *kanaima*) began to change. Much like within the Guarani of Paraguay, “Jesuit reductions provided the setting for various conflicts between priests,” and these “confrontations in which each side made use of the other’s weapons.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, this complex process of conversion did not take place on a linear continuum of pure continuity and pure discontinuity (see Fausto; 2008). Kanaimas responded to the evangelization process much like the Guarani, they would (as seen in the case of Thomas Youd in *Dark Shamans*<sup>42</sup>) “poison” or (like that of Hugh Goodwin<sup>43</sup>) “tear the victims apart” in order to subvert the indestructible nature of the Christian soul.<sup>44</sup> Kanaima, as an act of hyper-traditionality, much like cannibalism for the Guarani, was “a model for a person’s relation with the Other,” and became a resource for ethnic boundary making and the demonstration of male autonomy and power. It was also the use of terror against the state and Christian religion. It marked the convert’s body as location for assault—no rest for the Christian soul. No normalizing of political and religious order.

Most Patamuna are Christian and some practice what is called *alehuya* (halleluiah). *Aleluya* is a form of personal prayer that involves chanting and dancing. *Aleluya* is both a practice of being Christian and Patamuna and an integral part of Patamuna history. Whitehead

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<sup>41</sup> Carlos Fausto and Michael Heckenberger, eds., *Time and Memory in Indigenous Amazonia: Anthropological Perspectives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> Fausto and Heckenberger, *Time and Memory in Indigenous Amazonia*.

stated in *The Patamuna of Paramakatoi* that *aleluya* was received by the Amerindians of the Pakaraimas from a Makushi *piaiman* named Bichiwung around the 17th century long before the Pilgrim Holiness Church's arrival in 1946. Bichiwung claimed to have received the name of this religion from God in a vision which took place at the home of a white missionary in England. When Bichiwung returned to the Pakaraimas, carrying the first *aleluya* songs on a piece of paper, he taught them and the *aleluya* religion to many others, the most famous being the Akawaio as noted by Audrey Butt Colson. As *aleluya* continued to spread an Akawaio named Paiwa, who married a Patamuna, was the first to bring *aleluya* to Paramakatoi.<sup>45</sup> And as Whitehead observes, "Halleluia was a new thing and different to the *piiai-sang*, the 'high-science' of the ancients."<sup>46</sup> Patamuna "high-science," Jimmy James told me, involves the practice of *taleng*, *piya*, the use and application of *binas* or charms, and *kanaima*. High-science also includes the belief in plant and animal spirits, or *totopu*, "spirit guardians" as well as mermaids and water spirits that can cause sickness if seen or mental illness if one fraternizes or conjugates with them.

The first *aleluya* leaders in Paramakatoi, who are now known as the "first prophets of *aleluya*," or *iwepyatasak*, were Hendricks Charley, John Charley, George Williams, and Robinson Williams. During the length of my stay in Paramakatoi I made an effort to interview all of the pastors and former pastors of the Wesleyan, Full Gospel, Seventh Day Adventist, and Church of Christ vis a vis *aleluya*, *taleng*, and *kanaima*.

*Aleluya*, *taleng*, and *kanaima* are repertoires for creating ethnic boundaries between villagers and outsiders and power from which to assert Patamuna autonomy on the local, regional, and national level. I was told by the pastors that *taleng*, or ritual blowing, "is

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<sup>45</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, *The Patamona of Paramakatoi and the Yawong Valley: An Oral History* (Georgetown, Guyana: Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*.

something you use for medicine, it is good because God gave it to Adam...it comes from God,” and “God gave you medicine, but we have no medicines, so God gave us *taleng*.” Thus, bad *taleng esaks* (owners of *taleng*), as I was told by all of the pastors of the churches in Paramakatoi, are conceptualized as “satanic” or “evil” and this distinction seems to further delineate ethnic boundaries between villagers in Paramakatoi, for those who are considered “evil” are also treated as outsiders within the community and feared. This exclusionary practice however is never static, because one who is “evil” can also be redeemed. Thus, this process of ethnic boundary making is always in flux. The stability and inversion of boundaries is always open to revision through the tactical use of local religious repertoires. And as Wimmer (2008) observes, there are instances where “the category of excluded and despised comes to designate a chosen people who are morally, physically, and culturally superior to the dominant group.” Thus, *aleluya*, *taleng*, and *kanaima*, in the right circumstances, can also become a distinct way of being Patamuna.

While it seems like none of the pastors view *aleluya* as evil or heretical like they told me they do bad *taleng* and *kanaima*, they, nor the members of the church congregations that I interviewed do not seem to be especially interested in it. The pastor of the Church of Christ told me that, “*aleluya* is the Old Testament and the Church of Christ is the New Gospel,” he went on to say that the Church of Christ is, “the fulfillment of *aleluya*.” When I spoke to the remaining elder *aleluya* men (*aleluya’san*) in Paramakatoi, they too expressed similar sentiments—that, “*aleluya* prophesized the coming of Christianity and the decline of *aleluya*.” This reimagining is common throughout the whole of the Caribbean at large. Religious bricolage provides access to new sources of power for the Patamuna, both in relations with insiders and outsiders. And, this process is always ongoing.

When Whitehead conducted fieldwork in the 1990s in Paramakatoi he helped coordinate a *aleluya* gathering at Roger Harry's *benab* or home (see Whitehead, 2002). This "*aleluya* house" attracted over one-hundred people from all throughout the Yawong Valley and was recorded by Whitehead, but the video was never distributed at large in Paramakatoi. Thus, many Patamuna who participated had never seen the video that Whitehead shot during his stay in Paramakatoi. Knowing this, and also having a copy of the footage myself, I decided that for Amerindian Heritage month in September I would bring the footage and show it to the community. At the time, I thought of this as an act of giving back to the community, but I retrospectively realize that it was unconsciously also a demonstration of the ethnographer's power.

The *aleluya* house film connects directly to Patamuna notions of a sacred tradition. A Patamuna Christianity that pre-dates the Pilgrim Holiness Church and that connects to the stories of the first prophets of *aleluya* and how the village of Paramakatoi came to be. For as I was told by John Aldi, an elder *aleluya*'san, "the prophets prophesized the coming of the airplanes and the building of the airstrip before they knew what airplanes were."

Roger Harry, who now goes by Roger Alfred, was thrilled that I had the footage and decided that we should have another *aleluya* house, like the one that Whitehead helped coordinate with him years ago. I agreed to help and show the footage as well as record new *aleluya* testimonies from elders. On the morning of the second *aleluya* house elder *aleluya* men started to arrive very early. Two of the elders, over sixty years of age, struggled to walk. I visited Roger periodically throughout the day to conduct interviews with these men and record them singing *aleluya* songs. When I arrived at dusk they had set up speakers for dance music, set out bowls for *parakari* and *cassiri* (indigenous alcohol made from cassava), and *tuma* (a dried



meat, sometimes fish in *farine*, a toasted cassava flour) for guests. Roger draped a large white cloth on the outside of the *benab* so I could project the footage from my handheld projector. More and more villagers began to show up until there was more than fifty in attendance as night fell upon Paramakatoi. I gave a short introduction and then played the footage. Many Patamuna in the footage are no longer alive and seeing this wonderful and powerful footage brought many people to tears. The overall feeling was that of joy and gratitude and this event further illustrates the significance and entanglement of the ethnographer in the context of local history/historicity, tradition, identity, academic legacy, ethnic boundary making, and power relations. By playing this footage, I was co-participating in making available an engagement with a sacred tradition for Patamuna that connects directly to the historicity and power of *alehuya* in Paramakatoi.

I stood under the night sky and gazed at the stars as I listened to the Patamuna laugh and cry as they reflected upon the old footage, remembered the people they had lost, and praised the power and providence of *alehuya*. I thought about Whitehead and reflected upon the way our journeys had intertwined and the transition of the power of one ethnographer to another over time through academic legacy and situatedness in the field. I thought about Whitehead's untimely death to cancer and my survival of it. It felt like I was driven by fate to be there.

### **Taleng & Kanaima:**

Contemporary Patamuna religious beliefs include the practice of *taleng* also spelled “*taling*” (ritual blowing), which is conceptualized by the Wesleyan missionaries in Paramakatoi as a “formula to call spirits” or “witchcraft blowing.” *Taleng*, like *kanaima*, is part of the complex of violence and terror in Paramakatoi—*kanaima* use bad *taleng* as a mode of harming people. I was told by numerous Patamuna that there is good *taleng* (used for curing and healing) and bad *taleng* (used for harming people, to cause sickness, or even death) and that *kanaima* use

and fear it. *Taleng*, which translates into “words of fire” in Patamuna (*taleng*), Akawaio (*tareng*), and Makushi (*talen*), (known as *poori* in Wapishana) etymologically, is derived from a compound of two Patamuna words—*ta* “say” and *leng* meaning “embers of fire.”<sup>47</sup> The difference between spelling in Patamuna, Makushi, and Akawaio are orthographical, but *taleng* is pronounced the same in all three Carib speaking languages (The Wapishana speak Arawakan language).

The meaning of *taleng* in Patamuna (as in Akawaio, Arekuna, and Makushi) is both literal and metaphoric, which reiterates its believed efficacy vis a vis curing and killing. *Taleng* is not a humoral process of healing like those seen in other Amazonian healing complexes,<sup>48</sup> instead *taleng* involves a deep connection to and dependency on the spirit world, which Jimmy James said is, “more real.” And, bad *taleng* accusations also seem to be a primary mode of Patamuna ethnic boundary making. *Taleng* accusations, like *kanaima* accusations, can be utilized by social actors as means of “social closure.”<sup>49</sup> *Taleng* is part of a Patamuna occult theory of power that reproduces social relations wherein the outsider, distinguished as a bad *taleng esak*, like a *kanaima*, is used to recapitulate the local system (hierarchy, status, and the sedimentation of power).

Janet Forte defined *taleng* or “to blow” as:

The ritual blowing of the breath either through the mouth or down the nose in short sharp gusts is practiced by most of the Amerindian peoples of Guyana. The blower utters a special chant as he or she blows. Ritual blowing is believed to be capable of causing sickness and death on the one hand and on the other a means of curing illness and of achieving or preventing certain specific

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<sup>47</sup> Audrey J. Butt, “Ritual Blowing: Taling-A Causation and Cure of Illness Among the Akawaio,” *Man* 56 (1956): 49–55.

<sup>48</sup> For more information on humoral curing and healing see Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart, *Curing and Healing: Medical Anthropology in Global Perspective*, 2nd ed, Carolina Academic Press Ethnographic Studies in Medical Anthropology Series (Durham, N.C: Carolina Academic Press, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Andreas Wimmer, “The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 4 (January 2008): 970–1022.

aims. This ritual blowing is called *taleng* by the Patamuna and *tareng* by the Akawaio. Anyone can blow as long as he or she knows the special chants, of which there are many in many Amerindian languages.<sup>50</sup>

Benson Thomas of Waramadong in the Upper Mazaruni stated that:

Personally I don't believe in *tareng* though older people in the village and some members of my family also believe in it. *Tareng* is used for two things: either to destroy or to heal somebody. Everybody will try *tareng* when it comes to the healing part of it. If you suffer from skin problems for example you will go to somebody who is experienced in *tareng*; usually it will be an older person. He will tell you that somebody has blown bad *tareng* on you and he will either blow you or blow the oil that you will use on your skin. He will also repeat certain phrases as he blows on you. You won't find young people nowadays learning *tareng* chants.<sup>51</sup>

Lucillina Torres from Waipa in the North Pakaraimas said:

The old man will mutter some words and blow on the food—that is all. The words might be in Patamuna or Makushi or Wapishana or in some other Amerindian language. I think there is this variety in *taleng* chants because they learn many from other Amerindians. On occasions when I asked my father to teach me a *taleng* chant, he would tell me that I wouldn't understand because that one was Makushi or Arekuna and so on. Akawaio people say *tareng*, we say *taleng*. My father knows some of the chants and he knows to blow *taleng* if somebody is sick. People who know *taleng* chants will pass them on but *taleng* chants are difficult to learn. They have *taleng* that you blow on a girl so that she wouldn't get baby fast or if she wants to not conceive for five years or for any length of time. And when that girl is ready to get a child then she can get somebody to blow her back and she will conceive. People say it works—I don't know. But for it to work you have to also abstain from sexual relations for three months. Well my father told me that *taleng* but up to this day I haven't learned it. There are *taleng* for bad things and good things.<sup>52</sup>

In Paramakatoi *taleng* includes the practice of softly and quickly spoken utterances followed by the blowing of one's breath (many times in conjunction with tobacco smoke, which is considered an auspicious substance in Amazonia) and is synonymous with one's spirit. For example; At the Siparuni River, an ancestral location of the Patamuna, elders will use good *taleng* to ensure a successful kulak fish poisoning. Patamuna will gather the root of the *haiari* plant whose "active ichthyotoxic (*piscicidal*) principle is rotenone, which is used to asphyxiate fish" and "even when much diluted, and is also an insecticide."<sup>53</sup> The *haiari*, as Forte observes, is

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<sup>50</sup> Forte, Melville, and Correia, *Amerindian Testimonies*, 233.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>53</sup> "Lonchocarpus Chrysophyllus: Black Hiari" (Smithsonian, n.d.), <http://eol.org/pages/417894/details>.

a “word for any of a variety of vines which is beaten and released into the rivers where it destroys the water’s oxygen content, stunning the fish and making them float to the surface.”<sup>54</sup> Once gathered, a *taleng esak* who is usually a highly respected elder, will perform *taleng*. He will chant quietly prior to blowing on the *hiari* to infuse it with the magical properties of success which are cultivated through his spirit’s essence and power. As Audry Butt Colson observes, “the act of blowing... a person is creating a special ritual situation in which he ‘mobilizes’ his vitality to achieve certain ends,” and “a person detaches his own spirit from his body and sends it, in the breath with which it is associated, to perform certain tasks.”<sup>55</sup> This blowing ritual, is one of a few *taleng* that are done publicly, most *taleng* is performed in private to ensure its efficacy and secrecy.

While most *taleng* is done by elders, it is not completely withheld from young adults ages 20-30. Children are generally not taught *taleng* for fear that lack of maturity exacerbates the inherent risk of using it for harm. Power in the wrong hands can be dangerous and is emphasized. The pedagogy of *taleng* is usually through its spoken and performed inheritance from consanguineal and affinal kin and each families’ *taleng* is unique, each family has their own formula (distinct power center). *Taleng* ritual knowledge can also be transmitted through visions wherein *totupu*, or spirit owners of plants, animals, and minerals appear to inculcate *taleng* periodically throughout one’s life. *Taleng* can also be transferred through interrelationships between tribes such as the Akawaio of Region 7 or Makushi of Region 9, thus leading to its changing grammatical and lexical structuration. For example; in Akawaio *taleng* is

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<sup>54</sup> Forte, Melville, and Correia, *Amerindian Testimonies*, 229.

<sup>55</sup> Butt, “Ritual Blowing: Taling-A Causation and Cure of Illness Among the Akawaio.”

spelled *tareng*, and *aleluya* is spelled *areruya*, but pronounced the same in Patamuna, Makushi, and Akawaio. Both *taleng* and *aleluya* are present in all Carib-speaking Amerindian groups.

*Tareng* within Akawaio culture is part of *ozo maimu* or “serious talk” which is formal speech that is performed in organized settings. And, as seen within Patamuna culture, the Akawaio utilize *tareng* ritual blowing chants to both cure and cause harm upon people. Makushi *taren* or “blow” is used in their daily lives “to make their children grow fat, to help cassava to be plentiful, to ensure that a hunter’s arrows hit the target, to attract and enchant animals and potential lovers,” and much more.<sup>56</sup> This is similar to, when juxtaposed with the practice of *sangere* within the Suyá of Brazil. *Sangere* are “curing songs,” infused with animal power, that can be a powerful panacea because its transference is via one’s breath which is conceptualized as not only one’s “air of communication,” but also “the very spiritual life force of a person,” known as *esak* in Patamuna.<sup>57</sup>

When I interviewed Patamuna about the practice of *taleng* I was continually told how *taleng* was particularly beneficial during child birth, especially during long-term labor. Nurse Saigo, nurse mid-wife (retired) in Paramakatoi and Whitehead’s primary interlocutor, shared her experience with me vis a vis *taleng*:

It is something very technical...they have some words that they say, speak, and then blow. And these words not everybody can catch it. I don’t even know it. I can’t catch it. That is why I’ve always said, if these Amerindians had gone to the university, you know they would have been perfect, but it’s only that they haven’t had a chance. But they do, they do, they have blow for, men, to go and hunt. They have blow to go and catch fish. And ladies have blow to...catch men. And vice a versa.

And they also have blow for when a woman is in labor and she’s having a prolonged stage of labor, they will blow and help bring up something. I have a plant at the health center. I’ve been

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<sup>56</sup> Lucas Carneiro de Carvalho, “Consuming the Nation-State: Reflections on Makushi Understandings of the Person in a Transnational Context,” *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 13, no. 2 (2015): 143.

<sup>57</sup> Joel Sherzer and Greg Urban, eds., *Native South American Discourse* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986), 70–71.

a nurse mid-wife for a longest while, but I still believe in these things. Belief cures and belief kills. I believe because I've seen it work. I have a plant at the health center, I tell those ladies who are working there, no, they mustn't cut it. On Sunday I used it. I used part of it, I rub it, crush it between my hands, and I rub the belly down, I rub the belly down, and it works for me...the blow can also harm you.

There are people who have complained about people blowing something for them who have suffered asthma, they suffered from like tuberculosis, they suffered from migraines, everything, everything, they've suffered after the blow. And then they wouldn't want to reverse it, but there are people who would suspect that this is a blow story that is affecting you, they can reverse it...they would do this antidote thing and it cures them.

[During labor] If this person who knows about this blow thing is contacted she will come or send some water and this water, after blowing on this water, it would be put on the head, rubbed on the belly, and she drinks a little of it. And it kind of hastens the labor and hastens delivery. I've seen it happen. I've seen it happen as a mid-wife. I've seen it happen hundreds of times. Not only with the first babies you know, also the second, third, fourth and fifth ones. Yeah, I've seen it. [Taleng] They're spoken in Patamuna, there's some technical words that are in-between there...it will be such a technical name that I can't catch it, I don't even know.

This notion of utilizing plants in this manner is what Caesar-Fox argues is central to *tareng* within the Akawaio (So too does Carneiro de Carvalho 2015 in the Makushi context). For as Caesar-Fox observes, "usually the *tareng* calls upon an appropriate animal or plant, whose attributes are known to be the opposite of what the patient is suffering from."<sup>58</sup> The Akawaio *tareng* is centered on the use of animistic metaphors. These metaphors have to do with the transference of specific attributes of particular animals, plants, birds, reptiles, and fish. For example; to cure a toothache one would use the name of the otter because of his strong teeth. Or to cure diarrhea, one would speak about the sloth whose feces are known to be hard. Thus, *tareng*, like *taleng*, is intimately connected with notions of ecology, landscape, and environment. *Taleng* shapes identity and offers social actors access to new repertoires of power.

The Suya of Brazil also practice a version of *taleng* called *sangere* which utilizes metaphors that seem to be just as deeply connected to the power and agency of nature and

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<sup>58</sup> Desrey Clementine Caesar-Fox, "Zauro'nodok Agawayo Yau: Variants of Akawaio Spoken at Waramadong" (Rice University, 2003).

wildlife. If a child has a high fever or convulsions, the *sangere* songs would speak about the white caiman who is known for its stillness in the water and who never gets hot. Anthony Segger also explains that for a toothache, the Suyá would name the wild pig who eats hard roots and whose teeth do not get hurt. And if a woman is experiencing a difficult labor, the Suyá will use a *sangere* that focuses on a small fish that is known to slip through the hands without effort when held.<sup>59</sup>

Patamuna *taleng*, is not just used for curing purposes—it is also used to cause sickness, disease, and even death. In bad *taleng*, both secrecy and performance are intertwined with power.<sup>60</sup> A bad *taleng esak*, who specializes in bad *taleng*, I was told by many Patamuna will generally live on the periphery of the village and will not trust anyone for fear of reprisal. Their attitude and general disposition is one of irritation, self-induced isolation, and sickness. I was told that their eyes are typically red or blood shot, they are weak in stature, sometimes shaky, and (as is in cases in Paramakatoi) are often suspected of being a *sopai* kanaima (an assassin who is inflicted with symptoms of psychosomatic illness after committing murder) or what Whitehead called *sopaney* (spirit madness). They are treated with a high degree of caution and fear. *Sopaney*, Whitehead writes, occurs “if the kanaimas cannot discover the body then they will become overheated (*sopaney*), that is, mad or enraged.”<sup>61</sup>

Patamuna kanaima are said to utilize *taleng* for wicked purposes and most times they do so in conjunction with the use of *binas* or charms. A bad *taleng esak*, it is believed, whether a kanaima or not, can cause myriad illnesses, they can ruin relationships, and even bring about

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<sup>59</sup> Sherzer and Urban, *Native South American Discourse*, 70–71.

<sup>60</sup> Irving Goffman’s theatrical metaphors help to make sense of this. While the secrecy of bad *taleng* is protected from those who would want to “catch it,” and is thereby kept on the “backstage,” those who practice bad *taleng* tend to explicitly perform their roles on the “front stage.” See Goffman.

<sup>61</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 95.

death in their victims. One such suspected man that I became aware of through interviews in Paramakatoi is said to never accept food or drink from people for fear of bad *taleng* being used against him.

### **Binas & Kanaima:**

Notions of spirit possession like kanaima through the interaction with or consumption of powerful objects and plants similar to *binas* or charms in Amazonia is common. Take for example the Asurini of the Tocantins who, “have specialist shamans, whose power resides in the control of the *karowara*, which are not conceived as spirits but as animated nosogenic objects possessing a single intent: to devour raw meat.”<sup>62</sup> They are faceless animated teeth that shamans can absorb and keep hidden between their own teeth and gums. *Karowara* is the “omophagic power of the shaman, the representation of shamanism as a form of cannibalism.”<sup>63</sup> There are myriad physical objects capable of being *karowara* such as, but not limited to; capuchin monkey teeth, certain beetle species, thorns, stingray stingers, sharp bones. As Carlos Fausto observes, “In fact, any small and pointed object can be a *topiwara* in the hands of someone with the magical knowledge to animate it.”<sup>64</sup>

The kanaima engages with myriad *binas*, which foment what Whitehead argued was the user’s possession by *Kai-kusi yumu*. The kanaima, after using *binas*, seem to demonstrate a similar set of behaviors and experiences. Forte defines *bina* as a “Arawak word *ibina-hu* ‘a medicine or charm.’ One, generally extracted from fleshy Arum-like plant with sagittate leaves (*Caladium bicolor*), is used as a good luck charm.”<sup>65</sup> The practice of utilizing animal parts and

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<sup>62</sup> Carlos Fausto, *Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia*. (Place of publication not identified: Cambridge Univ Press, 2014), 185.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Fausto, *Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia*.

<sup>65</sup> Forte, Melville, and Correia, *Amerindian Testimonies*, 226.



plants in various cultural practices is common throughout lowland South America. The Panamanian *Embera`*, like the Patamuna *piaiman* or *kanaima* use animal parts and plants to “transmit particular effects, qualities or capacities of non-human bodies to human bodies.”<sup>66</sup> Kondo (2015) describes in detail the *Embera`* practice of *ombligada* wherein animal parts such as jaguar nails, the mashed eyes of kingfishers, the leg of a Grey-necked Wood Rail, and the juice of genipap fruit is mashed and mixed and put onto the skin in an effort to enhance “the human capacity to do a particular action by taking it from the bodies of distinction animals.”<sup>67</sup> The *Embera`* also uses plants, like the Patamuna *bina (e`molong* (the sleeping plant), ginger, green tobacco, bush hog, etc.), in the same manner. Just as the *Embera`* uses the eyes of kingfishers to find prey, or the nails of jaguars to become expert hunters or warriors, so too is the *bina* used by Patamuna to not only symbolize, but fully embody and imbue the power of plants and animals to enhance one’s agency and power. The practice of *bina*-ing oneself is what Frazer (1922) calls “contagious magic” and can be seen in many other Amerindian tribes in myriad practices and contexts (Santos-Granero, 2012; Whitehead, 2004; Walker, 2013; Kondo, 2015; Carneiro de Carvalho, 2015) Roman Jakobson calls “contagious magic” a “metonymic phenomenon.”<sup>68</sup> And while the use of *binas* in Paramakatoi is surely representational of the users’ knowledge of “high-science,” it also explicitly reflects identity, it implicitly enhances agency, and generates power in varying ways. Thus, the use of *binas* is not reducible, as Kondo argued vis a vis the *Embera`*, “to a metonymical phenomenon that is modeled on language,” but

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<sup>66</sup> Hiroshi Kondo, “The Skin as a Surface of Composition: The Use of Animal Body Parts and Plants in Various Practices of the Panamanian *Embera`*,” *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 13, no. 2 (2015): 1–23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, Reprint of the 2., rev. ed. 1971 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002).

when juxtaposed in a Patamuna context is also “an operational activity” with “transformative effects between related entities.”<sup>69</sup>

Patamuna women used to tattoo *binas* on their faces. This was explicitly done for aesthetic and symbolic purposes (although this practice cannot be simply reduced to its explicit metonymic value, its implicit efficacy is also cosmological) to indicate that a woman was skilled at making sweet *cassiri*. Tattooing *binas* is still prevalent within Patamuna culture, and is one popular form of Patamuna body modification as a means to enhance, protect, and attain power.

Joy Isaacs of Paramakatoi told Janet Forte that:

You will find that the old women have cassiri binas tattooed around their lips—my grandmother also used to have this tattoo. But no one tattoos herself any more. Many men still make the straight razor blade cuts on their forearms and legs and rub special binas into the cuts in order to make them strong.<sup>70</sup>

On their first trip the Pilgrim Holiness Church missionaries engaged several Patamuna women with facial tattoos, *saba* and *kurugai* markings (red paint derived from the Achiote shrub/*Bixa Orellana* and the *Arrabidaea chica* plant), the women had “tattooed lips and cheeks, painted faces streaked with red, straight pins sticking through the lower lips.”<sup>71</sup> While there is no indication that the missionaries were cognizant of these *bina*’s meaning or efficacy through exegesis of text, this testimony published by the Pilgrim Holiness Church in its entirety gives insight into early twentieth century Patamuna culture; identity, gender relations, sociality, and religiosity.

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<sup>69</sup> Kondo, “The Skin as a Surface of Composition: The Use of Animal Body Parts and Plants in Various Practices of the Panamanian Embera.”

<sup>70</sup> Forte, Melville, and Correia, *Amerindian Testimonies*, 120.

<sup>71</sup> Rev. J. Maxey Walton, *The Partamona Trail: Experiences of a Missionary Expedition into the Rupununi District of British Guiana Home of the Partamona Indians* (Foreign Missionary Office of the Pilgrim Holiness Church, n.d.), 43.

Painting apotropaic red dye was also common in Akawaio culture. It was painted onto the face for explicit protection from spirits and illness. Prior to painting the dye on the face *tareng* (ritual blowing) would be used to infuse it with the magical properties of success. One explanation for the implicit efficacy of Amerindian skin decoration comes from Hiroshi Kondo, who argued that a drawing on the skin protects against attacks by invisible beings because the decoration “changes the image of the user” and “hides his/her appearance.” Kondo goes on to say that Panamanian *Embera`* do this “so as to cheat the eyes of the spiritual beings which are looking for them,” and “in this way it disguises and helps to protect him or her from attacks of spiritual beings that have been sent by a jaibana [shaman].”<sup>72</sup>

As Claudia Joseph, from Maururanau in the South Savannahs said in regards to puberty rituals for girls:

They carried me into a little room and tied up my hammock there. It wasn't tied up too high. Then this old lady mixed some annatto dye (what we call coeish) with some kind of oil and put it in a bottle. I think that she blow-blow it too. She then took the annatto and rubbed it on my arms and legs and on the scale lines of my hammock. She said that was to prevent some evil spirit from coming to me.<sup>73</sup>

Today, Patamuna men and women still utilize *binas* as a means to cultivate and exercise individual power.

### **Kanaima as it Relates to Broader Amazonian Cosmology:**

Whitehead argued that through the death and ritual consumption of the kanaima victim's *maba*, the entire Patamuna cosmos is assuaged (thereby maintained). Whitehead also said that the victim, as much as the kanaima, plays a central role in maintaining the Patamuna cosmos through their ontological erasure. The victim is not just physically destroyed, but is spiritually

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<sup>72</sup> Kondo, “The Skin as a Surface of Composition: The Use of Animal Body Parts and Plants in Various Practices of the Panamanian *Embera*,” 14.

<sup>73</sup> Forte, Melville, and Correia, *Amerindian Testimonies*, 32.

consumed in a sacred context (becoming the food of the gods). This reflects what Rene Girard argues in *Violence and the Sacred*, that “narrative touches upon the mythic origins of the sacrificial system...violence is the heart and soul of the sacred...violence is behind all mythic themes.”<sup>74</sup> This notion of ontological erasure that Whitehead put forth through ritual death is not Patamuna specific, it is a common practice throughout Amazonia, take for example the Warao *hoaratu* and the Baniwa *manhene iminali* or poison-owners.

The Warao *hoaratu* of northeastern Venezuela serve *Hoebo* (the Lord of Death) the Ancient One, ruler of the land of darkness. In *The Order of Dark Shamans among the Warao* Johannes Wilbert points out that, "The land of darkness and its ruler have existed since the universe began. And when, in early times, the Lord of Death decreed that spiritual humans were henceforth to become embodied mortals, Hoebo manifested as the red macaw (*Ara chloroptera*) and claimed the new terrestrial species as his and his relation's staple food."<sup>75</sup> Thus, the *hoaratu*, much like the *kanaima* procure human victims as a sacrificial offering to sustain the Warao cosmology. Wilbert goes on to say that the *hoaratu* “bends over the covered coffin and sucks the rest of the corpse's blood out through a cane,” and “the veteran *hoaratu* became the top predator of humankind and a lycanthrope who assures the survival of the macaw people.”<sup>76</sup> The Warao, much like the *kanaima* utilizes sacrificial cannibalism to sustain the Warao cosmology.

The Baniwa of the northwest Amazon are also intrinsically connected to cosmology and death. The Baniwa believe that *manhene* (witchcraft) is the source of all serious disease and illness. As Robin Wright argues, “the importance of *manhene* can be estimated by the fact that

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<sup>74</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, John Hopkins paperbacks ed., [Nachdr.] (Baltimore: Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), 31–245.

<sup>75</sup> *In Darkness and Secrecy*, 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–40.

the first death in the primordial world was caused by poison.”<sup>77</sup> Manhene derives from the story of Kuwai, the son of the creator *Nhiaperikuli* who left poison hidden in a pot in his house which was stolen by the *Eenunai* (ancestral monkey spirits) and became *manhene iminali*. After having stolen the poison from *Kuwai* the *Eenunai* poisoned *Nhiaperikuli*’s brother who was the first person to die in this world. *Nhiaperikuli* stole back his poison from the *Eenunai* and hid it atop of various hills throughout Venezuela, where Baniwa *manhene* collect it to use for “dark shamanism” today (see Whitehead & Wright; 2004). Wright goes on to say that, "In addition, a poison-owner is someone who is considered to be 'no longer like a person,' for 'his only thought is to kill': the bodily form of such a which differs from that of normal people...the poison owner's soul is, according to shamans, a spirit of the dead, *inyaime*, which inhabits the periphery of This World.”<sup>78</sup> While the *manhene iminali* does not consume the physical body of the victim, their victim’s death is still very much connected to the maintenance of broader Baniwa cosmology. To be poisoned by a *manhene iminali* suggests, that the victim too is engaging in this primordial story, much like with *kanaima*, wherein the victim’s demise sustains the Baniwa cosmology through their physical and ontological death. The ontological erasure of the victim in *kanaima* is metonymical, it points to the cosmology of *kanaima* and the cosmology of *kanaima* in turn points to the need for the ontological erasure of the victim.

### **Christianity & Kanaima:**

“*Ka`yik wechipu` molo A`li Akwalu` wechipu` yau*” (A man with an evil spirit). This saying, was first used in the 1966 American Bible Society’s “Gospel According to Mark in Patamuna and English” or “*Waku` Itekale Mak Nu`menukapu`.*” This notion, of a man with an

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 2.

evil spirit has since been used to describe the *kanaima* (secret assassin) by the Patamuna in contemporary Paramakatoi. *Kanaima* is now conceptualized by many Patamuna, including the pastors I interviewed of the four Evangelical and Sabbatarian churches in Paramakatoi (Seventh Day Adventist, Wesleyan, the Church of Christ, and Full Gospel) as “the Devil’s work.” This reconceptualization of *kanaima* as satanic is part and parcel of the process of missionary conversion. And, as Whitehead observes, “*kanaima* as a native ‘Satan’ or evil spirit, was central to the ethnological and literary production of *kanaima*.”<sup>79</sup>

### **First Encounters of the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Paramakatoi:**

“One by one the Partamonas fill graves in their lonely savannah, or breath out their dying gasps beside the quick rushing streams of Guiana’s jungles...they grasp with eagerness for every ray of Gospel light, and tread the Partamona Trail with lighter hearts for having received the same...your obligation and mine is to see that they be not denied that which they so earnestly crave.” -Rev. J. Maxey Walton.

Christian missionaries first trudged their way into the mountainous region of the “Partamonas” in the 1946. On June 17th, 1946 Rev. Clifton F. Berg, J. Maxey Walton, J. C. Carth, and others launched their thirty-foot boat called “Good Tidings” down the Essequibo river from Georgetown towards the Pakaraima Mountains where they would then continue on foot through the arduous “Partamona Trail” that leads from the Siparuni River (an affluent of the Essequibo) to the village of Paramakatoi. This path, is one the missionaries called, “one of the hardest lines of travel the writer ever attempted to follow...through jungle, over mountains and savannahs for perhaps a distance of forty to sixty miles.”<sup>80</sup> The journey for the missionaries was full of hardships, but with the help of two Patamuna men and “the providence of God were

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<sup>79</sup> Andrew Strathern, Pamela J. Stewart, and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *Terror and Violence: Imagination and the Unimaginable*, Anthropology, Culture, and Society (London; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto, 2006), 180.

<sup>80</sup> Maxey Walton, *The Partamona Trail: Experiences of a Missionary Expedition into the Rupununi District of British Guiana Home of the Partamona Indians*.

carried through safely,” which lifted their “hearts in thanksgiving to him who is Lord over land and sea.”<sup>81</sup>

The Pilgrim Holiness Church was influential in establishing and organizing the village of Paramakatoi and spent many years building up this small Patamuna community because of their fervent belief in both their mission to evangelize the “unreached of earth’s Christless millions” and that the Patamuna of the Yawong Valley were both “eager” and “craving” their new gospel. The Pilgrim Holiness Church’s very first account of their journey to Paramakatoi makes visible, the politics of survival and the poetics of power relations in Paramakatoi during British colonization (1814-1966). The missionaries were dependent upon Patamuna translators for their work to be intelligible, yet the Patamuna were already familiar with Christian theology, particularly through the practice of *aleluya*, which had spread from the Akawaio to the Patamuna in the late 19th century. *Aleluya* facilitated Patamuna conversion to the Pilgrim Holiness Church (which later became the Wesleyan Church in the 1968 merger) unbeknownst to the missionaries who thought that the Patamuna simply “craved” this new gospel. After conducting multiple services on the “Partamona trail” Rev. Berg, Walton, and Carth could see no visible results, they witnessed the Patamuna “listening attentively” and noticed that the Patamuna “seemed to miss nothing of what was said or done,” but “left the attempt in God’s hands, and trusted that lasting good would result in it.”<sup>82</sup>

The adversarial nature of the mountainous Pakaraima landscape immediately captured the missionary’s imagination, for not only did they encounter poisonous snakes on their journey, but they conflated the “Partamona trail” itself with a snake, for they treaded “its serpent-like

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

twistings.” Thus, even the jungle trail became a conquerable “adversary,” and each encounter along the way to Paramakatoi became cosmologically compartmentalized, the missionaries seemed to make sense of what they encountered through the lens of their theology which also seemed deeply affected their subjectivities, their actions, and their interactions with the Patamuna they met along the way. Such as; when they met a man with “the pox” from the crown of his head to his toes like “Job.”<sup>83</sup>

Although the Pilgrim Holiness Church were not the first Christians to visit the Patamuna of Paramakatoi (the first being *aleluya*’san and Jesuits of the Roman Catholic Church), they were the first non-*aleluya* institution to establish a long-term mission in the village. After performing multiple church services, speaking to the Patamuna about “our debt to God,” and inculcating “how in mercy, God had given us life, health, and food...he had given us His ‘only begotten Son’, the greatest gift of all,” Rev. Berg, Walton, and Carth also emphasized “how God was angry with sin, and with those who committed it, and that we would all have to go to a place of eternal burnings had it not been for Jesus Christ, who loved us and took our place.”<sup>84</sup> The revelation of Pilgrim Holiness Church’s theology and eschaton fomented meaningful questions from the Patamuna, not hostility nor antagonism. This seemed to surprise Rev. Berg, Walton, and Carth who were even asked to explain the creation of the world while the Patamuna “listened eagerly” and “would have stayed hours longer” if they had continued the meeting.

Before departing Rev. Berg, Walton, and Carth spoke to the Patamuna about their interest in setting up a permanent mission in the village. They told the Patamuna that they “desired to send a Christian teacher who would live among them, and teach them, both of Jesus, and also,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



other needful things which they would be glad to know,” and “that it all depended upon the sanction of the government, whether this would be possible.”<sup>85</sup> In response, John Thomas, the villager *tushau* at the time came forward and fell on his knees in prayer and prayed in Patamuna (a common *aleluya* practice). He “voiced the cry of a long-neglected people,” the missionaries said. They went on to say that John Thomas requested in Jesus’ name that God bless the Patamuna, that he help them to live right, and allow the missionaries to have a teacher sent to them. John Thomas prayed so that the Protector of the Indians (God) might grant them the privilege of missionaries laboring further among them. The power and efficacy of prayer in Amerindian communities has been well documented in the anthropological literature (see Luzar & Fragoso, 2013; Vilaca & Wright, 2009). Rev. Berg, Walton, and Carth seemed quite pleased with themselves in the text, having thought that the Patamuna had converted to Christianity due to their arduous arrival and their successful missionary work.

### **Kanaima & the Colonial Imaginary:**

After returning from Paramakatoi, I came into contact on social media with a woman (who wanted to remain anonymous) who was part of the “El Dorado Expedition” led by Colonel John Blashford-Snell (JBS) in 1993. (Under the name *Discovery Expeditions* from August to September 1993). This woman who I will call “Sarah” described the purpose of the expedition:

The expedition members were chosen specifically as individuals who had their own individual interests and reasons for wanting to go and their own skills & fields of expertise, that were deemed to be of importance to the expedition as a whole. And it was only by invitation. members that were invited also had to pass a weekend of tests and interviews. which showed survival skills. The purpose was therefore varied & different for each member. However, the speech by JBS outlining the purpose included an interest in finding out about the kanaima. Magic Moss. Meet & greet the different tribes, some of which had not previously met Westerners. Contact these people's and ascertain levels of 'friendliness.' Take notes and samples. (Mark O'Shea was a snake expert & caught snakes which he then bagged and kept). The doctor Christina, held several clinics for the Amerindians to attend & even helped a lady in labour, give birth in her hut, as I had

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

been asked by her husband if there was anyone to help as he was very concerned for his wife's health. She had many children but had suffered terribly in previous births and some of the babies had died. There were no medics in any of the villages or any other Westerners. But only a few of the Amerindians did trust in 'foreign ideas of medicine'. As they still had strong belief in witch doctor type 'medicine', magic & herbal plant remedies. So the 'clinic' was not attended.

My purpose & interests were firstly in sound recording. Jungle Sounds, as I ran a record label that produced underground house/tribal/techno/dance music. I was loaned a high-quality tape recorder by BBC Radio 4 as they were possibly going to use my tapes on their radio programmes. I planned to use the jungle sounds on G-Force Records. I also was very interested & concerned for the conservation of wildlife & to meet & understand the cultures of the local tribes people. I was very active in collecting plant samples, as we had been asked...in regard to 'magic moss' or.. anything of interest. As the expedition unfolded, many members admitted they felt no purpose, and did not take much of a role in any particular fields. Their were admissions of fear and feelings of panic among the members at certain times, with some people very quickly feeling 'lost', out of their depth & pointless. whereas others such as Mark and myself and Geoff (photographer) took a more proactive approach & were always keen to explore the terrain. Mark led caiman hunts & captured snakes & some lizards. I met the people & talked with them & helped organised day trips out of camp & into surrounding areas. The trip to the cave outside of Paramakatoi was already on the agenda by JBS & previously had been somewhat 'mapped' but was still a mystery journey. The purpose of the expedition was mostly...thought out or NOT on a daily basis. As until the 'mutiny' when JBS gave up his leadership. He had been calling an expedition briefing early every morning. When the agenda for the day would be discussed & tasks assigned. This process broke down during the expedition. As it was done in a very British 'military' style, certain members did not take to the forced discipline & I particularly did not like the 'imperialist' old British colonial mentality, that came across in the attitude of all 'the top brass'.

The truth is very...hard to write as I never told anyone. All that happened. It was extreme survival on so many levels.

JBS had very high up associates with Guyana. He was friendly with the British Ambassador in Guyana, who lived in a huge residential 'palace', where we had a formal gathering before & after departure in Georgetown. The highest-ranking Guyanese Defense Force military also attended and knew JBS personally. He had been many times previously & was very well connected.

John Blashford-Snell mapped *Kuyaliyeng* Cave in Denis William's book *Prehistoric Guiana*, even marking the exact spot of the infamous ritual vessel.<sup>86</sup> Sarah also described kanaima:

Kanaimas are shapeshifters, they kill. Hide. Are evil. Can travel miles quicker than any human. Can be in people or look like animals when disguised. In other words, can be anyone or any animal. Can take over people. Poison you. Stick sticks inside you (I took this conversation to mean...rape young girls) They can turn good people bad. Takeover your personality. You can't fight them. They can hide, disguise or become invisible. And vanish into nowhere. Such was their power and people we saw were so scared to talk out that they could hear what was said.

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<sup>86</sup> Denis Williams, *Prehistoric Guiana* (Kingston; Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), 404.

Nobody that directly was accused, as they were too scared to say that in case of repercussions. It was known...who...but in the next village. Or he was here last but left, vanished...so no. But I got the feeling there was kanaima among us all the time. Embodied in different people in our group even. Nobody could therefore be trusted. People were scared. That fear was genuine. Even though the stories didn't make a lot of sense in a 'western' way.

Sarah also noted that everyone was also Christian in Paramakatoi in 1993:

Yes I'd say everyone was Christian in Paramakatoi. But having said that. There was no church services or Christian rituals that I noticed. Whereas another smaller village I stayed at a lot more remote Apoteri had a hut they used as a 'church.' Where I/we were invited to a service on a Sunday. The missionaries had obviously converted most and Jesus was the savior. But the beliefs of kanaima and use of witch doctors/shaman was still more widely used in daily life. The 'bad' presence of 'other beings' seemed real to most people.

My interview with Sarah reminded me of what Whitehead had so eloquently said vis a vis kanaima in both the colonial and broader cultural imagination:

This more detailed conjoining of the idea of Guayana with that of native savagery is not just the passing allusion of a few authors or travelers, but is a fundamental trope in the imagination of 'Guayana' from the inception of European exploration through to the present day. Nor is this mentality confined to colonial mentalities alone, since kanaima has also fed the national imaginaries of Brazil, Venezuela, and Guyana.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, kanaima was depicted and misrepresented as a savage form of jungle justice within the colonial literature (see Bates, Schomburgk, Im Thurn, & Raleigh). In ways that Whitehead claimed, "enabled the progress of colonial administration, especially through missionary evangelism but also through the imposition of colonial legal codes...a number of authors depict kanaima as a institution of primitive law, thereby also laying the groundwork for the later appeal to colonial justice as an advance on this primitive, if somewhat admirable, law of blood-revenge."<sup>88</sup> This misrepresentation of kanaima was the state's way of circumventing the power of the terror and violence of kanaima. A terror and violence intimately linked to state

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<sup>87</sup> Strathern, Stewart, and Whitehead, *Terror and Violence*, 172.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

notions of uncontrollable Patamuna wildness that lingered on post-colonization within later British “expeditions,” for as Sarah told me, “people were scared...that fear was genuine.”

### **Taussig’s Wildness & Whitehead’s Demonic Landscape**

Whitehead argued that kanaima is not just an internal discourse among Amerindians, but is also a means of being distinctly Guyanese, Venezuelan, and Brazilian. He states that, “the articulation of savagery through reference to kanaima is culturally grounded, quite literally, in ideas and metaphors of physical space.”<sup>89</sup>

As a profoundly ‘authentic’ icon of Amerindian survival, it has been appropriated by the national societies of the region as a sign of their emplacement in the wild and alien landscapes of the ‘interior.’ This idea of the ‘interior’ posits Guayana as the end point of exploration, the counterpoint of modernity and the obstacle to development...kanaima comes to stand for that alterity. In turn the terrifying encounter with kanaima becomes a token of the traveller’s, or anthropologist’s, or missionary’s, or miner’s penetration to that inner mystery. In this way kanaima becomes the metaphoric equivalent of the Conradian ‘heart of darkness’ where there is nothing but ‘the horror, the horror’, veritably a land of mystical terror and savage violence.<sup>90</sup>

Whitehead also notes the susceptibility of whites to kanaima as “indigenous counter-representation.” He states that, “tales of whites killed by kanaima and the possibility that whites might be susceptible to the physical mutilations, though not the occult meanings, of kanaima attack are to the fore...but such threatening meanings are averted in colonial mentality by the reassuring suggestion that the ‘white man’ might act as a final court of appeal in the jungle justice of the blood feud.”<sup>91</sup> A blood-feud that Whitehead sees as deeply intertwined with modernity and development:

Kanaima practice itself has become closely attuned to the violence of the development frontier and thus symbolically, as well as materially, directly engages with this external discourse of savagery. Modernity, development and kanaima violence are all related in current Patamuna thinking. On the one hand they are keenly aware of the way in which development, both now and in the past, seems to have passed them by, eluded them and made necessary efforts to go and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 182.

‘fetch it up’ from Georgetown. On the other hand, and conscious of the power of anthropology as the arbiter of ‘culture’, the Patamuna are also keenly aware of the potential for a loss of tradition, a distinct way of ‘being Amerindian’, which, paradoxically perhaps, the ritual skills of the *kanaima* or *piya*—death or resurrection—best express. In the face of modernity *kanaima* becomes a potent symbol of continuity with the past.<sup>92</sup>

Michael Taussig states that wildness “also raises the specter of the death of the symbolic function itself,” that it is “the spirit of the unknown and the disorderly, loose in the forest encircling the city and the sown land, disrupting the conventions upon which meaning and the shaping function of images rest.”<sup>93</sup> Taussig goes on to say that:

Wildness challenges the unity of the symbol, the transcendent totalization binding the image to that which it represents. Wildness pries open this unity and in its place creates slippage and a grinding articulation between signifier and signified. Wildness makes of these connections spaces of darkness and light in which objects stare out in their mottled nakedness while signifiers float by. Wildness is the death space of signification.<sup>94</sup>

The wildness associated with *kanaima* by the colonial state, its terror and power, seemed to be utilized towards the maintenance of order and control, for as Taussig observes, “...wildness is incessantly recruited by the needs of order...if it is not credited with its own force, reality, and autonomy, then it cannot function as a handmaiden to order.”<sup>95</sup> Taussig finishes by saying, “these creatures of the wild not only bear the burden of society’s antiself, they also absorb with their wet, shaggy coats the best that binary opposition can deliver—order and chaos, civilized and barbaric, Christian and pagan, and emerge on the side of the grotesque and the destructive.”<sup>96</sup>

By examining how *piya*, *aleluya*, *taleng*, and Christianity are situated vis a vis *kanaima* we learn that *taleng* can be used by non-*kanaima* as protection from and retribution for *kanaima*. For the *piaiman* we see an ongoing cosmic war between two Patamuna ancestors—*Makunaima*

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>93</sup> Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 219.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

and *Piai'ma* enacted between piya and kanaima shamans. In this chapter we also see how the outsider, both the Pilgrim Holiness Church missionaries and Sarah are drawn into the cosmology of threat by the way in which the “Partamona trail” was snake-like and how the Patamuna described and genuinely feared kanaima as a contagious evil. For as Whitehead states, “in the imagination of terror and violence, there is no limitation on how far such discourses can travel, or at least on the mediums in which they are expressed.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, “Violence & the Cultural Order,” *Daedalus* winter (2007): 9.

## Chapter Three:

Journey to Kuyaliyeng.

### Meeting the *Tushau*:

Strathern & Stewart (2006) stated that terror is grounded in a “interlocking feedback between memory and anticipation,” that terror exists in the “intrusions” of our “expectations of security.”<sup>98</sup> The terror I felt my first night in Paramaktoi was made visible when I woke up the next morning still firmly grasping my machete and flashlight. I had clenched my flashlight so tight that the green paint on its handle stained my hand. Then, as I reached over to check what time it was I heard distant strains of the American song “Unbreak my Heart” by Toni Braxton. Gideon John (*tushau* of Paramakatoi) arrived soon after apologizing for not showing up to chat with me the night before as he had promised. “I was busy,” he said, and a wave of relief came over me. All of my fears and projections of offense and certain revenge that had stirred my thoughts throughout the previous night vanished. I was relieved that I had not offended him.

We sat down on the guest house deck and I parsed out my research plan to him. I told him how I was interested in helping preserve Patamuna tradition as much as I was interested in the jaguar, and Gideon John expressed agreement. I had found a shared perspective. He went on to say that the youth are leaving Paramakatoi for better opportunities in Georgetown. His primary worry was that Patamuna youth are growing up seeking identity and success and that there are no opportunities for them in Paramakatoi. And that once they move away they forget their language and history.

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<sup>98</sup> Strathern, Stewart, and Whitehead, *Terror and Violence*, 7.

As we ended our conversation I felt a wave of relief, trust, and gratitude toward Gideon John. I presented him with the machete that I had been clinging to so ferociously through the previous night of terror. He seemed thrilled.

### **Gift Exchange & Networking:**

Interviewing did not come without its difficulties. While I was interviewing a man named Walter and he was singing *alehuya* songs to me his grandson James stepped in and abruptly stopped us. James started speaking in Patamuna to Walter in a distressed manner. I knew what he was saying without having to know the language, his body language said enough. Andy Williams, my guide, confirmed what I thought he was saying through English translation. James said, “Why are you singing songs for the white man? He will just record them with his apparatus and go make millions. You should charge him for recording your songs.” I nodded and told them I understood and that I would be happy to pay Walter something in return for recording his *alehuya* songs. I paid him two thousand Guyanese dollars, which equates to about ten U.S. dollars. Having the money, everyone then seemed satisfied and allowed me to continue to record. This kind of monetary exchange happened on numerous occasions and I eventually grew frustrated by it. For at times, it seemed like no matter how much I gave, it was never enough.

For example; I brought with me two laptops and a printer/scanner combo to donate to the village council. In return for this, at the village council meeting, I asked for a free stay in the guest house. The council seemed very pleased by my donation of the computers, but Matheson Williams, my art program assistant, friend of George Simon and Whitehead, and member of the village council, still tried to have me pay for the guest house caretaker’s salary. He wanted to know who would pay his salary for maintaining the guest house. Luckily, Gideon John and



Jimmy James (vice *tushau*) stepped in and told Matheson that I've, "done so much when others have promised things and never came through." The council then agreed to let me stay in the guest house for free.

### **A Claim to Involvement in Derek Leung's Death:**

I had a number of conversations with interlocutors that dealt directly with subject matter from Whitehead's *Dark Shamans*. The first, rather strange encounter I had, was when I interviewed a man whom I will call "Carl" from Brazil who had flown into Paramakatoi for a few days and was staying at the guest house with me. Carl brought many boxes of perishable food and bottles of herbs and vitamins to give away to villagers. He received a lot of attention, free meals, and marijuana in return for his gift giving, which included free healing consultations, and chiropractic adjustments. The attention waned when he ran out of gifts.

Carl and I sat on the guest house deck one morning while it was raining and discussed his knowledge of shamanism, kanaima, and his confessed involvement in the death of bush pilot Derek Leung from *Dark Shamans* wherein Whitehead writes:

On top of this I was given a final 'sign' that the project, so precipitously begun in 1992, was probably at an end. Derek Leung—the bush-pilot without whom not only my fieldwork but more important the daily life of the people in Paramakatoi would have been infinitely more difficult, for want of emergency medical assistance and supplies of gasoline, tools, and the like—was killed. His plane lost instrumentation just outside Mahdia, his base of operations, and, according to air-traffic control, his last words were, in that inimitable terseness that was his hallmark, 'Ooooh fuck.'<sup>99</sup>

I did not introduce the topic of Derek and his untimely death, in fact, I had forgotten of Whitehead's account until Carl boasted of his supramundane powers and claimed that he had caused the death of Derek:

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<sup>99</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 35.

Yeah man, I have powers man...Derek Leung took over my mining claims and I cursed him. I got special forces. Told me I had a gift. But he cost me millions in mining claims, so I told that motherfucker...(Carl then turned and pointed his finger in my face and said) They'll find you with your plane in a tree with your neck broken. And that's exactly how they found him.

Whitehead's grief over Derek's death was, as I was told by his family, part of the reason he never returned to Paramakatoi. He and Derek were very good friends and I have heard many stories from the Whitehead family about how Derek did many good things for Amerindians. I was, and still am, quite troubled by Carl's testimony. I felt like my chance meeting of Carl in Paramakatoi had its own preternatural aspect, as though the meeting was fated so that I could put together the lost pieces of the mystery over Derek's death that Neil had wrestled so deeply with and never concluded. I was also angry because this boast was an act of impunity, making me feel the same suffering of Derek's death because I knew how Neil had suffered from it. This is a contagious form of terror and the pain of fulfilled violence. Carl was boasting about Derek's death in an effort to intimidate me and take away my power. In doing so, we learn how interpersonal struggle takes place as a performance of masculinity. Carl wanted to make me fearful of his supernatural power—to draw me in to a cosmology of threat wherein he was the master of violence and I a possible victim. By doing so, I then, like Derek, could become vulnerable to physical and or spiritual destruction if I ever crossed him. Before he left Paramakatoi he wanted me to give him my solar panel phone charger because he said he needed one during his trips into the hinterland, but I did not. In my refusal I thought about the terror of a violence in which the source is unspecified or operates in another dimension but is directed by a person who might have a grudge.

### **Terror in Kuyaliyeng & Surveying Villages and Places:**

Sherryann Balkaran invited me to sit down for a chat under her large cashew tree and after making formal introductions, I mentioned that I was one of Whitehead's students. I then

asked Sherryann if she had known Whitehead when he was in Paramakatoi conducting fieldwork in the 90s. She knew of him and remembered not only seeing him walking the *asandas*, but also the story of his sickness from “troubling” the pot in Kuyaliyeng Cave.

The subject of Kuyaliyeng (Macaw Cave) from *Dark Shamans* came up pretty fast after that. Sherryann first told me that the ritual vessel that Whitehead had touched was still there and intact. Naturally I was intrigued by this and asked more about what exactly happened to him. She called Kuyaliyeng a “sacred spot” and went on to tell me that her store was built on an old burial ground. She said she also found a similar pot with bones in it when digging in a latrine and that it had human femurs inside it. She said the pot was ornate with a snake design on the rim, just like the one in Kuyaliyeng. She said the one she found was stolen shortly after she found it and that the snake design goes back to Carib warfare.

Sherryann went on to tell me that, “there are spirits on my farm” and that there is “an angry spirit of a man in the guest house” (where I was staying). When I told her that I was interested in jaguars and jaguar stories, she told me that jaguars are dispersing around Paramakatoi to South Rupununi due to human activity. She would later call me the “jaguar man.” Her husband Steve came by and told me he saw a jaguar fishing once, that it jumped into the river and swam right by him, but luckily, he was standing on a rock and it left him alone. When we talked about jaguars, the subject of Kuyaliyeng came back up and Steve and Sherryann both asked me if I wanted to see the cave for myself. They were laughing and smiling and their invitation seemed earnest, so I agreed adding: that I would not touch anything, of course referring to the pot with bones and Whitehead’s “troubling” of it:

We learned that, at the head of the valley, there was a small cave, Kuyali’yen (Macaw Cave), in which an urn burial had recently been found. This was exactly the kind of information we had hoped to gather, and it immediately justified our decision to organize the research in a way that

directly involved the Patamuna... When I first saw the ‘burial’ I was disappointed as it was evident that the ‘burial’ vessel was very small, not nearly large enough to contain a complete human set of remains. It was accompanied by a small tuni (offering bowl). It had not been my intention to collect archaeological materials; we not only wished to be alert to Patamuna sensitivities about the handling of ancestral remains, but we were also in no position to carry heavy and fragile ceramics for the remaining six weeks. However, what happened next was to become, both in my mind and that of others, a defining moment: as the Patamuna with us would not ‘trouble’ the pot in any way, my Lokono companion moved the pot to the cave mouth where I could photograph it—and where I, too, without thinking, touched it.<sup>100</sup>

I let the Balkarans direct the conversation, so I could get a grand tour interview of what they wanted to talk about. As we continued to chat the Balkarans talked more about the spirits of dead people, but not kanaima, which is the first thing Whitehead said Patamuna talked to him about. The difference may be due to the Balkaran’s having more power in Paramakatoi (Sherryann is on the village council and their family owns two shops, including the one that coordinates the planes that fly in and out of the village four days a week) and not having to deal with the same level of kanaima terror that the Nurse and her family did:

Unknown to me at the moment the plane touched down, but soon apparent, the kanaima would come to dominate that trip’s research, as well as subsequent fieldwork in the region. Within thirty minutes of landing, we were visited by the Nurse from Paramakatoi, who politely listened to our plans, then launched into a startling account of what we ‘should really be investigating’—the kanaima, especially because of the interest (not all of it favorable) that earlier work of my Lokono companion had aroused.<sup>101</sup>

Sherryann told me that “Neil was haunted” after taking the bone from Kuyaliyeng. When we discussed his fieldwork and time in Paramakatoi, specifically in regard to “troubling” the ritual vessel in Kuyaliyeng cave, she told me that Whitehead “took, but did not steal.” She smiled and in the midst of our conversation called the pot in Kuyaliyeng “a demon pot” and said that “anytime outsiders go into the cave the spirits get angry.” That, “Whirling winds vex the spirits.” She still offered encouragement about going. She then laughed and continued to joke

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 18–19.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 12–13.

about me going to the cave. I in turn also laughed and joked and stated clearly again that I would go, but that I would not touch anything. Sherryann did not mention Whitehead's claim of being poisoned from his ethnography, and I felt it was better not to bring it up this early into my stay:

...the contents of the pot—it contained human skeletal and tissue material that appeared, and was later verified to be, very recent indeed, not at all archaeological...we nonetheless had given an archaeological commitment to the Walter Roth Museum, which we honored by measuring and photographing the pot and, unfortunately, by removing a sample of the bone material to determine its age. I say 'unfortunately' because this act, as far as can be said with certainty, may have been the immediate reason for an apparent attempt to poison me.<sup>102</sup>

Neil believed sullyng the pot had been the event that led to his illness. I was also told by interlocutors in Wisconsin that he had feared *kanaima* long after he left the field and feared that it was the cause of his cancer. This elucidates the ways in which we are never just outside observers, we are always entangled in ways that are not *outside* the societies we study, but subject to its meanings in ways that bleed into our own beliefs and understandings.

Sherryann inquired about the shirt I was wearing which said, "Gracie Jiu-Jitsu: Established in 1925," on it. I told her that I trained in Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, (a martial art that involves taking an attacker to the ground and applying various chokes and joint locks). I explained that I thought it was the best form of self-defense in the world. Sherryann immediately told me that she would be interested in learning Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, and I told her that she should because women in the United States practice it—that it was not just a martial art for men.

At that moment,

Andy Williams arrived and stepped through the door having overheard our discussion. He said he too wanted to learn Gracie Jiu-Jitsu. I repeated my claim, that it was the best form of self-defense in the world and that I trained in it back in Wisconsin. Andy reiterated that he

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

wanted to learn it and asked if I would teach him. Nonchalantly, I agreed, thinking nothing would come of it. He responded by promising me that he would pick me up at the guest house to take me wherever I wanted on the village ATV (all-terrain vehicle), which he is allowed to use and maintain on behalf of the village. I learned later that Gideon John had told Andy that he should take me wherever I wanted to go over the course of my stay. Andy casually mentioned the machete I had gifted to Gideon John, (it seemed this was reciprocation for that gift) and Andy asked if I had anymore machetes like the one I gave the *tushau*. When I said I didn't, he asked if I could bring one for him the next time I came to Paramakatoi. I told him I could bring one another time. He seemed pleased.

At the appointed hour, the next day, Andy picked me up driving me to a few different places that he thought were significant. Instead of asking me where I wanted to go, he made suggestions and said, "let's go." I sat on the back of the ATV and held on as we climbed over steep hills, dirt trails, through mud, and over large rocks. It was a rough ride. Andy is known in the region for his ATV driving skills, which is why the village lets him keep the bike. He also maintains it by ordering parts in from Georgetown with his own money. Andy took me to a place called the Rockies, a small village called Bamboo Creek, and past a large *tepu*i (granite uplift) he called Dragon Mountain. Dragon Mountain, was the only thing he had anything to comment upon explaining that a dragon once flew off the top of the mountain and that it still lives in a cave somewhere, but had not been seen for many years. The Patamuna notion of a dragon, is that of a large-snake creature. A small village named *Ourubeeru*, just outside of Paramakatoi, translates to "dragon." The *Ourubeeru* (Dragon) cave is situated on the side of the *Ourubeeru* stream in the dense jungle outside of the small village of *Ourubeeru*. It takes just over an hour to reach this cave from *Ourubeeru* on foot, which is the only way to reach it

because the ATV trails do not lead to it. This particular site, Andy explained, used to be the home of a large dragon, owned by a *piya*, and killed by the Caribs many years ago. It is believed that the Caribs built a large scaffolding to slay this snake-like creature. I was told by villagers of *Ourubeeru* that the Caribs are the only people capable enough to kill the *Ourubeeru*. And it is now believed that a large *kalosoimu*’ or *kumudi*, (anaconda) inhabits the cave today.

We did not have much conversation because of the roaring engine, but during my first month in Paramakatoi Andy and I quickly forged, what I thought was and seemed like a genuine friendship. Whereas most of my friendships in Paramakatoi seemed always circumscribed by how much money and gifts I had plied with them. The more I gave, the more interlocutors would tell me or show me. On numerous occasions Patamuna would arrive at the guest house unannounced and attempt to sell me art, pottery, food, and precious stones—some of which I bought for gifts for my wife and sons. These transactions would lead to more interviews and friendships within the community.

**More Encouragement to see Kuyaliyeng:**

When I first met Nurse Saigo I told her that I was Whitehead’s student and that he had passed away in 2012. She was not aware of his death and seemed struck by it. She immediately invited me in for a chat based on my affiliation with Whitehead. We conversed about Whitehead briefly, and when the topic of Kuyaliyeng came up she reiterated what Sherryann had said, that he was “haunted” by “troubling” the pot. She did not mention *kanaima* to me, which she had so emphatically brought up to Whitehead upon his arrival. According to Whitehead, Nurse Saigo had been adamant about having him research *kanaima* in 1992. Whitehead believed that this was partly due to her husband, whom I would later meet, having been attacked:

The victims also bear the constant stress of being aware that the kanaimas ‘know’ them and will revisit them with fatal consequences. (This is currently the case with the Nurse’s husband, which may well have been part of her motivation for speaking out.)<sup>103</sup>

I asked Nurse Saigo about the churches in Paramakatoi and she said that she goes to the Church of Christ, just down the hill. She immediately invited me to attend a church service and said that it would be great if I did. I told her that I would. Like Sherryann, she also joked and laughed about me seeing Kuyaliyeng Cave, to which I repeated—that I would go, but that I would not touch anything. Nurse Saigo also told me that Whitehead “had nightmares that scared him,” that “he fell out of his hammock in fear one night,” and that “he saw people that were not there” after “touching them bones.” George Simon also repeated the story that Whitehead had seen people that were not there after troubling the pot in Kuyaliyeng. As I felt my own dread well up inside me, I began to understand how the terror of kanaima might have produced doubt in Whitehead and how he had come to fear that his cancer and looming death was due to his transgression of Patamuna boundaries and retribution for that transgression by kanaima.

### **Reflecting back on Whitehead’s Journey to Kuyaliyeng:**

Whitehead departed for Kuyaliyeng early in the morning. He walked from Paramakatoi down into the Yawong Valley, which I can attest is an arduous trip. I walked this road once and hiking the mountain was physically and mentally demoralizing. Whitehead described his journey as such:

We were due to leave Paramakatoi early the day after next in order to keep to our itinerary, and though I made copious notes of that first conversation, I did not yet seriously entertain deviating from our original plan. So we walked from Paramakatoi, which is on a small savanna at the top of a mountain at the end of the Yawong River valley, down into the valley to search for our chief Patamuna collaborator, whom I call ‘Waiking.’ It was on this day that archaeology and kanaima came together in a startling way. We learned that, at the head of the valley, there was a small cave, Kuyali’yen (Macaw Cave), in which an urn burial had recently been found. This was exactly the kind of information we had hoped to gather, and it immediately justified our decision

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 93.



to organize the research in a way that directly involved Patamuna. To have uncovered this site through physical survey would have been much more time-consuming and uncertain. We decided to visit the site immediately so that we could walk out of the valley, as planned, the following day.<sup>104</sup>

Whitehead went on to describe his interaction with the ritual vessel inside of the cave, specifically moving it to the cave mouth to photograph and collect a sample of bone to have analyzed back at University of Wisconsin-Madison. Whitehead then parsed out what happened on the way back from Kuyaliyeng:

On our way back from the cave, my Patamuna companions suggested that this was something ‘kanaima’ and that we should return via the *benab* of an individual whom I will call ‘Pirai.’ At that moment, I presumed that this was because Pirai was living closest to the cave, but it transpired that he had a much more substantive connection with the vessel. I could not follow the initial part of the conversation with Pirai on arriving at his *benab*, but it was obvious that he was very excited and upset about something, and the word *kanaima* occurred a number of times. We climbed back up the bump to Paramakatoi to find that news of the ‘discovery’ was already in the village and that, in the opinion of those villagers who spoke to me about it, it was an excellent development and should enable the museum ‘to let everyone know the truth of those *kanaimas*.’<sup>105</sup>

After returning to Paramakatoi, later in the evening, Whitehead describes his possible poisoning:

We were lodged at the boarding school for the duration of our visit, since it was still the Christmas vacation and the children had returned to their home villages. We also had use of the refectory, and while we were starting to prepare some food that evening, a Makushi woman came in and offered to cook for us. As she did so she started to talk animatedly about *kanaima*, although we had not raised the topic, but neither of us spoke Makushi and her English was fragmented. I must confess that I had had quite enough of the topic for one day and was more concerned with how I was going to physically meet the challenges of six weeks of hard trekking. I knew that, among other things, eating properly was a basic rule, and I wished that she would simply serve up the rations that we had given her to prepare. The food was execrable. Although it was simply rice and a few dried shrimp, she had managed to make it taste absolutely horrible...I have no proof otherwise and make no accusations, but I started feeling extremely ill within a few minutes of finishing that meal, and the symptoms got steadily and acutely worse during the next few days.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

It would not be until he was dangerously ill that his companions would suggest that he was poisoned for troubling the ritual vessel in Kuyaliyeng:

Thinking that my illness was a reaction to some form of food poisoning, I ignored my physical state as well as I could. However, in the general conversation we had while redistributing our loads at Waiking's house, the matter of my 'illness' came up, as the droghers (carriers) were concerned about taking me into the bush while in such a condition. When I jokingly blamed the poor culinary arts of the Makushi woman, someone, I don't recall whom, remarked that to have let her cook for us was 'a stupid thing to do, boy. Don't you know she lives by Pirai?' Of course we hadn't known, but with that strange luminosity that comes with feverish thought, I suddenly appreciated that what was being suggested was not poisoning by my food but of my food.<sup>107</sup>

Whitehead's condition continued to worsen, to the point where he had to be flown to Georgetown to seek medical attention. Whitehead stated vis a vis his suspected poisoning that, "The pervasive nature of kaniama as a cultural discourse and the manner in which I had entered into it—by inviting enmity as a result of 'troubling' the vessel in Kuyali'yen—entailed certain consequences that were beyond my control." He finished by saying that once in Georgetown he, "became alarmed again when I started urinating blood" and that it was suggested that he "fight 'fire with fire' by consulting someone on the Berbice who had knowledge of bush-medicine," which he did and whatever he was given stopped the passing of blood.<sup>108</sup>

I was on the verge of repeating Whitehead's visit to Kuyaliyeng and the parallels were disconcerting. I, like Whitehead, was being encouraged to go to Kuyaliyeng, albeit for different reasons—he was told there was archaeological evidence to survey and I was told I should go so that I could see the cave my mentor had visited before becoming ill after "troubling" a kanaima vessel, a vessel I was told is still in tact and still has human remains in it. To encourage me to

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

see it seemed like an invitation and a test, a test that if I were to fail could lead to similar consequences.

### **My journey to Kuyaliyeng:**

Andy Williams, Roger Alfred, Tarrío, and I set off for Kuyaliyeng days into my stay in Paramakatoi. Roger Alfred explained how he “carried” Whitehead to Kuyaliyeng in 1992 and then to Turuka on horseback after he became ill. Roger who goes by the nickname “Curly” for his curly black hair, accompanied us because he was the only one, Andy claimed, who knew how to get there. We pulled up at Roger’s *benab* early in the morning. Tarrío is well known in Paramakatoi for being a great “bushman” and he was thought important to join the party in case we encountered any trouble along the way. We all got along from the get go. We joked and laughed as we rode on the back of the ATV (which fits up to four people). We trudged up and down rocky mud-covered cliffs and through thick jungle trails. The subject soon turned to Whitehead when Roger said, “Neil was warned not to bother the bones and pot, but he did not listen in the name of research.” Roger repeated Sherryann’s claim and what seemed to be generally accepted belief that Whitehead was made sick by “troubling” the bones and not by being poisoned.

Clouds were hanging low on the horizon, a sign that it would soon rain. An ominous feeling descended on our exploration party. It took about forty-five minutes by ATV to reach Persaud Jonas’ daughter’s *benab*, which is situated about a half hour’s hike from Kuyaliyeng. Persaud’s daughter, Lauri, and her sister Enid were grating and cooking cassava when we arrived at their *benab*. Roger, Andy, and Tarrío referred to them as “the cave girls.” They made jokes about who was going to court them. We parked the ATV and were invited to drink some cassiri, which is customary throughout Amerindian villages in Guyana. While imbibing cassiri the cave

girls joked with Andy about us paying them to see the cave. They brought this up to me and at first, I laughed it off and said that “Andy would take care of it.” On the return trip Andy took me aside and suggested that I do really give the cave girls something in return for allowing us to see the cave. I agreed and paid them one thousand Guyanese dollars, (five U.S. dollars). I paid them for fear that if I did not I would create enemies. I was greasing the wheels of sociality, not because I wanted to, but in this instance because I felt obligated. In return Lauri gave me some cassava bread to take home, which I shared with Roger, Andy, and Tarrío.

We finished our cassiri, thanked the girls, and then started our hike to the cave. We hiked single file up *asandas* and through the bush in thick steep mountainous jungle to get to the cave entrance. This took over a half an hour. Andy made jokes about how slow I walked, and how I was out of breath. We descended into Kuyaliyeng through a small opening in the rocks which I recorded on video. Once inside, the cave opened up to over twenty feet in height. There were large stones inside. We crawled over and under rocks and came upon a large rock with only a small space under it, barely big enough to fit my body through. From there Roger said we would only have to climb up to see the pot with human remains inside. At this juncture I decided it was best that we stopped our journey. It was too dangerous to climb under the small passage in the rocks and I made jokes about not wanting to become a “permanent resident in the cave.” We all laughed and agreed that it was not worth the risk. Instead, we took an hour break inside the cave and listened as Roger told the story of the *yamata* (jaguar skin coat). (Later, Roger painted the story for me as part of the “Luring the Jaguar” art program, which I will discuss in a later chapter). While I never saw the pot in situ, I did however, retrieve updated (2017) images of the pot with human remains from Kuyaliyeng from a young man in Paramakatoi who went to the cave as part of a school trip. This secondary school field trip included a group of Paramakatoi

students lead by Paramakatoi school teachers. The young man named Marlon, from whom I got the images, was a secondary school teacher from Georgetown. Apparently, he has not been troubled by the spirits of the cave for having photographed the pot.

(Below: The ritual vessel and *tumi* offering bowl in Kuyaliyeng 2017.)



## **Chapter Four:**

Luring the Jaguar.

### **Gracie Jiu-Jitsu:**

I was hesitant to agree to teach Andy Williams Gracie Jiu-Jitsu because one has to be a certified instructor in order to do so (which I am not). I simply train at a CTC or certified training center. Renner Gracie, son of Rorion Gracie, who founded the Ultimate Fighting Championship or UFC, said that, “Gracie Jiu-Jitsu is for everyone” and that “everyone in the world needs to know Gracie Jiu-Jitsu.” I teach my own children, so I reasoned that teaching the Patamuna techniques from the beginner Combatives program would be both ok and a great opportunity for me to develop relationships and give back to the Paramakatoi community.<sup>109</sup>

When Andy told me that he wanted to learn Gracie Jiu-Jitsu to protect himself from kanaima, I was intrigued. Why did Andy think that Gracie Jiu-Jitsu could protect him from kanaima? Other young men also seemed to feel the way Andy did and I found that Gracie Jiu-Jitsu was perceived to be a new repertoire of power from which Patamuna could draw from in order to augment and perform individual power and masculinity within the Paramakatoi community.

### **Teaching Gracie Jiu-Jitsu:**

Andy Williams and I were discussing kanaima at the guest house when he interjected, “I want to train Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, so I can protect myself from kanaima.” He said he knew of other

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<sup>109</sup> All of the techniques from the Combatives program can be purchased online at [www.gracieuniversity.com](http://www.gracieuniversity.com) and are available to the public. I did not receive any payment for teaching, it was free and done in a safe and strictly monitored environment. I acknowledge and distinguish between Gracie Jiu-Jitsu and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. I use the former as opposed to the latter in this thesis to recognize the origination of what has become widely known as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu throughout the world. I also use Gracie Jiu-Jitsu because this is the form of jiu-jitsu that I myself train in under the Helio, Rorion, Renner and Ryron Gracie lineage based in Torrance California.

people who were interested in training as well. Unbeknownst to me, he had been discussing this with many of the young men in Paramakatoi. Andy asked me when we would start training, to which I replied, "I don't know, how about next week." He seemed pleased and I then asked him how many people he thought would want to train. He said around ten, all of which were young men in their 20's. He then asked where we would train, and I recommended right on the guest house deck. The deck is concrete, but it was the cleanest and safest place to train (no biting insects or dirt). As long as I structured the class to avoid any techniques that might cause injury from hard concrete, I knew it would be sufficient.

On the first day of training only Andy showed up. We went over two techniques and ended class, which lasted just over half an hour. Andy was hooked from day one. He then told me that more people would show up at the next class. He was right, at the next class over twelve young men from Paramakatoi attended, all of whom seemed eager to participate. One young man named Jacob, had watched the UFC on television, so he was particularly excited to learn. He was one of two young men who showed up to almost every class. After the second class, Andy thought it was best that we have one class per day, five days a week, to take full advantage of training while I was in Paramakatoi.

Over the two months I spent in Paramakatoi I taught twenty villagers Gracie Jiu-Jitsu. Nineteen men, and one young woman (a sister of one of the young men who attended class). She became interested in Gracie Jiu-Jitsu because her brother was interested in it. The class was open to all genders, ages, and people, but primarily only men, ages 13 to 25 attended.

### **How Young Men are Finding Ways to get Power:**

As the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu classes progressed I asked the young men about the graffiti I had seen at Kuyaliyeng Cave and throughout the Yawong Valley. What I began to understand was

that the young men of Paramakatoi are finding new ways to attain power and status within the community. Here I recall Gideon John's concern for the youth moving away to find new opportunities in Georgetown. The graffiti, which is done particularly by young men, as well as the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu class I offered seemed to be two ways in which the struggled for power is elucidated as fraught and ongoing for young men in Paramakatoi. For when I asked the young men to fill out a survey of why they wanted to train Gracie Jiu-Jitsu they said, "Protection from people. Self Defense, knowledge of. Protection from harm. Self-defense and want to be famous. Protect from harm."

As classes went on the young men would increasingly make subtle jokes about kanaima and how Gracie Jiu-Jitsu would also aid them against bullies, who many times were older kin. I was told by Sherryann that a Karate instructor had visited Paramakatoi and taught some of the Patamuna kicking and punching techniques years ago.

At the very last class Jacob tested me. Jacob wanted to train Gracie Jiu-Jitsu because his brother bullies him. This young man was one of the few that showed up to almost every class during the two months I spent in Paramakatoi. At the end of my stay he took an active role in helping me demonstrate techniques during class. But, during the last class he started to publicly challenge me, testing me to see what I would do if an opponent did "this or that" from various positions. I put him in his place. The rest of the class watched and then laughed after he gave up testing me and my power. I also kept it playful and friendly, so Jacob was not upset with me, but the message not to test me or my power was firmly conveyed.

This was not the only time I was publicly challenged while teaching the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu class. The second time was much more intense and involved a Kato police officer who was staying in the guest house. The Kato police officer challenged me while I was teaching a



technique called punch block stage one. This technique utilizes the guard position and keeps the attacker close so that they cannot punch you while you are on the bottom of the fight. The officer, who was black Guyanese from the coast, was in his mid-twenties and I had witnessed him on multiple occasions doing pushups on the patio when Patamuna women were around—(explicitly performing his masculinity). I tried to avoid this officer, who was armed with a pistol, because at night he would get intoxicated and belligerent. My Patamuna friends also warned me to stay away from the police when they came from Kato because they believe them to be corrupt and only interested in arresting Patamuna for minor criminal offenses, which as one man told me, he served seven years in jail for owning an illegal shotgun.

As I was teaching punch block stage one, this officer stepped out onto the patio and said he had trained “jiu-jitsu” before and that I should try that technique on him. I knew this was a “lose lose” situation. I had two choices—either he would win and make me tap (give up in submission), or vice versa. With him being a police officer and openly carrying a gun, I knew winning would be a very bad idea. And as I was told by villagers, “the police can do whatever they want.” The situation was intense, but I accommodated his challenge. I wrapped him up into punch block stage one and knew immediately as he tried to get out that he had never trained Gracie Jiu-Jitsu before. Although I was relieved, the officer started to get mad and more aggressive in his escape attempt. In an attempt to perform his power and masculinity, he was now being humiliated, and no matter what I knew I now had two choices as he begun to drive his forearm into my throat with increasing pressure—1) I could either push his arm out of the way and choke him unconscious with a head and arm choke or 2) de-escalate the situation some how. I chose the latter. I released my grip and with good humored non-chalence said, “it’s all good,” and smiled reminding him that “this is not a real fight.”

I later interviewed the police officer, after giving him a peace offering of food, and he expressed his outright dislike of the Patamuna learning Gracie Jiu-Jitsu. He claimed they would use it in “lawlessness,” but my suspicion is, that he was worried that they would use it against Kato police officers. Needless to say, when the Guyanese military arrived in Paramakatoi during my second stay in September, I quickly recalled my experience with the Kato police officer and stayed the heck away from them as they patrolled the dirt roads with their automatic weapons.

These two challenge matches reveal how power is always being vied for by young men in Paramakatoi. At first the young men wanted to gain power from learning Gracie Jiu-Jitsu to protect themselves from *kanaima*, but when Jacob felt he had mastered the techniques he then wanted to test my power as a means to usurp it and gain higher status amongst his friends. The officer also wanted to demonstrate his power in front of the young men thinking that by defeating me it would augment his own power in the community (and the power of the state at large).<sup>110</sup> When the Kato police officer’s attempt backfired and suddenly his own masculinity and power was at risk of being taken in front of the young men he so direly wanted to impress, the technique itself was treated as a threat to law and order.

(Below: Gracie Jiu-Jitsu at the Paramakatoi guest house 2017. Photo taken by author.)



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<sup>110</sup> Wherein the control and submission of bodies augments the power of the state. See Foucault *Discipline and Punish*.

## The Art Program:

About six villagers showed up on the first day of the “Luring the Jaguar” art program. At the first meeting the artists all chose colors from the supplies I brought, they took paper and brushes and markers and pooled some ideas about what they wanted to paint in terms of jaguar stories. Matheson Williams, former *tushau* of Paramakatoi and known artist within the community aided me in organizing it. Matheson wanted to create a painting that represented his uncle’s death at nine years old by a jaguar. Clarence Alfred, a local pastor for the Church of Christ, wanted to paint his story of fighting off a jaguar in the bush, but had no art experience so he asked for my guidance as he told me his story:

From the time I spent, years and years, I never realized, I would be somebody like this...the Lord with me, God protected me, it was me alone, I myself, I couldn’t conquer this beast because it was so huge. I was nothing, I am nothing, the beast was good size. God had a plan, I believe in God, almighty God, and he had a plan for me. From that time till now, I am the shepherd for his flock. I never knew that this was God’s plan. To dwell in the jungle it is not safe, like when you are dwelling in the cities, it is dangerous, you expect something else will attack you. I was nobody, but he chose me to be somebody, to run his flock.

I was telling my people, I was nobody, I was a sinner, and when you mention anything what you think about wickedness, I did it, but God still didn’t kill me because of the same mistake I made, I will encourage others. When David was a shepherd boy, when the lion and bear attack his father’s sheep, he run behind him, when lion turn around and grab him and smite him, that is what scripture said, I said ok, it’s something like that. But God protects, he protects from all danger, he protects you too, he destroy, but we just don’t realize we are important until God, me, I am telling you, I was important in front of almighty God and when the tiger attacked me, this was the jungle, three nights he disturb me, growling up on the mountainside.

I never really expect this would happen to me, to meet the tiger in the bush. I was all alone. The tiger smiling at me, wagging his tail and licking his mouth. I said I am man, you are beast, one of us got dead. I am me, but I am telling you, not a drip of blood, I say you will lick your dry mouth. I build up my mind to face the beast. This is not play, there was nobody to defend me. I said move, move you bastard! I said that dry mouth never taste my drip of blood, see this blood it is very expensive blood. There was nobody to help me or defend me. The old people, tradition, and customary, say that any language you talk to tiger he understands. It could be Spanish, Portuguese, he understands. No joke you know, all of this argument, I use language to build me just like he. Mind conquer, that is why I’m telling you about King David, he conquer Goliath.

I said if you don’t move, I will move you from here. I pulled out my cutlass and whop whop whop, I just took my cutlass and sent it right around. He couldn’t touch me cause I chopping

with cutlass all the time. I said, I am man, he is beast. Anytime he charge, I charge him too, he run and run and run. If I gone too close he'd make a spring. I running, rushing, not giving him a chance to spring on me. He looking for a chance, but I running, running all the time. Chopping, just going through. I said go on you stupid beast, I am man, I tell you that dry mouth you can run with it. More than two hours, almost night, I didn't use the gun, I didn't have time to use the gun. Evening came, then I had the fear come into my mind. I like the young people know, they will learn from it.

(Below: Painting of Clarence fighting off the jaguar 2017. Photo by author.)



Roger Alfred, who drew many of the images for *Dark Shamans* wanted to paint the story of the *yamata* or jaguar skin coat (see Appendix). Natalis, a younger Patamuna man wanted to paint the underwater tiger. Bedford Sandwell did not mention what it was that he intended to paint, but I would later find out that I would be a central part of it.

Clarence also told me a story of his encounter with a *kanaima* in the bush:

I was hunting, I tied my hammock and heard strange whistling noises. I begin to feel strange, my head was swollen, my body go limp and boneless, but like when facing the tiger I became strong. I ready myself. I jumped down from my hammock with my gun and charged towards the whistling noise. I saw the bush move and the whistling was off into the distance.

A similar story of *kanaima* terror while hunting in the bush was told to me by Steve Balkaran:

Neil Bernard was hunting in the 1980s, he tied up his hammock and heard sticks snapping in the darkness. When he shown his torch on it, it stepped behind a tree. He knew it was a man, a *kanaima*, not an animal. So he waited. It kept coming and coming, coming. This is down in the

valley behind PK towards Kato. It kept coming and took wide steps. When it got close he shown his light and shot his arrow. Hit it and it tumbled to the ground. He waited an hour before going down to check it out. When he did he only found blood. Nothing else. He thought in that hour that someone must have came and helped the kanaima away.

Going alone in the bush, as Steve emphasized, can have dire consequences, especially if one is having social conflict with a suspected kanaima:

Another boy named Martin, who lives just up there, got into it with King Kong and he said King Kong followed him everywhere. Then he wanted to visit his girlfriend who lives in the bush that way. He was told not to go alone, but he did anyway. He came back bruised, loose neck, bitten tongue. He died and King Kong was suspected, but can't prove it. He said he had nothing to do with it.

It was very difficult getting Patamuna to meet at specific times and dates because the Patamuna are quite busy on their farms. When I would try to arrange a meeting time only one or two artists would show up. To circumvent this, Matheson proposed that all the artists should take the art supplies home with them to do the paintings on their own time. I trusted Matheson's judgement. Before everyone left our first meeting I told them that they were free to come to me at the guest house at any time to get more supplies or to seek my advice. I also suggested that they traded paints with other of the artists if need be.

There were some Patamuna in Paramakatoi who were very skeptical of me, which, at times made fieldwork frustrating. It took weeks before I saw any progress in the art program. Brother John told me that the art program was "a waste of Patamuna time." He also suggested that I should pay villagers to take pictures. He thought I would get rich from selling them to western magazines. There were a few people who did not want to talk to me because they thought, "I was going to profit financially from their stories."

### **Jaguar Stories Lead to Kanaima Discourse:**

Andy Williams knew that I was interested in jaguar stories. He decided that I should talk to specific Patamuna in the community who he knew had jaguar stories. He said that he, "knew who I should talk to," so he "carried me" (took me) to a man named Grover's *benab* on the back

side of Paramakatoi towards the Yawong Valley. Grover was in his seventies, spoke Patamuna and broken English, so Andy translated. Grover's adult son Ben and young granddaughter were also present. I made formal introduction and Andy told Grover about my interest in the jaguar and jaguar stories. Grover invited me to sit down with him on a small wooden bench on the hill overlooking the Yawong Valley. As we spoke the young girl examined the tattoos on my arm. I asked about jaguars and to my surprise *kanaima* came up.

I responded by asking what *kanaima* is. Grover told me in Patamuna that a *kanaima* is a, "warrior, killer," and that "too much *bina* can make you *kanaima*." He said it is a "bad name," and that, "Region 7 still do *kanaima*." I then asked more directly about *binas*. Grover told me that you take a "*kosak* (palm leaf) rolled tight, put *bina* on it, and put it up through your nose and out your mouth." Grover went on to say that, "Then you pull it out and lash your body with the palm." Andy then chimed in and said *kanaima* are "ancient cave warriors." I thought this would be a good time to bring up Whitehead. I asked Grover if he knew him. He said yes, that he knew of Whitehead's journey to Kuyaliyeng and how he "troubled" the pot. He then told me that two people have died since Whitehead left from also troubling the pot—that they were both Amerindians. (It is interesting that non-Patamuna tend to be victims for troubling the pot.)

Then Ben said, "Kanaima is an ancient warrior practice to war with Makushi and Wapishana." In regard to *binas*, Ben said that, "You sting yourself with ants, it is a charm to hunt." But, "If you over *bina* yourself at home, you become *kanaima* and never come back. You are lost to the bush forever." Grover then told me the story of *binas* in Patamuna, Andy continued to translate:

The tiger would not allow man to hunt, so a man had to secretly use *binas* to become a better hunter. Young men had to kill tigers to prove themselves. To kill bigger and bigger tigers, they would use *binas* and hunt from high perches to kill bigger tigers.

I then asked if there had been any man-eating jaguars to which Grover responded, “There have been many man-eaters.” Ben then said, “I kill tigers because they eat men, so I eat tigers.” By eating the jaguar, who is conceptualized as a man-eater, Ben is then consuming the jaguar’s power, which suggests that power is something that can also be devoured.

### **Becoming Jaguars:**

When Roger Alfred told me about his painting he said that when a man wears the *yamata* (jaguar skin coat), he transforms into a jaguar (*weytupok*). Roger went on to say that:

Once a tiger, the man goes into the forest to hunt, whatever he kills he then will take back to his family. But, if a man kills a human being as a tiger and tastes his flesh, then the man is always a tiger. That’s why you always cut the head off a tiger, because you never know if it is man or tiger.

Permanent jaguar transformation due to the consumption of human flesh in Roger’s narrative is similar to the inherent power and danger of becoming a jaguar as seen in the story of the *yamata* parsed out to me by Clarence Alfred:

A man went hunting with his friend and was told to stay in one spot. He didn’t listen and went into the bush. He saw a big tiger, shot it with an arrow, but it got away. He came back to the spot where he was told to stay by his friend. Then his friend who told him to stay in one spot returned with a toothache. He opened his mouth and had a arrowhead spear point lodged in it. His friend realized that he was the tiger he had shot.

Jimmy James of Paramakatoi told me in regard to the jaguars that, “You don’t kill them, you harm them... They move away due to injury, they won’t come back. They are plenty, but we don’t trust them.” Jimmy’s distrust of the jaguar is not only because the jaguar is dangerous, but also because of its ambiguous identity. A jaguar, he said can be a *kanaima* or a sent to harm you by a *piya*.

The jaguar can be a man, a *kanaima*, or *kin*. The danger and power attained through jaguar transformation is also the reason jaguars are distrusted and subsequently beheaded. The jaguar is a proxy symbol for a person who would do harm to you in what Whitehead calls “a

predatory cosmos.” The relationship between the Patamuna and the jaguar is deeply intertwined with and exacerbated by kanaima terror and violence. The jaguar in Patamuna art reflects the ongoing tension and trepidation of kanaima.

### **My Interview with Nurse Saigo:**

My follow-up interview with Nurse Saigo further shows how kanaima is central to power relations in Patamuna culture. Herein she describes how suspected kanaima use boasting as a means to terrorize the community, enhance masculinity, and gain power. Below is a transcribed ten-minute excerpt from our longer conversation:

**TJ:** Ok, if you could please state your name and your former position in Paramakatoi:

**NS:** My name is Matilda Saigo Williams, nurse midwife, retired. Five years now, but I still do help at the health center when my service is needed.

**TJ:** Twenty Years ago, you did an interview with Dr. Neil L. Whitehead from University Wisconsin Madison, do you recall what you talked about with him?

**NS:** Yes I do, some of it.

**TJ:** Can you tell me a little bit about what you talked about with that interview with him?

**NS:** We talked about the kanaima and how other villages used to raid in other villages. We talked about tribal wars.

**TJ:** And since your interview with Dr. Whitehead, has kanaima still been an issue in Paramakatoi and to what extent?

**NS:** Yes, it has been an issue, but not to the extent that they have gone to raid places. They are dealing mostly with individuals, not villages as such.

**TJ:** So this is a person seeking revenge on another person, something like that?

**NS:** Something like that, but really they don't have anything to revenge upon, but still come or go to these different villages and trouble people.

**TJ:** Just for the sake of?

**NS:** Just for the sake of troubling people, just for the sake of killing people, just for the enjoyment of killing people, I don't know what benefit they get out of this.

**TJ:** And, how many cases do you think happen here in Paramakatoi per year, of kanaima attack or death?



**NS:** Can we go to Bamboo Creek?

**TJ:** Sure.

**NS:** There have been two incidents from July to August with kanaima attacking people and they died.

**TJ:** Can you tell me a little bit about the victims without giving names, like were they men, women, children?

**NS:** There was an eleven-year-old girl in July. I was down at Bamboo Creek and went to prepare some farine and the afternoon I went, the afternoon after I got there, somebody come telling me Ms. Saigo, there's a death in the village. And we went to see the victim and that was it. And the other one happened just last Sunday. She died last Sunday.

**TJ:** Was that the Pastor's wife?

**NS:** Yes...kanaima. You see how people identify the victims of a kanaima is that they have fingerprints on them. Marks of fingers that have turned black and blue. For example; if they would have held the person by the shoulders you would see...they would of held them on the back and you would see fingerprints on the shoulders. If they would of held them on their seat you would see finger marks. They would have turned black and blue.

**TJ:** So the symptoms, essentially are still the same that you parsed out to Dr. Whitehead?

**NS:** Very much.

**TJ:** The bruises, the piercing with the fangs of the tongue and the anus attack? So these are the same symptoms you saw with the Pastor's wife?

**NS:** Very much the same...the little girl, apparently somebody held her mouth. There were fingerprint marks across her face and on her mouth.

**TJ:** Were there any other symptoms that suggest that it was kanaima attack?

**NS:** Yes, there were...well, when somebody dies, within a certain amount of hours, rigor mortis sets in right. But then even after all here is stiff with rigor mortis, the neck would twist. If it was not the neck that was affected it would be here that twist, it would be so limp.

**TJ:** Broken?

**NS:** It wouldn't be broken, but like it's dislocated or something. If it's the leg, the leg would be one side shaking and the other side stiff.

**TJ:** When was the last one you did examine that you can remember?

**NS:** Years ago, I can't quite remember when it was, but it was even before Dr. Whitehead was here. There was a child that died, a nine-year-old boy. He died at the health center, that's why I was able to examine the body. There was a protrusion of the anus that was not normal. Because when anybody dies you don't have a protrusion in the anus...but there was a protrusion in the anus and the anus was leaking a stained substance, not blood as such, but a blood stained something.

**TJ:** Now, I heard the case of a 40-year-old man who passed away here in Paramakatoi...the same symptoms were suggested to me...blood all over the backside of the trousers...can you confirm if that was true?

**NS:** I heard about that, but I didn't check. You see I'm no longer in the medical profession so.

**TJ:** Are there any active or known kanaimas in Paramakatoi without giving any names?

**NS:** Yes there are.

**TJ:** How many do you think there are?

**NS:** Paramakatoi proper, there are three and one at Bamboo Creek.

**TJ:** I've heard about (Name redacted), who lives up on the hill back there, how many people has he been suspected of having killed?

**NS:** I wouldn't be able to say how many, but any day, any time after the death of anybody in the village, he would boast around and say, you see, you said you were gonna kill kanaima, see you haven't killed kanaima, look what kanaima has done to your relative. You know, that kind of thing. And that is kind of a proof, that he's boasting. I can't really say how many, but quite a few people. My nephew was one of them. My nephew, he attacked, a thirteen-year-old boy...he died. He could not have survived, because there were fang marks just below his scapula...I saw the body. I examined the body. Apparently they had held him from the back, blocked his ears or something, held his ears or something, and you could have seen the marks of the fingers.

**TJ:** And why was he suspected?

**NS:** He was boasting.

**TJ:** So how come the police haven't dealt with him?

**NS:** I don't know. He has people in Georgetown, ah, If I may go so far. One of his sisters is the confidential secretary to the President. And she says that any time anybody reports him to the police just on suspects, she is gonna handle the situation. So nobody's really tried doing anything. And right now he's out of the country.

**TJ:** Is that because he is on the run?

**NS:** No, because of the same allegations his niece decided to carry him out for a while and then he's gonna come and do his damage.

**TJ:** Does he only do this to people in the village or does he do this to outsiders as well?

**NS:** Outsiders...

**TJ:** Like me?

**NS:** No, no no. He wouldn't try to attack you. (she giggles) He would go to Taruka or those other places, around.

**TJ:** I heard he's afraid of white folk, is that true?

**NS:** Yes, he is.

**TJ:** Why is that?

**NS:** He is just afraid, I don't know...he's just not going to trouble the white people. Neither the negros, I mean the coastlanders. He wouldn't trouble them. It's probably too risky because it will end up in the hands of the police.

The notion of suspected kanaimas boasting about their deeds was also parsed out to me by Sherryann Balkaran who said:

King Kong will boast after someone dies. He will liken the victim to an animal and say things like, let's say a black man was killed, he would say, "I killed a black tiger," and give the animal the same attributes as the victim. Or if the victim was a big man, he would say, "I tied a up a big cow last night."

Whitehead saw this as a tactical use of metaphors in boasting about kanaima death:

Since most avowed killers admit to no specific killing and allusions to killing are often given metaphorically—as when it is said "we tied a cow" to mean "trussed up a victim"—it is perhaps unsurprising then, that Emewari was extremely difficult to interpret, speaking of certain events through allusions to individuals I could not identify and using words that were not of Patamuna origin.<sup>111</sup>

Yet, Whitehead also observed that self-identified kanaimas have a natural propensity to boast about their deeds:

...as with all other avowed killers I have encountered, Emewari had a marked tendency to boast about what he could achieve...the kanaima are often well-known individuals, and the kanaimas in particular may choose to openly brag of their deeds, or purported deeds.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 29.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–204.

## Conclusion

### Devouring the Anthropologist:

The art show, not the art program was a bust. While four of the Paramakatoi artists did bring me finished artwork, I ended up waiting on Roger and Matheson until my last day in Paramakatoi. No one showed up to see the artwork displayed at the guest house except Clarence. And not many Patamuna seemed interested in my art program except the artists themselves, who seemed to enjoy creating their paintings and telling their stories. I know Clarence did, he told me so. The most beautiful piece of art produced, in my opinion, was that by Bedford Sandwell. Bedford is a young Patamuna man and he created a beautiful image of a man being devoured by a jaguar. Bedford did not show me this piece until I was waiting for my plane back to Georgetown. I did not spend too much time examining the painting before he offered to sell it to me. Bedford's painting was my favorite piece from the art program, so I agreed to buy it and began to haggle on the price. At first Bedford wanted one hundred U.S. dollars for it, but after a little back and forth we settled on seventy-five. He seemed quite happy and I folded up the painting and put it in my luggage before boarding the plane. It was not until I arrived home back in the United States, that I fully realized the importance of the piece. As I hung the painting in my dining room I began to notice that the victim looked eerily similar to myself—white skin, a small beard, and had my same haircut—it was then that I realized that the jaguar in the painting was in all probability devouring the anthropologist. And in that “ah ha” moment I laughed when I thought about how I had paid seventy-five dollars for an elaborate depiction of my own demise. However, when I read the story he wrote about the painting, I am still not quite sure what to think:

Long time ago, in the ancient days there was the peoples who live in the thick tangled forests. Those people who live there, were the great hunters. In those days, there was plenty wild animals

and dangerous animals also, like jaguars, mountain lions, and river tigers. But one of the dangerous animal who live in the cave, near by their hunting line was Jaguar. It eat's the hunters when they go for hunt, where the hungry animal does stay, they never return back. However they didn't know that animal was there, it happened not every day but once a time, just like the picture that is showing behind. But there was a young man who never scared of anything just like me, he was the person who like to hunt. One morning he went and do hunting through the same line, that line carries a person towards the cave. While he was going through the line he heard the terrible noise in that cave, he didn't know. What was it. So he wasn't scared of it. He still stepped forward toward the cave. Suddenly it jumped from the cave and landed upon the old tree trunk that was close to that young man. Then he saw a huge colored jaguar nearby. There was no time for him to defend himself. But quickly he stepped back and shot it with his arrow. It was not time for he to die, it was the time for that animal. He didn't go more further, he went back and tell all the rest of the people, and jaguar was not there anymore and these people live long without harm by nothing. This is the end of my story. Bedford Sandwell.

Bedford's story is told as a myth, a totalizing cosmological folktale, and is an interesting key to Patamuna history, power, masculinity, terror, and violence. First, the beginning frames the historical narrative, "people who live in thick tangled forests" and who are great hunters who hunt dangerous animals. One in particular (the jaguar) always overcomes the hunter. The death of the hunters is periodic, and the picture portrays this periodic killing. Then, a young man (Bedford—the hero of this story and identified as the mythical hero from the past, who has no fear and is a great hunter) approaches the territory of the cave—the jaguar's killing field. He hears the jaguar and has no fear. Next, the jaguar leaps at him from out of the cave, there is a confrontation, and the hunter (Bedford), the hero, shoots the jaguar. The hero then returns to the village and tells the villaagers he has the killed the jaguar. "Bedford's" killing of the jaguar results in the people living without harm.

In this story the jaguar/kanaima/evil that threatens human beings is overcome. And the subtext also is that the outsider/anthropologist/victim is also overcome leaving the village in peace. This may be a very unconscious story of threat. The jaguar overcomes the hunter, but maybe the kanaima overcomes the anthropologist. Or, the hero overcomes the jaguar/kanaima and the village is at peace. Also notice the large stinging black ants in the bottom corner of the

painting—the *binas*. The main structure is the threat of evil. In one version the anthropologist is overcome by the jaguar/kanaima and in another version the jaguar/kanaima is overcome by the hero. Both are threats to the people of the forest in a cosmology of threat.

(Below: Bedford Sandwell’s painting of the man being devoured by a jaguar 2017. Photo by author.)



### **Amerindian Heritage Month:**

September is Amerindian heritage month in Guyana and many Amerindian villages throughout the country celebrate with a variety of festivities whose apogee is the Miss Indigenous Heritage pageant in Georgetown at the end of the month. At this pageant, each region of Guyana is represented by their “queen,” a young woman chosen by elders to represent their region and compete for the title of Miss Indigenous Heritage. Paramakatoi chose Sherryanna, the daughter of Sherryann and Steve Balkaran to represent Region 8 in 2017. Because I was in the village and had known artistic skills, I was asked by Sherryann to help in some of the preparation for this event, which included designing traditional garb for Sherryanna

to wear on stage. While using the WIFI at Sherryann's shop I was asked to help design a necklace for Sherryanna to wear on stage that represented both Orinduik and Kaitaur Falls. The original design for the necklace Sherryann showed me was from a photo on the internet. The photo was of a similar necklace that was worn by a native North American tribe. So, drawing on this design, I designed the necklace for Sherryanna to wear at the national competition.

Sherryanna Balkaran not only went on to win the contest, but also won the “best gown” and “traditional wear” prizes. The newspapers said that she had, “limited support from the audience,” and that “the now reigning queen confidently highlighted the common misconceptions about Guyana’s first people, who are falsely dubbed ‘stupid and uncivilised’ as she urged Indigenous persons to pursue advanced education to discredit the stereotype—while advocating for the preservation and maintenance of ancestral traditions.” (*Kaitaur News*, Sept 2017) In the Miss Indigenous Heritage pageant the ladies competed in four categories; the introduction, talent, evening gown and the intelligence segments. Sherryanna’s platform was “Targeting Deforestation as a means of Countering Climate Change.” She addressed her platform in the talent portion of the contest by performing a kanaima skit wherein she crept out onto the stage towards a lone man while making strange whistling noises, she then confronts him:

Who is this stranger in my forest that I see? Doesn't he know strangers are not to be lonely? For there are evil vices out there. I must tell this stranger that he ought to beware. Look at you all on your own, you shouldn't be alone. Ah! What is this? A bible and a knife? I know what you've come to do. You've come to take my jungle's life. Oh Kai-kusi, my dear sister the jungle, do you know who I am? You see this forest, you see how it's pristine? Well I am the protector of it. And they call me the kanaima...and for your vices you will pay...we kill this way. First, a paralyzing with a bina...Next, I'll injure his rib and make him feel sick...Next, I'll prick his tongue with a snake's fang...then I'll pull on his toe and the doomed man will go. Ha ha ha...oh the doomed man will go. Bruising, fever, sweat by the liters. And all the ailments that you'll feel and see, they'll know it was me. And no medicine man can cure my curse (she shakes her finger in the air at the audience) three days later he's put into the earth...I'll visit the grave in the midst of the night and I'll knock on the tomb with my bamboo. And I'll taste the succulent juices...I'll

even have a few. Don't you dare cross me! Don't you dare trouble my trees! Don't you dare come into my jungle and diminish my biodiversity. And if you need not heed this warning, and if you choose not to hear, I swear I'll be your worst nightmare, so you better, you better beware! (She sings out) You better beware!

Sherryanna said that during her two-year reign as queen she plans to merge with the Ministries as well as the NGOs including the Amerindian Peoples Association in relation to targeting deforestation. She said that climate change affects the entire world and that she hopes to include everyone she can in this project. Sherryanna is currently a first-year student at the University of Guyana pursuing a degree in law.

Sherryanna's tactical use of *kanaima* as the protector of the Pakaraima jungle demonstrates what Whitehead argued—that *kanaima* can function as an act of hyper-traditionality and as “a counter-discourse on modernity in which the promise of development is violently rejected in favour of a new kind of tradition.”<sup>113</sup>

...the source and even symbol of a potent indigenous society and culture that is capable of defending itself against the depredations of the outside world, be that a neighboring village or even the national state...whatever the tragedy, distress, and death that dark shamans and allied ritual specialists may perform on humanity, then, they are nonetheless an inevitable, continuing, and even necessary part of the cosmos.<sup>114</sup>

Similarly, at the launch of the heritage festival, a festival that the *Guyana Chronicle* said “seeks to foster entrepreneurship by providing vending opportunities for indigenous arts and craft, while promoting social cohesion between the indigenous communities and coastlanders,” (*Guyana Chronicle*, Sept 2017) the Rupertee Culture Dance Group of Region Nine performed two songs—The Five Plegs in North Rupununi and the *Kanaima Dance*. The Social Cohesion Minister, Dr. George Norton stated that he “was impressed with the dancers” and “pointed out that the festival was in keeping with the spirit of Indigenous Heritage Month.” (*Guyana*

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<sup>113</sup> Strathern, Stewart, and Whitehead, *Terror and Violence*, 186.

<sup>114</sup> Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, 204.



*Chronicle*, Sept 2017) I also learned that an Amerindian football team called the Georgetown Kanaimas also took part in the annual Indigenous Heritage Games at the Everest Ground in Georgetown. The kanaima concept continued to be stretched into different meanings throughout the month. Neil Primus published a kanaima story from Amerindian folklore in the *Guyana Chronicle*:

In a small remote settlement in the hinterland, a group was making ready to depart the village. It was comprised of seven young men in their early teens and three men of the village. They were on a learning expedition. The boys would be trained in the ways of the village.

The group moved away from the village and headed deep into the forest. They would be away for a few days. As they trekked along the men pointed out bushes, herbs and roots that were used for many different purposes. They fished for lunch then continued on. That night the trainees were allowed to make the fire and roast the catch; two labbas. After eating, they slept in hammocks tied to the nearby trees.

Next day, they set out early. The elders showed them many fruits and vines. They were also able to spot a few animals like anteaters, monkeys, sloths and accuri. Soon they were learning the different marks left by animals and how to track them. The most exciting were the prints of the solitary jaguar. It had passed that way the previous night. They picked up the tracks of a deer and followed it through the dense forest. As they proceeded they came upon a magnificent flatland with rich vegetation. Deer and other animals could be seen grazing in the distance.

The eager group tracked a number of animals including the labba, tapir, agoutie, and anteater. They ended the second day much like the first. The third morning they set off again. They focused on birds especially the powis and wild duck. They learned to set traps for most of the animals they would have to hunt. The next morning they began their return trip. On the way, they caught crabs and roasted them. They picked fruits and ate as they travelled.

One of the trainees at the front of the group motioned for them to stop. He pointed to the forest floor and the elder told them that it was the tracks of a large snake. The group buzzed with excitement. They all wanted to hunt the reptile. Each youth was armed with a knife, a bow and a quiver of arrows. Two of them had machetes. The elders had old shotguns. They set out in the pursuit of the snake. They followed the tracks for close to two hours sometimes losing it and having to backtrack to pick up its signs again.

The tracks led them to a bushy plain and they spread out sensing that they were closing in on the snake. The oldest trainer named Basil suggested that they break off the search and head back to the village. They ignored him and press on. Hsssss! One of the youths had come suddenly upon the creature. He sprang back barely avoiding a bite. "It's here!"

The group converged on the location. The snake slipped into the vegetation and disappeared. Now they would find out if their training was any good. They soon located its tracks and followed it. Each time they closed in the crafty snake slipped away. It was as if it was reading their minds.

“The next time we sight it, go softly. I will shoot it.” The trainer cocked his weapon and advanced, ready for action. The next sighting was different than the others. This time they tried to surround the animal teasing it mercilessly. “Let’s catch it!” “No! Let’s kill it!” CLICK! BANG!

The snake writhed and slithered swiftly away leaving a trail of blood. It had been wounded. They chased after it and eventually lost its track when the animal slithered into the river. Disappointed, they trudged back to the village each with an exciting story to tell. All, except one.

Basil, the quiet, elderly man walked back to his village with head hung low in thought. He seemed to have aged rapidly but he walked faster than them all. The group stopped to eat then continued their journey back to the little village. At the village, there was excitement and joy for the young men who were now considered adults. They would be joining future hunting parties.

The old man headed for his hut at the lower edge of the village. As he entered he gave an anguished cry. Loud sobbing could be heard coming from his hut. News of this got around and villagers arrived to attend to their friend. When they entered the small, dark dwelling, a great shock awaited them.

Lying next to his aged wife, the old man sobbed as he stroked her wet silver hair. There was one bizarre thing about this scene. The man’s wife lay dead in his arms. She had been shot in the head by a shotgun. When the full significance of this hit them, the villagers withdrew quietly. There would be quiet prayers that night in thanksgiving for the death of a Kanaima.

(*Guyana Chronicle*, Sept 24, 2017)



(The Balkaran Family after Sherryanna’s win at the Miss Indigenous Heritage Contest. Sherryanna is also wearing the necklace that I helped design depicting Orinduik and Kaitour Falls. Photo by Ministry of Amerindian Affairs 2017.)

### **Women Empowered by Binas:**

I spoke with Sherryann Balkaran one more time before I left Paramakatoi. We were discussing the jaguar when the use of *binas* came up. She told me how *binas* were not just for men, but how they also empower women. She said that she uses “stinging ants to reinvigorate her body,” and that she will “snort ginger to cure a headache.” Sherryann also told me that she will cut her shoulders and squeeze *binas* in it to make her strong. She said it is a secret ritual for young men and that her son Steven wanted to do it. She said all his friends have it and he wanted it done too. She told me how women *bina* themselves and so do children and how it empowers them. She told me women use *binas* for strength, agility, and to walk fast:

I was walking with my friend to another village, she stopped and said some words and blew on her walking stick (*taleng*) and we made it in two hours not four hours. *Binas* empower women. To do things like fetch cassava fast.

Sherryann also told me that women have been more successful than men in Paramakatoi, that she was voted for *tushau*, but didn't want the constraint of being tied down to just one village because she likes to work in many villages.

### **The Day I was Threatened by a Suspected Kanaima:**

Andy Williams carried me to a suspected kanaima's *benab* the day before I left Paramakatoi. A man whom I will call “Gary.” Our arrival was not planned, and Gary was not happy to see us. He refused to shake Andy's hand. Gary was very upset that Andy had brought me to visit him and told him so in Patamuna. Gary lives on the very outskirts of the village in a very run down *benab*. I heard from interlocutors that he was not only suspected of being a kanaima, but that he was very ill, which villagers suspected to be *sopaney* (madness). Gary was in his sixties and his brother, whom I know, was a former *tushau* of Paramakatoi. After hearing stories about him from interlocutors, I persuaded Andy to carry me to his *benab* for a chance at

an informal interview. Andy was unsure of this but agreed. When we arrived, Gary was sitting outside his *benab* chatting with two young Patamuna men who left very quickly after I made introduction. I did not recognize any of these young men.

Gary did not say much to me at first. He looked very sick. His eyes were red, and his arms were shaking. He seemed to be in a very weakened state. Andy attempted to explain to him why I was in Paramakatoi, but he was not interested in talking to Andy. I shook Gary's hand and pressed forward with an interview. I asked him how long he had lived in Paramakatoi and he said, "seven years." He was explicitly lying to me. I already knew that he had spent his entire life in Paramakatoi. I then asked if he had ever seen any jaguars or knew any jaguar stories to which he replied, "I don't know nothing about no jaguars." In frustration, I decided to stray from my usual interview tactics and breach the topic of kanaima with him directly. I told Gary that I was interested in Patamuna traditions like *taleng*, *alehuya*, and kanaima. He then excitedly responded by asking me, "Who told you about kanaima? I don't know nothing about no kanaima, who told you about kanaima?" He was quite upset. I told Gary that I was one of Neil Whitehead's students and that "you know, people talk." When I mentioned Whitehead, he settled down and smiled. He said, "I knew Whitehead, I used to *drogher* (carry gear) for him." Then, Gary wanted to shake my hand again. Although more responsive, Gary was still not interested in answering any of my questions, and still visibly perturbed, instead he started asking me questions. He asked where I was from and where I was staying and how long I was staying in Paramakatoi. Then, before we left, he looked me in the eyes and said, "I'll come see you later." Gary did not mean he was coming to visit me for the purposes of a follow up interview, he did not say this in a friendly tone, instead, I took it to mean he meant to explicitly threaten me. In response, I told him "I look forward to it." And we left.

## **The Nature of Terror: Theorizing Terror and the Kanaima**

Kanaima is an act of hyper-masculinity, used to foment fear, acquire fame and power, and its terror is a weapon of the weak used to destabilize power relations (for example, with the state and anthropologists). A kanaima not only terrorizes their victims prior to physical attack, but its terror affects the community at large.

Kanaima terror produced doubt and fear in Whitehead. Whitehead's death is perceived by the Patamuna to be retribution for his transgression of troubling the pot in Kuyaliyeng Cave. Kanaima terror shaped every facet of my fieldwork in Paramakatoi—from my preparation and entry into the field, to the kinds of data I collected and questions I asked. Kanaima was always on my mind.

Central to *Terror & Violence* edited by Andrew Strathern, Pamela J. Stewart, and Neil L. Whitehead was the notion that terror and the imagination are deeply intertwined. That terror is “in the mind and in the interaction between the mind and the world at large,” and “based on an interlocking feedback between memory and anticipation.”<sup>115</sup> For as Strathern observes, “the power of ideas regarding terror does not rest solely on the events of terrorist actions, destructive as these may be...it rests also on the great multiplications of reactions to these acts and the fears that these acts arouse in people's imaginations.”<sup>116</sup> Thus, the imagination is critical in the conceptualization of terror.

A poetics of violence is vital to understanding terror and violence. By examining how kanaima has been used as an expression of Patamuna identity (intimately connected to the jaguar and the wildness of the Pakaraimas), its link to Carib history (through ritual and violent death),

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<sup>115</sup> Strathern, Stewart, and Whitehead, *Terror and Violence*, 6–7.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

how it enhances masculinity, and is utilized in asymmetrical power relations between the Patamuna, the state, kin, and outsiders I was able to see how I, like Whitehead, was continually drawn in to the cosmology of kanaima threat. In the cosmology of threat, we also see that the victim is drawn close. When violence is intimate you can only effect such violence by a repertoire of these mental mind games that people seemed to do. Encouragement to see Kuyaliyeng cave, teaching Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, and even the art program were all part of the ways in which the Patamuna created and performed their identity. The control over bodies (alive and dead) imaginatively and physically produce political and individual power. The strange degree of mutilation done upon kanaima victims, as well as kanaima performances in front of the state during Amerindian Heritage Month become an imaginative theatre of terror that empowers the Patamuna and strikes fear into the heart of any would-be enemies.

Kanaima also helps the Patamuna identify with and lay claim to a particular land and space—the forest of the Pakaraimas. The concern for indigenous land rights is growing due to the expansion of industry and the encroachment of the state into indigenous affairs. As Sherryanna's platform and kanaima performance at the Miss Indigenous Heritage pageant demonstrated, kanaima can also be a means to terrorize those who seek to exploit both the Patamuna and their homeland. This is where the kanaima becomes the protector of the forest against logging corporations.

The depictions of violence in art create a similar imaginative space in which the contemplation of violence can take place and terror can continue to do its work. The depiction of the man (or anthropologist) killed, but not ripped apart by the jaguar/kanaima by Bedford Sandwell elucidates the extent to which terror can be reproduced by images of violent death (an image wherein I had to remain identifiable in order for its terror to do its work upon me). It is

not simply the image of death that is frightening it is the evocation of the ritual mythic narrative that is behind the picture. The hero (masculinity performance) ridding society of the outsider.

The image and threat of kanaima death is that which truly terrifies those who become part of its cosmology. Kanaima terror is a deep seeded fear capable of transcending the boundaries of the Pakaraimas. It can be equally felt in Georgetown or small-town Wisconsin United States. For as one interlocutor told me, “there is a real dangerous kanaima in the Amerindian hostel in Georgetown,” and “a kanaima like me would freeze in Wisconsin.” Veiled threats and violent images linger, grow, and stir in the dark depths of the imagination. Violence is profoundly infused within historically fixed modes of behavior and it is through kanaima that we can see this. Depictions of kanaima violence create a space in which the contemplation of its violence can take place, and this is how terror does its work.

Two weeks before Whitehead died I met him in his office. It was then that that I came to understand how terror does its work. Terror breaks through boundaries and makes visible how we become entangled in systems of meaning—how our objects of study always include us in unexpected ways that change us forever.

**TJ:** How taxing was your fieldwork on kanaima on you mentally?

**NLW:** Well I guess pretty devastating really. If I think about the most difficult things, I would say that was it. Extremely weary, and it doesn't stop when you leave. So, like I say, when you asked the question about would you do it all again, not if I had realized the way it always stays with you. And it's inescapable in some senses right. So, I'm still now, still, thinking about that...They put something in me and I've never been able to get it out. And I've had long conversations with people in Guyana about what to do. Well there's really nothing to be done. So, you know, some things are all to shit. You can't get back, so I can't get back ever, to who I was before that. (TLJ Interview; March, 2012)

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**Appendix:**

(Roger Alfred's "Yamata" painting. Photo by author 2017.)



(Paramakatoi art program. Photo by author 2017.)





(Photos of Gracie Jiu-Jitsu classes at the guest house in Paramakatoi. Punch block stage one 2017.)



(Paramakatoi welcome sign by airstrip. Photo by author 2017.)

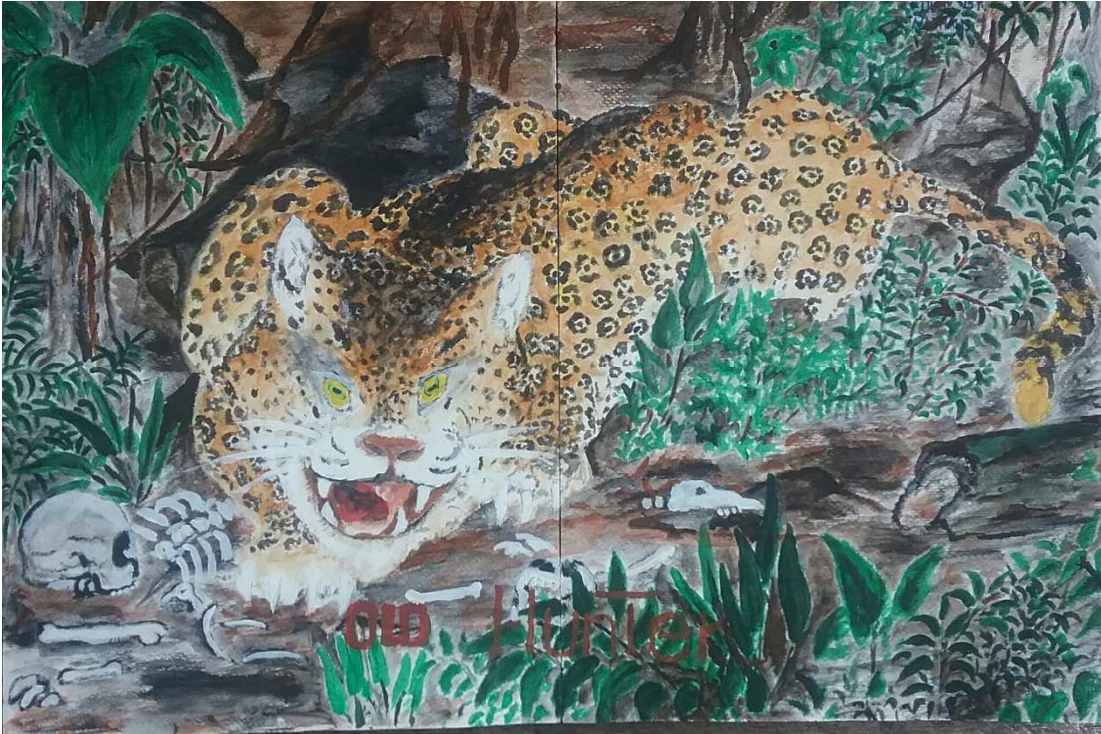




(Story of the tortoise and the jaguar painted by Sheila Waithe. Photo by author 2017.)

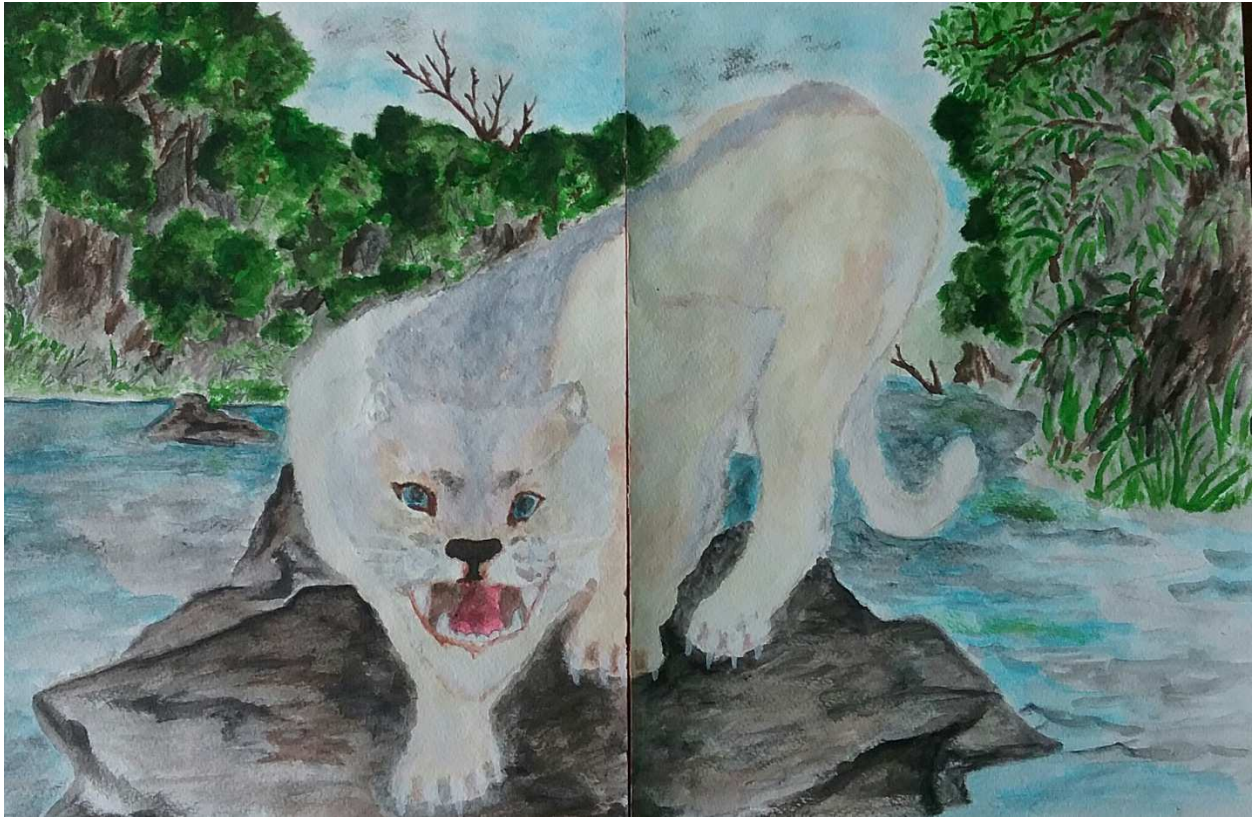


(The "Old Hunter" by Natalis. Photo by author 2017.)





(The “Underwater Jaguar” painted by Natalis. Photo by author 2017.)



(Paramakatoi Guyana 2017. Photo by author.)





(The Yawong Valley 2017. Overlooking the village of Mountainfoot. Photo by author.)



(Baking cassava bread at Persaud's daughter's benab by Kuyaliyeng Cave 2017. Photo by author.)





(View from atop Kuyaliyeng Cave 2017. Photo by author.)



(Sitting on top of Kuyaliyeng Cave with Andy and Roger 2017. Photo by author.)



(Photo of the guest house (turquoise building) on top the hill. Paramakatoi 2017. Photo by author.)

