# Exchange, caretaking, and being human: Shamanism and the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual among Wounaan in Panamá

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*Abstract:*

Ethnographic work on Wounaan, often erroneously grouped with Emberá, has had an emphasis on shamanism. Today Wounaan recognize the beseeching ritual to the creator, the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual, as their most culturally important. I combine indigenous studies and ontology literatures to argue for shamanic and *haaihí jëeu nʌm* rituals as requisite moral exchange among reality's human and non-human realms. Based on over twenty years of socio-environmental research with approvals from Wounaan authorities and communities, I use oral traditions and participant observation to explore both rituals. I show how the rituals are part of exchanges, enabling the caretaking of Wounaan, other beings, and their place. Skilled embodied care is critical for the rituals and emphasizes nurturing ancestors, people, spirits, and other non-human beings. I conclude with a prompt for Wounaan to explore the sociolinguistic complexity of their oral traditions and rituals to correct ontological simplifications.

*Keywords:* ritual; shamanism; caretaking; ontology.

## Intercambio, cuidado y ser humano: chamanismo y el ritual *haaihí jëeu nʌm* entre los wounaan de Panamá

*Resumen:*

El trabajo etnográfico sobre los wounaan, a menudo agrupados erróneamente con

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**2002 - Maach hap'ʌʌm Uribe Carpio Chamarra (q.e.p.d.), frente, tocando el hɨ̃rrdagsĩe en el ritual de haaihí jëeu nʌm, del Congreso Nacional del Pueblo Wounaan, Majé, Panamá**
*Julia Velásquez Runk con la autorización de publicar por la familia Carpio y el Wounaan Podpa Nʌm Pömaam (Congreso Nacional del Pueblo Wounaan)*

los emberá, ha puesto énfasis en el chamanismo. Hoy los wounaan consideran el ritual de suplicar al creador, *haaihí jëeu nʌm*, como el más importante. Combinando los estudios indígenas con la literatura sobre ontología sostengo que los rituales chamánicos y *haaihí jëeu nʌm* operan como un requisito del intercambio moral requerido entre los reinos de realidad humanos y no humanos. Basada en más de veinte años de investigación socioambiental con la aprobación de las autoridades y comunidades wounaan, utilizo las tradiciones orales y la observación participante. Muestro cómo los rituales son parte de intercambios que permiten cuidar el bienestar de los wounaan, otros seres y su entorno. El cuidado encarnado y experto es fundamental para los rituales y hace énfasis en nutrir a los antepasados, las personas, los espíritus y otros seres no humanos. Concluyo con un llamado a los wounaan para que exploren la complejidad sociolingüística de sus tradiciones orales y rituales con el fin de corregir las simplificaciones ontológicas.

*Palabras clave*: ritual, chamanismo, cuido, ontología.

## Troca, cuidado e ser humano: o xamanismo e o ritual *haaihí jëeu nʌm* entre os *wounaan* em Panamá

*Resumo:*

O trabalho etnográfico sobre os *wounaan*, ligados muitas vezes equivocadamente aos *emberá*, tem focalizado o xamanismo. Atualmente, os *wounaan* consideram que pedir ao criador: *haaihí jëeu nʌm*, é o ritual mais importante. Conforme os estudos indígenas e a literatura sobre ontologia, considero que os rituais xamânicos e *haaihí jëeu nʌm* operam como uma necessidade de intercâmbio moral demandado entre os reinos de realidade humana e não humana. Com base em vinte anos de pesquisa socioambiental e com consentimento das autoridades e comunidades *wounaan*, utilizo as tradições orais e a observação participante. Além disso, estabeleço como os rituais são uma parte das trocas que permitem cuidar o bem-estar dos *wounaan,* dos outros seres e de seu entorno. O cuidado encarnado e experiente é fundamental para os rituais e se dedica ao sustento dos ancestrais, as pessoas, os espíritos e outros seres não humanos. Finalmente, concluo com um convite aos *wounaan* a pesquisar a complexidade sociolinguística de suas tradições orais e de seus rituais, no intuito de retificar as simplificações ontológicas.

*Palavras-chave:* ritual, xamanismo, cuidado, ontologia.

## Introduction

When I first began to read anthropologists' accounts of Emberá and Wounaan peoples, shamanism was always prominent. From the early works of Swedish

ethnographer Erland Nordenskiöld (e.g., 1927) to Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff's lengthy articles (e.g., 1960) to Reina Torres de Araúz articles and books (e.g., 1962), to Michael Taussig's (1987) *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* to Martha Luz Machado Caicedo's (2011) book on shamanic staffs, not only is shamans' curing power central, but so was the alterity, the otherness, of shamanism. That focus on shamanism is easy to perpetuate: I did so, too, as shamanic rituals' 10-12 hours coalesced that difficult-for-outsiders-to-conceive reality into a discrete package (2017). Over the years, Wounaan colleagues and co-authors spoke openly and repeatedly about how this emphasis on shamanism in the ethnographic literature did not fully represent their reality.

Today's Wounaan instead name the ritual known as *haaihí jëeu nʌm*, petitioning, praying, or beseeching to the creator *Hẽwandam*, as that which is most foundational to their culture. I had been reluctant to write much about the ritual, as it had long been prohibited from outsider's viewing, and with Wounaan approvals I briefly overviewed it in *Crafting Wounaan Landscapes* (2017). I, too, perpetuated misunderstandings of the ritual's *k'ugwiu*, the ritual or «prayer» canoe, as it often is translated (frequently by missionaries), by combining Wounaan knowledge with previous ethnography. In the mid-2010s, as Wounaan began to allow outsiders, even briefly visiting journalists, to see and film *haaihí jëeu nʌm*, Wounaan colleagues Chindío Peña Ismare, Rito Ismare Peña, and Chenier Carpio Opua and I (2020) decided to write about the ritual. We understand the *k'ugwiu* as key to the communication between realms of reality via the creator *Hẽwandam*; a crucial part of the ritual's embodied auditory and aesthetic beauty to prevent calamity and to cure. The ritual canoe symbolizes communication, a role that canoes have in many indigenous cultures (e.g., Cole, 2002; Meide, 1995).

During various collaborative projects with Wounaan authorities, villagers, colleagues, and co-authors, addressed below, I have tried to understand how both rituals were critical to Wounaan lives and wellbeing with others, and yet only one, shamanism, was so disparaged. Clearly, missionization is part of this story: centuries of Christian teachings took a strong hold among Wounaan, initially in Colombia and then much more so in Panama, in the 20th century's last half. It is perhaps telling that The Bible in Wounaan meu uses *«Hẽwandam»* as a translation for «God» and *«Dösät»*, the trickster figure who showed Wounaan shamanism, as a translation for «Satan». In spite of that, Wounaan clearly hold syncretic beliefs: a number of times I saw friends who maligned shamanism go out of their way to seek a shaman when a family member became ill. Now, as a revise during the COVID-19 pandemic, friends and colleagues report on shamans treating patients in areas where none were thought left. I also was inspired by Nimachia Howe's (2019) detailed work on

the linguistic and cultural simplifications of Naapi trickster accounts written by and for non-Blackfoot audiences.

As that reading of Howe's work relays, I increasingly have been guided by the scholarship in Native American and indigenous studies, often by indigenous scholars, and in ontology, often by non-indigenous scholars. However, these literatures rarely come together. One reason is, as Métis/otipemisiw scholar Zoe Todd (2016) has written, that "«ontology» is just another world for colonialism," with much of social sciences' ontology repeating patterns of settler colonialism, with outsiders, often more powerful ones, not just speaking for indigenous peoples, but also taking from them (e.g., Bessire & Bond, 2014; Ramos, 2012). As Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa (2013) stated "Much later, once I had become an adult, I began to ask myself what these white people had come to do in our forests. I came to understand that they wanted to know it and plot its limits in order to take possession of it." A huge decolonial literature addresses these points, but does not often elaborate on ontology (cf., Oslender, 2019).

In terms of the Isthmo-Colombian area, another reason why those literatures are rarely put together is that much of the Native American and indigenous studies scholarship is from North America's northernmost countries (the United States and Canada) and ontology scholarship about Latin America. That the latter is often written by non-indigenous scholars is testament to the persistent and pervasive marginalization of indigenous voices and peoples in the region. Additionally, the Latin American scholarship in Spanish tends to focus on perspectivism and has been difficult to access both inside and outside the region, a combination of unindexed journals, small print runs, and, in places like Panama, few book stores. A growing number of Latin American indigenous scholars[4] are collaborating with academic scholars to publish on their cultures and increasingly use open-access formats (e.g., Domicó, et al., 2002; Hernández Castillo et al., 2019; Leyva et al., 2015; Rappaport & Ramos Pacho, 2012).

[4] It also is, admittedly, difficult to know which scholars identify as indigenous.

Given that the indigenous studies and ontology literatures have scantly overlapped in the Isthmo-Colombian area, I have been resistant to combine them. I feared that doing so might unduly strengthen the notion of «Amerindian», homogenizing the many indigenous groups of the Americas, creating another settler colonial violence. However, my Wounaan colleagues recognize a distant kinship with other indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, something that was clear in 2012 when we took Native American linguistics classes together with other indigenous scholars at the American Indian Language Development Institute. In this context, not bridging the literatures reinforces colonialism by cultural translation via, typically, non-indigenous academic scholars. Wounaan colleagues

and I have co-authored on ontology to decolonize the literature, however, in the relative absence of regional indigenous scholarship I was wary that we were creating another epistemic violence by using non-indigenous theory and writing in the traditional scientific article format (Marker, 2003; Velásquez Runk, 2020). Today, this rupture seems more pronounced, as authors of indigenous studies and ontology write on similar themes, but often in very different ways and with distinct vocabulary. Additionally, as I wrote and then revised this manuscript, I thought more in terms of the indigenous studies literature, but was encouraged to revise in terms of the ontological literature. As a result, I did a major revision, putting both in conversation.

I argue that shamanic and *haaihí jëeu nʌm* rituals are complementary and skilled caretaking, with ritual performance a requisite moral exchange among human and non-human realms of reality. By following oral traditions, I show how both rituals are part of reciprocal exchange for the caretaking of Wounaan, other beings, and their place: the trickster figure (*Dösät*) taught shamanism and the creator figure (*Hẽwandam*) taught the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual. Ritual performance is required to affect that care, heightened by aesthetic, olfactory, and auditory beauty. Such skilled embodied care emphasizes conviviality, nurturing ancestors, people, spirits, and other non-human beings. Even though shamanic and *haaihí jëeu nʌm* rituals are vastly different in their timing, participation, and performances, both are crucial and complementary for the peoples' moral wellbeing. I see this article as a means to revise ontological simplifications and as an invitation for Wounaan scholars to correct simplified ontological translations.

I rely on over twenty-three years of research with Wounaan, and some also with Emberá, in Panama on cultural, environmental, and linguistic topics.[5] To be clear, I had never intended to study shamanism or the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual. During socio-environmental research, I have repeatedly witnessed those rituals and conversed about them in participation observation of everyday life and the meetings of all Wounaan communities, called congresses, that are held every one to two years in Panama.[6] Traditional authorities' organizations, also called congresses, granted approvals for all research, as they do for activities with

[5] From the end of 1996 – 2001, I worked on the socioeconomics, ecology, and conservation of non-timber forest products used by Emberá and Wounaan to make basketry and carvings. Since 2001 I have worked with the Wounaan Congress and Foundation on a series of collaborative projects: political and historical ecology of Wounaan forest use (ultimately including topics such as silversmithing, intellectual property and material objects, and REDD+); documenting the Wounaan language through 60 years of recordings of oral traditions; the political ontology of rosewood; and bird guide training, ethno-ornithology, and forest restoration.

[6] From 1996-2001, work was approved by the Congreso General Emberá-Wounaan and the Congreso General de Tierras Colectivas Emberá-Wounaan. Once Wounaan separated from those congresses, subsequent work was carried out through formal agreements with or resolutions by the *Wounaan Podpa Nʌm Pömaam* and the Fundación para el Desarrollo del Pueblo Wounaan.

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their communities, at local (village) and national levels. Since 2001, these were the *Wounaan Podpa Nʌm Pömaam* and the Fundación para el Desarrollo del Pueblo Wounaan. Additionally, institutional review boards[7] and the Panamanian government[8] approved or permitted the research. Since at least the mid-1990s, Emberá and Wounaan in Panama have had prohibitions on studying and collecting medicinal plants[9] and I have respected those bans. Wounaan do not consider shamanism to be medicinal in the same way as medicinal plants, and therefore researching shamanism and its entheogenic or psychoactive plants is not considered medicinal plant research (Velásquez Runk, 2017). During 2018-2020 Chindío Peña Ismare, Rito Ismare Peña, Chenier Carpio Opua and I (2020) wrote about and presented on the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual.

This article is organized in the following way. First, I present the Wounaan community, addressing populations in Panama and Colombia. Second, I overview theoretical approaches on relationality, drawing from the literature in indigenous studies and social science's ontology. Third, I use oral traditions to show how Wounaan received shamanic and *haaihí jëeu nʌm* rituals and compare both. Fourth, I position the rituals with the theoretical literature. Finally, I offer conclusions about caretaking, morality, and ritual, addressing how centuries of change coupled with the last two decades' rapid changes have reworked shamanism and its «trickster» figure. I end with a petition for Wounaan scholars to use this text as a prompt to marshal their sociolinguistic complexity to decolonize *Dösät* and *Hẽwandam* and their related rituals.

**Wounaan**

Living in both Panama and Colombia, indigenous Wounaan have long used both countries' lands and waters. The most recent censuses suggest more Wounaan in Colombia, 9,066 to Panama's 7,279 (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2005; Dirección de Estadística y Censo, 2012). However, those numbers are still changing with continued violence in northwestern Colombia: Wounaan are both internally displaced and refugees to Panama (e.g., Flórez, 2020).

The Wounaan meu language and the Emberá languages comprise the Chocó language family (Constenla Umaña, 1991). This is perhaps one reason why the two groups are confused. However, the languages are mutually unintelligible. In Panama, where the two groups are much more proximate than in Colombia, outsiders fail to recognize linguistic and other differences between the peoples, but often observe similarities concerning dress, shamanism, and house construction.

[8] The Autoridad Nacional del Ambiente and Instituto Nacional de Cultura.
[9] Now covered under Law 17 of 2006 on the protection of indigenous traditional medicine (República de Panamá, 2016).

In addition to language, differences between Wounaan and Emberá become apparent in terms of behavior, history, oral traditions, objects, dress, and ritual (Peña, 2009; Velásquez Runk, 2017). For Wounaan, a fundamental marker of difference is that they celebrate the haaihí jëeu nʌm ritual with the k'ugwiu prayer /petition canoe; both define and symbolize Wounaan identity and being (Peña Ismare et al., 2020).

**Relationality, Exchange, Caretaking, and Being Human**

Scholars, indigenous and otherwise,[10] recognize the relationality of reality. For indigenous peoples, these relationships harken back to creation, they "explain," Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (2000, p. 18) wrote, "that humans, plants, and animals, and the forces of nature are part of the universe's creative impulse." Non-indigenous scholars have long recognized such relationality, but have been challenged to understand its mix of human and non-human beings. In *The Anthropology of Love and Anger,* Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (2000) compiled chapters about many South American indigenous groups, addressing conviviality among humans, but not non-humans.

Scholars, mostly non-indigenous ones, have referred to the idea that non-human beings have capabilities (for example, to think, to act, to hear) as personhood or beinghood. The latter term allows for a wider array beings, such as objects, animals, spirits, plants, and fungi (Santos-Granero, 2012), which allows for the variable animacy of non-humans that is not necessarily equivalent to that of human beings (e.g., Halbmayer, 2012a; Rival, 2012; Santos-Granero, 2012). In the Isthmo-Colombian area, recent work has found that humans distinguish themselves from other beings (Halbmayer, 2019; Martínez Mauri, 2019; Niño Vargas, 2020; Velásquez Runk et al., 2019).

It is accountable relationships with other beings (sensu Simpson, 2017) that often have proved challenging to translate to non-indigenous peoples and for them to cognize, generating social sciences and, more recently, its ontology literature. In the U.S. and Canada, core indigenous values may be represented by the mnemonic of the four R's, which manifest as obligations: relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution (Bell, 2013; Harris & Wasilewski, 2004; Simpson, 2017). "We are told," wrote Cree and Métis scholar Mary Siisip Geniusz (2000, p. 14) about Anishinaabe, "that humankind was the last created, the youngest, and therefore the most dependent of all the different forms of life."

[10] It often is difficult to know how a scholar self-identifies, particularly given intersectional identities. In this manuscript, I use "non-indigenous scholar" for those who have not identified as indigenous, "indigenous scholar" or the specific indigenous identification for Native American, First Nation, or original peoples' scholars, and simply "scholars" when self-identified identity is unclear.

Scholars, mostly non-indigenous ones approaching from outside the cultures about which they write, have long sought to understand relationality. In his book *The Gift* (1923), Marcel Mauss noted that gifts, rather than simply being free, are part of total prestation, that is, systems of exchange that affect the whole rather than simply persons. As a result, persons are inextricably linked with their gifting, creating social bonds with honor for both the giver and receiver. Mauss evoked rituals, in addition to goods, wealth, property, and other rites and services, in exchanges. Gifting is thus imbued with morality of obligations to give, receive, and return (Mauss, 1990 [1923]). Drawn from examples in many cultures, Denis Vidal (2014 [1994]) recently showed that Mauss' treatise reflected his own cultural traditions, harkening back to the three Graces as an allegory for bestowing a benefit, receiving it, and returning it.

In the many decades since *The Gift*'s publication, a number of non-indigenous scholars have countered the notion that *all* is exchange, objecting to the idea that no gift can be free (e.g., Douglas, 1990; Testart, 1998). Annette Weiner (1992) developed the idea of inalienable possessions. She found that keeping objects, especially precious ones, out of circulations of exchange, both creates and confirms relations of social hierarchy (Weiner, 1992). She also drew attention to gender, detailing how «keeping-while-giving» illustrated the social and political relations between women and men in Oceanic societies (Weiner, 1992). Maurice Godelier (1999), subsequently described objects kept from exchange that are passed down through generations, allowing inheritance. Such restricted objects have symbolic power and are sacred, linked with the origins of a people and attributed to forces outside of themselves (in spite of peoples' contributions to that social order) (Godelier, 1999). Additionally, he showed how people owe a debt to the figures linked with their origins, such as gods or their earthly human representatives (e.g., priests), creating a debt that cannot be repaid, which builds inequality and privileged elite (Godelier, 1999).

Philippe Descola (2012), who did ethnographic work with Amazonia's Achuar, has elaborated on such relational modes, focusing on whether relationships are mutual or not. He noted that exchange, taking or predation, and giving or gifting ensure the movement of something valuable between those of the same ontological status and allow for the reversibility of movement. Exchange is symmetrical (giving and returning), predation or taking is negative asymmetry, and gifting or giving is positive asymmetry (Descola, 2012). In contrast, producing, protecting, and transmitting are always non-reversible and operate between those in hierarchical status (Descola, 2012).

Other recent scholarship on Latin America has described hierarchical exchange relationships. In Amazonia, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro stressed predation and affinity as a perspectival cosmos (e.g., Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Such predation

has been taken into the schema of mastery or ownership and nurture (Brightman et al., 2016). The idea is that some indigenous groups have relationships of skilled hierarchical control or power over other beings, mastery, that also is coupled with nurturing. Such relationships of mastery or property and nurture have been described for indigenous peoples and pets (e.g., Fausto, 1999), enslaved peoples (e.g., Santos-Granero, 2010), orphans (e.g., High, 2012), and land (e.g., de Matos Viegas, 2016), among others. These ideas also have been used to describe shamanism (e.g., Fausto, 2012; High, 2012), putting new names to unequal relationships long noted among shamans and their auxiliary spirits (e.g., Gow, 1994; Pardo Rojas, 1987). Working among the Mebengokre-Xikrin in Brazilian Amazonia, Cesar Gordon (2016) used «wellbeing» to describe the nurture expressed in mechanisms of social differentiation and ideas of good, beautiful, and correct way of life.

Others scholars have suggested that such patterns are not as much related to the predator schema as they are to convivial morality. The intimacy, commensality, and accompaniment of many beings, including human beings, is foundational to reality among at least some Latin American indigenous groups (e.g., Halbmayer, 2012b; Rahman & Echeverri, 2015; Velásquez Runk et al., 2019). For the Urarina, of lowland Amazonian Peru, moral conceptions of what is good and valuable relate to how the self is made through accompaniment (Walker, 2013).

The animal-prominent hierarchies of Amazonia are contrasted with plant-prominent ones of the Isthmo-Colombian area. Non-indigenous scholar Ernst Halbmayer (2020b) has characterized this as «symbiosis of agricultural care». In a volume he edited on the Isthmo-Colombian area (Halbmayer, 2020a), this hierarchical symbiosis is between the one who cultivates and those that are cultivated, with the one who is cared for and protected reciprocating by caring, feeding, and fertilizing those who have provided care (Halbmayer, 2020b, p. 19 ). These relationships describe peoples' relationships with things (Martínez Mauri, 2020), ancestral beings (Arenas Gómez, 2020), and plants (Kaviany, 2020). Additionally, Halbmayer noted the importance of transmission of substances, abilities, and knowledges between humans and non-humans (e.g., Arenas Gómez, 2020; Goletz, 2020; Velásquez Runk et al., 2019), as well as the substances that have a subjective or spiritual dimension that may make material changes, or the spiritual materiality of life (e.g., Halbmayer, 2012a; Kaviany, 2020; Martínez Mauri, 2019; Peña Ismare, et al., 2020).

As a result of these differences, scholars propose fundamental differences between indigenous groups of Amazonia and the Isthmo-Colombian area. Halbmayer (2020b) suggests that the Isthmo-Colombian package focuses on hierarchy, hierarchical symbiosis, the transference of substances, and the materialization of thought (Halbmayer, 2020b). In a recent chapter, Juan Camilo Niño Vargas

(2020, p. 52) suggested that the "Chibchan version of *perspectivism* owes more to agricultural labor of *subjection* than to hunting activities of *predation*."

For indigenous peoples and scholars, such theories are often considered abstractions to what they know, experience, embody, and are taught by many beings. Ideas of conviviality, wellbeing, and morality run through the writings of Native American and indigenous studies scholars, who instead bring them together as the caretaking and nurture that are part of being human and living with others. It is the deep interconnectedness of being that requires caretaking, guardianship, and protections (Stewart-Harawira, 2012). Being in the world is nurturing and restoring, learning to be human and to live together with others (Justice, 2018). As Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017, p. 21) explained "The Seven Fires creation story sets the parameters for the Nishnaabeg intelligence: the commingling of emotional and intellectual knowledge combined in motion or movement, and the making and remaking of the worlds in a generative fashion within Indigenous bodies that are engaged in accountable relationships with other beings."

## Ritual Origins by *Dösat* and *Hẽwandam*

*Hẽwandam* asks Wounaan "how do you want to cure people, if someone suddenly becomes ill?"[11] Everyone remained silent for a while, and then someone said "We're thinking, but we don't know how to do it." Then the ancestor [*Hẽwandam*] spoke again "If you are interested, I can explain to you how you can do it with natural water." "It consists of the following," said *Hẽwandam*. "In the creeks there are stones on which fall water drops, you can collect those drops and with that water you can cure the sick." But in that moment *Dösãt* responded from the corner "I know how I can teach you that."

From that moment, *Dösãt* begins to teach a Woun[12] out in the forest. The Woun is able to cure various patients, with plants and spirits. The teaching was successful, having "all at once taught everything." *Dösãt* taught the plants to cure snake bites. *Dösãt* even taught to heal with secrets, words that are chanted to cure a person. When teaching about spirits, *Dösãt* also taught about the different forms of songs for curing. "It is said it was that way," one Woun summarized, "if our ancestors had received the teaching from *Hẽwandam*, how could we die? [It would have been] so easy; one could almost be dead from snakebite and upon being treated with only water we would remain alive. That is why now, in our days we are experiencing the same thing, because we don't obey."

From this oral tradition, from the moment shamanism comes into being, it

[11] These passages are from a transcript of 1977 recording in the Binder collection of Wounaan oral traditions, BTFW_06a_C49_Hoor_monaaumkiir_jaautarr_T_ESP.txt.
[12] Woun is singular, Wounaan is plural.

carries with it a history of moving Wounaan away from their creator, from his mentoring. In this story, *Dösät* tricks Wounaan into learning shamanism rather than *Hẽwandam*'s healing with water. *Dösät* teaches the arts of being a *bënk'ʌʌn*, a shaman, by teaching the elements of the *dödöjö p'ie nʌm* rituals[13] (often translated into Spanish as *cantando jai*, singing spirits—with the Emberá word for spirits--or *poniendo mesa*, setting a table). Moreover, *Dösät* continues to trick *Hẽwandam* throughout the oral traditions, carrying out bets with *Hẽwandam* that are detrimental to Wounaan. Among Wounaan, the most cited of these is how *Dösät* caused *Hẽwandam* to turn the once freshwater oceans into salt water. More than that, as the above narrator implied, *Dösät*'s trickery also guided Wounaan away from the potential immortality of *Hẽwandam*'s curing with water.

*Hẽwandam* said "build yourself a *k'ugwiu*, like a small canoe, from the *t'aik'ierrp*[14] tree. Once finished, get *k'ipaar* [*genipap*] and *jaar* [annato] and paint it with the centipede design" (Peña Ismare, 1997, p. 188). The *k'ugwiu* must be built in one day. If the *k'ugwiu* is left in the forest to be brought the next day, *Dösät* may play it and prayers/petitions will not reach *Hẽwandam* but be directed to *Dösät* (Peña Ismare 1997, p. 191). *Hẽwandam* said "then you must hang it with the front facing east, towards where the sun rises. As you play, you will worship and ask things for me through songs according to your needs" (Peña Ismare 1997, p. 188). *w* continued:

> "When you worship me, do so only until noon or a little after noon. If you do it after that hour, in the afternoon hours, the worship will not be for me but the *Dösät*. When comments or strange appearances and disturbances crop up among people, if you ask me for this not to happen, I will answer your requests. Or when diabolical manifestations are noticed that spread panic among the people, ask me to repel those diabolical manifestations and I will make them disappear, sending them to the farthest ends of the earth. If what you sow does not do well and you ask for a good crop, I will make everything that you sow do well. In short, I will do what you ask of me in response to your requests." (Peña Ismare 1997, p. 188)

Later *Hẽwandam* said: "if you worship me or ask something from me and follow all my instructions, you will live very well" (Peña Ismare 1997, p. 190). Sitting beneath an inclined *k'ugwiu*, a sick person may be freed from a malevolent spirit when all pray/petition to *Hẽwandam* (Peña Ismare 1997, p. 192).

The above passages from oral traditions are published in *Maach wounaanau nem sirnaa hau nʌm dʌ̈ jemk'a nʌmpa k'ĩirpierr*, a book by Wounaan scholar Chindío

[13] This is the general name for the rituals, which Chindío Peña Ismare (1997) has clarified as five specific rituals.
[14] *Trichospermum galeotti*

Peña Ismare with missionary linguist Ron Binder and Wounaan illustrator Chafil Cheucarama M., about Wounaan music. Above, it is clear that the *k'ugwiu* must be kept away from *Dösät*. This ritual is performed to beseech *Hẽwandam*, to avoid cataclysm, ask for good crops, and even cure. That is the ritual Wounaan consider most foundational to their culture, petitioning to *Hẽwandam* using the *k'ugwiu*. Once carried out over days to weeks, in Panama the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual now only begins the national congresses' days, the meeting when Wounaan from all of their villages and urban areas come together (Peña Ismare et al., 2020).

**Contrasting and Complementary Rituals, *dödöjö p'ie nʌm* and *haaihí jëeu nʌm***

Looked at in comparison, the two rituals are contrasted and yet also complementary. Each ritual teaching initiates an exchange with a specific ancestor, shamanism and its *dödöjö p'ie nʌm* from the trickster *Dösät* and the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual from the creator *Hẽwandam*. This is a crucial difference for the rituals, as in oral traditions *Hẽwandam* created all things and *Dösät* often tricked the creator through challenges that resulted in something less advantageous for the people. Today, Wounaan widely view *Hẽwandam* as benevolent and *Dösät* as much more malevolent.

The two rituals' timing, locales, and participation are distinct. Shamanic rituals are held at night, from after sunset to before sunrise, and typically performed in the *bënk'ʌʌn*'s house. In *dödöjö p'ie nʌm*, the *bënk'ʌʌn* is a specialist, the sole person affecting the ritual (except for the apprentice at his teacher's command). The shaman has a gift that was identified as a child, and encouraged and nurtured by family and other shamans. They studied their craft for years, learning sequentially with shamans to train their auxiliary spirits and chanting the songs to cure the illnesses caused by various spirits, each time carving a new *papörmie*, shamanic staff. After sunset on the night of a *dödöjö p'ie nʌm*, community members gather, from babies to the elderly, to participate in the curing. The other active participants are the once-dead spirits visible only to the *bënk'ʌʌn* whose vision is enhanced by ayahuasca (*pildé*). The *bënk'ʌʌn* sings to their auxiliary spirits (*kayam*), calling them forth, attracting the auxiliary and illness causing spirits with alcohol, fragrance, and the symbolic objects' beauty. Community members watch, struggling to stay awake throughout the night as the shaman sings in their auxiliary spirits to battle against the illness causing spirits.

In contrast, the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ceremony is held during the day, performed in a *dichaardi* roundhouse, the architecture type Wounaan consider most traditional and most representative of their people. This is a critical element: in recent years, with large roundhouse architecture in decline, a small roundhouse is built (and sometimes even a *k'ugwiu* made) just for the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual that opens a congress. The *k'ugwiu* must be kept in a roundhouse: if a *bënk'ʌʌn*'s house is one and a *k'ugwiu* kept there or a *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual held there, its key characteristic

is that of a roundhouse not that of the shaman. The *haaihí jëeu nʌm* requires some specialist knowledge, especially by the person who has learned in dreams the songs to play on the *k'ugwiu*. Traditionally all could participate by singing and dancing, and also by bringing food to share together (Peña Ismare, 1997). Only those who have trespassed Wounaan's strongest cultural prohibitions—those who have been in an incestuous relationship or in a relationship with non-Wounaan--cannot participate (Peña Ismare, 1997). Together, these differences in ritual spaces and participation might intimate the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual is more collective than the *dödöjö p'ie nʌm*.

Each ritual relies on material objects that carry significance harkening back to the oral traditions. For the *dödöjö p'ie nʌm*, *Dösát* instructed Wounaan how to cure and the *papörmie* recalls *Hẽwandam* and his son's attemps to make Wounaan from wood in the origin story. The *bënk'ʌʌn* alone makes each *papörmie* to their design, each housing an auxiliary spirit and thus representing illness they know how to cure. The *papörmie* are made to last for years from hardwood, most commonly zorro (*Astronium graveolens*) and cocobolo (*Dalbergia retusa*) in Panama (Velásquez Runk, 2017). The shamanic staffs are not to be touched, often hidden in the roof thatch, and, as the auxiliary spirits' residences, are potentially dangerous. They are contrasted with the disposable ritual balsa (*Ochroma* spp.) wood figures that provide an almost enigmatic beauty. The shaman and their family make them and may include, depending on the ritual, two headed balsa figures, carved balsa animals, a large balsa or woven palm enclosure, a small balsa doll, and/or large carved balsa figures, all painted with dark *k'ipaar* (genipap or *jagua* as it is known in Panama, *Genipa americana*) and red *jar* (annatto or *achiote*, *Bixa orellana*). All ritual balsa and also palm fiber objects are considered potentially spiritually contaminated and disposed after the ritual. The *bënk'ʌʌn* wears no ritual attire. In the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual, *Hẽwandam* instructed how to make the *k'ugwiu*. The *k'ugwiu* is kept in a roundhouse, typically stored raised to the rafters so that no one can touch it, for years and years. When men go to harvest material for the three types of sacred flutes, *hä̈rrsir*, they must be quiet and touch little, for doing so risks the cane or bamboo (depending on which flute) drying up and disappearing entirely from that area. The flutes also are kept out of reach, often in a raised *k'ugwiu*, so that no one can touch them. In addition, participants are attired to distinguish them from spirits: painted with *k'ipaar* in an asymmetrical way, women wearing a plain *hapk'ajũa* (wrap-around skirt) and men wearing a traditional square loincloth, *mojarr hajuũa* (Peña Ismare, 1997). They are attired with *chi höo*, traditional jewelry, providing pleasant rattling and an aesthetics of respectful beauty (Peña Ismare et al., 2020).

The musicality of each ritual is distinct. In the *dödöjö p'ie nʌm*, the *bënk'ʌʌn* chants, calling to the unseen and unheard spirits in their control, their *kayam*, and

the illness causing spirits, *mepeer*. Only the shaman, with ayahuasca-enhanced vision, can see the spirits and whether the curing is affected. The community participants watch and may dance in specific rituals. The shamanic rituals are an embodiment of ambiguity and mystery, which was underscored by many Woun's equivocal answers to my questions about ritual elements. In the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual, one person plays the *k'ugwiu*, and others may do so in turn, singing supplications to *Hẽwandam*. They are surrounded by concentric circles of dancing and singing women and flute-playing and dancing men. It is a visual and auditory embodiment persons and community, gender complementarity, and inclusion (Peña Ismare et al., 2020). In *haaihí jëeu nʌm* the ritual is always ordered and everything is shared (Peña Ismare, 1997). In *dödöjö p'ie nʌm*, there is a greater likelihood of chaos with the spirits interceding, the *bënk'ʌʌn* having taken ayahuasca, and the participants drinking alcohol. I saw one ritual where the *bënk'ʌʌn* lost control of himself and the spirits, generating community fear of the spirits' harm (Velásquez Runk, 2017).

Reciprocal nurturing is apparent in both rituals. As they go about their everyday life, the *bënk'ʌʌn* must continually feed their *kayam* with maize alcohol. Without this caretaking, the auxiliary spirits may flee, leaving the shaman without their ability to cure. When a shaman dies, without this nurturing the auxiliary spirits slowly leave the *papörmie*. Family members of a deceased *bënk'ʌʌn* may place the *papörmie* in the forest to facilitate the spirits' departure. In the *dödöjö p'ie nʌm* rituals this caretaking also is evident: under the banana-like leaves of *Calathea lutea* are the small tree gourds that the shaman has partially filled with alcohol and each auxiliary spirit drinks from their carved gourd through the night. Likewise, the shaman must also nurture their patients, regularly treating them after dawn or before dusk, typically rubbing the patient with *papörmie* and saying curing incantations, *bën waupi sim* (Velásquez Runk, 2017). Ethnographers have underemphasized this regular caretaking and treatment of the ill, instead highlighting the *dödöjö p'ie nʌm* rituals that treat acute or persistent chronic illness. The shaman and their family also care for community participants during the rituals, providing food and drink in the middle of the night. The *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual also illustrates nurture. It was by regular celebrations of the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual that Wounaan cared for their relationships with *Hẽwandam*. With missionization, that nurturing has transformed into Christian church services with the result that the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual is less frequently held. As one Woun explained: "Why should I get all prepared and wear a loincloth to use a *k'ugwiu* when I can just go to church and pray to *Hẽwandam*? (Velásquez Runk, 2017, p. 87). Both rituals, however, are extra-ordinary, to right something that has gone amiss: the ordinary is to practice quotidian responsibility, caretaking self and community (Velásquez Runk, 2017). That reciprocal nurturing also extends

to the non-human, such as care for the plants which provide for the sacred flutes and not being excessive hunters of animals that provide food.

**Caretaking and Being Human**

As established in traditional stories, both shamanic rituals (*dödöjö p'ie nʌm*) and beseeching rituals (*haaihí jëeu nʌm*) reflect reality of humans in relationship with more-than-human beings. Together, ancestors, plants, spirits, people, objects, animals, and others are in convivial everyday relationship that at times go awry via ill health, crop failure, pests, earthquakes, prey scarcity, floods, or the like. Tthese are addressed by *haaihí jëeu nʌm* to *Hẽwandam* to control such problems, protect Wounaan and other beings, and prevent calamity. Health, both of humans and of the broader community of beings, is typically addressed by *dödöjö p'ie nʌm* shamanic rituals. Both rituals work to right the convivial world, to cure and heal (Velásquez Runk, 2017).

The rituals signal a reality in which Wounaan are subjected to hierarchical ancestral forces outside their control, as well as the nurture required to right them. In both rituals, Wounaan engage with ancestral figures, who exchange their protections, reminiscent of ontological schema among ancestral parents and their offspring (Arenas Gómez, 2020; Descola, 2012; Halbmayer, 2020b). It is humans' embodied skill in performing ritual that nurtures those relationships. While the ritual objects are sacred and do not circulate because they are associated with those figures (as per Weiner 1992 and Godelier 1999), they do not create inequality. Additionally, the shamanic staffs are home to the *kayam*, which the shaman care. Such caretaking is found among hierarchical relationships throughout the Isthmo-Colombian region (e.g., Halbmayer, 2019, 2020a; Martínez Mauri, 2019; Velásquez Runk et al., 2019). By considering these hierarchical relationships as «guardianship» or even «mentorship», rather than «mastery» the dominance is reduced while elevating the skill and care. It also indicates the moral embodied responsibility of reciprocity, taking care in everyday as well as ritual life. As such, caretaking is less dominant than the wellbeing noted among the Mebengokre-Xikrin (Gordon, 2016) and without the consumptive emphasis of Halbmayer's (2020b) «symbiosis of agricultural care».

More than that, I understand the rituals as the convivial sociality of being human, recognizing our roles to care for ourselves and others, being in good relationship with others, and embodying relationships set forth in oral traditions. For Wounaan those others include humans and other beings, not just plants and animals, but also the ancestors *Dösät* and *Hẽwandam*. This aligns with work of indigenous scholars who write about how such guardianship and caretaking is foundational to being human (e.g., Justice, 2018; Simpson, 2017; Stewart-Harawira, 2012; Tallbear, 2019). Kim Tallbear (2019, p. 25), a Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate scholar,

has drawn attention to how caretaking is integral to the Dakota idea of "being in good relation." As such, caretaking is a shorthand for the four R's of relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution, and implies humans' intentionality to make and remake relationships (Simpson, 2017). For many indigenous peoples, humans have relationships with the beings that came before them. As Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013, p. 9) has described:

> "In the Native ways of knowing, human people are often referred to as «*t*he younger brothers of Creation». We say that humans have the least experience with how to live and thus the most to learn—we must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance. Their wisdom is apparent in the way they live. They teach us by example. They've been on the earth far longer than we have been, and have had time to figure things out."

Caretaking encompasses foundational ideas of being human, a responsibility that we previously described as morality because it underscores that actions link beings and collectives. It is reminiscent of Davi Kopenawa's (2013) words about his people that "they worked with an uprightness and spoke of what they did. They grew their own thoughts, turned to their people." That morality, as we have shown for the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual (Peña Ismare et al., 2020), also is expressed in beauty, by wearing well-appointed attire and decorating the ritual objects, which also is true of the beautiful, but more enigmatic, objects, sounds, and scents of *dödöjö p'ie nʌm* rituals. Juan Camilo Niño Vargas (2020, p. 55) has suggested that for Chibchan peoples "humanity occupies a central but transitory position in the universe, a humanity with divine roots, but inevitably destined for animality, a humanity subject to irreversible processes but capable of delaying the calamitous changes to come." Those patterns have some similarity with Wounaan, and this reality is put into practice with moral behavior that still cannot wholly prevent stochastic calamity (Velásquez Runk, 2017). Another way to think of that morality is the responsibility of caretaking.

Together, both rituals highlight the complementary importance of human and other beings. Non-indigenous scholar Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy (1972) described this for Wounaan as personal autonomy and social responsibility. It is tempting, especially for someone like me who has worked during the decline and disparagement of shamanism, to underscore the *haaihí jëeu nʌm* ritual's collectivity and beauty as more foundational to Wounaan thought when compared to shamanism's individuality and mystery. However, the rituals have coexisted and been complementary for millennia. And both illustrate caretaking.

Shamanism's vilification is clearly related to its ritual alterity and *Dösät*'s centuries of mistranslation. Christian conversion was strategic to Spanish colonialism in the Americas, including Panama and Colombia's Wounaan regions (Castillero

Calvo, 1994; Williams, 1999). That has resulted in *Dösät* translated as Satan, which in the twentieth century's latter half cascaded into shamans' expulsion from newly formed villages and missionaries' promotion of western medicine (Loewen, 1985). In turn, by participating in Christian church services, Wounaan concomitantly reinforce *Hẽwandam* and reject *Dösät*. In the future, Wounaan may reconsider *Dösät* as indigenous scholar Nimachia Howe (2019) has with the Blackfoot's Naapi trickster. As I read about Naapi's "episodic creativity" (2019: x), that "connects Peoples' land to life values" (2019: ix), informs and shapes "Peoples' values, humor, creativity, ethics, morals, codes, and potential futures with which People can identify and claim" (2019: ix-x), and that "he is the mediator among Peoples, plants, animals, and the elemental forces of creation, the accounts of which are told in story" (2019: x), it reminded me of *Dösät*.

I have resisted allying Wounaan beliefs within any one relational schema, particularly because I have learned by doing, much more so than discussing. That hallmark of anthropology, learning by doing has reminded me of "kinetics, the act of doing, isn't just praxis; it also generates and animates theory within Indigenous contexts, and it the crucial intellectual mode for generating knowledge. Theory and praxis, story and practice are interdependent, cogenerators of knowledge" (Simpson, 2017, p. 20). Additionally, when collaboratively reviewing a manuscript in 2016, one Woun authority began a discussion about ethnohistory saying "we have always been Wounaan," recognizing and esteeming who they are and not necessitating such regional comparisons. Over the last century, as settler colonialism has increasingly alienated Wounaan from their land, educational systems, language, governance, and even some beliefs, there has been a greater imperative to make those translations. Wounaan colleagues have long asked me to use my relational privilege to make known their people, while also restricting what they do not want shared (Velásquez Runk, 2017, 2020), resulting in co-authored works (e.g., Peña Ismare et al., 2020; Velásquez Runk et al., 2010). Over the last fifty years, as centuries of Christian teachings have made further inroads in Panama and Colombia, some Wounaan are considering those changes. I see this article as a prompt for Wounaan scholars to improve upon it with sociocultural and sociolinguistic analysis of the ritual origins by *Dösät* and *Hẽwandam* in oral traditions and their continued ritual performance. I look forward to corrections of my own simplified ontological translations.

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