Names, places, and dance houses: social units among the Eastern Tukanoans

Nomes, lugares e malocas de dança: unidades sociais entre os Tukano orientais

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Abstract: Since Irving Goldman's pioneering work among the Cubeo (Goldman, 1968 [1963]), defining Eastern Tukanoan social units has been a recurring issue in regional ethnology. Many late twentieth-century ethnographies produced solid knowledge on Tukano social structure by showing distinctive and exclusive features within the Amazonian scenario (such as language exogamy, patrilineality, specialized hierarchical clans or sibs, etc.). However, they also indicated some inconsistencies and paradoxes related to a discrepancy between the ideal model of hierarchy and patrilineality and a dynamic reality more attuned to equality and cognatic arrangements. Recent attempts to understand these paradoxes have focused on what a social unit actually means from an indigenous perspective, leading to new ideas about the fractal (multi-scale) character of such units and the way they work. These interpretations take the *maloca* (communal house) as a model, which evolves as it changes names, places, rituals, and specific narratives that serve to create permanent differences, which in turn produce disputes and alter kinship relations.

Keywords: Eastern Tukanoans. Northwest Amazon. Kinship. Ritual. *Maloca.*

Resumo: Desde a etnografia pionera de Goldman (1968 [1963]) entre os Cubeo, a maneira de comprender as unidades sociais dos povos Tukano orientais é um dos problemas mais recorrentes na etnologia regional do Alto Rio Negro. Apesar de muitas das etnografias das últimas duas décadas do século XX terem produzido conhecimentos bastante sólidos sobre a estrutura social dos Tukano que mostraram certos traços distintivos e exclusivos dentro do cenário amazônico (por exemplo, a exogamia linguística, a patrilinearidade, clãs ou sibs especializados e ordenados hierarquicamente etc.), esses trabalhos também apontaram certas incongruências e paradoxos relacionados com a discrepância entre um modelo ideal que exalta a hierarquia e a patrilinearidade e uma realidade dinâmica mais afinada com a igualdade e o cognatismo. A busca por respostas a estes paradoxos tem focado, em anos recentes, na compreensão do que é uma unidade social desde a perspectiva indígena. Entre as várias interpretações, surgem novas ideias sobre o caráter fractal (multiescalar) de ditas unidades, tomando a maloca como modelo, e sobre suas atualizações a partir de nomes, lugares, rituais e conjuntos singulares de narrativas que estão a serviço da criação permanente de diferenças, as quais produzem disputas e mudanças dentro das relações de parentesco.

Palavras-chave: Tukano oriental. Noroeste amazônico. Parentesco. Ritual. Maloca.

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INTRODUCTION[1]

This paper explores some features of the formation process and size of social units among Eastern Tukano-speaking groups. Since Goldman's (1968 [1963]) seminal work on the Cubeo, this issue has been recurrent in the ethnology of Northwestern Amazon. Many late twentieth-century ethnographies produced very solid information about Tukanoan social structure, conferring on these people some distinctive and unique features in the Amazonian scenario. Yet, authors also registered some inconsistencies and paradoxes in the difference between a stable ideal model stressing hierarchy and patrilineality and a dynamic reality that emphasizes equality, affinity, and cognatic relations. Recently, research on these paradoxes has focused on the question of what a social unit might be from the Indians' point of view, thus generating a number of possibilities.

These new interpretations have raised possibilities that fit better the fractal (multi-scale) character of these social units, as C. Hugh-Jones (1979) stated in her pioneer work. They explore the ways in which such units change according to names, places, and specific sets of narratives and knowledge designed to generate differences. In turn, these changes lead to disputes and alter kinship relations. Thus, blood relations can become affinal, and vice-versa, underscoring local alliance dynamics and the distinct networks that historically encompass them. This article also highlights the importance of the *maloca* (communal house) and the rituals required to create new social units, complementing some of S. Hugh-Jones (1993, 1995) interpretations on the subject.

SOME INCONSISTENCIES IN THE IDEAL MODEL

Speakers of Eastern Tukano languages, comprising, at least, ninety thousand people, make up a vast sociocultural complex in Northwestern Amazon, straddling the frontier zone between Colombia, Brazil, and Venezuela. Nowadays, this great regional system encompasses around thirty peoples who speak Eastern Tukano, Arawak, Naduhup, and Kákua-Nukak languages, the last two including peoples generally known as Makú.[2] There are also the Karihona, survivors of a Karib-speaking people, and the Baré (Table 1) who originally spoke an Arawak language and now speak *nheengatú* or *língua geral*, ". . . a Tupi-Guarani based lingua franca" (Aikhenvald, 2012, p. 87), created during the region's specific historical process.

Marriage networks, ritual objects, material culture, and political relations among local and regional organizations connect distinct indigenous peoples within this wide-ranging social system. According to the general model for the region, social units comprise exogamous patrilineal sibs or clans. The Eastern Tukanoans sustain that their ancestors emerged either from an Anaconda-Canoe that led them to the center of the world, or from specific parts of the Ancestral Anaconda's body from which they acquired five specialties. House (*maloca*) masters came from its head, singers-dancers from its neck, warriors, from its middle section, shamans from further down, and workers, from its tail. These clans relate to each other hierarchically as older and younger brothers. Ideally, they follow birth order along a territory with a river at its center, the oldest at the mouth, the youngest at the headwaters. Possession and use of certain ritual goods also observe this hierarchy. Residence is patri/virilocal and exogamy regulates all marriages. The ideal models prescribe language exogamy[3], marking the region's multilingualism. Simultaneously, each group prescribes marriage with other groups nearby regarded as traditional

[1] This is a longer version of the conference "The Formation of Social Units among the Eastern Tukanoan: New Insights into an Old Issue" delivered at the "Workshop Vaupés-Vanuatu: an interdisciplinary workshop on linguistic diversity", Max-Planck Institute for the Sciences of Human History, Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution, Jena (Germany), May 15-17, 2019.

[2] Until very "recently, the naduhup and kákua-nukak language families were classified as one single family, makú-puinave" (Cayón & Chacon, 2022, p. 3). Bolaños and Epps (2009), Bolaños (2010) and Epps (2020) sustain that the first classifications were done with few terms and very superficial comparisons. Thus, they suggest this new classification.

[3] For a recent critical discussion of language exogamy, see Chacon and Cayón (2013, 2021).

Table 1. Linguistic families and ethnic groups of the Upper Rio Negro.

Linguistic family	Ethnic groups
Eastern Tukano	Arapaso Bará Barasana Cubeo Desana Karapana Letuama Makuna Miritíi-tapuyo Pirá-tapuyo Pisamira Siriano Taiwano Tanimuka Tatuyo Tukano Tuyuka Wanano Yuruti Yauna
Arawak	Baniwa Cabiyarí Curripaco Matapí Tariana Warekena Wakuenai Yukuna
Naduhup	Döw Hupda Nadëb Yuhupde
Kakwa-Nukak	Kakua Nukak
Karib	Karihona
Tupi-Guarani	Baré

brothers-in-laws, as well as close and potential affines to whom they can marry and expand their networks. These peoples also share a ritual cycle based on sacred flutes and trumpets regionally known as *yurupari*, and on exchange in rituals named *dabucurí*. They partake mythical narratives and cosmological bases that structure and define the use of the common living space.

Several ethnological studies point out the prevalence of a patrilineal ideology in Eastern Tukanoan social organization. Such ideology entails a number of features, such as agnatic ancestry, the equation of identity with language, the co-occurrence of territory and group, ideal clan specialization, ranking between older and young siblings, language exogamy as the general marriage rule, and the role of close affines in creating local groups. Nevertheless, many works also identify a discrepancy between the ideal model celebrated in the patrilineal ideology and 'sociological reality,' which reveals clan spatial dispersal and a variety of local marriage arrangements. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the makeup of social units, even though they are often described as exogamous. On the one hand, these units stress real and virtual (mythical) agnatic relationships on different scales. The smallest exogamous unit is a group of siblings; above it is the clan or sib, followed by a cluster of clans comprising an ethnic group (*pueblo*). On the largest scale is the phratry, a cluster of groups speaking distinct languages whose ancestors held common agnatic ties since the origin of the world. On the other hand, the units split up and grow far apart both in space and in genealogies. This means, for instance, that members of the same clan who live (uxorilocally) in distant territories can establish affinal relationships with groups not regarded as traditional brothers-in-law, and fail to maintain ties with their own agnatic relatives.

Situations such as this also mean that it is possible to have a variety of affines according to social and spatial distance. There are real affines or allies, usually traditional brothers-in-law, virtual affines who are relatively near, and potential affines who can be exchange partners or enemies, but may eventually become real affines. These differences manifest distinct marriage forms. Among real affines, we must distinguish between traditional and allied brothers-in-law. The latter keep solid exchange relationships with their real affines for generations, whereas the former display mutual solidarity and affect. Preferential cross-cousin marriage between them is more regular and includes 'courtesy marriages' when wife retribution occurs years or a whole generation after the first wife giving.

In contrast, real affines practice symmetrical exchange of real or classificatory sisters that follow recent agreements. Virtual affines are relatively far from each other, but partake of the marriage possibilities within networks of different sizes, for instance, corresponding to a main river. They usually prefer symmetrical marriage exchanges. Potential affines are spatially distant. They either exchange objects or have mutually hostile relationships. In the latter case, in the past, marriage by abduction led either to war with no wife exchange, or to mutual wife exchange conducive to real affinal relationships. We can see, like Andrello (2019, 2020), that social and spatial distance works both ways, for consanguinity and affinity. It produces a number of local adjustments in social relations that render this vast regional system virtually impossible to grasp in its totality.

In the region, Andrello (2019, 2020) affirms, both affinity and consanguinity adjust to distance, as there are both brothers-in-law and older and younger brother living upriver and downriver. In the case of blood relatives, spatial distance is equivalent to time distance, because the system stresses the difference in relative age between senior and junior. An implication of this distinction is that difference and alterity are not limited to affinity, as in other Amazonian cases, because they also apply to consanguinity. Therefore, for various reasons, as we shall see below, it is possible to invert both rank and blood-affinal relations. The best marriage strategies of a rising clan may encourage it to engage in affinal relations with previously co-affinal groups, that is, with whom it shared the same group of affines, hence, unavailable for marriage. On the other hand, it may lead such a clan to interfere with access to the preferential wives of an agnatic clan, which become co-affines competing with each other, thus minimizing or reversing ranking order.

A major problem in defining these exogamous units hinges upon the principle of language exogamy. Sorensen (1967) and Jackson (1983) associate a language group to an exogamous unit, following the general rule that a person should marry someone from a different language group. It is true that this principle seems applicable to some Eastern Tukano groups. Initially, classic texts pointed out notable exceptions among the Cubeo (Goldman, 1968 [1963]) and Makuna (Århem, 1981). The Cubeo seem to have phratries speaking the same language and marrying each other, whereas the Makuna have phratries (Water People and Land People) that exchange wives and speak a single language. This would explain why Cubeo clans and phratries originated from distinct language families (Arawak, Eastern Tukano, and Naduhup), whereas this does not apply to the Makuna, because, to the Water People, the Land People are traditional brothers-in-law who, due to interethnic contact, ended up speaking the same language (Århem, 1981; Cayón, 2013).

The alleged exceptionality of marriages between same-language speakers is not confirmed. There is, in fact, a tendency for affinal relationships to create linguistic homogeneity in some places and among certain groups (Chacon & Cayón, 2021). Furthermore, people like the Barasana and Taiwano stand as affines to each other and speak practically the same language (their differences are only in rhythm and lexicón) (see Jones & Jones, 2013), just as among the Tanimuka y Letuama. The Tariana adopted the Tukano language, and some Bará clan segments at the Japú river speak Tatuyo. These are just some examples. These cases show that there is no necessary correspondence between filiation, identity, and language. Recently, Århem (2002) and S. Hugh-Jones (2004) have turned to local classifications for the definition of exogamous groups, thus minimizing the importance of the exogamy-language identity pair.

In classic regional ethnography, it is also difficult to set the dimensions of each exogamous unit. Each author defines its composition in a different way. Goldman (1968 [1963]) states that the tribe consists of fratries and these of sibs speaking the same language. C. Hugh-Jones (1979) affirms that, according to the ideal model, hierarchical specialization within the same sib consists of a simple exogamous group linked to four other sibs,

thus forming a structural unit or a composite exogamous group associated to other such groups living close by and, together, they make up a phratry. Jackson (1983) suggests that an association of sibs constitutes a language aggregate (the equivalent of) (see C. Hugh-Jones', 1979) simple and composite exogamous groups), and that several of these aggregates (speaking different languages) comprise a phratry, in C. Hugh-Jones' (1979) sense. Århem (1981) affirms that sibs form phratry segments, which, in turn, comprise phratric categories, each one corresponding to a language group (like exogamous groups) (see C. Hugh-Jones', 1979). Chernela (1993) sustains that a language group contains several sibs made up of local groups, distributed in hierarchical order along certain parts of a river. Correa (1996) argues that several lineages constitute clans with blood ties, which, together as an exogamous unit, represent the body of their ancestral Anaconda. Mythical blood ties bind these to other similar units and, together, they constitute a phratry or a large exogamous unit.

The myriad of interpretations highlights the strength of the patrilineal descent ideology and shows the existence, at least in conceptual terms, of larger and multilingual exogamous units that match the notion of phratry and form clusters within which intermarriage is forbidden. However, phratries also create inconsistencies. It comprises groups living in discontinuous territories and are 'mythically' related to each other as older and younger brothers, and as 'mother's sons' (*pahko makü*), a third category. This notion begets its own problems. Mythical narratives establish their existence, but ritual practices show no evidence that members of different groups materialize and actualize a larger unit, as opposed to clans or a set of clans that allegedly share the same ancestor. In theory, phratries might contain groups of the same cosmic domain, since peoples relate their ancestors to water – Bará, Makuna, Pirá-Tapuya, etc. –, earth – Tukano, Barasana – or sky – Desana, Tatuyo, etc. (C. Hugh-Jones, 1979; S. Hugh-Jones, 2002), but it is not confirmed.

In fact, if we deduce a phratry from a common origin, there should be consensus about its configuration. Besides, its languages should be similar, which is not the case. For instance, the Makuna and Tuyuka belong to the same phratry and both agree that the Taiwano and Karapaná are part of it. Nevertheless, the Makuna regard the Letuama and Bará as having their own phratry, whereas the Tuyuka exclude these peoples, but include the Arapaso, Mirití-tapuya, and Tariano (Cayón, 2018). In both cases, the limits of the wider unit do not match and their languages are not similar, except between Makuna and Taiwano. Furthermore, the fact that Makuna and Bará cannot intermarry does not change their relationship to the Tuyuka, for these often marry Bará, and their languages seem much closer to each other than to Makuna. This last example shows that language similarities may have to do with affinity rather than with consanguinity (Jackson, 1983; Correa, 1996). This is quite common, judging from the language similarities between intermarrying groups, such as Makuna and Barasana, Tatuyo and Karapaná, Yurutí and Siriano, Letuama and Tanimuka, Yukuna and Matapi, etc., in contrast to languages and groups regarded as 'siblings.' Therefore, according to Chacon and Cayón (2021, p. 20):

> when we look critically at language exogamy and the formation of wider exogamous units, we see that language is a defining feature neither of. . . identity nor of. . . exogamy. . . . according to recent versions of social unit formation in the region, we should examine it [in connection to other features].

The 'mother's sons' category is also poor to define a phratry. Usually, these people have been classified as 'the affines of our affines', a sort of 'real brothers' (C. Hugh-Jones, 1979), 'real blood kinsmen' (Correa, 1996), or an intermediate category between kin and affine (Århem, 1981). Regarding terminology, *pahko makü* or *hako makü* designate both matrilateral parallel cousins (MZS) not equated to brothers – unlike patrilateral parallel cousins (FBS) – and uterine brothers, sons of fathers from different groups. In both cases, marriage is forbidden. Cabalzar (2008) sees

this category as capable of restoring consanguinity to distant agnatic relatives through a common group of affines. This term can also be expanded to some exogamous groups that share the same real or virtual group of affines without marriage links. Århem (1981) and Andrello (2020) have pointed out that 'mother's sons' are neither full kinsmen nor brothers-in-law, but a third category which mediates between kin-affine relationships and allows for their reversal. In part, this is posible because the clans continuously split up and change composition, thus creating social and spatial distance, on the one hand, and, on the other, affinal proximity via local alliances. With time, distant agnates may become affines and close affines may become kin, which in turn requires that new alliances be established, particularly for political reasons. Andrello (2020) explains that the *pahko makü* are co-affinal groups related locally via a third group to whom they established successful alliances. Thus, the phratry and the 'mother's sons' would be the outcome of the expansión of a clan's alliances or of a group from a given place, therefore, there would always be a local logic to help understand such a thorny issue.

We might say that conceptually Eastern Tukanoan phratries are a general framework to demarcate, in a difuse way, as C. Hugh-Jones (1979) states, the upper limits of exogamy. However, in practical terms, they depend on local kin, affinal, and co-affinal relations. This is why it is imposible to reach a systematic and coherent view about them. These arguments do not mean to cast off the phratries. They are important for a regional comparison of Arawak-speaking groups, and help us understand the dynamics of concrete local relations, linguistic (Chacon & Cayón, 2021), and historic processes, because they can evoke the memory of old agnatic group cleavages that created and diversified present-day groups. For instance, a Taiwano narrative recounts that, in its maiden voyage, the group's ancestral Anaconda was accompanied, most of the time, by the Tuyuka and Makuna Anacondas. All three belonged to the same group until they began to split up at different points on the way to occupy territories of their own (ACAIPI, 2015, p. 121). The Eastern Tukanoans deem the places mentioned in the origin narratives as fundamental to the process of differentiation.

It is a different matter altogether when we shift our attention from patrilineal ideology to the actual constitution of *malocas* and villages, where one observes the importance of affinal and residential bonds. Most often, no clan occupies just its own territory. Many members live elsewhere. Århem (1981, 1989, 2000) explains that the Makuna do follow a descent ideology, but also combine it with the principle of symmetrical alliance in order to spatially establish the basic units of their social and political organization. He calls the Makuna social organization a system of segmentary alliance. Blood relatives slowly drift apart, as they concentrate on affines in new places, thus producing a spatial organization of small and localized groups arranged via alliances that may split at any moment. Then, spatially organized groups could be: (1) Domestic groups economically independent, gathered around a set of brothers or agnatic relatives with their wives, or around a married couple with married and single children, (2) local groups of several neighboring domestic groups linked through blood and/or alliance, located on a section of a specific river, (3) territorial groups made up of several local groups occupying an entire river (Århem, 1989, p. 16). Such local groups rally around at least two segments of allied groups when they decide to live together in neighboring *malocas.* Each settles on some section of the river and both choose a place to be the reference for their location on that river or on one of its tributaries. Each local group becomes a political unit and usually follows a leader, who can be a housemaster, a shaman, or both. The local leader mostly organizes rituals and promotes several feasts to exchange food, thus reinforcing the ties between neighboring local groups that constitute a territorial group.

Here the emphasis is not on sibling ranking, but on the symmetrical equivalence or equality between real and virtual affinal groups on the same river. If the ideal, discursive model postulates that the various clans of a group must occupy

a certain river, the formation of territorial groups shows that real relationships are anchored in alliance. A territorial group, most often related to the tributary of a major river, entails both relations between allies and virtual affines, and between agnatic relatives and 'mother's sons.' This is a small-scale version of the larger and more open social networks that occupy vast section of a river, the entire riverbank of a main river, or adjacent parts of two important rivers. The foundation of villages, decades ago, on the Pirá Paraná and Apaporis Rivers follows the same organizational logic (Århem, 2000). Nevertheless, according to Franky (2004), whereas on the Pirá, villages are organized as local groups, on the Apaporis, they are arranged as domestic groups.

Cabalzar (2008) sustains that both filiation and affinity shape specific social spaces, for each group creates a regional nexus formed with a cluster of local groups related through political, ritual, and labor relations. These relations rest either on agnatic kinship or on affinal connections, tending to create a center/periphery model, the center favoring filiation, the periphery stressing affinity. Strong agnatic ties between close relatives, usually from the same sib, uphold central local groups usually of high rank and with ritual privileges. Their home villages are regional ritual centers where they preserve their specific language identities and ritual practices that reinforce hierarchical relations. Moreover, these groups engage in affinal relationships with segments farther away. Peripheral local groups comprise sib segments of low rank, are either drifting away or losing political or demographic strength. Their members play minor ritual roles and tend to live with nearby segments of affinal groups with whom they intermarry most often. Their situation is similar to that described by Århem (1981, 1989) for local groups in which a common set of affines allows members of a genealogically distant group to activate common agnatic ties. We should notice that the spatial organization of such groups can be lineal, as the ideal model suggests, or concentric, as Cabalzar (2008) describes. Given the variety of outlooks, the issues related to the constitution of social units, added to our difficulty to understand them solely on the basis of kinship, exogamy, and residence, we need to introduce other considerations, namely, shamanism, cosmology, mythology, and ritual.

ON FILLIATION, HIERARCHY, AND ONOMASTIC

The overlap of filliation, affinity, and spatial organization in social units increases the tension between the hierarchical principles that order relationships within a clan, or exogamous group, and the egalitarian principles central to the external relationships with affines, because social units like clans, exogamous groups, and local groups are equivalent when seen as traditional houses (*malocas*), called *basa wiri* (dance houses) in some languages of the Tukano family. In late twentieth century, S. Hugh-Jones (1993, 1995) attempted to solve these problems by coming closer to the native interpretations of Eastern Tukano categories of social organization. To him, Tukanoans conceptualize social relationships in two distinct and complementary ways. The first emphasizes a male view of the house or *maloca*, by privileging group autonomy, unilineal descent, exogamy, agnatic ties, and internal hierarchy as expressed in clan rituals (*He* House) or *yurupari*, particularly the link with the founding ancestor and the ranking order of a sibling group. The second stresses equality, interdependence, and blood ties as manifested in daily life and expressed in food exchange rituals (Food-giving House), or *dabucuris* between neighboring communities, underlying co-residence, endogamy, and the extended family or blood group formed around ties of commensality.[4] The first view

[4] Similarly, Århem (2000) states that these ritual expressions determine two complementary kinds of sociability. He calls the first 'Descent House'; it is agnatic and centers on the *yurupari* ritual, which creates an exclusive 'us' and an identity that marks categorically the limits between we and the 'others', whether kin or affines. The second, 'Consanguineal House', where consanguinity rests on a food-exchange ritual, produces an inclusive 'us', that is, an identity based on commensality, which blurs the kin/affine distinction.

corresponds in part to the anthropological concept of filiation or descent; the combination of both is similar to Lévi-Strauss' (1989 [1979]) notion of 'house societies[5].' Although the Tukanoans speak of patrilineality, they put much weight on the proximity and closeness to their real affines and reinforcement of their mutual ties via ritual exchange. This leads us to examine, on the one hand, how they understand patrilineality and how it contrasts with affinal relations, and, on the other, the importance these relations have in rituals, whose basic scenario is the *maloca*, as we shall see.

Recent works (S. Hugh-Jones, 2002; Andrello, 2016; Maia & Andrello, 2019) have examined some aspects related to the local understanding of patrilineality. They point out that rather than a product of automatically and vertically transmitted substance by a genitor, patrilineality results from the ritual work of person building. This ritual work involves complex connections with the past and the present, its axis being the circulation of names among both living and dead relatives in alternate generations. Every exogamous group has an exclusive set of male and female names. One should not pronounce these names publicly during a person's adult life. They are sacred because they are secret, as they refer to clan ancestors and to *yurupari* flutes. Furthermore, they contain knowledge about social specializations (Cayón, 2013). These specific names, bestowed at birth, are different from other kinds of names, namely, a nickname given to a child by close relatives and frequently used, and another name, in either Spanish or Portuguese, acquired from Whites. S. Hugh-Jones (2002, pp. 57-58) states that secret names are souls. According to the Tukanoan theory of conception, the father provides semen to make the baby's bones, connected to clan permanence, whereas the mother contributes with blood and flesh, associated with affinity and impermanence. A shaman, ideally a father's agnatic kin, gives the child its soul-name in a ritual a few days after childbirth. It comes from a group of ancestors, particularly a recently deceased grandfather. According to Maia and Andrello (2019), the shaman transfers the name to the child by blowing tobacco smoke on its head.

Filiation, then, has a corporeal dimension passed on by the father in the form of bones, and another, immaterial, connected to the name and transmitted by a shaman, an 'artificial' procedure that ties persons to their forefathers. Oftentimes, when the father is not indigenous or his soul-names are unknown, the child gets the secret names of its mother's group. Thus, it can claim membership to its maternal group (J. R. Barreto, 2012, p. 137). This procedure should not affect marriage arrangements, because it does not alter the position of cross cousins. However, it may cause some tensions in ritual and shamanic contexts when spouses have secret names coming from the same group, perhaps incurring in a sort of 'soul incest' or 'onomastic incest.'

As they circulate within the group, names tightly bind it to its vitality in tandem with ritual regalia, which represent its visual counterpart. S. Hugh-Jones (2002, p. 61) explains that, given the prohibition against using these secret names, during rituals men wear their regalia as if it were names, play these names in flutes and sing them in their songs, thus displaying the groups' vitality. In other words, a group presents itself or displays itself to another as in a performance. Therefore, an exogamous group appears as a set of names exhibiting themselves in ritual interaction. This name set is limited and exclusive. The right to use these names grants their owners the privilege to claim descent from a given mythical ancestor. Their bearers recognize

[5] For Lévi-Strauss (1989 [1979]), the house is a grouping that persists through time; its continuity depends not only on succession and replacement of its human assets, but also on fixed and movable property, and transmission of titles and privileges, an integral part of its existence (Carsten & S. Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 7). As a group of people, or a 'moral person,' the house "owning a domain consisting of both material and non-material property – wealth, names and titles – transmitted along a real or fictive line which is held to be legitimate so long as its continuity can be expressed in the language of filiation or marriage or, more usually, both together" (S. Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 241).

each other as agnatic kinsmen. Actually, in some Eastern Tukano languages, the term for clan and exogamous groups is the same, as in *mahsã kura* in Tukano and *masã buturi* in Makuna. This means that clan and exoganous group are similar structures at different scales.

Among other things, this implies that many people in the same group have the same soul-name, although other names identify them as do the kinship terms that differentiate older from younger siblings, a rule also applied to clans. Ranking is not devoid of strong disputes and contradictory interpretations. An interlocutor of mine affirmed that there are different ways of seeing group configurations. What sustains these differences are the variations of certain events in mythical narratives. Therefore, there is no single understanding of how a group, a phratry, or clan ranking is fashioned. Maia and Andrello (2019) take as an example the Tukanoans, the largest group in the region in membership and of clans (about five thousand people and thirty four clans), to explain this from the point of view of the *Ye'pârã Oyé*, a clan specialized in keeping the original memories of the group. The Tukanoans comprise four ranked sets: older brothers (chiefs) with four clans, younger brothers (warriors) with twenty clans, ritual specialists with six clans, and 'cigarette makers,' the lowest rank, with six clans. The clans sprang up from ten ancestors whose names pass on both to persons and clans, thus producing repetitions in clan names. The founder's nickname distinguishes the clans. When crosschecking different narratives about clans, Maia and Andrello (2019) detected a consensus about who is part of the senior, the ritual specialists, and the cigarette-maker sets. In contrast, in most clans of the younger-brother set (warriors), there is a dispute between older and younger brother. This framework based on sets reveals two parallel lines between the major clans, which in turn originate other parallel lines of younger brothers, an arrangement that is absent in lower sets.

Tukanoan anthropologist J. R. Barreto (2012) explains his group composition in a similar vein. He states that the patrilineal line of reasoning is, in fact, a way of speaking and naming, and that each clan has its own version of its constitution. From the standpoint of his own clan, *Sararó Yúpuri Búbera Porã*, the Tukanoans regard their group as a tobacco leaf. Each side of the midrib has a group led by an older brother followed by a sequence of younger brothers. There are, then, two major blocs, Wauroa and Sararoa. When the ancestral Anaconda-Canoe emerged at the center of the world, the first to appear were a line of twelve ancestors led by Yúpuri Wauro, and later, another line of brothers led by Ɨremiri Sararó. Both lines stood parallel to the Ipanoré rapids, where humanity first appeared. J. R. Barreto (2012) says they recognize the Wauro as older brothers, but Sararó was also an older brother born in the opposite line, and should be a Tukano leader. All versions of clan and group origin rest upon the act of 'speaking over the tobacco plant,' (*Münropaü Uúkunse*), describing Tukano genealogy from each clan's viewpoint. What distinguishes clans and groups, he says, is the 'ritual culture,' which, when acted out, shows that Tukanoan thought is always under reconstruction, and each collectivity identifies itself with a language, a mythical past, and a place. He adds that groups became brothers-in-law, because they spoke similar languages.

As we can see from this example, disputes and tensions between older and younger brothers are very frequent within families and clans, as transpires in mythical narratives. This is due to the differential access to spouses. As exogamous marriage favors a direct and reciprocal sister exchange, the older brother always has a greater chance of finding a wife than the younger brother (Cayón, 2020). When this tension rises up to clans, there may be ranking reversals and it is even possible to turn a blood relative into an affine. Clan growth and multiplication are fundamental, because they mean vitality, as Andrello (2019) explains. Clan demographic growth is thus a crucial strategy to secure wives. When a senior clan grows more slowly than a junior clan for lack of sufficient males, it loses political and ritual

significance. Andrello (2019) points out that the literature on the region shows cases of clans that were very close distancing themselves because the lower clan grew more rapidly, perhaps causing conflicts and witchcraft accusations.

Actually, a clan strengthens its position and status when it diversifies its alliances, bringing in new affines and competing with its blood relatives for wives, which involves the practice of shamanism. Decline in the number of males may result from a shaman's evil manipulation to propitiate the flow of wives without retribution to the women's clan or, if he is a blood relative, to dispose of the women from the declining clan, his classificatory sisters, for his own benefit in wife exchanges (Cayón, 2004). The Makuna explain that such situations drive the male members of a declining clan to seek protection from another group to restore its vitality. When this happens, the protecting group gives them a woman and follow shamanic procedures to recover the weak group, but at the cost of the latter's ritual dependence of and debt to its protectors. Among other things, this means that the members of a convalescing clan ought to favor marriage exchanges and alliances with the host group.

Rank and blood/affinal reversals such as these appear in mythical narratives referring to various events, both old and new. For example, on the voyage of the Anaconda-Canoe bringing all the ancestors, *Pamüri masã* (Transformation People), at first, the Desana were the leaders and principals and later, the Tukanoans, who eventually became the former's brothers-in-law. These reversals occur either because of sibling disputes that subvert the relations between higher and lower clans (see Maia & Andrello, 2019) or due to changes in some ritual as Pimenta da Veiga (2014) describes. The Yurimawá and Yuremawá, two Cubeo clans, were brothers who settled in Wanano territory. During an initiation ritual, when they played their sacred flutes out of tune, they fell out with each other and, from that moment on, decided to become brothers-in-law. This led to an opening in the system, when one of them opted to become a Wanano co-affine (*pahko makü*). In such cases, when kin become affines, we might ask what happens to the use of secret names, since, in theory, two affinal groups share the same set of names, thus contradicting the saying that filiation implies a common set of secret names. Here, new language variations may affect names, as in the case of a very common name: Yepá, Yehpá, Yebá, Yibá.

However, the solution to this possible contradiction may be in yet another onomastic feature, that is, names can also refer to a person both cosmologically and territorially. Tukanoan anthropologist J. P. Barreto (2022) explains that a name (*heriporã bahseke wame*) is injected into a baby by a shaman primarily to provide it with a social position that will allow it to play a special role in ritual ceremonies (*bahsamori*), and to interact with non-humans (*bahsese*). The name entitles the person to claim the houses visited by the Anaconda-Canoe as life references, as well as the places mythically and historically occupied by its group and clan. The name also connects a person to a set of inmaterial knowledge and with certain objects. Hence, says J. P. Barreto (2022), a name defines the frontier of group membership and gives access to exogamy, thus defining a social and political position, a territory, a place from where to speak, and exogamy possibilities.

Just as a set of exclusive names can define a clan and an exogamous group, so does a certain exclusive configuration of sites, referred to in origin narratives and transmitted with the name. This is why narratives and places enable us to understand the differences between clans and exogamous groups. It also distinguises between paternal siblings, as each specialty is associated with specific places while birth order is not the only way to differentiate. When a shaman 'injects' a name, he also transmits an arrangement of places associated with the child's ancestors and its future social specialty. All of this the shaman inscribes in the child's body-soul-thought (Cayón, 2008, 2013). These interrelations are understood as vitality.

RITUAL UNITS

Let us return to S. Hugh-Jones' (1995) ideas about the double interpretation of the concept of house. When Tukanoans

represent their patrilineal groups, they emphasize a set of goods and rights that compose their identity and ancestral powers. Besides names, these goods are: ceremonial objects kept in a feather box, a set of sacred instruments (*yuruparí*), rights to make specific objects of material culture, a language, proper names, songs and dances, prayers and enchantments, melodies, musical styles, and a mythical corpus that identifies and legitimates the ancestral powers activated in the ritual (S. Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 241). To this set of possessions, we might add a territory, an original ancestral *maloca*, a house of the dead, certain cultivars, and some places from where to get materials for various activities (Cayón, 2013). All these connections are highlighted in the *yuruparí* rituals of a given clan or exogamous group. Clan rituals induce the initiates to return to the origin of world, becoming one with their Anaconda ancestor (S. Hugh-Jones, 1979), as the *maloca* where the ritual takes place, together with the ceremonial objects, the food consumed and those present mingle together and become the body of the ancestral Anaconda. The sacred instruments are its bones, the sound of the instruments its breath, the feather box its heart, the roof its feather crown, the ayahuasca its blood, the coca and tobacco leaves its skin, and the participants its guts. The novices become one single body with their ancestors and with their paternal relatives, thus reaffirming the group's patrilineal identity. Therefore, it is not enough to carry a secret name to engage with one's ancestors, because this connection must occur during the initiation ritual, when the novices first interact with the flutes and their respective ancestral spirits. Through sounds and visions, these entities teach the young about the specialties attributed to them at naming.

From the point of view of a clan or exogamous group, the *maloca* encapsulates and actualizes a mass of elements in a single body. These features are the relationship with its eponymous ancestor, a mythical past and the present, the dead and living members of the group, the clans, the territory, the language, sacred instruments, ceremonial objects, exclusive names, shamanic songs and knowledge, and other distinctive features of each group in the region. Simultaneously, this ritual fusion triggers several possible meanings, since *maloca* may mean the universe, the ancestral body, or a human body. It shows overlapping scales that fit together and present homologies in the relationships it entails, as the same fractal person expands or contracts (Andrello, 2016, p. 71) as do demiurges, ancestral anacondas, and the primordial *yuruparí*. The bodies, fluids, and objects of these beings spawned everything that exists now.

S. Hugh-Jones (1993, p. 106) shows that from the *maloca* a consistent basic structure emerges from here, namely, a father and his sons ranked according to birth order constant at all scales: clan segment <clan <set of clans <exogamous group. From a female view of the *maloca*, where affinal and exchange relationships take place and where *dabucurís* are the highest ritual expression, the basic structure is repeated at all scales: family compartment [son/married brother] <house <territorial group <humanity. Hence, the *maloca*, with its capacity to fuse scales through rituals, also entails the discrepancy between a patrilineal exogamous group composed by a set of brothers, on the one hand, and a local group comprising kin and affines, on the other. This is most evident when we focus on house configurations and ritual activities during exchange feasts via the interrelations between specialists (chief, singers-dancers, warriors, shamans, workers). Let me explain.

The visible dynamics of searching for marriage strategies also appear in the political-ritual field. Disputes between seniors and juniors derive from clashing political positions grounded in specific ritual projects (see Cayón, 2020). One of the purposes of these rituals seems to be to emphasize a collective project designed to reach the ideal of performing the whole group in a given site, be it a clan, a set of clans, an exogamous group, a local group, or a territorial group. It always entails the ritual expression of the relations a set of people has with a given territory and with the ritual objects. When older and younger brothers work together without disputes, that is, when their relationship evokes all the connections existing in patrilineal filliation, then an exogamous patrilineal unit becomes concrete.

As ritual activities aim at reproducing the group and all other beings in the universe, social reproduction is but one part of the cosmos life-giving processes. This is the key to understand how, in this region, exogamous and local groups can become ritual units, which elsewhere I called cosmoproducers (Cayón, 2013). A ritual unit may be multiscale, sometimes extolling patrilineal ideology, other times, stressing alliances between affines with brothers-in-law as central pieces. Actually, what we have here is a general form, a house, kept constant on different scales.

The ritual unit is the outcome of the relations arranged between specialists as they unfold within the *maloca* in ritual perfomances. At a feast, there is always the opposition of at least two such units related to each other symmetrically, because their leaders are always equivalent. To carry out a ritual, there must be at least one other unit that acts as counterpart. In terms of social relations, the minimal ritual form is the exchange between host and guests, as Perrone-Moisés (2015) rightly suggests. It opposes kin (hosts) to affines (guests), whether or not their relations are real. Sometimes village feasts involve members of the same clan who play both hosts and guests. In ritual performances, same-clan members invited as guests occupy spaces in the house near the men's door, corresponding to affines. Alternatively, the same people, when on a visit, settle down near the house owner, closer to the women's door.

To think of social units as ritual units is to relativize the apparent contradiction or the figure-ground play between an ideal model at the conceptual level and a concrete sociological reality, between kin and affines, agnatism and cognatism, and hierarchy and equality. As we have seen, filliation is discursively favored, and names are performed in rituals. As for affinity (and for women who are members of a local group), apparently, it comes up mainly as performance in feasts; perhaps for this reason it went unnoticed by non-indigenous anthropologists. Tuyuka anthropologist Rezende (2021) described Tukano sociality as a vast exchange feast, a fruit *dabucurí* with various ceremonial dialogues between host and guest leaders. These dialogues display the aesthetics of social relations by highlighting the contribution of kin and affines to the organization of the ceremony, always keeping the distinction between hosts and guests. In structural terms, both are in the position of affines as are their social units. At the beginning of the feast, these positions are kept apart, but at the height of merriment and efervescence, there is a ritual fusión. Host and guest differences fade away when both manifest the same humanity or, in Rezende's (2021, p. 151) words, are converted "in members of the same cosmic family, children of a single father, Yepa Oãkü[6]." The differences return at the close of the ceremony. In the ritual climax, there is no affinity and the indistinctiveness of mythical times is temporarily restored. Host and guest alternate because, after an invitation, the guests must invite their hosts to dance at their own *maloca*, thus creating an alliance dynamic between *malocas* and groups which is reinforced at each ritual.

To see affinity through the context of ritual units confers to it the importance it deserves viz-à-viz filliation that is favored in Tukano discourses. What I mean is that both clans, exogamous, local, and territorial groups come into existence and operate according to the same logic, be they ritual units, ceremonial houses, or dance *malocas*. The ideal ritual unit would be a patrilineal group gathered in its ancestral territory, with a marked clan hierarchy and specialization. Each clan would have its own *maloca*, be specialized in one of the major rituals of the annual cycle, and have its own feather ornaments and ritual objects. This paraphernalia must circulate around the *malocas* to activate the agency and ritual knowledge that animate the group and the beings that fill the universo. To reach this ideal seems rather utopian, as it eclipses affinity, which is the real basis of everyday relations and the necessary condition for group perpetuation.

Actually, what we have are men and women, kin and affines, working together to organize and carry out feasts.

[6] Portuguese translation from English.

The headman or *maloca* owner and his wife send invitations, distribute tasks to produce food, and welcome the participants with food offerings. The shaman negociates with the spirits of game and fish to be partaken at the event, protects and strengthens the participants with the substances he cures and blesses during the feast. The main singer-dancer organizes and leads his cohort along the ritual. The hunters bring game. The women prepare manioc and fruit, cook, make drinks and immediately distribute them. The workers collect and process coca, tobacco, firewood, and everything that is needed for the ceremony. In the old days, warriors protected the *malocas* from a posible enemy attack.

Underlying the older-younger brother basic structure is a general and ideal framework which is hardly applicable and depends on the presence of specialists from affinal groups. Whether all the principal specialists are agnatic relatives, or some are affines makes no difference to the purposes of the feast. The reasons to hold a feast are to tighten the bonds between distinct kin and affine groups, to be joyful and have fun. Most importantly, however, is to reinforce the vitality of the participants and of the non-human beings that live in the territory. This vitality grows with food, drink, and shamanic substances that are 'blessed' or inflate potency and well-being with the blowing of a *kumu* (shaman). The shaman wanders mentally through the multiple houses inhabited by various beings, which are part of mythic narratives. In other words, he retraces stretches of the voyage of the Anaconda-Canoe or the ancestral Anacondas, and stops at the house that hosts the feast. This route is performed in the movements of the principal singer-dancer (*baya*), his cohort, and the parallel line of women and children that follow them around the *maloca* four main poles that demarcate the 'dance path' (*basa ma*).

To enhance other beings' vitality means that, besides hosts and guests, there is a third party whose presence is hidden from the non-indigenous observer. This third position belongs to non-humans which get coca and tobacco from the hosts and singing, dancing, and merriment from the guests in exchange for the food they provided for the feast (see Cayón, 2017). Hence, we can think of this third non-human party as connected to both human units. At *dabucurí*, the figure-ground play is not between filliation and affinity, but between humans and non-humans (Andrello & Vianna, 2022). The *dabucurí* also reveal that to the hosts ritual politics has two directions. One, sociopolitical, under the responsibility of the house owner, addresses the guests. The other, cosmopolitical, in *kumu*'s hands, focuses on the relations with non-human beings. House owner and shaman are ideally related to each other as older and younger bother respectively. They are magnified persons with the capacity to encompass the whole collective simultaneously (see Cayón, 2020). It is the relationship between house owner and shaman that validates any ritual.

If, as Andrello and Vianna (2022) propose and the brief analysis of *dabucurí* shows, kin-affine relations are symmetrical, would this feature appear in rituals that use *yuruparí* flutes and exalt patrilinal filliation? Would the *yuruparí* ritual be a sort of *dabucurí*? There are two kinds of *yuruparí* ritual. One uses the flutes to enter the wild fruit *maloca* (Fruit House). The other is the initiation ritual (Yuruparí House) properly so called (see S. Hugh-Jones, 1979). Both forbid women and children from seeing the instruments. Tukanoan anthropologist Sarmento (2018) explains that the use of *yuruparí* flutes to carry wild fruit is a kind of *dabucurí* between men and women, thus constituting a most basic and direct form of exchange between affines. In such scenario, the men, mediated by the flutes-ancestors, hand food to the women for manioc and chicha in a suggested symmetrical and complementary way. Well, then, would there be a logical dimensión from which to think of male initiation ritual as a *dabucurí*? It is posible. The sociological scenario is the same as that of the wild-fruit *yuruparí*, with women prohibited to see the flutes. This aspect sets the ritual only on the relations between males and ancestral spirits.

Women, although present, are hidden from view, as do non-humans at *dabucurí*. In male initiation rituals, the hosts are humans and the guest, *yuruparí* spirits. Men feed coca and tobacco to the flutes in exchange for their sound,

knowledge, and reproductive power. Hence, we might think of this ritual as a *dabucurí* of the living and the clan ancestors incorporated in the flutes (see S. Hugh-Jones, 1979). In other words, men feed the ancestral spirits that provide them with the capacity to reproduce. Although women are not present, they represent an invisible third party. Therefore, we might think of the *yuruparí* ritual as connected to exogamy (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1996), although we understand that *dabucurí* is the prototype of sociality (Rezende, 2021) and the most basic ritual form in region. The Tukano word for *dabucurí* is *posé*, which, according to Francisco Sarmento (personal communication, 28/11/2022), means both feast and exchange, etymologically translatable as a "gathering of houses."

To ponder about ritual units in Northwest Amazon may help compare different regional systems, understood as variations of each other. There is no space here to advance such comparison, but I would like to mention a couple of features to contrast Eastern Tukanoans to their Southwestern neighbors on the Caquetá-Japurá and Putumayo-Içá Rivers. Peoples in that region call themselves People of the Center. They constitute a multilingual regional system with eight groups of four language families, viz., Witoto (Murui, Ocaina, Nonuya), Bora (Bora, Miraña, Muinane), Arawak (Resígaro), and Andoke-Urekena (Andoke) (Echeverri, 2022). They were victims of genocide by the infamous Casa Arana during the first rubber cycle, which forced them to go through a complex reorganization process to reconstruct their social organization and alliance networks.

There are some outstanding similarities between Eastern Tukanoans and the People of the Center. Some, like the Bora and Miraña, have yuruparí and peach palm rituals that resemble those of the Eastern Tukanoans and Arawak who live on the Miritíi Paraná River. Besides, all the People of the Center have fruit rituals reminiscent of dabucurí. They are also organized in patrilineal clans with a set of exclusive names, rights over a certain territory, a place of origin, and specific mythical narratives. Some patrilinially related clans claim higher status than others, although this hierarchical distinction seems to be less marked than among Eastern Tukanoans. There are differences in the birth order of paternal brothers, but they emphasize the first and second born (who acquire important ritual names), and the last born of both sexes. Among the Bora, the first-born are given 'pretty' names associated to maloca headmen, whereas the second born get 'ugly' names connected to shamans (Lucas, 2019). They practice virilocal residence, have *malocas* (octogonal in shape unlike the Tukanoans whose dance *malocas* are rectangular, elongated and rounded in the back, or circular), which identify a residential unit as a ceremonial unit (Echeverri, 2022). Nevertheless, there are differences in affinal relations. Although these groups are patrilineal, their terminology is not Dravidian, but Eskimo-Hawaiian, which expands consanguinity and prohibits marriage with all relatives descended from the four grandparents, thus forcing each generation to enlarge its marriage networks. This is why a great many marriages are interethnic.

Several specialists in the region (Guyot, 1972; Gasché, 1976; Landaburu & Pineda, 1984; Griffiths, 1998; Londoño Sulkin, 2004; Karadimas, 2005; De La Hoz Melo, 2005; Pereira, 2012; Lucas, 2019; García, 2021; Echeverri, 2022) have pointed out that ritual life is organized in *malocas* and 'ceremonial careers', the most important being shared by all groups. A *maloca* leader must be a specialist in only one career. When its associated ritual cycle is completed, he is replaced by his eldest son. To organize a ceremony, the host invites at least one 'opponent' from another *maloca* with the same ceremonial career. Thus, both leaders develop a permanent relationship as ceremonial allies. Like the Tukanoan 'mother's sons', they are neither kin nor brothers-in-law, but potential affines included as third parties. Hence, at the feasts there is always a latent animosity. Unlike the Tukanoans, the People of the Center legitimate the position of this third category in rituals rather than in mythology.

Enmity among ceremonial allies is performed by the guests in dances and gestures and minimized in ceremonial discourses with the use of kin terms by the host leader. Through ritual condensation, this produces a symultaneous

and contradictory bond between affinity and consanguinity among the participants (García, 2021). Other opponents may be invited to some ritual and positioned to the East and West, North and South within the host's *maloca*, thus conforming regional networks that are ceremonially connected. Such feasts seem to follow the basic design of a *dabucurí* where hosts and guests echange with each other. The former offers tobacco and garden produce for game meat, singing and dancing. However, unlike the Eastern Tukanoans, it is the guests who mediate or promote the relation of the hosts with non-human beings. In this brief sketch, we can recognize, as in a system of transformations, several themes dealt with along this text.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In their speeches, the Tukanoans exalt patrilineal ideals. Actually, *maloca* and village arrangements contain both kin and affines segments living together, thus underlining the importance of alliances in the making of local and territorial groups. When I propose that social units are ritual units, I am trying to show that what really matters is to focus on the ways in which rituals yield kinship relationships and world reproduction, rather than on tensions between filiation and alliance. Regardless of the intensity with which filiation and alliance build this or that village, most important are life-creating ritual via the articulation of the social specialties, which, in part, meet the requirements of the ideal model. This articulation reveals whether the specialists are members of the same filiation group or whether they are brothers-in-law. The crucial issue is to generate life; hence, what matters is to achieve the means to organize rituals and activate the various agencies, that is, bring specialists together. Therefore, I reiterate the notion that a ritual unit consist of the interaction between specialists. There is also a political dimension here, for the production of vitality production is also a political concern, as a number of authors clearly demonstrate (S. Hugh-Jones, 2002; Cayón, 2013; Andrello, 2016). It is quite simple. If a village has no means to celebrate rituals for lack of specialists apt to occupy the positions that make it a ritual unit, such village will not have much political weight and will become dependent on a village capable of celebrating rituals. In large villages such as Yawareté (Andrello, 2006) and Pari Cachoeira (Santos, 2018), rituals always frame political disputes between kin and affines, although those people no longer live in *malocas*, but in large clusters of houses in big villages. Nevertheless, these *bairros* (neighborhoods) follow the spatial logic of the *maloca*, but no longer under the same roof.

All specializations intertwine in ritual contexts to build, at any level, a sense of totality for the ritual units. As the social specialties are interrelated and complementary positions, they materialize the ritual units inside the *maloca*, thus highlighting internal relationships and hierarchies. They also express the unit vitality, because specialists use various ritual objects to activate the powers required to maintain and prolong its life. The *maloca*, then, contains and expresses each ritual unit, all the way from a local group, to a village, a clan, and a broader exogamous, patrilineal unit. Therefore, the units that arise in a ritual context aim at producing kinship ties and various kinds of persons via the shamanic manipulations of their components, and the consumption of vitality-producing substances. The term 'ritual unit' may have a functionalist flavor, but rather than stressing ritual purposes, I insist that every collectivity comes into existence by means of a relational disposition created in rituals (time) performed inside a *maloca* (space). This relational disposition involves the interaction of specialties, names and places. Specialists may change from one ritual to another, and the unit may keep a basic set of agnates occupying main specialties, or appeal to affines, if necessary.

The ritual interaction between different units has historical consequences to the group's constitution, creating brothers-in-law and age-ranked brothers. For instance, the Makuna, self-named *Ide masã* or Water People, consider as their ancestor the Water Anaconda (*Idehino*), said to have five clans. In fact, only three clans (*Tabotihehea*, *Sairã*, *Wiyua*) descend from this ancestral Anaconda, whereas the other two (*Buhabogana* and *Süroa*) have very different origins.

Perhaps potential affines in the past, nowadays the other clans refer to them as older and young brothers, respectively. On the other hand, the *Emoa* clan, regarded by the Water People as preferential brothers-in-law, came from the saliva of the Water Anaconda; originally kin, it became an affinal clan. The Makuna explain these three cases as the consequence of the increase in the Water People's ritual repertory. In their narratives, these clans could then choose their own reference kinship terms. This happened in specific places. Thus, ritual and place are central to the narratives, including recent times, because they describe the various historical trajectories of each clan or group, where they performed rituals, to whom they related, and what they learned. Places and the narratives associated with them are yet another source of differentiation within a clan or group of clans.

This exploration of recent ideas about the constitution of social units and patrilineality indicates the extent to which the older brother-younger brother set is central to the Eastern Tukanoans. Equally important are secret names, places, narratives, and ritual life. We can also appreciate how difficult it is to define social units when we try to build a single and coherent framework for the peoples in the region. The contours of these units, being multi-scale, depend on who interprets them. For this reason, I have attempted to reach an alternative that might reveal a structural form applicable to several scales and relate to ritual life, hence, my emphasis on ritual units, dance *malocas*.

Unit constitution varies according to the state of social relations. Since the latter change with conflicts, conciliations, new alliances, etc., they may separate or approximate clan segments, distinct clans and groups of affines, create alignments and alter the hierarchical order. Given the fission forces produced by conflicts between senior and junior brothers, stressing asymmetry, relations with affines, markedly egalitarian and symmetrical, seem to be amenable to the work of ritual units, or, at least, to the continuity of ritual practices otherwise thwarted by sibling estrangement.

Tensions between hierarchical and egalitarian forces, responsible for fusions and separations, are part of the system, propelling its functioning and creating processes of similarity and difference. The combination of difference production and the singularity of local alliance dynamics affect other fields, such as linguistics. The result is that different languages may come closer to each other, whereas the same language may split internally. Such processes serve to reconfigure relationships between groups at a higher level and to reinforce the functioning of the system as a whole, thus avoiding homogenization, by holding the tension between hierarchy and equality, on the one hand, and patrilineality and affinity, on the other. A historical analysis of these processes should contribute to linguistic studies in the region. There are yet unknown implications for these studies. On the one hand, different languages, sharing the same space due to affinal relationships, affect each other and change. On the other, various circuits of affines affect the same language, when an exogamous group has dispersed and lives with affines speaking distinct languages. This double dynamic is crucial to grasp the processes of linguistic similarity and differentiation in the area, the construction of kinship, and spatial distribution.

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