

Village schools, power and new inequalities: effects of schools on Wauja local economy, political system, and domestic relationships

Escolas indígenas, poder e novas desigualdades: efeitos das escolas na economia local Wauja, sistema político e relações domésticas

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Abstract: Studies argue that formal schooling in Indigenous communities tends to be negatively associated with children acquiring local cultural knowledge, and that formal schooling using a language and world views unrelated to local knowledge contributes to its erosion. Yet the impact of schooling on a community extends far beyond the curriculum itself. School reshapes the daily routine, as well as the nature of work and leisure for children, teachers, parents and the community. In cultures such as that of the Wauja of central Brazil, where, before the arrival of schools, all adults contributed to food production, schooling immediately creates a division of labor between salaried workers who can buy food and people without salaries who must produce it themselves. Salaries change not only labor patterns, but the local economy itself, as well as residence patterns, and even gender roles. Young men who earn salaries can be head of their own nuclear family households, instead of doing bride service and living in extended family households under the authority of a father-in-law. This change in residence patterns, in turn, impacts roles and status of women within their homes. Effects of various disruptive forces associated with introduction of schools are examined.

Keywords: Literacy. Inequality. Gender.

Resumo: Estudos argumentam que a escolarização formal em comunidades indígenas tende a ser associada negativamente com a aquisição de conhecimento cultural local pelas crianças, e que a escolarização formal usando uma linguagem e visões de mundo não relacionadas ao conhecimento local contribui para sua erosão. No entanto, o impacto da escolaridade em uma comunidade é muito mais amplo do que o do currículo em si. A escola reformula a rotina diária, bem como o trabalho e o lazer para crianças, professores, pais e comunidade. Em culturas como a dos Wauja, no Brasil central, onde, antes das escolas, todos os adultos contribuíam para a produção de alimentos, a escolarização cria imediatamente uma divisão do trabalho entre assalariados que podem comprar alimentos e pessoas sem salário que devem produzi-los por conta própria. Os salários mudam não apenas os padrões de trabalho, mas a própria economia local, bem como os padrões de residências e até os papéis de gênero. Os rapazes que ganham salários podem ser chefes de suas próprias famílias nucleares, em vez viverem sob a autoridade de um sogro. Essa mudança, por sua vez, afeta os papéis das mulheres. Os efeitos dessas forças disruptivas associadas à introdução escolar são aqui examinados.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização. Desigualdade. Gênero.

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THE WAUJA IN 1981-83¹

This essay discusses changes seen during the past forty years among the Wauja, an Indigenous Arawak-speaking people in Central Brazil. It focuses on the early years of this period, which are less known, and compares those times to the present.

INSISTENCE ON RECIRCULATION OF OBJECTS

When I first visited the Wauja in 1981, there was no road to their village, only a footpath, so a few Wauja men met me at the grassy airstrip near the administrative post and we walked 26 kilometers to the village, most of it through tall, dense forest that has been lost to wildfires in recent years. My companions wordlessly led me to the house of the hereditary chief, *Walakuyawátumpá* (Figure 1).² I was made to understand that I should address the chief, clearly a formidable man, as ‘papa,’ which means the same thing in Wauja as it does in many other languages.

As the chief sat silently, smoking a long cigar, my hammock was slung a few feet away from his. The chief occupied himself with tending the small fire beside his hammock, while his family indicated to me with gestures that they wished to see the contents of my bags. There was only passing interest in my typewriter, camera, notebooks, and medicines, but when my hosts discovered I had brought enough canned fish, nuts, and powdered cocoa to get me through my first six months, the chief had it all carried outside to the plaza. Papa went out, and I followed, watching meekly as he solemnly distributed the food, which was quickly consumed by the assembled villagers amid a festive atmosphere.

That day I learned two things: that food was shared, and that, to the community, my identity was my



Figure 1. Principal chief (*kehoto wekeho*) *Walakuyawátumpá* in 1982. Note emblems of rank: Jaguar-skin crown and oropendola feather ear ornaments. Photo: E. Ireland (1982).

kinship relation to the chief. No one really knew who I was, where I was from, or why I was there. All that mattered was that the chief had granted me a status as his (fictive) kin. That (and possibly the food) embedded me in the community, even though the Wauja did not yet know my name.

¹ Observations in this essay derive from eighteen months' residence in Piyulaga village during 1980-83, in the households of *Walakuyawátumpá* and later *Yawalátumpá*, as well as subsequent visits to Piyulaga and the newer villages of Ulupuwene and Piyulewene in 1989, 1996, 2012, 2015 and 2018. In 1983, 1990, 2016, and 2017, Wauja elders and young scholars have resided in my home as we collaborated on various cultural documentation projects.

² The chief used the name *Walakuyawá* in the latter decades of his life. When spoken, the name of a deceased person should include the respectful suffix *-tumpá*. His name refers to the *walaku* fish, *Leporinus* sp.; called *piau* in Portuguese (Kaji Waurá and Turuza Waurá, personal communication, Jan. 5, 2023). The first mention in this essay of a deceased Wauja person's name will use the suffix *-tumpá/-tumpá*, and the plain version thereafter.

During the following months, the Wauja worked patiently but tirelessly to break down my obstinate belief that I had a right to hoard objects that others wanted me to share. Because I came from a culture in which money was a necessity of everyday life, I had assumed, even though the Wauja did not yet use money, that I would need to maintain a personal stash of trade goods (such as fishhooks, hunting ammunition, and beads). Otherwise, I reasoned, I might find myself unable to pay for food, lodging, tutoring, and other benefits I received.³

From the Wauja point of view, however, my having a sack of fishhooks sitting idle in my duffle bag was not good planning on my part; it was intolerable hoarding. As I revisit my early field diaries from 40 years ago — an operatic litany of misunderstandings and bruised feelings — I realize that the first six months were largely consumed by an epic struggle between the anthropologist and her would-be teachers, between a daughter of capitalism and a society that was a finely-tuned machine for grinding down conspicuous material inequality.

So long as my duffle bag still contained unclaimed treasures, I had no peace. At last, after I had given away or traded everything I thought they wanted, I had only my shoes and clothes, medicines, and the bare essentials I needed to do my work: notebooks, paper, pens, a camera, an audio recorder, and enough headlamp batteries to allow me to write up my notes each night.

Alas, it turned out that my six-month supply of batteries remained an affront to Wauja norms. The Wauja came to me and politely explained that they wanted to use some of these batteries for night fishing. I politely explained that I needed them to do my work. But you have so many,

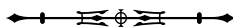
they would say. It's true, I did, but I needed them to last for several months of writing for at least an hour each night. They must have been astounded at my lack of good manners.⁴ However, after rebuffing several more polite requests, I noticed my supply of batteries was shrinking. I began to lock my little cardboard suitcase. Finally, one day, I saw it had been carefully jimmed open and just a 'non-hoarding' number of batteries remained, maybe enough for a week. I had been silently but effectively reprimanded.

When I pointed out to my hosts that nearly all my batteries were gone, they examined the broken lid of my cardboard suitcase and expressed shock that it had been recklessly broken like that. Soon the gossip network was buzzing about someone having ripped apart my suitcase. I pointed out that I didn't care at all about the suitcase and cared only about the batteries. But everyone insisted that it was a very bad thing to break apart my suitcase in such an angry manner — a disgraceful thing to do. Oddly, or so I thought, no one suggested that it was wrong to take the batteries. Looking back, I suspect that the intense gossip about this event was motivated in part by a desire to find out who did it so that others could demand a share. Doubtless, the perpetrator (or redistribution agent, depending on your point of view) ultimately was left with only a few batteries, just as I was.

After that, I tried using candles, reasoning that using candles in a canoe at night would be impractical, and the Wauja would let me keep them. However, candles are handy to use in houses. I was allowed to keep a few, but I had to share all the rest. I realized I could not reside peacefully in the Wauja village while hoarding large supplies of something they wanted and could not produce themselves.

³ Although money was not yet used in the village, a few of the Wauja had recently begun to go to São Paulo to sell handicrafts, usually buying aluminum cauldrons and hunting ammunition with their earnings. They spent the money immediately, and did not bring it back to the village, because the annual inflation rate was 100% or more during 1981-83, and paper money quickly lost its value, becoming 'weak' (*wakapai*), like old batteries.

⁴ In those days, the Wauja rarely refused when someone asked to be given a particular object. The owner could ask for an object of comparable value in exchange, but simply refusing, without even making an apology or a joke, was not done. A person who was 'stingy' (*kakayanumapai*) also tended to be perceived as 'angry' (*peyetepei*) — both qualities ascribed to witches. Dole (1958, p. 132), who visited the Kuikuru in 1953, describes a "compulsion to grant requests for gifts." Among the Wauja during those years, for those wishing to maintain a praiseworthy reputation, generosity was indeed compulsory.



Only when I abandoned my ill-mannered attitude regarding 'my' private property did I find a solution — a carbide lamp, the kind miners used before modern headlamps. As fuel, these lamps use a stinky rock that, until it is burned in the lamp, smells like sulfur. The Wauja did not want it. At last, *détente*.

In those days, the Wauja community had many subtle but effective mechanisms that demanded recirculation of most kinds of material objects (whether by sharing, payment, exchange or confiscation). No one could escape, whether they were anthropologists or the Wauja themselves.⁵ There were, however, certain kinds of possessions that a person could honorably avoid trading or giving away simply upon request. These included objects of prime value that arguably can be considered 'luxury objects' and were used to pay for costly but essential ritual and shamanic services. They are called *apapa alai yajo* 'real things' in contrast to objects of lesser value and prestige, variously referred to as *hapari* 'little trifles' or even *yakawaká* 'insects'. Some common examples of 'real things' are headdresses of crested oropendola (*Psarocolius decumanus*) and macaw (*Ara macao*, *Ara ararauna*) tail feathers (Figure 10); crowns of toucan (*Ramphastos toco*), macaw, and curassow (*Crax fasciolata*) feathers (Figures 2, 10); necklaces and belts made from the shell of a large land snail (*Megalobulimus* sp.) (Figures 1-4, 7-11); large ceramic cauldrons, and exceptionally large manioc griddles. These were all objects requiring significant labor to make and were treated as having roughly equivalent value. By 1981, glass beads, rifles and shotguns also were included in this category.

Note that this category of *apapa alai yajo* 'real things' was restricted to high-prestige items that would be well-received by any shaman or ceremonial performer. The Wauja made headdresses from many kinds of birds, but

only specific iconic styles from specific bird species were considered suitable as payment for shamanic or ritual services. Belts (Figures 9, 11), armbands, and crowns (Figure 1) of jaguar skin and necklaces of jaguar claws were considered prestigious and valuable, but they were rarely, if ever, used to pay for services, presumably because such adornments could be worn only by men of the highest prestige and inherited rank, normally the principal chief and his presumptive heirs.⁶ To do otherwise would be to invite mockery. That has changed in recent years.

The shaman's personal tobacco pouch, which might contain secret or powerful objects, and which was essential for the exercise of personal shamanic knowledge, likewise was not treated as an ordinary material object, and was not something that people would expect the owner to relinquish. A man or woman might keep a sack of shell necklaces or belts for decades, saved against the day the services of a shaman were needed, or when payment was required to negotiate a marriage or arrange a funeral.

Food, however, almost always had to be shared. In a small community subject to seasonal food scarcity, social institutions that promote and even demand food sharing are crucial. For instance, the circular layout of Wauja villages is perfectly suited to enabling subtle, but powerful social pressure by the community on all its members. When asked, the Wauja say their villages are circular because their ceremonies require that performers go from house to house around the circle, remaining visible across the plaza to everyone. Look at the Ikpeng (a neighboring group), they sometimes added — they used to have one big house for the whole village. If they wanted to perform the *tákuara* flute ceremony, they couldn't. The performers

⁵ This discussion refers to material objects, including fish, game and other food. The Wauja consider certain kinds of 'immaterial property' (such as personal names, songs, healing chants, as well as shamanic, herbalist and midwifery knowledge) to be personally owned. That category of possession is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶ The Wauja say that only a person of highest inherited rank, such as a village chief (*amunáu kehoto wekehopei*) could inherit and use the personal name *Yanumaka* 'Jaguar,' and that having a jaguar tattoo on the shoulder blade or chest was likewise reserved for such men. The late Wauja chief Walakuyawátumpa listed *Yanumaka* as one of his names (from his grandfather) and *Ianuconê* ('Jaguar' in the Kustenuau language) as the name his father had used. Both Yawalá (who later became principal chief) and Walakayawá had Kustenuau fathers, and therefore were ethnically Kustenuau, as shall be explained later.



would be standing in one place outside, with nowhere to go. That's why they adopted circular villages, like ours.

This explanation was reasonable enough. Yet the circular village layout also served to allow monitoring of which people had food and whether they were sharing it. In effect, it prevented people from cooking food at home in private. Every house had a front door that was kept open during daylight hours. The men sitting in the men's house, located in the central plaza, had a direct line of sight into the cooking area of every house. Only a foolish person would attempt to evade the obligation to share food while cooking it in such a visible space. Yet, even in this unlikely circumstance, inescapable Wauja social mechanisms that opposed hoarding produced a most elegant response.

One day during the rainy season, when fish were scarce and everyone was a little hungry, a man we shall call Tortoise had some good luck, and was approaching the village with a large catch of fish. Now, Tortoise was a single man of middle age who led a relaxed way of life. He lived with his sister's large family, and good-naturedly ignored her occasional scolding that he ought to go out and find some fish. Instead, he liked to sit calmly at home, watching the bustle of people going about their tasks. He often spent afternoons at the men's house, where men took turns sharing with one another the fish they caught that day. Some of these men were expert fishermen, and generously shared more fish than they received on other days from less skillful men. Tortoise, it must be said, was the opposite sort, someone who was unbothered that others knew he always received more fish than he provided.

On this particular day, Tortoise did not come home by the usual path from the canoe port to the village. Instead, he took circuitous rough paths used by people who wanted to hide something, usually an amorous assignation, although in this case, the beloved object was a supply of food that he didn't want to share. Tortoise managed to sneak into his house through the back door, and finding no one at home, began to grill the fish himself.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Tortoise, his erstwhile companions at the men's house had received some intelligence about the fish that he, at that very moment, was grilling. Thanks to another wonderfully effective Wauja mechanism of social control, gossip, the men already knew perfectly well the size of his catch and even what kinds of fish he had caught. Some children had been playing at the riverside where the canoes are docked. After seeing Tortoise's catch, they immediately ran down the main path to the village and reported their reconnaissance at the men's house, while Tortoise was still making his way home via the back trails. I was sitting among the men as they began to peer intently into Tortoise's house. The plaza is wide, so it is difficult to see details of activities inside the shadows of the house. But as soon as the cooking fire was visible, they knew. He was planning to hoard those fish.

Presently one of the young men made a sharp whistling sound that rang out across the plaza. Other men began to do the same. Of course, the whole village heard this unfamiliar sound and began to wonder at the cause. "That's the sound of the Tapir spirit," the men explained to me. "That's Tortoise's *okawakála*" (his spirit familiar, his 'dangerous possession').⁷

⁷ In Wauja, the sacred flutes used in solemn ceremony are called *kawoká*. The word '*kawoká*' also translates literally as 'danger' and is commonly used in utterances having nothing to do with the *kawoká* spirit. For example, '*Kawokápapai itsewe. Talúkene minya pitsu.*' (Its teeth are dangerous. They could bite you.) This is said to warn someone about a half-stunned piranha flopping around in the canoe near their feet. Returning to the meaning of *kawoká* referring to a spirit being, the Wauja use the term '*nukawokala*' to refer to the spirit master of a ceremony of which they are the sponsor. The term '*nukawokala*' is simply the first-person possessive of '*kawoká*' and translates literally as 'my dangerous possession.' The Wauja language has several ways to form possessives, depending on the noun in question, but a common one is: [person marking prefix] + noun + [-*la* or -*ala*], as in *nu* + *kawoká* + *la* (*nukawokala*, my dangerous possession), *pi* + *xawoká* + *la* (*pixawokala*, your dangerous possession), *o* + *kawoká* + *la* (*okawokala*, her/his/its/their dangerous possession), *yi* + *xawoká* + *la* (*yixawokala*, your (pl.) dangerous possession). Translating '*nukawokala*' as 'my dangerous possession' is faithful to the original Wauja term, expresses the ambiguity regarding who is master of whom, and avoids the connotations of private property in the English word 'owner.'



Thus, the men were not only embarrassing him, loudly calling attention to his selfish act before the whole village. They were also demanding a share of food on behalf of a spirit that must not be refused by its ceremonial sponsor, lest the spirit become angry and cause its sponsor to become gravely ill. Years before, Tortoise had suffered a serious illness that was found to have been caused by the Tapir spirit. To ensure his recovery, Tortoise had sponsored a ceremony that bound him to the spirit and required him periodically to provide food to ceremonial participants who made the spirit's ceremonial regalia and performed the songs and dances. At such ceremonies, the spirit was considered likewise to be fed, through the act of feasting the participants.

As I watched, the men continued to whistle loudly in the direction of Tortoise's house. This racket continued intermittently for at least ten minutes. Tortoise did not come out. It became a war of wills. Tortoise eventually must have realized that his situation had become quite ridiculous, and that the story of his asinine behavior was likely to be told far and wide — with comic embellishments, of course — even in other villages. The longer this went on, the more ridiculous he would become. Finally, sheepishly, he slowly shuffled to the plaza with the fish he had tried in vain to hoard. The men shared the feast, and the little kids who helped the grownups enforce the custom of sharing food also got shares.

Witnessing this, I marveled at the elegance of the Wauja solution to this problem. In my country and many others, millions of children go to bed hungry every night. Yet here, even someone who seemed to be immune to social control was finally forced to share, much against his will, with no arguing, threats or physical coercion. Unfortunately, this subtle but effective system would be altered profoundly within a few decades, as shall be described later.

The reader should not imagine that only anthropologists and fools were subject to these powerful pressures to share wealth and avoid hoarding. Even men of prestige, who were well-loved by the community, were not allowed to hoard wealth. Yawalátumpá (Figure 2), for instance, exemplified the ideal Wauja man; he was said to

be a *wauja yajo*, a 'real' or 'true' Wauja. He was generous, hard-working, and did not quarrel. He mastered and shared traditional knowledge of all kinds. He was eloquent, with a nimble wit, and knew the old stories, as well as flute melodies and how the ceremonies had to be carried out. He was a healer, specializing in magical incantations, and could be called upon to reduce fever in a child, or help a woman whose baby was slow in coming out.



Figure 2. Yawalá (right) and fellow song specialist (*apao yekeho*) Yaitsakumatumpá sing to honor the dead in 1982, about five years before Yawalá became chief in 1987. Note feather ornaments. Photo: E. Ireland (1982).

Although he was left with only his widowed mother after the 1954 measles epidemic, by middle age he had a large family, with two wives and twenty children. At one point, Yawalá decided to make a number of fine ceramic pots to sell in São Paulo. He planned to buy large aluminum cauldrons for his womenfolk so they could produce large batches of food more easily. His efforts paid off, and he returned home laden with at least a dozen large shiny aluminum cauldrons, ideal for carrying water and processing manioc. Never before had the Wauja seen so many of these objects in their village. Soon his womenfolk began to hear gossip that Yawalá had many fine new cauldrons and was unwilling to share any of them. He ignored the chatter at first, but it became increasingly insistent. Finally, he knew what he had to do. The way he handled himself in this matter suggests why the Wauja respected him.

Did he politely say 'no' to repeated requests, and stubbornly hang onto all the cauldrons as the gossip become ever more pointed and accusatory? Did he voice complaints when the cauldrons disappeared, a few at a time, until they were nearly gone? Quite the contrary. He was no anthropologist. Instead, one afternoon he gathered the cauldrons and started carrying them to the center of the village. When all were set out in public view, gleaming impressively, he called out in a friendly voice to all the village: "Come and get these worthless trinkets from the *kajaopa*!⁸ There are only a few and they are quite small! Come! Come, all the women!" From houses all around the village, women came quickly. Soon all the cauldrons were carried away by delighted new owners. Yawalá returned home to his crestfallen wives and daughters, where he was greeted with silence. They had given up the cauldrons, but his dramatically generous gesture, made without any show of rancor, burnished his reputation as a 'real Wauja' and likely contributed to his elevation as principal chief after Walakuyawá died a few years later, in 1986.

Novo (2017, p. 27) describes how the Kalapalo distinguish between what they call *patikula* (from the Portuguese *particular*, 'private, separate'), referring to individual or 'personal things' as opposed to 'community things' (*katutolo engü*, lit. 'thing of all'). Examples nowadays of 'personal things' are cash from a person's social security benefits, or a basket made at home for personal use or sale. Examples of 'community things' are funds and manufactured goods derived from community projects, visiting anthropologists, or village associations. These distinctions obtain in Wauja communities, as well, though they are often vigorously contested. Since 1981, a number of items that once were considered 'community things' have come to be viewed as 'personal things.' In the example above, when Yawalá spent weeks making ceramic pots for sale, he assumed he would keep the proceeds, just as if he had exchanged a pot at a *huluki* trading ritual for some beeswax or arrow cane. He assumed his pots and their proceeds were *patikula*, 'personal things.' Yet the community viewed Yawalá's aluminum cauldrons as a conspicuous quantity of scarce manufactured goods, which nearly always (in those days) were distributed communally in the central plaza. The new cauldrons therefore became, in the end, 'community things.' Today, however, the Wauja routinely make handicrafts for sale, and Yawalá's cauldrons would be considered strictly *patikula*. In the previously described episode of the missing headlamp batteries, also an example of contested categorization, the anthropologist viewed her fishhooks as 'payment' and therefore distributed them as 'community things,' but she mistakenly viewed the batteries as 'personal research tools' (her *patikula*), an error the Wauja patiently but firmly corrected.

The incidents described above illustrate how the Wauja could readily apply immense pressure on individuals to share objects with the community at large, even when

⁸ The Wauja term *kajaopa* glosses as 'brancos,' 'whites' or non-Indigenous people.



those individuals were strongly opposed to doing so.⁹ Such pressure can be seen as legitimizing confiscation of what the Wauja viewed as illegitimately hoarded objects.¹⁰

STRICTURES AND DISCIPLINE OF KINSHIP

Forty years ago, another very powerful mechanism of social control was Wauja expectations for how people must behave toward various categories of kin. Before attempting to learn the language, I first had to memorize how I was related to each person in the village (as 'daughter' of the chief). This person was 'uncle', that one was 'sister-in-law.' Otherwise, I would unwittingly trample rules of affinal respect in both my speech and behavior, causing the people I addressed to feel uncomfortable, or else scold me mildly for addressing them rudely. If the person I addressed pretended to ignore my blunder, there usually were others nearby willing to correct me.¹¹

A Wauja must avoid uttering the names of their parents-in-law, child's spouse, and spouse's opposite-sex sibling, and even, as Basso (2007, p. 171) observed for the Kalapalo, "words that evoke those names." There were many people in the village whom I was taught to treat as affines and whose names, out of affinal respect, I was not permitted to pronounce. My nemesis was a very nice guy named *Kamo* 'sun,' who happened to be my son-in-law. To behave respectfully toward him, I had to avoid many

common expressions related to time of day, seasons, and even temperature, such as:

the sun is hot	(<i>iyatapai kamo</i> , 'hot is sun')
what time is it?	(<i>kanai itsapai kamo?</i> , 'where is/was sun?')
about this time of day	(<i>ojonai itsapai kamo</i> , 'sun is/was here' [pointing])
next dry season	(<i>veekitsa kamokawa</i> , 'distant future sun season')
last dry season	(<i>kapaka kamokawa</i> , 'yesterday sun season')
daytime	(<i>kamomawa</i> , 'during sun')
my wristwatch	(<i>nukamoja</i> , 'my sun')
let's go! it's getting late!	(<i>ayiu! enupai kamo!</i> , 'let's go! sun is high!')

I had to keep names of my affines in mind at all times when speaking, which was not easy. This responsibility grows more complex and demanding as a person ages. Years ago, the number of names I had to refrain from saying was manageable, mainly because the Wauja population was then only about 127 persons, and I had no grandchildren among them. Today, however, there are over 700 Wauja, including a large number of people I address as grandchildren, many of whom are granddaughters of my various sisters-in-law, and have inherited the very names I am forbidden to say! As a result, when I address my granddaughters, I often do not dare say their names, and instead simply call them *weku* 'grandchild' or *nowotu* 'my granddaughter.' Similarly, to

⁹ Note that Wauja society is not one of social equality, but of hereditary rank, with some people born to chiefly rank, and called *amunāu* (fem., *amunuleju*), while others are born commoners (*iyataku*). Nonetheless, the Wauja in 1981 insistently demanded recirculation of certain material objects, particularly food and tools needed for food production and other essential daily tasks. High-value 'luxury goods' or prestige objects, such as feather ornaments and shell belts, were recirculated, but less widely. Healers, seers, and other ritual specialists were more likely to be on the receiving end of such recirculation.

¹⁰ However, the Wauja had many other customs and rituals that did not employ confiscation to achieve redistribution of objects. I will list only a few: Public athletic exhibitions showcasing the skills of a champion archer (*ōtai yekeho* 'bow master') who had the privilege of distributing game he killed among all the villagers, a prerogative otherwise reserved to the chief; the *huluki* trading ritual, practiced throughout the Upper Xingu, described by Dole (1958) and most recently by Novo (2017) and Novo and Guerreiro (2020); the show of generosity upon a girl's menarche (*tonejutāi yumekepei*), as her family provides gifts to others; the costly payments to seers and healing specialists who diagnose and treat the sick; and the many payments made in shell belts, feather ornaments and other objects of prime value when a spirit is identified as the cause of an illness, to performers (singers, flute players, dancers) in connection with every ceremonial performance.

¹¹ I was lucky they had the patience to correct me. In 1981, villagers had limited experience with non-Indigenous outsiders, so they assumed I should learn how to speak Wauja and behave appropriately. Like a pet parrot or enemy captive, I constantly was fed phrases, coached, and corrected. Nowadays, they tend to slip back into Portuguese with an outsider who knows Portuguese but is trying to learn Wauja. Instead of focusing on incorporating the outsider into their culture, they have become more interested in learning about the world outside their community.

avoid saying the name of young male affines, such as the husbands of my growing number of daughters, I often say *tsalá* or *kampá*, 'younger male relative.' However, even though I do not 'say' a name, I still must 'know' it, to avoid saying or invoking it in ordinary conversation.

In the 1980s, younger Wauja found it amusing to trick me into forgetting myself and saying a name that was forbidden to me. It was difficult to avoid saying the names of my affines, because personal names often are names of things in everyday life, such as water, rain, song, manioc gruel, mosquito, old man.¹² As a result, when speaking, I had to know the names of all the people I must not name, so, for instance, if my sister-in-law's name happened to be 'Water' (*Uno*), I would not use that word, and instead find a circumlocution, such as 'wetness' (*kulagaki*).

Basso's classic work on affinity (Basso, 1973, 1975, 2007) convincingly argues that many dimensions of Kalapalo social interaction are critically indicated by relationship terms. The centrality in everyday life of relationship terms and associated behavioral expectations applies not only to the Kalapalo, but also to the Wauja, especially as I knew them in the 1980s and 90s.

The fruiting season of the pequi tree (*Caryocar brasiliense*) is a time of ceremonies that playfully pit men and women against each other in bawdy contests. One day, as I was watching the *Mapulawá* ceremony from the front door of my house, the elderly wife of the chief told me to stop scribbling and join the celebrants. A few hundred

yards away, two raucous lines of dancers were singing at top volume, shouting taunts at each other and shrieking with laughter (Figure 3). When I hesitated, she pushed me firmly toward the plaza, demanding that I go. There was one line of men, and one of women, so I quietly slipped into the line of women.

Moments later, the singing and dancing abruptly stopped, and the lines became ragged as people discussed the problem. Unwittingly, I had slipped into the women's line in a spot that was opposite a classificatory nephew, who certainly was not supposed to make bawdy jokes about or laugh directly at someone he called 'aunt,' as that is the term used for mother-in-law. The poor young man was visibly upset and embarrassed. My kinship blunder had made it impossible for the ceremony to proceed.



Figure 3. Mayhem and hilarity erupt as men and women tussle during the *Mapulawá* ceremony in 1982. Photo: E. Ireland (1982).

¹² To give an idea of the discipline, self-awareness, and mental effort required by name avoidance rules, here are some Wauja words that refer to plants, animals, household objects, and other concepts, many of which frequently occur in everyday conversation. However, these words happen also to be used as personal names. If such a name belongs to the speaker's affine (spouse's parents, spouse of opposite-sex sibling, or children's spouse), the speaker may not utter it at all. These are but a few examples among hundreds: *Aayu* (cotton plant), *Ahato* (bird locust), *Ai* (pepper), *Aixe* (pepper sauce), *Alua* (bat), *Apaó* (song), *Apiya* (white-lipped peccary), *Atamai* (buriti bark fiber), *Atanapo* (sapling), *Atapojá* (hornet), *Autu* (collared peccary), *Ayúe* (tortoise), *Hukai* (diarrhea), *Ikitsapai* (footprints), *Isiki* (feces), *Itsamala* (canoe prow), *Itsautai* (buriti palm fruit), *Itsautaku* (buriti palm grove), *Ixamá* (bitter tasting), *Ixana* (witchcraft), *Iyapi* (beeswax), *Iyapu* (stingray), *Iyepé* (cloud), *Kajaopa* ('branco' or non-indigenous person), *Kamaní* (the interrogative 'why?'), *Kamo* (sun), *Kapi* (coati mundi), *Kapulukumá* (howler monkey), *Kumpe* (sourdough bread), *Kumútu* (bad luck), *Kunú* (house door), *Kutá* (leaf-cutter ant), *Kūyekūyeyuto* (dragonfly), *Kupá* (tick), *Māikiyagá* (Corn Gruel), *Malula* (giant anteater), *Mapapalu* (butterfly), *Mēi* (bullet ant), *Mukúto* (Mouse), *Munu* (termite hill), *Pitsá* (gourd dipper), *Pokojo* (agouti), *Tipúka* (small pond), *Tsiyua* (Suya, the name the Wauja used for the Kisêdjê people), *Tulumá* (woodpecker), *Tutujeme* (*Jararaca*, a venomous snake), *Uku* (arrow), *Ukūyūto* (testicles), *Ulako* (electric eel), *Uno* (water or rain), *Unú* (green heron), *Upi* (duck), *Usixuwi* (manioc gruel), *Walamá* (anaconda), *Weu* (horned beetle), *Yaká* (caiman), *Yamurikumá* (ancestral spirit women or the ceremony named for them), *Yanumaka* (jaguar), *Yanunu* (elder or old person), *Yelatu* (crab), *Yuluma* (Piranha), *Yuuma* (a kind of catfish).

Like a stuffed doll, I was summarily yanked into a location opposite a cross-cousin. With affinal respect behavior once again restored, the ceremony resumed. The young people singing, dancing, laughing, shouting lewd insults, pushing each other playfully and snatching away each other's ceremonial objects, created a scene of joyous, outrageous, comical mayhem, but the importance of respecting kinship rules was not forgotten for a moment.

Even today, forty years later, I make a practice of never uttering names of certain affines, even when I am home in the U.S., speaking privately to my husband, lest I forget myself and let the name slip when I am again among the Wauja.

LONGEVITY AND POWER OF YAKAPÁ PRINCIPAL CHIEFS

Another powerful form of social control a generation ago was the Wauja principal chief (*kehoto wekeho* 'keeper of the land' or 'person in charge of the territory'). Throughout most of the twentieth century, until Chief Walakuyawá's death in 1986, there were only two principal chiefs. The first was Chief Tupataritsumpá (Figure 4), who was photographed in his prime when Rondon's expedition visited the Wauja in 1924. Tupatari (also called Anakatú¹³) was still chief in 1948, when Lima (1950) visited and observed:

One of the most characteristic traits observed in the Waurá and which contrasts with the other tribes of the Xingu that we have visited, is the position of the chief within the tribe. There is a true transmission of power from father to son, power recognized by the entire community. . . . The authority of the Village chief is respected by all and his appeals or work orders are carried out. (Lima, 1950, p. 9)

The other major political figure of the 20th century was Chief Walakuyawá, who became principal chief after

Tupatari died in the 1954 measles epidemic. These men were both respected and feared, in part because of their accomplishments, erudition, and personal attributes, and in no small measure because they were *yakapá*, masters of special shamanic powers that enabled them to identify the witches among their fellows.¹⁴ Unlike lesser *yakapá*, these two men were considered to be *kujutaixei* 'having vision' that was authoritative (*aitsa minyulipai* 'not false').

When I resided in Piyulaga village in 1981-83, on several occasions I witnessed Chief Walakuyawá perform his duties as *yakapá*, smoking enough tobacco to bring on visions that would reveal the cause of a person's illness, whether that be a spirit or a human being. I recall that the village would suddenly become silent except for the deep

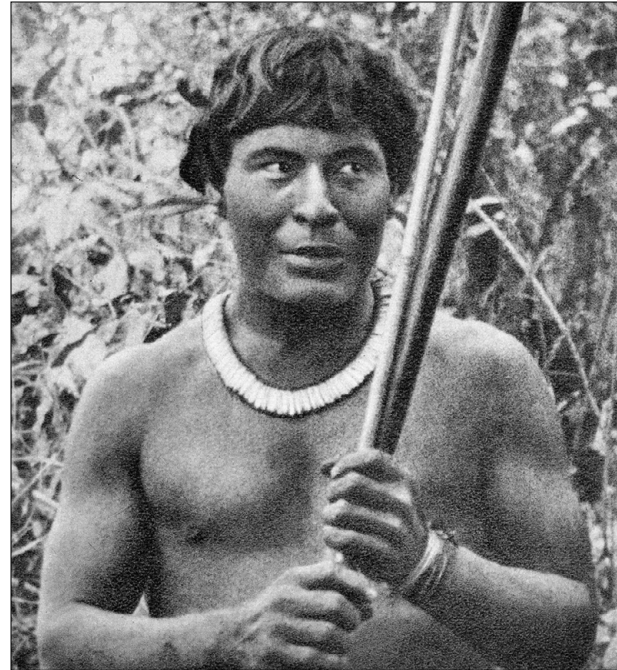


Figure 4. Principal Chief (*amunāu kehoto wekehopei*) Tupatari in 1924, when he used the name Anakatú (Rondon, 1953, p. 140). Photo: Major Thomaz Reis.

¹³ Lima (1950) calls him Apakatú.

¹⁴ Most Wauja *yakapá* in the past two centuries have been male, but various Wauja women in the past forty years have become *yakapá*: The first was Kaititsumpalu, who married Akusatumpá of the Mehinaku people, and was the older half-sister of the Wauja principal chief Walakuyawá. In the 1980s, another Wauja woman, Masasalu of Piyulaga village, became *yakapá* after she was trained by her Wauja husband, who was himself a *yakapá*. For several decades, Walakuyawá was the most prominent Wauja *yakapá*, but after his death, other *yakapá* became established, including a third Wauja woman, Kapi of Ulupuwene village, also trained by her husband, Elewoká.

groans of the chief as he staggered unpredictably around the village, following his vision. The houses left their doors open, but strangely, nearly everyone hid themselves, watching furtively so as not to draw attention. When children made a sound, they were frantically hushed by their elders, also a strange behavior. It was obvious that people were filled with dread that the chief's pronouncement could fall on themselves or their loved ones.

Often, at the conclusion of such episodes, the chief would let it be known through his womenfolk that the cause of the person's illness was such-and-such a spirit.¹⁵ Sometimes, however, people began to hear through gossip channels that a certain household held a witch, or even that a certain named person was the malefactor. Everyone knew that if the chief repeatedly, on multiple occasions, identified a certain person as a witch, that person was marked, and either would have to flee the village or, if they remained, know that they could be executed for witchcraft at any time.

In the twentieth century, while Tupatari and then Walakuyawá were principal chiefs (and *yakapá*), a period of about six decades,¹⁶ sixteen Wauja men were identified as witches by the *yakapá* in power at that time. Some were executed, some fled into exile. Marked as witches by their own people, and without defenders in their place of exile, some were killed where they took refuge. Some, however, managed to live out their days in exile. Of these sixteen, only one was able to remain in the village and survive. This individual sought out the Kamayurá chief at that time, Takumátumpa, also a renowned *yakapá*, and provided

immense payment to receive training as a *yakapá*, a skill he subsequently passed on to his sons, and even his wife and daughters. My point is that the Wauja *yakapá* chiefs of the twentieth century had — and repeatedly used — the power to pronounce a fate of exile or death for men in their village.

Nowadays, however, no Wauja is forced to live in exile as an outcast among strangers. Instead, an accused man can take his family and start a new village within the Indigenous territory, far enough away from the main village to allow them to prosper in peace. When Walakuyawá died, there was only one Wauja village, Piyulaga. Now there are seven additional Wauja villages.¹⁷ More recently, some Wauja have chosen to settle in the border towns outside their territory, earning a living as laborers or otherwise. It should be emphasized that, especially in recent years, people leave the main village for a variety of reasons, and certainly not only when under duress. The effect of this option to leave, however, dilutes the tremendous power that some Wauja chiefs once had, especially if they were also *yakapa*.¹⁸

It also should be noted that the Wauja formerly had a mechanism that served to check the power of a chief who was also a *yakapá*. That was the role of the auxiliary chief (*amunāu opalukaka* 'chief of the opposite side'). The name of the office referred to the position of the house of the auxiliary chief — directly across the plaza from the chief's house.¹⁹ However, the word *opalu*, contained in the title of this office, can have additional meanings in Wauja: 'opposite,' 'opponent,' 'opposition,' and even 'enemy.' The

¹⁵ This is an example of how politically sensitive information was channeled through women, who could shape it as they passed it along (Ireland, 2021). Of course, channeling this information through women also gave politically prominent men plausible deniability. I have seen the chief say he was misquoted when it turned out something he said — that I had heard him say to his womenfolk the night before, and that had been repeated by his womenfolk — met with pushback on the gossip circuit of the village women.

¹⁶ Tupatari was principal chief by 1924 or earlier. When he died in 1954, Walakuyawá succeeded him and remained principal chief until he died in 1986.

¹⁷ These are: Alamo, Awa Enumutukaga, *Terra Indígena* (TI) Batovi, Kiyagaluwá, Piyulewene, Topepeweke and Ulupuwene.

¹⁸ Until the later half of the twentieth century, men under accusation did not have the option to simply take their wife and children elsewhere, clearing a new village in the forest, because a single-family settlement would be defenseless against enemy raids. In recent memory, the Ikpeng (Txicão), the Juruna and the Kisêdjê (Suyá) all raided the Wauja, taking captives and sometimes killing the Wauja and suffering fatalities in return.

¹⁹ That is, the auxiliary chief not only 'orated' opposite the principal chief, he also 'built his house' directly opposite that of the principal chief (Kaji Waurá, personal communication, December 29, 2022).



Wauja say that the auxiliary chief was a respected leader in his own right. When the chief emerged from his house to formally orate, his auxiliary chief would emerge from his house to formally respond. The auxiliary chief also would stand in when the chief was away, such as when he accompanied the Wauja to intergroup observances.²⁰ This was an inherited office, held by men of high inherited rank.

During Tupatari's tenure, from at least 1924²¹ until his death in 1954, he was accompanied in his leadership role by a man named Kapulukumatumpá, who had inherited the role from his own father, Wakuyukumatumpá, who also had formally responded to chiefly oratory in the main plaza. Kapulukumá actually held office longer than either of the two chiefs he served and died in 1965.²² The Wauja explained that the role of the auxiliary chief was to formally respond in public to the chief. But they also made sure I understood that the auxiliary chief Kapulukumá was a formidable leader in his own right: a *yakapá*, as well as a wrestling champion (*kapi yekeho*), champion archer (*ontai yekeho*), master of incantations (*ejekeki yekeho*), and even skilled at the dark art of rituals and charms to cause witches to come forward and confess (*tsixe wekeho*, adept at *tiwixahi*). Wauja elders say the *kajaopa* (non-Indigenous people) called him 'Capitão Apwikatuá' (his name at the time).

When I compare the number of deaths and exiles during the years Kapulukumá held office (1924-65) against the years after his death (1965-86), when a powerful *yakapá*

chief held office alone, the evidence shows that the presence of an auxiliary chief with *yakapá* powers coincided, in this historical instance, with a dramatically reduced rate of accusations that resulted in grave consequences, such as death or exile. Sadly, although I was privileged to witness Walakuyawá deliver chiefly oratory at dawn, I did not get to hear Kapulukumá (Figure 5) formally respond, as he had died almost twenty years earlier. No one took his place as auxiliary chief, and today in Wauja villages at dawn, there is no chiefly oratory and no response from 'the chief of the other side'.²³



Figure 5. Auxiliary Chief (*amunāu opalukaka*) Kapulukumatumpá in 1924 (Rondon, 1953, p. 142). Photo: Major Thomaz Reis.

²⁰ In 1884, Steinen describes sharing tobacco with some Bakairi elders, "among them the chief and, if I understood correctly, a vice-chief, the authority for the time when the latter is absent." ". . . unter ihnen der Häuptling und, wenn ich recht verstand, ein Vicehäuptling, die Autorität für die Zeit, wenn jener abwesend ist." (Steinen, 1886, p. 177). In those days, the Bakairi lived very near the Wauja (Figure 6), and the two groups performed certain rituals jointly, notably the *Makaqoneju* 'Bakairi Woman' song cycle.

²¹ Tupatari, who inherited chiefly office from his father, Alapokumatumpá, was chief in 1924 and very likely before. Major Luiz Thomaz Reis, during the 1924 visit by the Rondon expedition, photographed the key Wauja leaders at that time: the 'cacique' (Tupatari), his two younger brothers Malulatumpá and Akuetetumpá, and the auxiliary chief Kapulukumá.

²² Kapulukuma was photographed by Major Luiz Thomaz Reis in 1924, and again by Harald Schultz in 1964.

²³ There is another mechanism that in former times could check a powerful chief. Some Wauja elders have described how, in former times, a group of ten or more adolescent boys of high chiefly rank would go through a year or more of puberty seclusion together, on a platform built at about chest height inside the house of the principal chief. This custom could not have been observed during the time of Tupatari and Walakuyawá, a span of years when the Wauja population was reduced by repeated epidemics to a single village which, after the measles in 1954, contained only about 80 survivors. It would require a much larger population to have so many high-ranking youth of roughly the same age. When a group of men are all, in terms of rank, eligible to be chief at roughly the same time, it is much more difficult for a powerful incumbent to eliminate them all from contention one by one. Doubtless, the horrific depopulation the Wauja and all Xinguanos have suffered during the past few centuries has resulted in the loss of certain important cultural institutions that require larger populations.

One thing that puzzled me about Walakuyawá is that no one in the community seemed to know any details about his paternal ancestors. At the time, I thought it odd that a hereditary chief in a society that preferentially passed chiefship from father to son never spoke of his father or grandfather. No one seemed to question this; perhaps no one dared. Several other elders could provide detailed genealogies of their own families spanning five generations and more, but I could not get a straight answer when I asked the chief who his father and grandfather were. Chief Walakuyawá was older than everyone else in the community, and so perhaps no one felt entitled to ask him about it, as it would be an implied challenge to his authority, given that he never volunteered the information. His half-sister, mother of the chief of the neighboring Mehinaku people, dropped me some hints, but she was too dignified and well-mannered to respond directly to questions that no one else presumed to ask.

In the forty years since that time, some fascinating old family secrets have gradually surfaced, become openly acknowledged, and even claimed with pride by the younger generation of Wauja. It turns out that principal chiefs Walakuyawá and Yawalá both had Kustenau fathers, and therefore were ethnically Kustenau. It was Yawalá who first revealed this history as he was dying. During his lifetime, as he grew politically prominent among the Wauja, he never spoke a word of his Kustenau parentage, not even to his children, with whom he was emotionally very close.

At his death, however, his children buried him as he had requested, seated in his grave, with a ladder inclined to the sky, in the manner of a Kustenau chief. The Wauja may bury a high-ranking person with costly ceramic objects, or even buried in a hammock slung between two poles, but burying a chief with a ladder is not Wauja custom. In the case of Walakuyawá, after his death it became known that his father bore a Kustenau chiefly name. These stories

now are treated as interesting pieces of history; the Wauja proudly claim these two chiefs as their own.

Genealogies and other data suggest that during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were numerous consequential and fruitful matches between high-ranking Wauja and Kustenau families. This is not surprising, since the map drawn for Steinen in 1884 by a Kisêdjê chief shows the Kustenau and Waurá villages adjacent to each other (Steinen, 1886, p. 214; Figure 6).²⁴

In addition, during the same period, repeated epidemics resulted in Kustenau survivors arriving in Wauja villages simply as refugees from devastation. Their children, who subsequently were born and raised among the Wauja,

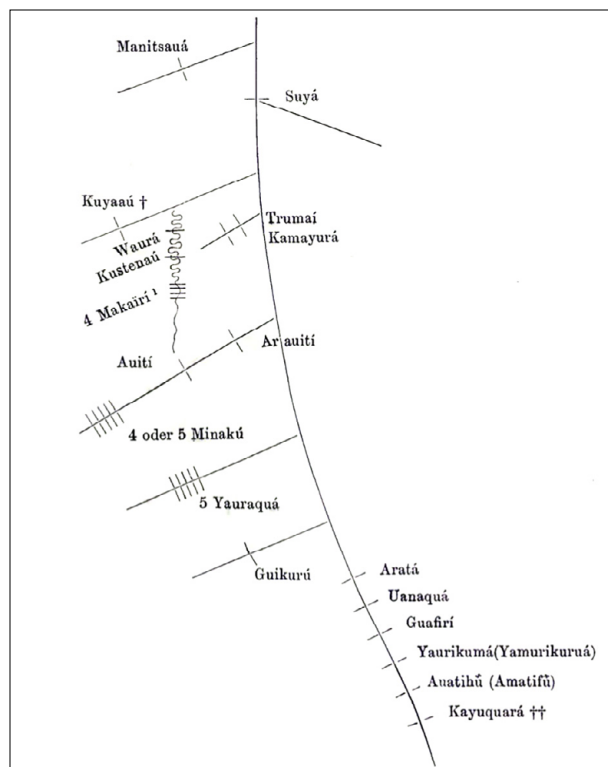


Figure 6. How the Suyá (Kisêdjê) chief mapped the headwaters of the Xingu for von den Steinen. Note the close proximity in 1884 of the Waurá (Wauja) to the Kustenau and Makairí (Bakairi) (Steinen, 1886, p. 214).

²⁴ The people Steinen (1886) called Suyá are now called Kisêdjê. The map their chief drew also agrees in the essentials with Steinen's (1886) own map. The Kisêdjê, who traded with the Wauja and also made war on them, visited their village and knew its exact location, unlike Steinen.

speaking Wauja as their native language, would have some claim to Wauja ethnicity despite having Kustenau parents. In 1981, the Wauja generally avoided mentioning any Kustenau parents or grandparents, because the Kustenau, in those days, were believed to have brought the epidemic upon themselves through their own witchcraft (Ireland, 1988, p. 168). However, after 1988, when the widely admired Wauja principal chief Yawalá was buried in the Wauja central plaza in the manner of a Kustenau chief, certain younger Wauja gradually have been coming forward to say that such-and-such an ancestor actually was Kustenau. These long-buried histories hold meaning for young Wauja descendants of these people and have clarified many questions in my genealogical data.

Today, numerous descendants (grandchildren, great-grandchildren and more) of these Kustenau ancestors reside among all three Arawak-speaking Upper Xingu peoples. Fortunately, the Kustenau people did not simply become 'extinct.' Survivors of the epidemics were absorbed, both physically and culturally, into neighboring Arawak groups, most often the Wauja, where they already had relatives though previous generations of intermarriage. The reader should keep this buried history in mind regarding Wauja culture, and perhaps the Upper Xingu more generally.

Since then, in the 37 years since Walakuyawá's death in 1986, there have been seven chiefs (Yawalá, Atamai, Kupatokumá, Kamalá, Atakaho, Awaulukumá, and Yapatsiyamá). Five died in office of natural causes; most of these were elderly. One was pushed out by a rival heir. With the exception of Yawalá and Kamalá, who led in a more traditional style, these leaders were not principal chiefs in the old sense, because most of them led with an informal partner, and when either partner died, the remaining one took another partner. It does not appear that their duties changed after they took a new partner; they were not 'principal chief' and 'chief of the other side.' Significantly, none of these chiefs of brief tenure were *yakapá*. *Yakapá* chiefs within Wauja memory and oral histories all became principal chief well before old age and held power for decades.

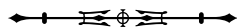
THE WAUJA FOUR DECADES LATER

Over the past generation, perhaps the greatest engine for change in Wauja culture has been village schools. Wauja children now experience a childhood that is radically unlike that of their parents. With the establishment of schools, children have stopped spending most of their days exploring the rivers, forests, and fields where their parents, in former times, acquired knowledge and skills essential for fishing, hunting and growing crops. Wauja schoolchildren no longer are physically and socially active all day, roaming the village environs in play groups, creating their own amusements with minimal adult supervision. Instead, they sit more or less passively in a small room for hours, carrying out activities chosen and directed by an adult authority, and interacting with their peers only as permitted by that authority.

As a result, many young people do not have the opportunity to become familiar with their own natural environment. A few years ago, a young man in his early twenties had just married and brought his bride to live with him in his father's house. I visited that house frequently, and whatever time of day I showed up, the young couple was cuddling, giggling and whispering in their large hammock, which was prominently positioned near the doorway of the rather small house. Amorous behavior is expected for newlyweds but, normally, it is now and again interrupted by periods of work.

One morning, I heard the elderly father demanding that the son help with fishing, because he was too old to provide for the whole household, including the young couple, all by himself. The son listened quietly and said nothing. Neither did he rise from his hammock. A few days later, however, a child was sent in the early evening to the house where I was residing, with a request to borrow my flashlight. It turned out that the young bridegroom had gone fishing but had not returned, so his worried father went out to look for him.

Hours passed. Finally, well after midnight, the two exhausted men returned. The young man had gotten lost (and there were no fish, either). Such a thing never would have happened before schools, when any boy as



tall as your chin could be trusted to safely guide you on the local waterways. Boys used to spend years exploring their riverine domain in small, leaky old canoes that grownups didn't use if anything better was available.

It takes time and experience to learn the river. The winding water on this flat landscape is a shape-shifter, with dead-end oxbows, shortcuts through flooded forest, and sinuous tangled strands of water that separate, meander and flow back together again. But every Wauja fisherman must learn it. Many still do, despite schools, but the young newlywed is not the only one who can read, count money, and use a mobile phone but is unable to navigate the prime domain of a Wauja provider.

SCHOOL CURRICULA AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The Wauja were first exposed to literacy training through Bible translation work for the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)²⁵ starting in the 1970s and before. When I first visited the Wauja in 1981, I learned that a few young men had done some paid translation work for the SIL missionaries who were working on the Wauja language, but in those days, the Wauja were not interested in Christianity. Their general view was, "Why should we believe them? They say their 'Jesús' shares fish and bread. But *kajaopa* never share food unless you have money. We are the only ones who share fish and bread!!"

Another issue was the depiction of Jesus. The Wauja, who value strength and good looks in their leaders, could not understand why the *kajaopa* had a chief who, to the Wauja, looked like an executed witch. Furthermore, the principal chief during those years was the indomitable Walakuyawá, who opposed any missionary presence, and apparently made his point by having his sons shoot arrows near the feet of a newly arrived missionary to encourage her to leave (J. Richards, personal communication, c. 1980).²⁶

Throughout several decades of intermittent Wauja exposure to SIL, there was not a single convert, but that changed when the Wauja began regularly visiting the local border town, Canarana, in the nineties and early aughts. The Wauja say they often feel unwelcome in shops and other establishments when they go to town. The exception is the evangelical church, which welcomes them, calls them friends, and offers them cookies and soda. The Wauja village of Ulupuwene now has a Wauja pastor who hopes to build a church in that village.

Franchetto (1994, 2021) and Barros (1994) describe the history of how, in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, missionaries from SIL exercised great influence on how bilingual Indigenous education was taught. Franchetto (1994) describes the SIL approach as:

... a model of bilingual education resulting in didactic material (booklets), training of indigenous teachers and indigenous authors, through the production of the so-called 'indigenous literature'. This has imposed itself as a modality for the dissemination and use of writing, as a metabolization of oral traditions (which I have on other occasions called the infantilization of oral narratives); for the missionary, the last phase of the use of writing would be training in the translation, reading and propagation of the Bible and civilizing texts. (Franchetto, 1994, p. 413)

The 'infantilization of oral narratives' is a key insight, and aptly describes what is usually the end result when a brilliant multimodal narrative performance — words, songs, oral mimicry, dramatic gestures, vocal pitch, volume, pace, tone, pauses, and a host of other storytelling techniques — is reduced to the flat, silent page. When that happens, oral literature is treated as if text alone has value, and all the rest is chaff to be winnowed away. In a similar vein, Barros (1994) argues that this text-centric model of bilingual education often has had the effect of negating the orality of Indigenous culture, because its goals typically are not aligned with those of the Indigenous community:

²⁵ SIL is a Texas-based evangelical Christian organization, whose stated "core contribution areas are Bible translation, literacy, education, development, linguistic research and language tools." (SIL International, n. d.)

²⁶ To be fair, he wasn't keen on anthropologists, either.



The indigenists saw the bilingual educational project as the most efficient method for teaching the national language. For missionaries, bilingual education is part of the conversion process, where literacy in the indigenous language is a condition of the evangelizing task. (Barros, 1994, p. 29)

Not only is the text-centric approach reductive; it rarely produces anything that is used and valued in the daily life of the community. Franchetto (1994, p. 417) describes a project designed by well-intentioned outsiders that was viewed by the elders of the community as “dangerous, for interfering in traditional life. Why learn to write in native languages, still alive in their orality? What pathetically useless purpose was proposed for these written languages?”

Unlike the Wauja's first village schools in the late 1980s, which had only non-Indigenous teachers and did not incorporate Wauja language and values into the curriculum, today, the schoolteachers and administrators in all six villages are themselves Wauja. As a result, year by year, they gradually are revising the curriculum to include more locally valued kinds of knowledge, especially spoken Wauja and traditional stories in oral form, training in the Wauja relationship to the natural environment, and in using local resources. The village schools also have adjusted their academic calendars to better accommodate the Wauja calendar that is tied to seasonal harvests and ceremonies (Autaki Waurá, personal communication, Jan. 7, 2023).

Despite the many challenges and disruptions that schools have brought to their community, the Wauja value literacy and its power to connect them to one another in distant villages, and in the words of one young Wauja, make them ‘citizens of the world’. In recent years, recognizing that their culture is rapidly changing, literate young Wauja scholars as well as traditional elders have become strongly motivated to participate in documenting their own culture. They have collaborated with non-Indigenous colleagues on projects to document Wauja history, literature, cultural geography, material culture and iconography (Barcelos Neto, 2002, 2020; Ramos, 2019, 2020; Rodrigues-Niu & Ramos, 2023; Autuyawalu Waurá, 2020;

Piratá Waurá, 2021; Tukupé Waurá et al., 2012). Such community-based projects are not only valuable additions to the ethnographic record of the Upper Xingu, but are also critical to the Wauja's ability to define and shape their own identity in a rapidly changing world.

NEW MODES OF SHARING AND SHAPING INFORMATION

Nonetheless, even though schools take children's time away from some of the traditional kinds of learning, Wauja parents want their children to be educated, mainly so they won't be disadvantaged in their increasingly frequent interactions with non-Indigenous people. Young Wauja want to acquire education so they can learn about and participate in the world beyond the borders of their territory, and perhaps also in order to qualify for a salaried job in their home village. They are eager to master Portuguese and cherish their right to vote, knowing that protecting their ancestral territory depends on a government that respects Indigenous rights. Young Wauja and their peers throughout the Upper Xingu are increasingly interested in political affairs, legislation, and even in public office, especially now that the incoming government of President Inácio Lula da Silva has named several Indigenous leaders – including two women – to key posts in his government.

The digital information revolution has dramatically altered the ways in which information is shared and shaped among young and middle-aged Wauja (Figures 7 and 8). A generation ago, there was a fairly strict division of labor by gender in many aspects of daily life. Of course, this does not mean that one gender did the labor and the other did not. Instead, each gender was responsible for a distinct set of tasks that complemented what the other gender did. Both genders did agricultural work, but only men used axes to cut down trees, and only women used digging sticks to dig up manioc tubers. Both genders carried heavy loads, but only men carried them on their backs in tumpline baskets, and only women carried them on their heads in a different kind of basket. Both genders provided





Figure 7. Song Specialist (*apao yeketsu*) Kapulukú Waurá demonstrates how, in her youth, she memorized complex series of songs with the help of knots on a cord. Still image from Waurá, Piratá, 2021.



Figure 8. Yaminalu Waurá learns the songs with the help of her mobile phone. Still image from Waurá, Piratá, 2021.

food, but only men fished and hunted, and only women processed manioc and made bread.

And so it was, a generation ago, with political affairs in the community. Both genders played essential roles that were distinct but complementary. Men were the public actors in political matters, while women's political activity took place behind the scenes. All men, and especially politically prominent men, were expected to behave with decorum in public, which included strictly avoiding contentious topics of discussion. Significantly, it was considered morally degrading (*kuhupiki* 'crookedness') for a man to discuss, outside the privacy of his home, anything that hinted at conflict or dissent.

Therefore, when a man wanted to know what was being discussed in other households, he asked his womenfolk, in the relative privacy of his hammock area at night, to tell him the news. Likewise, when he wanted to send a message to other households that he was constrained from delivering in public, he told his womenfolk what was on his mind, and the next day the message was shared with other households. The women, of course, could modify the message in the retelling. That was part of their power.

Each day, while drawing water or in other contexts, women met informally with women from other households, individually or in small groups, collecting information, shaping it to their interests, and passing it on. In an entirely oral

culture, there are no newspapers, televised news reports, or viral hash tags on social media. Instead, all information the community considers newsworthy is sooner or later communicated and digested through the gossip network. Gossip provides information essential for governance. How else can a chief learn what the community is talking about? A chief who ignores the flow of gossip in his community is unlikely to remain in office for very long. Naturally, the chief must pretend to ignore gossip, but he would be foolish to actually do so. Anthropologists likewise should not dismiss the political significance of gossip.

In some respects, Wauja women a generation ago and before played the role of journalists in an informal but relatively free and unfettered press, gathering and distributing information, drawing attention to problems, debating issues, and of course, editorializing. In the 1980s, Wauja men even half-heartedly acknowledged this, teasing the women, saying they were *jornalistas* (a way of calling them gossips). Belittling women who share ideas, information, and criticism through gossip is likewise a consistent theme of the Christian Bible. Gossip stings and threatens because it often carries sensitive information that people don't dare to share publicly. But it allows grievances to be aired and potentially addressed without resorting to more direct forms of conflict. To ignore it as ethnographically insignificant is irrational.

Women's ability to modify information as it circulated sometimes had dramatic consequences. In an incident I witnessed, a Wauja woman boldly manipulated gossip to protect a loved one. By using a play on words that cleverly changed the target of a witchcraft accusation that the chief had shared with her privately in the presence of his womenfolk, she deflected the accusation and arguably spared her husband's life (Ireland, 2021, pp. 8-9).

Against this historical background of a gendered division of labor and modes of participation in the flow of community information, centuries and more in the making, consider how information is shared in Wauja communities today. It has radically changed (Figure 8), and continues to change, especially during the recent years of relative physical isolation due to COVID.²⁷ The combination of literacy training and digital technology has allowed both men and women to explode the old restrictions against debating politically sensitive issues in a community-wide forum.

All adult Wauja who can read use their mobile phones to access and share information. Even some older Wauja who are not fully literate go online to view news stories in video format. Various Wauja individuals host daily WhatsApp chat groups in which news and legislative issues are discussed, interspersed with local events, gossip, jokes, and teasing. The largest chat groups bring together men and women from all the Wauja villages, including members of opposing factional groups, who are welcome so long as they remain civil. Most of the Wauja participants who give their names are male, but there are always some women, as well as people who do not give their names to the group, but are known to the moderator. Some non-Indigenous friends and associates, such as medical personnel, photographers and other artists, schoolteachers, anthropologists, and non-governmental organization (NGO) staff also participate from time to time. In contrast to

these larger chat groups are small family chat groups, some set up by women, that allow members of a single extended family to stay in touch despite living in different villages.

In short, the formerly disparaged women's gossip network has gone online and diversified its membership. Men, for the first time, are full participants. Online chat groups provide an opportunity for men and women from different households to openly exchange ideas about events in their community and beyond. In the past, a woman could not simply approach a man who was not a close relative simply for the pleasure of conversation. Likewise, a man who approached a woman who was not close kin allegedly to talk about political news certainly would draw unwelcome attention.

Through private social media chat groups, however, younger Wauja men and women are participating together in sharing and shaping all kinds of information in a direct and open manner that was not possible in the past. This has empowered men to speak openly about contentious issues that are important to the community, and has provided women a way to engage directly with men who are not close kin in a friendly but non-sexualized way.

Significantly, chat groups also allow participants to contact each other individually to share information away from the rest of the group, just as Wauja women used to do a generation ago, when they had private conversations with one or two female companions as they walked together to the river to draw water, out of earshot of everyone else in the village. Women lost that channel of information when a new water filtration system was installed shortly after 2000 (Piratá Waurá, personal communication, Nov. 10, 2022), bringing water to spigots beside every house, and ending the burdensome women's task of carrying heavy loads of water each day (Ireland, 2021, p. 10). However, after the new water system was installed, women no

²⁷ Since 2021, use of the Internet and digital recording and editing tools, as well as daily participation in Wauja-focused social media channels have greatly increased among young and middle-aged Wauja. Internet connectivity and mobile phones have become viewed as necessities. People often end up buying mobile phones for younger family members, simply to avoid the annoyance of not being able to use their own phones because others constantly want to use them.



longer had a ready excuse to talk privately to women from other households each day. Now, in 2023, many younger women have mobile phones, and they once again have ready access to private chats with women from other households, as well as men.

NEW KINDS OF INEQUALITY

Schooling has affected Wauja society far beyond the domains of what is taught in school, how school can interfere with mastering traditional skills, and how the new tools of literacy are used in Wauja culture. In 1981 the Wauja did not have money in their community. On the rare occasions they went to the city to buy things, they spent the money right away, because if money was saved in a basket back home, it would quickly lose value due to high inflation in those years. Inevitably, money was going to penetrate the Wauja community sooner or later, but schools brought it in suddenly, with teachers, administrators, lunch workers, janitors, and others receiving cash payments every month.

In the Wauja community, schools have had the effect of normalizing obvious and significant material inequality in a community that had not tolerated it in the past. Local schools brought salaries for local teachers, and the emergence of a new category of men who work every day like other men but, unlike them, do not have to fish or hunt, and have a little more money to buy luxury goods that others cannot afford. Some of the first Wauja who were trained in school became eligible for additional specialized training, as village health agents, and earned salaries that way. Schoolteachers and health agents make modest salaries and provide essential services, but the days are gone when someone who buys a dozen shiny new aluminum cauldrons with money they have earned can be socially pressured to give them all away to the rest of the community.

In fact, in one village there is a sizable storehouse, locked with a padlock, behind the residence of a highly respected *yakapá*, an elderly man who must submit himself regularly to the exhausting and often unpleasant rigors of tobacco intoxication, in order to provide his services to all

those in his sizeable village who ask for his help in healing their loved ones. In the old days, they would have paid him with objects of prime value (Figure 9), such as a shell belt or collar, an oropendola feather headdress; a crown of toucan, macaw and curassow feathers; a large ceramic cauldron or griddle; a hunting rifle or shotgun; or a heavy necklace of several dozen long strands of high-quality glass beads, suitable for ceremonial occasions. Most of these items were things any industrious and capable man could make himself, requiring only the knowledge and skill to find the materials in the natural environment, hunt the birds (if feathers were involved), and then make a beautiful, valuable object.

Unfortunately, since the climate has become hotter and drier and the river systems and forests are changing, the large snails that formerly were plentiful in certain areas now are becoming rare. As a result, it has become difficult for the Wauja to make shell belts and necklaces. Birds such as oropendola and toucan, that used to live in trees only a morning's walk from



Figure 9. Family valuables hanging in the private area of a home in 1982. Note number and variety of ornaments made from once-abundant birds and animals, including four sets of armbands made from diverse colors of macaw and curassow feathers, three shell collars, three shell necklaces, toucan feather ear ornaments, long red macaw tail feathers, and more. The jaguar-skin belts signify that the owner is of high rank, normally a village chief or one of his sons. Stored out of sight in the rectangular flat folded mat at upper right are additional feather valuables. These typically would be golden yellow diadems of delicate oropendola tail feathers, and perhaps eagle and macaw tail feathers. Such displays are not seen today. Ornamental bird feathers are becoming rare, and people tend to store valuables in suitcases and sacks. Photo: E. Ireland (1982).

the village, now cannot be found, especially in the past decade, when repeated wildfires in the local forest have killed or driven away many birds. As a result, young people today cannot get feathers to make the beautiful headdresses and other finery to complete their ceremonial regalia (compare Figures 10 and 11).

Some Wauja say that large ceramic objects that require a lot of clay are harder to make nowadays, because the river sponge needed to temper the clay is dying and hard to find. Hunting guns and rifles are almost impossible to get, because even if you have the money to pay a price that is roughly ten times what it was forty years ago, you cannot legally buy a gun due to laws prohibiting such purchases. Guns on the black market are even more unaffordable. A large quantity of glass beads is also expensive, and not something a man can make himself. Because of all these changes, most men cannot create wealth the way their fathers were able to do. These days, when a loved one gets very sick and needs a shamanic specialist to help, the only kind of wealth many households have readily available is the large aluminum cauldrons that make women's manioc processing tasks easier and more efficient.

Those are some of the reasons why the locked storehouse behind the kindly old healer's home is filled with at least a hundred large aluminum cauldrons that no one is using, even though the former owners doubtless would welcome having them back again, and why many

young men nowadays, unlike their fathers, cannot make or even borrow a beautiful golden oropendola headdress to wear as they dance in ceremonies.

The damage to the natural environment in recent years that has affected Wauja men's ability to provide for themselves is not related to schools, but it comes at a time when the community already is experiencing economic inequality that is partly a result of some families having salaries and others not.

The introduction of schools also has affected gender relations. Forty years ago, both men and women of inherited rank (*amunāu*) could receive advanced training at home from their high-ranking parents in valued kinds of specialized knowledge (as herbalists, storytellers, historians, ritual specialists, experts in magical incantations, and more). Men left home to live with in-laws when they married, but a woman remained with her parents, where she had lifelong opportunities for specialized education. A man or woman born into a 'commoner' (*iyataku*) household would be taught the essential skills required to provide for a family, as well as how to conduct oneself in daily life, but they would not be taught the specialized skills that high-ranking people their age could learn. In those days, the inequality in educational opportunities was by rank, and not gender, unless a slight edge is given to high-ranking women who stayed home and continued learning with their parents after marriage (Ireland, 2021).



Figure 10. Men and boys dance *Hapulupulu* in 1982. Note abundance of feather diadems, feather crowns and long macaw tail feather ear ornaments. Photo E. Ireland (1982).



Figure 11. Young Waura nowadays use digital tools to record traditional ceremonies, such as this *Hapulupulu* in 2018. Note absence of feather headdresses and macaw tail feather ear ornaments. Photo: E. Ireland (2018).

Ironically, the introduction of schools also has created new kinds of gender inequality regarding access to education and economic opportunities as a salaried worker in the Wauja village. When schools first were introduced in the community in the 1980s, they offered only the primary grade levels. If a student wanted to complete high school, he or she had to leave the village and live away from family in a border town outside the Indigenous territory. Naturally, parents did not want to send away their girls of twelve or thirteen to live completely alone in an unfamiliar border town, so those families who already had salaried jobs and could afford to pay for room and board sent their boys to high school, but not their girls. The few girls who were able to attend high school in those days had brothers who were also attending at the same time, allowing the siblings to watch over each other.

The result of this unintended obstacle to girls' education was that all the local village schoolteachers trained in those early years were male. Consequently, the local school became staffed exclusively with young men in their early twenties who had daily access to teenage girls, with no supervision by older educators, leading to predictable consequences. In the ensuing decades, the Wauja have begun to address this issue, and today the three largest villages each have their first female teacher in a staff that was formerly all male. This may sound like slow progress, but these jobs are coveted, and it is real progress that women are participating.

Schools are not the only source of monthly income in Wauja communities. Wauja elders (at least age 55 for women, 60 for men) are eligible for federal retirement income (*aposentadoria*). In addition, during the past two decades, Wauja families with children received monthly federal funds through the *Bolsa Família* program, provided the children attended school and were vaccinated. Many Wauja families benefitted from this program, and although the Bolsonaro government ended it in 2021, it was

immediately reinstated and expanded by Lula's government in 2023. Note, however, that the funds for families were tied to school attendance. This is another way in which schools are linked to increasing reliance on money, as opposed to subsistence activities such as fishing and growing crops.

RESIDENCE PATTERNS AND KINSHIP

Affinal respect behavior regarding personal names also has begun to change as younger Wauja increasingly are exposed to national and global youth culture through social media, television, and other channels. Although relationship terms and associated practices are still of central importance in daily life, young people today are finding ways to avoid some of the discipline and constraints required by strict adherence to the affinal civility register as practiced by their elders. In recent years, young men have begun addressing and referring to same-generation affines, such as brother-in-law, using common Brazilian nicknames, such as Careca, Paulinho, Chico, or Junior. Girls and young women do the same, except that they tend to use Brazilian personal names such as Linda, Allyne, Karlla, Karina, and so on. Nicknames are commonly used in Brazil, and in adopting this custom, the younger generation of Wauja is reducing the power that affinal respect rules would otherwise have over their speech.²⁸

As Basso observed for the Kalapalo in 1973, the relationship between affines often entails, in addition to respect and avoidance, behavior and speech events that denote relative dominance or subordination:

... A man who is of no political importance (that is, who is not a village leader) and who is a subordinate affine, lives with his wife's kinsmen upon marriage.... and is in the most subordinate position of any kind of affine. (Basso, 1973, p. 15)

Nowadays, schoolteachers and other salaried young men are considered desirable as potential breadwinners, but they often are reluctant to live in a

²⁸ At a Kalapalo community meeting in 2017, among the proposals was one calling for young people to maintain the 'traditional' names that have gradually been replaced by names of the whites (Novo 2017, pp. 21-22).



father-in-law's household as a subordinate son-in-law.²⁹ As a result, extended uxori-local households increasingly give way to nuclear households. While uxori-locality can be seen as a relationship between men in which the father-in-law has certain kinds of authority over the son-in-law, the absence of uxori-locality quickly reveals that uxori-locality also powerfully defines the relationship between husbands and wives. In an uxori-local household, the woman's father is considered its head, while in a nuclear household, her husband is its head, or 'in charge of the house' (*pāi yekeho*).

Women who live uxori-locally with their extended families usually have help available for childcare and other daily tasks, while women in nuclear households headed by a salaried man must take care of children by themselves much of the time. Not only this shift to single-family residence patterns, but schools themselves, have created new hardships for mothers, who no longer receive childcare support from their own older children, who are now in school during the day. In former times, older children entertained the younger ones, giving mothers much-needed help with childcare, and providing younger children with playmates who kept them safe outdoors. In particular, older siblings carried, soothed and distracted babies and toddlers, who demand constant attention and must be kept away from the hot griddle where mothers make meals. Now that the older children are in school, the youngest remain at home with mom, who must attend to daily tasks with babies and toddlers crawling underfoot. For this and other reasons, many young wives today prefer to have smaller families than in the past.

One solution to lack of childcare support in small families is television (connected to a solar panel and a laptop or satellite dish). This innovation happens to be most common in nuclear family households headed by schoolteachers and other young salaried men. It is common to enter such homes in after-school hours to find the neighborhood kids seated on a wooden bench silently watching an animated children's movie. Meanwhile, the grandparents might be next door, making a basket or a hammock without children beside them. One elder, a community historian and accomplished storyteller, recently confided to me, "No one asks me for stories."

The new residence patterns sometimes marginalize the elderly in other ways. As young salaried men set up their own nuclear households instead of residing with and helping to provide for their wife's parents, older people can find themselves dependent mainly on their modest retirement income and the food it can buy. Typically, the money is not used to buy fresh vegetables, fruit, or fish, which are relatively expensive, but instead the cheapest food, such as coffee, sugar, cookies, crackers, rice, noodles, and soda. A 50-kilo bag of rice can last for months. In Brazil, coffee is usually made with a generous dose of sugar. I remember one elderly Wauja woman who had, sadly, outlived her husband and children telling me, "Coffee is great! After drinking it, you can work all morning and not feel hungry!" In general, young Wauja take good care of their parents. However, as the elderly live in smaller households, separate from younger relatives, they are likely to eat fish and game less often.

²⁹ Horta (2017, p. 235) describes a common view among people who have migrated from Xingu villages to the border town of Canarana: "If Indianness is, from the white perspective, poverty, poverty is, from the indigenous perspective, a lack of autonomy." To support themselves in town, Indigenous migrants typically must accept the position of 'peon,' earning low wages for long hours of hard physical work while obeying the demands of a 'chefe' or 'boss.' Unlike physical labor in the Indigenous village, in town there is a striking lack of autonomy. Workers sweat without respite under the hot sun, unable to rest in the shade, eat some bread, or get a drink of water. Meanwhile, back in the village, an educated and salaried young man, such as village schoolteacher or health worker, by becoming educated in the 'branco' knowledge that commands salaries, can achieve a significant degree of autonomy from his father-in-law by becoming the head of his own nuclear-family household. In that sense, some of the new inequalities in village life that have arisen since the introduction of schools and salaries are not only material and social inequality, but also a weakening of the bonds of obligation between the generations, often experienced by elders as a loss and by young salaried workers as autonomy.

As households have become smaller, they have grown more private in subtle ways. It is common nowadays for a house to have a gas stove. The gas stove cannot be set up near the open flame used for making manioc griddle cakes, so it is set up along a wall of the house, a good distance away from the doorways and any open flame. Food cooking on the gas stove can be seen by anyone who enters the house, but critically, it cannot be seen from the men's house or by people passing by outside the house. Unlike a generation ago, when a man who didn't share his fish easily could be observed from the men's house and pressured to surrender his catch to the group, today, fish, chicken or beef can be cooked and eaten privately, out of public view.

In one village, there is a house whose owner has hung black plastic sheeting inside the doorway to shield the house interior from being peeked into by passers-by. I myself have been inside this house and never seen the cooking area. This individual is famous for arranging deals with commercial film crews, keeping most of the payment and, on one occasion, even hiring an air taxi to deliver frozen chicken, which was consumed in private by his household and certainly not shared publicly. It should be noted that such behavior is met with disapproval by most Wauja, who still value and practice generosity.

Another factor in changing attitudes toward food is that the natural food sources, which seemed inexhaustible a generation ago, are declining year by year. Recurrent wildfires, due to worsening climate change and rampant deforestation by ranchers outside Wauja territory, destroy not only the forest but also fruit orchards and fields where crops are growing. Fish stocks are diminishing in several areas of the Xingu. As with crop loss, there are likely multiple factors involved — in the case of fish, the headwaters of some of the rivers are outside the indigenous reserve. These unprotected areas have been utterly denuded of their forests, typically to make way for soy plantations and other agribusiness operations.

As a result, the headwaters are starting to dry up. There are also recently constructed hydroelectric projects

that further reduce the water that used to flow into the Xingu basin. In addition, increasingly hot weather, coupled with the absence of forest cover, accelerates water loss from evaporation and contributes to sinking river levels and dwindling fish populations. Fish are much harder to find. In 1981, catfish over a meter long were common; now they are rare. It is hard to maintain an attitude of uncompromising generosity when food is becoming more scarce.

REDUCED ROLE OF CHIEFS

The power and authority once wielded by some of the old-style *yakapá* principal chiefs, such as Alapokumá, Tupatari, and Walakuyawá is not seen today among Wauja hereditary chiefs. In large part, decision-making authority in civic matters has shifted to village associations, with leadership roles for hereditary chiefs focused mainly on local ceremonies, and formal ritual interactions with other groups.

In the days of Orlando Villas Boas and before, the chief alone had the authority to distribute goods from the outside. This was still true in 1981-83. On one occasion, when I observed privately to a trusted Wauja elder that the chief had distributed a supply of manufactured goods so as to blatantly favor his close followers and disadvantage everyone else, my friend, who definitely was in the latter group, replied with a wise smile and a single word: "*Amunãu*" ("He is chief").

While the old chiefs in former times had the exclusive privilege of distributing axes, knives, fishhooks and beads, they have no role in apportioning the modern forms of wealth, such as retirement pensions, federal assistance to families, and salaries. Other sources of outside wealth, such as project grants from NGOs and payments from film crews and researchers, do not pass through the chief's hands, either. The village associations, staffed by young men who can read contracts and understand budgets, control these kinds of wealth. This is another instance in which literacy and numeracy skills that young men learn in school allow them to bypass the authority of the older generation. In this case, it is not the father-in-law who is bypassed, but the village chief himself. In 2011, Ball (2011, p. 106) observed:



There is much tension in Wauja and other communities as typically younger Indigenous association members usurp power and resources from their elder chiefs. This is an important pragmatic aspect of the emergence of alternative political structures throughout the Amazon that are displacing traditional regimes of community leadership in many places.

In 2012, when I visited, the situation appeared to me as Ball (2011) has described, but now, a decade later, the tension appears to have diminished somewhat, perhaps because the role of the associations has grown substantially, and that of the chiefs has not. It should be noted that cash project grants from NGOs, which are an important community resource, are disbursed to the community associations as designated representatives of the community, and not to individual men who are hereditary chiefs.

However, the associations are still in the process of maturing as organizations. It should be noted that, at this writing, I know of no village association in any Wauja village that has a woman as a full voting member. In some villages, women fill the office of Secretary and take meeting notes, but they do not vote with the male association members who decide which proposals to present to the community. It is common for the association members to vote among themselves on a course of action and then present their proposal to the community for a 'Yes' or 'No' vote. In such instances, women and unschooled elders often have no role in shaping the options they later will be allowed to vote on. As the Wauja continue to observe and participate in Brazilian democratic processes, this may well change. In recent decades, the role of NGOs has grown increasingly active in village affairs. This is not surprising, because NGOs consistently have provided crucial support in projects supporting public health, education, environmental protection, food security, and other issues important to the Wauja.

In 1981, the Wauja told me that the approval of chiefs in neighboring Arawak groups was a factor when the Wauja selected a chief to succeed one who had died. After all, the other chiefs will have to interact with the Wauja successor as a peer for as long as he lives. By custom, their

children will intermarry with his. A Wauja candidate that the neighboring chiefs strongly opposed would not likely be chosen by the Wauja. I recall speaking years ago to Aritanatumpá, renowned chief of the Yawalapiti people, about names being floated for potential successors to Walakuyawá, and at the mention of a certain name, his face became uncharacteristically stern as he said, "That certainly will not happen! It will not be allowed!"

Nowadays, the Wauja say that it is the NGOs who have some say in deciding whether a chief is legitimate. As a hypothetical example, an NGO might not provide project assistance to a community whose chief was involved in illegal logging. The Wauja pragmatically say that NGOs are more likely to provide opportunities and support to chiefs who in turn support the NGO's priorities (that is, on environmental issues, public health, and so on).

CONCLUSION

The immense changes the Wauja have experienced over the past four decades cannot be reduced to a single cause or set of causes. The Wauja survived repeated disease epidemics in past centuries, but are now beset by the chronic metabolic diseases of modernity; they have changed from an oral culture to an increasingly text-centric one; from a cashless economy that demanded recirculation of material objects (whether by sharing, payment, exchange or confiscation) to a largely money-based system, with salaries for the educated elite and new kinds of inequality affecting women, elders, and those with less access to new kinds of wealth; from a community that minimally interacted with non-Indigenous people outside their borders, to one whose children consider themselves 'citizens of the world'; from an analog world in which people knew how to make almost everything they used in daily life to an online community of avid consumers of digital media (Figures 8 and 11); from skilled ceramists and arrow craftsmen to photographers and filmmakers who win international awards. This is a partial list. All this has occurred in less than a half-century.



Alongside all these changes there is a process of 'disintermediation' as the community organizes itself around national and international economic and digital information systems. However, the Wauja are not merely connecting to a global system. Young Wauja men who are literate and numerate, who speak Portuguese, and are able to operate in the outside world, are also able to bypass the traditional Wauja 'middlemen,' the community's web of obligation, and act by themselves (as individuals) and for themselves in ways that were not possible under the old system. They can in many respects bypass the authority of the elders and chiefs, can acquire new wealth and keep it, and can live as head of their own separate household instead of submitting to the authority of a father-in-law.

It is not merely the Internet or any one factor that has caused so much change and disruption in Wauja culture in the past forty years. It is a whole set of new systems that arrived more or less at once — a new language and knowledge system, the cash economy, and powerful digital tools for those few who can acquire the new knowledge and the new wealth. These together create barriers to access for all but a few, suddenly producing social distortions that were prevented under the old, largely internally focused social system.

Yet, though the Wauja have suffered multiple disruptive changes during the past half-century alone, they now have far greater knowledge and understanding of the forces affecting them, and are determined to play an active role in shaping how their community changes in the future. Indeed, Fausto (2011) argues for understanding contemporary sociocultural changes by examining indigenous ways of bringing about transformation and not merely focusing on the specific historicity of the contact situation or the structure of the broader sociopolitical process in which indigenous societies are embedded:

Changes in tradition are not usually thought of by the Indians in the form of innovation, but of exogenous appropriation, the result of creative interaction with foreigners (human or non-human) through dreams, trance, war or exchange. (Fausto, 2011, as cited in Novo, 2017, p. 24)

The Wauja are well aware that their culture is undergoing rapid change and are committed to recording their history as well as maintaining the traditions they most value. At the same time, there is a new willingness to re-examine old traditions and choose which ones they want to keep.

For example, Lima (1950), after visiting the Wauja in 1948, described seeing an impressive ritual object, a large tree trunk in the men's house, over a meter in diameter, completely hollow, open at the ends, and extending the full length of the men's house, which was 19.5 meters. The outer surface of the giant log was covered with various designs, mostly zoomorphic (Lima, 1950, p. 7). This extraordinary object was the *pulupulu* drum, associated with a complex ceremony. Since Lima (1950) saw that drum, however, the Wauja suffered epidemics and dislocations, and have not had a *pulupulu* or its ceremony in their village since.

The Kuikuru, a neighboring people, say that in the distant past, boys would spend years in seclusion with the slit log drum. According to their oral tradition, long ago one of the young initiates was killed after breaking the strict seclusion rules to have sex with a girl, and today Kuikuru do not remember when they last had the drum in their village (Fausto, 2020, p. 91). Another neighbor, the Kamayura, in 1998, built a log drum after the ritual had 'slept' (not been performed) for many years, but it was burned in the center of the village a few years later, when its owner died (Barcelos Neto, 2020).

In 2016, I had a conversation with two Wauja elders, Kuratu Waurá and Atapuchá Waurá, about the *pulupulu* drum that Kuratu saw when he was a small boy, about six or eight years old. He said that to make the drum, the men would cut a huge tree, hollow it out with fire, and then drag the drum to the village using vines. Once the drum was positioned in the central plaza, the men would build a men's house around the drum. Kuratu insisted there was no other way to get the immense drum into the men's house. As the drum was brought into the village and



the men's house was built, the women stayed inside their houses with doors closed, as they were strictly forbidden to even peek at the *pulupulu*.³⁰

Kuratu remembers the ceremony as a spectacular, joyous festival of many types of masks, as well as flute-playing, singing and drumming that went on for many days. There were huge masks (*yakui*) taller than a man, with long skirts made of straw that would hide the dancer inside. The dancer tied the 'waist' of the mask to his head, so that the face of the mask towered well above the crowd of men. The *yakui* were made in pairs, male and female, each painted according to their gender. The sound of the men beating the drum was wonderful, like no other sound. To give the flute players a rest, the men in the tall masks would sing, and when the song ended, the flute players would start again. The men would be happy, dancing and singing for days. Recently, Barcelos Neto (2020) has produced an analysis of the visual and cosmological transformations of the *pulupulu*, including a stunning array of drawings by Wauja artists depicting the *pulupulu* and its associated spirit creatures.

Kuratu and Atapucha said the drum was about four feet in diameter, large enough for the adolescent boys to sit comfortably and sleep in it at night. When the finished masks emerged from the men's house, the women could see them, but it was always forbidden for the women to see the *pulupulu*, in the same way it is forbidden to see the flutes. The women had to stay shut inside their houses and not look outside during most of this period.

Kuratu and Atapucha (personal communication, 2016) summarized the traditional story associated with the *pulupulu* spirit.

Long ago, when the men were all off fishing, the *pulupulu* spirit slipped off its own skin and climbed into the skin of a human being. It looked exactly like a man, except it didn't have a belly button. The monstrous beast went to the village, planning to devour the women there. Well, the women saw that it had no belly button and knew exactly what the monster was planning, and they were incensed. They burned down the men's house with the monster in it. That's why the young bachelors don't leave the men's house. They beat the log drum, but the sound is not made by men, it's the creature and nothing else.

Knowing that many other Arawak peoples have log drum traditions, I asked whether the Wauja might make their drum again. Kuratu said, "No, it's better not to do it again."

"But why?"

After a pause, Kuratu replied, "Well, we probably couldn't find trees that big any more."

"What if you go a little way up the river? There are still big trees there."

Patently, Kuratu replied, "I don't know whether the kids will be interested."

"Can't we get them interested?" I insisted.

"Well, let me tell you how it was. The men were happy, dancing and singing. But the women didn't like it so much."

Kuratu explained that during the festival period, which lasted for several weeks, the women were forbidden to leave their houses except during very specific and limited periods. The penalties for breaking this rule were very severe, the same as seeing the flutes. So, the women had to stay inside their houses. They couldn't go to the river to bathe. If they had to defecate, they dug a hole in the earthen floor of their house. They could not go outside to tend their gardens. When the men ran out of food, the ceremonial sponsor would pause the ceremony, saying to the women,

³⁰ In 1998, Kuratu's father, Arutatumpá, made a detailed drawing of men dragging a log drum that is visible, as though by x-ray vision, inside a men's house that is fully thatched to the ground (Barcelos Neto, 2020, p. 10). The drawing appears to be more like a schematic, showing the process and the result, and not like a snapshot of a moment in time. In the drawing, the drum fills the entire length of the men's house, which is consistent with the oral description provided by Kuratu and Atapucha. Looking at the drawing (and consistent with the oral description), it is obvious that the immense drum could not have been dragged into a fully thatched men's house through the door. Even if the drum were somehow shoved through the door, it would have been too long to turn lengthwise inside the oval men's house. Finally, although the drawing shows the drum entirely visible despite being situated behind a wall of thatch, it could not have been possible to see the entire drum while it was hidden inside a fully thatched men's house. Presumably, Aruta's drawing shows two phases of the process: dragging the drum into position and covering it with a thatched men's house.



“go now and find some food for us.” So, the women would go to their fields, harvest some manioc and return quickly to their houses when the sun was [at about two o’clock in the afternoon]. Meanwhile the men had all gone into the men’s house so as not to be seen until the women were back inside. This went on for several weeks. The women could not sit outside as they grated manioc. They had to stay inside the house. The bitter smell of grated manioc filled their noses as they worked and gave them headaches.

“I see,” I said.

After a pause, Kuratu added, “I don’t think the women would put up with it anymore.”

I was struck by the truth of his statement, realizing I had not considered how severe the strictures on women had been, never having heard them described this way. At the same time, I noticed he had creatively inserted the issue of women’s ‘autonomy,’ which he well knew would finally make the female anthropologist immediately pause her questioning on the matter.

Later, as I reflected on this conversation, I tried to imagine how such a complex ritual could be organized and performed in the Wauja villages of today, assuming the women were not opposed. Barcelos Neto (2020, p. 11) notes that, in 2000, when he asked Atamai, a chief at the time, why the Wauja no longer performed *pulupulu*, he replied without hesitation, “It’s too expensive.” Indeed, the Wauja say that *pulupulu* is the most elaborate of all their rituals, requiring a large number of musicians, singers and dancers, who would perform repeatedly during a period of several weeks. It also required a variety of musical instruments, and many kinds of masks embodying a panoply of spirit beings. All the masks had to be created in pairs, male and female. In addition, the labor required to make the immense *pulupulu* drum, transport it, and build a men’s house around it was a daunting undertaking in itself. Although the ritual has one or more sponsors who contribute wealth objects (feather headdresses, shell necklaces and belts, large ceramics, etc.) to its cost, a communal work project of this magnitude would require the community to collectively provide labor and other resources.

When Lima (1950) saw the *pulupulu* drum in the Wauja village of Tsariwapoho in 1948, the village economy was based on recirculation of food and handmade objects through redistribution, sharing, payment, exchange or confiscation. Every adult contributed directly to food production, everyone ate the same kinds of food, and food-sharing was expected, even demanded. Conspicuous inequality in material wealth was not tolerated. Money was unknown in the village; no one had salaries or cash from federal entitlement programs. All community members were expected to participate at various times in the communal work associated with important rituals. Frequently, the results of such labor were *coisas da comunidade*, ‘community things’ – shared resources, shared wealth.

Thinking about the Wauja villages of today, it seems far more difficult for the community to come together to support a highly complex, labor-intensive ritual such as *pulupulu*. Today’s village economy is hybrid: many men spend their days earning salaries as teachers, health workers, administrators, and so on, buying much of their food from stores in town, while elders and less educated men continue to feed their families by fishing, hunting and farming. Unfortunately, because of shrinking fish stocks, recurrent wildfires, and climate change, fishing, hunting and farming no longer produce the generous surpluses that encouraged sharing in former times.

Labor patterns are also hybrid: With so many men in their prime years working at jobs in schools and clinics, a significant portion of the male population would not be available to contribute labor. For the educated elite, labor is starting to be seen as a personal resource that can be exchanged for money. Like many other resources once shared communally, labor is gradually shifting into the category of ‘personal things’ (*patikula*). Food, likewise, is starting to be seen as a ‘personal thing.’ In the men’s house, sometimes there is fish shared in the afternoons, but more often there is none. The salaried men who eat rice and beans, and sometimes chicken or sausages, certainly are not

expected to bring those things to the central plaza to share. Things bought with money usually are considered *patikula*.

Comparable processes are occurring in other Upper Xingu villages. Barcelos Neto (2020) notes that in 1998, when the Kamayurá performed their last log drum ritual, which they call *warayumia*, they depended on outside resources to cover the costs:

According to what the Wauja told me, in order to carry out the *warayumia* ritual, the Kamayurá would have counted on the support of a foreign audiovisual production company, which would have paid part of the costs of the ritual and an additional amount in kind for the rights to record and broadcast the image. (Barcelos Neto, 2020, p. 11)

Although Kuratu was likely correct in stating that Wauja women today would not tolerate the strictures of the *pulupulu* ritual, it appears that the women's attitude is not the only thing that has changed. The introduction of schools, a cash economy, and the new inequalities these have engendered, along with habitat degradation caused by forces beyond the Wauja's control, have made the extraordinary *pulupulu* ritual, once central to Wauja culture, something they can no longer fit into their current way of life.

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