

Maizza, The wander women

THE WANDER WOMEN: SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT GENDER IN AMAZONIA

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Abstract. Based on my ethnographic research with the Jarawara, speakers of an Arawá language inhabiting the middle course of the Purus River in Brazilian Amazonia, this article explores how a particular notion of the agency of Jarawara women may be linked to dream activity and shamanic knowledge. I examine the festival held when girls emerge from their seclusion at menarche, the *mariná* ‘ritual’ and its effects on the composition of a ‘takeable’ agent. The idea explored here is that ‘sleepiness’ (*nokobisa*), ‘tiredness’ (*mama*) and ‘beauty’ (*amosa*) are forms of *ritual action* that aim to develop (or better, draw out) the capacity of women’s bodies to be ‘takeable’ (*towakama*) or ‘carriable’ (*weyena*). This capacity is also associated with shamans. Through this exploration of the Jarawara ‘female initiation ritual’, I also question the public/domestic and man/woman dichotomies.

Keywords: agency, Amazonia, effects, gender, knowledge, indigenous women, initiation ritual

Female agency

During a recent stay in Casa Nova, the largest village of the Jarawara, an indigenous people living along the middle course of the Purus river in Amazonas state, a large one-day football competition was held to which many guests were invited. The prize for the winning team was a pig, raised from a young age especially for the occasion. After the tournament was over, dinner was offered in the evening to the participants, and at around 9 pm a *forró* dance began. The young hosts and their friends sang popular *arrocha* and *brega* hits accompanied by keyboards also played by themselves. The dance floor remained packed all night, and in the early hours the houses were still bustling with people constantly coming and going, drinking, chatting and wandering about for diverse reasons. It was without doubt a great festival in terms of the number of guests invited and their enjoyment – or at least that is how young people described it to me.

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By around three in the morning I was already feeling very tired, but I stayed close to the dance floor, observing the young men and women dancing. I looked around and realized that virtually all the older women, both guests and hosts, were also sitting there, just like myself, watching the dance. Perhaps somewhat ethnocentrically, I thought that they were keeping themselves awake from a 'desire' to see the *forró* until the end, imagining that they could not miss this rare night of excitement, amid the so many quiet nights of their day-to-day lives. It was only the next day, while talking with some people about the night's events and the gossip from the festival, that I discovered the older women had stayed awake until dawn in order to 'look out' or 'care' (*kakatoma*) for their 'daughters', 'nieces' or 'granddaughters'. There were many non-indigenous men in the village, and the women (but also the men) were extremely worried that 'the Whites' (*yara*) could 'carry' (*weye*), 'hold' (*bokori*) or 'take' (*towaka*) the young Jarawara women to the outskirts of the village to have sexual relations with them, or worse still, that they might 'steal' (*boti*) the women to marry them. On this night of *forró*, some girls were indeed 'taken' to the forest, despite the earlier warnings from their close kin 'not to go with the men', warnings did not 'obey' (*tokataba*). My impression was that the watchful presence of an older woman ensures that these young women are not 'carried', as if the former 'held' (*tamana*) the latter with their gaze.

On the other hand, the hypothesis I wish to explore here is that these young women have a certain ability to be 'takeable' (*towakama*) or 'carriable' (*weyena*), hence the vigilance. This ability is revealed by the girls during the period after their first menstruation, when they remain in seclusion in huts made especially for them, the *wawasa*. This is the desired effect of the *mariná* emergence festival, an event that can be described as a 'female initiation ritual'. During these festivals, sleeping and dreaming become forms of learning and of recognizing the capacities of both the body and the soul. These are the central arguments that I seek to develop during the course of this article, where they merge with an attempt to translate the Jarawara terms *weye* and *towaka*. *Weye* means something like 'carry', 'place/take/carry on the shoulders', 'use (wear) something', while *towaka* refers to the acts of 'taking', 'being taken', 'taking with'. The vocabulary in which the festival is formulated mobilizes other terms that dialogue with these: the girl's father 'detains' (*nawata*) his daughter before 'releasing her' (*sobana*) at the moment of the festival. Marriage too is conceived as a kind of 'holding': 'if you want to marry,

you have to hold', I was told. Conjuality is like 'holding' (*tamana*) and never 'letting go' (*sobana*).

The argument developed here is that, in Jarawara society, female agency is linked to the terms *weye* and *towaka* and involves the fact that women personify or incorporate the qualities of 'being takeable' and of acquiring knowledge through dream journeys, the latter being effects produced by the *mariná*. From the viewpoint of a person from the western tradition, these qualities, which I call 'agency', could be seen as 'passive' or the antithesis of what the concept of 'agent' means to us (Mahmood 2001: 210-212). In the Amerindian world, however, 'dreaming' is an important form of learning (Kopenawa and Albert 2010). Another part of my argument is that the category of 'woman' should not be taken as an *a priori* based on the western premise that 'nature' is given and differentiates the sexes innately (Strathern 1980: 191), but that it should be understood instead through ethnographic narratives.

Much of what I present in this work is linked to my own experience of a *mariná* held in May 2014 for a young woman called Dyimamirira. Dyimamirira's mother and her sisters are the women who have been closest to me ever since my first visit to Casa Nova in 2004. When I arrived for her daughter's festival, Makeni told me to hang up my hammock inside her house, meaning I was just a few metres from the *wawasa*, Dyimamirira's seclusion hut. Because of this proximity, I experienced the *mariná* in a very particular way. The present text provides me, in effect, with the chance to reveal some of my own sense of 'dazzlement' (Strathern 1999: 258).

About women

Before proceeding further, I wish to situate some of the ideas with which I shall be dialoguing indirectly in this work, perhaps the most important being how to approach concepts like 'woman' and 'female'. Today the non-universality of the category 'woman' seems to form part of western ideas in general.² In the 1970s, anthropology contributed to the critical reformulation of the category 'woman' by providing ethnographic examples of the variability of gender and gender roles, and reinforcing the feminist position that gender is not biologically determined (Moore 1994: 10). Authors like Sherry Ortner (1974) and Michelle Rosaldo (1974) furnished a social rather than a biological description of women's position in society and the origins of

² In this article I use the term 'western' to refer to societies corresponding to what Bruno Latour calls 'modern' (1991), i.e. societies that believe themselves to be different from others because they 'dominate nature'.

gender difference (Moore 1994: 11). However, in the process of arguing against ‘biological determinism’ and in favour of ‘social constructionism’, feminist authors and anthropologists both left suspended the underlying idea that there exist innumerable social formulations for a supposedly single and self-evident fact: the natural distinction of the sexes that is given by male and female bodies. The feminist separation of sex and gender, rather than challenging the dominant western models, ended up reproducing the same premises on which these models are based (Yanagisako and Collier 1987: 25, 49), one being the public/domestic dichotomy.

In western society, family, home and the ‘domestic’ merge into a single unit, defined in opposition to the ‘public’ sphere of work, business and politics (Moore 1988: 23; Rapp 1979: 510). Commerce involves competitive relations, negotiations and contracts that western society sees as separate from and opposite to relations of intimacy, raising children and care associated with family and home (ibid.). The public sphere, the place of work, needs to be kept as separate as possible from the child-centredness of the home: to become an adult, the person must leave the domestic sphere (Strathern 1988: 89).

Anthropology initially conceived the household as a nuclear family composed of a father, a mother and the couple’s children, as Malinowski defined the family (Yanagisako 1979, cited in Moore 1988: 24). However, these ties were later minimized, and it was argued instead that the basic unit of society was not the family but the mother-children unit (Fortes and Goodenough, cited in Moore 1988: 23-4). In this formulation the very notion of ‘domestic’ is constructed through an interweaving of the concepts of ‘mother’ and ‘maternal care’ (Moore 1988: 25). The category ‘woman’ is directly associated with maternal attributes like fertility, naturalness, maternal love, care, feeding, giving life and reproduction (ibid.). In western society, the categories ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ overlap, meaning that the definition of ‘woman’ depends on the concept of ‘mother’ and the activities associated with ‘being a mother’ (ibid.). Hence one of the clear premises of the western concept of gender is its insistence that maternity is natural and paternity cultural: mothers make babies naturally and biologically (Haraway 1990). Paternity is a cultural variable, while maternity is more natural, more universal and more constant (Moore 1988: 24).

In ‘Euro-American’ (western) kinship, intimate relations are linked to procreation, while procreation is directly related to sexual intercourse, conception and birth (Strathern 1995: 303; Schneider 1968). Sexual intercourse reproduces parenthood as the result of a union of parties

who differ from each other by gender: a woman and a man have sexual relations in order to have a child. But while fathers and mothers are seen as equal in terms of their genetic contribution, their roles in the kinship process are different. Maternity is established by the mother giving birth, while paternity is produced through proof of sexual relations with the mother (Strathern 1995: 303). It is a cultural convention to imagine that the father can never truly 'know' whether a woman's child is also his own – this must always be proved (ibid.: 311).

While in the west the idea prevails that procreation should occur within the context of a relationship, the social partner is also imagined to be a biological partner (ibid.: 314). But since procreation is taken as a natural fact, we imbue woman with both the naturalness (givenness) of her role as a mother and the responsibility of providing a father for 'her' children through her relationship with the man with whom she has sexual relations. We also imbue women with the image of guardians of the ideal that biological procreation should be tied to a social relationship (ibid.: 314-15). We presume that relationships need to be created, constructed by human action on a natural, given world of individuals whose bodies determine their sexual difference (ibid.: 317). Our idea of procreation is thus perhaps the most powerful metaphor for the form in which we conceive gender relations.

One variant of this way of thinking is the argument that everywhere in the world, women are providers of sexual and domestic services, and as such possess an equal and intrinsic value, while men have the legitimate authority to exchange women (Yanagisako and Collier 1987: 5). During the 1950s and 1960s, many societies were described by anthropologists, both male and female, from the premise that men must control female fertility in the same way that they control nature, thus assuming that women substantialize fertility (Strathern 1988). Marilyn Strathern argues that this way of formulating the question of the dichotomy between feminine and masculine – that is, linking it to the oppositions domestic/public and natural/social, is based on the fact that we imagine that 'women make babies' (Strathern 1988: 311). In contrast to this formulation, the author shows that Melanesian women do not in fact make babies (ibid.). In his article 'What kinship is?', Marshall Sahlins describes ethnographic examples where we find, to cite the author, 'men who are mothers, women who are fathers: there is nothing inevitable about the kinship of procreation' (Sahlins 2011: 4). Along the same lines, Lee Drummond argues that maternity, far from being the most natural thing in the world, is one of the most anti-natural:

becoming pregnant, giving birth and caring for a child are dilemmas that require a high degree of cultural interpretation (cited in Moore 1988: 28).

At this point I return to the Jarawara, for whom parenthood is not synonymous with procreation. In this society, kinship can be said to be linked to a process of care and seduction, the desired effect of which is to ‘beautify/transform/repair/rejuvenate’ (*namosa*) relations and day-to-day life. As I have discussed elsewhere (Maizza 2014) these practices of *namosa* as transformation and seduction also contain the concept of *nayana*, translatable as ‘raising’ or ‘fostering’. Approximately a third of Jarawara children are raised by people who are not their biological parents. This ‘fostering’ takes place not because the child has been abandoned by its parents, as occurs with some adopted children in our society, but because the child has been seduced by other parents, who want to raise it. The child thus ‘chooses’ whether to stay with its parents or be raised by other people, with whom it will forge bonds that will be transformed over time into what we might call kinship or, as Sahlins formulates it (2011), ‘mutuality of being’. In other words, women do not need to be fertile, become pregnant or have sexual relations in order to be mothers. Indeed, the reproductive process is masculine: it is the man who ‘makes/works’ (*yamana*) the child in the woman’s belly. After birth, both the father and the mother must participate in raising the infant.

Since fertility does not seem to be something that holds the attention of the people about whom I am writing, my aim here is to remove it from the analytic panorama. It might be argued that the entire *mariná* festival, the topic of this article and the event on which this ethnography is based, is triggered by the girl’s first menstruation, and thus the appearance of blood, and consequently by the fact that, after her menarche, she will be fertile, ready to marry and have children. I do not discount this sequence entirely, as it may well make some sense. However, the evidence leads me to believe that in Jarawara society ‘marrying’ and ‘having children’ are not dependent on female fertility. Linking women to their reproductive capacities, to their bodies as we (westerners) conceive the body, may well produce a line of argument whose conclusion arrives back at its own initial premise, namely the idea that what differentiates men and women is their bodies. This formula is related to our own conception of what defines ‘being a woman’. I opt instead for a conception that takes as its reference point the idea that women’s problems are not the same everywhere (Strathern 1988: 33). If this is the case, then my question is what dispositions would qualify the feminine among the Jarawara.

The seven girls

The *mariná* is what the anthropological literature would call a ‘female initiation ritual’. There exist three ways of referring to this type of event in Jarawara: 1) *mariná*; 2) *xicane*, the local Portuguese term; and 3) *ayaka*, the name for male songs (discussed shortly). I opt to use the term *mariná* since it is closer to the idea of a festival, a feast with lots of food, a banquet. Also I believe the word ‘festival’ is a better approximation of what people experience during these events than ‘ritual’.

At Dyimamirira’s *mariná* festival, which I witnessed, after the final night of dancing, some women and girls led the young ‘initiate’ to the stream to bathe her, apply perfume, comb her hair and dress her again in her festival clothing. Seven young women, all of whom had already been through the *mariná*, got dressed, combed their hair, put on lipstick and some feather headdresses (*atawa*) and wrapped shell rattles (*kikisiri*) around both ankles. While they were getting ready, they also made small canes (*awayori*) from the bark of a palm tree growing nearby. When they were all ready, the seven girls formed a single file and Dyimamirira, still with her eyes covered, was placed in the middle with two girls in front of her and five behind. They began the walk up from the river to the village clearing. Some other women accompanied them, singing the female *yowiri* songs. When they arrived at the clearing, they carried on walking and singing in single file with the canes made moments earlier held in their right hands.

All the guests had gathered in the clearing to watch, where about seven boys, were singing the *ayaka* male songs, circling around a trunk where all the dances were held over the three nights of the festival. Next to the trunk the shaman Kowisari was sitting in a chair, conducting the songs. The seven girls began to zig-zag towards the men’s circle, singing and jumping up and down so that the shells of their ankle rattles shook. They then formed a semicircle surrounding the smaller inner circle before moving away again in winding movements. They sang *yowiri*, while the men sang *ayaka*. This to-and-fro movement of the girls lasted a few minutes when suddenly they attacked the boys with their canes. One of them stayed by Dyimamirira’s side, holding her arm, ensuring that she did not fall or hurt herself during the short burst of rushing about. The boys imitated the grunt of peccaries and ran into the ‘forest’ to escape the women’s lashes. The atmosphere was one of joking and laughter among both those watching and those taking part in the finale.

After this sequence, formerly the girl would be tied face down on a tree trunk and then ‘whipped’ (*kokosia*) by some men, normally her ‘affines’. The whip used was a cane very similar to those carried by the seven girls. The middle of her back was whipped until her skin started bleeding, leaving a small scar for the rest of her life. Today, as has happened for more than a decade now, the parents, who decide how the festival will unfold, opt to omit use of the ‘whip’ (*kokosi*). The argument is that they are now believers (i.e. Christians).³ As a result of missionary pressure, after the above sequence, instead of the girl being tied up to be whipped, she is made to sit down on a chair, the basket or hat (*boro*) that has covered her head throughout the festival and the blindfold covering her eyes both being removed, and she listens to various ‘sermons’ on how she should behave from this point on. These speeches, made by both men and women, the young and adults, and above all by those most closely linked to the pastors from Jocum, typically tell her that she must work, help, listen and obey her mother. After the speeches had ended, those present at Dyimamirira’s festival hugged her one by one, and the *mariná* was over: ‘Now she can “come out”’ (*ewa mate amake fahi waha*).

These final events, especially the walk up from the river to the village, the dance and the ‘attack’ on the boys by the seven girls, can be described as an example of what Houseman and Severi (2009) call ‘ritual condensation’, a concept related to the theory of schismogenesis formulated by Gregory Bateson (1936). The notion of ‘ritual condensation’ is defined as the simultaneity of antithetical modes of relations within the same sequence of action (Houseman and Severi 2009: 10). It amounts to an apex or culmination in which diverse relations mobilized during the course of a ritual are ‘made visible’ (*donner à voir*), combining relations that would normally comprise an antithesis. What are typically ‘condensed’, therefore, are contradictory relations. For this method of interpretation – one which I do not propose to develop here – it would be necessary to mobilize various dichotomies in Jarawara thought like ‘high/low’, ‘water/land’, ‘men/women’ and ‘guests/hosts’.

The sequence of the seven girls can also be connected to stories that we could call ‘myths’ or *hiyarabote*. One of these stories recounts that a woman, the mother of a nursing infant, wanted to

³ Evangelical missionaries from Jocum (Jovens Com Uma Missão: Youths with a Mission) and SIL (the Summer Institute of Linguistics) have been present in Jarawara villages since the 1970s. In two of the three villages, Casa Nova and Água Branca, the missionaries have their own houses and often end up living in there for a number of years. The Evangelicals do not seem to oppose the festivals discussed here, sometimes even using these moments to reinforce their doctrines. Some songs have become songs about Bible teachings, for example. However, they prohibit the girls from having their backs marked and are against all shamanistic practices.

go to a *mariná* festival to dance and asked her mother to look after the baby. The girl then painted her body, put on a dress made of red cloth (*yayafa*), attached a ‘tail’ (*dyifori*, *dyifo behe*) to herself and went to join the dancing. A number of things happened next, but here I simply wish to highlight the fact that this girl from the ‘mythic times’ dresses to look beautiful and take part in the dances in precisely the same way that the young woman in seclusion is dressed during her ‘coming out’ or ‘emergence’ festival. This clothing is also the attire used by the *inamati*, celestial beings, ‘plant people’, who represent ideals of beauty, strength and danger (Maizza 2012) and sing and dance with rattles on their feet in their never-ending festivals.

At the same time, however, the design painted on the girl’s body is the same design used on the trunk around which the nocturnal dances are performed, as well as on the length of wood on which the girls used to be placed to be whipped. It was suggested to me that this design represents the skin of the anaconda (*makehe*). The ‘snake beings’ (*yama maka*) are very important in Jarawara thought, perhaps being, along with jaguars (*dyome*), the most potent and dangerous beings in the cosmos. Meanwhile the ‘tail’ (*dyifori*) that the girl uses is reminiscent of a *timbó* (fish poison) vine root before it is placed in the water. These roots first need to be beaten so that, once placed in the water, they release a milky liquid that partially asphyxiates the fish, making it difficult for them to swim and easier for them to be caught or shot with arrows. In sum, the girl’s clothing and gestures on the days of the festival, like those of the seven girls, appear to refer to the *inamati* supra-humans, celestial beings associated with the above, while the girl’s body painting appears to refer to beings associated with water.

The final sequence of the festival also recalls the *hiyarabote* (ancient history or myth) of how people were turned into peccaries (*hiyama*). One day a man went off to fetch Brazil nuts and asked his relatives to wait for him. However, his relatives wanted to speak ‘like the noise of fire’ and, transformed (*rabika*) into peccaries, wandered off into the forest. When the man returned, he became furious with them for not waiting. So he went after the peccaries and shot many of them with blow darts. He even shot his wife, carried her off, smoked her and ate her. He broke the snout of his son, who turned back into a person. His sister was in seclusion, so he removed her from the *wawasa*, ‘whipped’ (*kokosi*) her, removed her ‘hat/basket’ (*boro*) and ‘released’ (*sobana*) her. He said: ‘Sister, you’re going to turn into a fish; I’m going to turn into a fish too.’ His sister turned into a *tambaqui* (a small fish related to the *pacu* and *piranha*), himself into an

arapaima (a very large freshwater fish) and his son into a bird. Here again we encounter an association of the girl in seclusion with water and a reference to the above with the bird.

My intention in assembling these different reference points is to highlight the idea that the festival can be understood by means of a symbolic or structuralist analysis that explores a series of dichotomies, parallelisms and inversions. The sequence of the seven girls seems to mobilize various kinds of beings of great importance in Jarawara cosmopolitics: peccaries, the *makehe* ‘snake beings’ and shamans, the *inamati*. Those beings appear to be in dialogue with what I propose to examine here, but not in the foreground, so to speak. Instead I adopt a phenomenological approach, based on my experience of Dyimamirira’s festival. I wish to use the final sequence of the *mariná* festival to emphasize a single point: the idea that the girl is being ‘taken’ (*towaka*) by the seven girls. ‘Being taken’ is the situation in which Dyimamirira was placed every time she left her *wawasa* from the day she entered it: she was always led by someone, or had her arm held, including when dancing. As we shall see, the state of always ‘being taken’ is connected to the fact that her eyes are blindfolded or her head covered. On festival days, even while inside the *wawasa*, she seems to be ‘taken’ by the effects of sleep, song and snuff (*sina*).⁴ But we should start at the beginning.

Dream subjectivization

On the day Dyimamirira menstruated for the first time, her mother Makeni and her maternal aunt (*amise*) Hinabori, helped by two of her sons, went to fetch *wawasa* palm leaves from areas close to the village. The objective was to make a small hut for Dyimamirira inside the family house where she would stay until the day of her *mariná* festival. This hut is named after the palm they went to fetch, *wawasa*. Her mother and her aunt spent all day working on the structure, first building a framework from branches bound with twine, then covering this ‘skeleton’ with the palm leaves. They left an opening on the side, hung up a length of cloth to act as a door, and suspended a small hammock from one corner of the cramped space to the other. The interior of the hut ended up very dark and fairly stuffy, measuring roughly two metres in length and one and a half in width. Dyimamirira’s hair was then cut and one of her brothers struck the ‘ceiling’ of the *wawasa* with a cane, thus beginning her period of seclusion.

⁴ This snuff (*sina*) is a substance made from *sina* (tobacco) leaves, crushed and mixed with the ashes made from the bark of cacao (*hoko*).

For about four months she spent the majority of her time alone inside the *wawasa*, lying in her hammock or sitting on a mat placed underneath the latter, making bead necklaces, playing with a doll, drawing and inhaling snuff (*sina*). Once a day one of her sisters would take her to bathe. She was led to the stream, following in her sister's footsteps or being led by the hand. As she went, a towel was placed on her head so that, I was told, she would be unable to see or be seen by men. At the end of the day or after the evening meal she received visits from her friends of the same age or a little older. The main concern of her mother (*ami*) and aunts (*amise*) during the day, as far as I could tell, was whether Dyimamirira had eaten. She was served various meals with flour, fish, rice and beans – a real abundance of food. I witnessed the start of Dyimamirira's seclusion, and when I returned some months later for her festival, I noticed that she had become fatter. My friends even queried me on this topic, wondering whether I had seen how 'chubby' (*gordinha* in Portuguese) or simply 'pretty' (*amosake* in Jarawara) she was.

Contrary to what might be imagined, spending days and days inside the *wawasa* brings about a variety of dispositions, but 'relaxing' or 'resting' are not among them. Over the course of the day, the heat and lack of light mean that the inside of the small hut becomes somewhat stuffy and lonely. Dyimamirira called for her mother and sisters at various times throughout the day, sometimes so she could go to the toilet, sometimes to ask for something, like water, and sometimes to complain of discomfort. Someone always had to stay close to the *wawasa* to 'care for' (*kakatoma*) Dyimamirira. When her mother wanted to spend the morning in the swidden, for instance, she would ask one of her daughters or sisters to stay near to the hut. At night things became even more tense. More than once Makeni (Dyimamirira's mother) told me that she was exhausted. She had slept badly because Dyimamirira had called for her a lot, crying in the early morning, saying that she was scared, afraid of the *inamati*, she was hot, she was feeling unwell. Makeni slept in a hammock suspended next to that of her husband, Dyimamirira's father, and she often had to wake him for him to sleep somewhere else so their daughter could sleep with her and they could finally get some rest.⁵ The experience of living within the *wawasa* was described to me by the young women who had recently been through it as one of fear and anxiety. As the festival approaches, these sensations increase in intensity. The girls become very 'worried' (*aawawa na*) about what will happen to them during the *mariná*. The night before her

⁵ Men, even the girl's father, cannot see her during her period of seclusion. Or rather, she cannot see any men during her seclusion.

festival, Dyimamirira was unable to sleep; ‘she was crazy’ (*rabika*) according to her father, and ended up talking a lot with her mother. Eventually she fell sleep, once again in the hammock with Makeni.

Kamo (Dyimamirira’s father) had decided on a date to ‘release’ (*sobana*) his daughter, four full moons after she entered the *wawasa*. I returned to Casa Nova especially for the occasion. As the ‘agreed’ day approached, Dyimamirira’s brother organized a football competition. However, it seemed difficult to name the precise day the festival would begin: people explained that some things needed to be done beforehand. The first was the competition (taking up a full day), and the second was the need to wait two or three days after the football event so that the men – both hosts and guests – could go off hunting and return with game meat (*bani*). And that is what happened. The scene described in the opening of this article occurred at the end of the day of football. The next morning, after the night of *forró* music, the *yara* (‘white’) male and female guests left. Some men from the neighbouring village of Saubinha stayed to go hunting and remained until the day of the festival. Others, young parents in particular, went back home and returned to Casa Nova three days later.

The festival began on the fourth day after the football contest, when at around nine in the morning one of Dyimamirira’s younger brothers (*ayo*) struck the roof of the *wawasa* with a cane and then left. Various women then came to sit beside the hut and began to chant the *eé* songs. These are songs that the shamans hear sung by the women of the *neme* (‘upper layer’) during their visits and ‘bring back’ (*kaki*) to teach their wives and daughters – the ones who really know the songs. Each of them tells of an animal species, describing, so to speak, a specific characteristic or action. The refrain of the songs, which I surmise is the source of their name (*eé*), is always the same: ‘*E hinari, eé hinari*’. This can be translated as ‘it’s what they recounted, what was said’. These are high-pitched and compelling songs, which, due to the constant repetition of the refrain and the height of the note, give the impression of being one single and infinite song. The women who were there when Dyimamirira’s *mariná* began sang the whole day, without pausing, until 5 pm, when the space fell silent. Dyimamirira was listening from her hammock: the songs were being sung for her. Some singers left and came back, others stayed for the morning only, and others arrived after lunch, but many spent the entire day sitting down, leading or following the songs. While they sat around singing, some looked after their small children, others made necklaces, others painted their nails, and those nearest to Dyimamirira

worked on finishing the details of the clothes she would wear that night and on the other two nights of dancing.

At the end of the day the *ee* songs ceased, and people went to bathe and get ready for the feast that would begin in the early evening. Kamo and Makeni, the girl's parents, had stocked up for months on manioc flour and bought rice and pasta; the men who had gone hunting had brought back monkeys, peccaries and birds. The feast was lavish. All the guests, around a hundred people, received a full plate of food and a glass of fizzy drink. After the dinner there was a moment of rest, but not for Dyimamirira, who received visits in her *wawasa* and inhaled snuff with her girlfriends during this time before, at about 11 pm, her mother (*ami*), aunts (*amise*) and 'sisters' (*ati/asima*) began to dress her for the nocturnal songs and dancing. First they put on her cotton skirt dyed with annatto (*yayafa*), followed by a belt with two feather details, one on each side, then the shell rattles (*kikisiri*) on both ankles and a 'tail' (*dyifori*) made from *moriche* palm leaves (*dyifo*), with its tip dyed with annatto. Finally her eyes were covered with a cloth blindfold and a basket (*boro*) was placed on her head, decorated with four red macaw feathers, one on each corner, sticking upwards. At this point, I think, she should also have been painted. In her case, however, this did not take place since there was no genipap with which to paint the designs in black (the painting is done using red annatto and black genipap).

During this first night, which was, we recall, Dyimamirira's first day of emergence after months of seclusion, the women closest to her, including myself, were really excited, ready to make it a lovely night of dancing. Some minutes earlier, male guests had arrived surreptitiously in the house where most of the people were gathered waiting and beat the hut roof. This prompted everyone to stand up and imitate woolly monkeys (*wafa*), creating a lot of laughter and leaving the atmosphere buzzing. However, when Dyimamirira finally left the house, climbed down the stairs⁶ and reached the clearing where the dances would be held, she began to feel unwell. She was unable to stay on her feet and whispered that she was very tired, almost finding it difficult to breathe. So they fetched a chair for her to sit on, and for a while she stood up and sat down again on the chair, exhausted by these few movements. I was fairly worried and thought that the festival would not continue, but my friend Hinabori, who was by my side observing, told me that this was very normal: 'Dyimamirira was tired'.

⁶ All the houses are raised high on stilts.

As noted earlier, the girl's period of isolation is far from being quiet or a time of rest. In my view, this first moment when we see Dyimamirira 'on stage', so to speak, shows how exhausted she is before the festival even begins. The months spent inside her dark *wawasa*, marked by days of solitude, fear, anxiety, discomfort and sleepless nights, can, as seems to have been the case here, give her first emergence a 'sensory explosion'. Her body is different, now more rounded, fatter and heavier. In my view, the *boro* hat and the blindfold stimulate senses other than vision: it was as though Dyimamirira was suddenly experiencing the effects of her months of isolation all at once, and as the festival progressed, so these effects would become stronger and more vividly present.

Some women then started the *yowiri* female songs and dances, and the circle became fuller and fuller. Dyimamirira was placed in the middle to dance. During the first few hours she had to sit down various times, still feeling tired, but from early morning onwards she no longer paused. She danced the entire night, always being taken or held by two people, one on each side, turning to one side and then the other, hearing, but never singing, the *yowiri* female songs, and jumping hard on the ground from time to time so that her ankle shells rattled loudly. As dawn broke, she was taken by her 'sisters' to the stream, her *boro* was removed and she was bathed; then her *boro* was put back on, followed by her dress, and she was taken back to her *wawasa*. I imagine she was exhausted, but she had scarcely entered the hut and climbed into her hammock when various women (not those who had spent the night dancing) arrived, sat down and began the *ee* songs.

The entire next day unfolded in the same way, filled with *ee* songs, followed by a meal, visits, getting dressed and nocturnal dances, now with male songs (*ayaka*). At dawn there was more bathing and a return to the *wawasa*, followed by *ee*, a meal, visits and dances, now with the shaman Kowisari leading the *ayaka* songs. Three days and three nights passed. I had decided to record the *mariná* songs and so I looked to accompany Dyimamirira the whole time. As I said at the beginning, her mother had given me a good spot to stay in, a few meters from her daughter's *wawasa*, which provided me with a pleasant proximity. What I can say is that I almost never slept, except during the early evening before the dances began, while Dyimamirira was receiving visits in her *wawasa*. I ended up numb with tiredness, which seemed to make the people who saw me pleased. I was asked various times whether I was sleepy, almost as though validating my experience of the *mariná*. While I slept very little, Dyimamirira must have gone without any

sleep whatsoever – or rather, she was not given a single moment when she could sleep. There was always someone singing by her side, or else she was accompanied inhaling snuff, or in the middle of a dance circle.

The actions of the *mariná* seem to configure a situation in which the girl at the centre of it sleeps little. All the signs are that Dyimamirira experienced a state of constant drowsiness during the festival as a result of her lack of sleep, as though the lack of (prolonged) sleep meant that she could dream at any moment, as though she found herself in a condition of drowsiness (*nokobisa*) and tiredness (*amaha*) that led her into a dream-like state. Sleep would function almost as a drug that would make her ‘dream’ and leave her ‘light’. Light here is not an antonym of ‘heavy’ but means ‘takeable’, facilitating ‘being taken’ (*towakama*), ‘being carried’ (*weyena*), ‘being brought/led’ (*kaki*). These are the ideas that will guide me through the final section of the article.

Making oneself taken

During my stays in Casa Nova, people explained to me that the ‘soul’ (*abono*, *kanamori*) can detach itself from the body and have experiences with other kinds of beings. These experiences are dangerous and undesired since they indicate an out-of-control state, which may even lead to death. Being sick is one of these states, where the ‘soul’ (*abono*) has been captured, held or stolen by other kinds of beings and stays there with them, in their villages, as the body becomes ill. The ‘soul’ needs to be located, brought back (*kaki*) and placed inside the body again, a task undertaken by the plant-children of the shaman who are summoned by him. I was told a story in which two female souls (two ‘female monkey’ souls) captured the ‘soul’ of a man when he was hunting alone in the forest, secured and tied the soul up with twine and asked to marry him. The man became very sick, but in the end he was ‘cured’ by the shaman Kanabono.

Dreaming is an experience similar to falling ill. Okomobi told me that, ‘when we sleep, the body remains in the hammock, but the soul travels to the “sky” (*neme*), visiting, staying there talking’. Many times when I was staying in Casa Nova, in the early morning, huddled around the fire warming those already out of their hammocks, someone told me that he or she had ‘dreamt with the soul’ (*inamati*). The conversation was very brief, just an indication of the unfortunate incident, which always left the person concerned very worried. An older man once told me of a disturbing dream in which he had been wrapped up in the kind of line used in fishing nets: an *inamati* had bound him up and placed him upside down. When he awoke he discovered his

hammock was squeezing him. It is as though life here and life in dreams (the life of the ‘souls’, the *inamati*) are parallel worlds that can align at certain moments, the dream experience being a powerful form of this kind of passage from one reality to another, one perspective to another (Lima 1999).

In the Jarawara language, the involuntary state in which the soul detaches itself from the body is called *labirika* or *rabika*, translated into Portuguese as *ficar doido*, ‘going crazy’. Indeed I have heard the term *labirika* used in cases of sickness, fever (malaria), drunkenness, panic attacks, secret love affairs and other situations. The concept is also mobilized in the narratives of the ancient times, in the ‘myths’ (*hiyarabote*) indicating the moment when a kind of person metamorphizes (forever) into an animal species. However, I never heard this term being used for a shaman, precisely someone who experiences encounters with other kinds of being. The shaman’s knowledge of the world and of the various worlds is woven during journeys through which he sees after inhaling snuff and being ‘carried’ (*weye*) on the backs of his plant-children, arriving in distant villages and meeting the people and other beings that inhabit them. In a shaman’s *ayaka* (songs) we can hear their stories, like the day he arrived in a village in the *neme* and everyone was singing, dancing, holding a *mariná*, or another time in another village ‘there above’ (*nemeya*), when he was pursued by a jaguar.

Davi Kopenawa, in the book written with Bruce Albert, translated as *The Falling Sky*, talks of his experience as a shaman. This experience is linked to travelling and learning about the world of the *xapiri* – souls, ghosts and celestial beings, who correspond to the Jarawara *inamati* – beautiful, shining, the ideal of beauty and humanity. He says that to undertake these voyages, he himself has ‘become a ghost’, ‘become *xapiri*’ (Kopenawa and Albert 2013: 277), in one of two ways: either through nasal ingestion of the hallucinogenic substance called *yākoana*, or through dreams (ibid.: 24). While these are the ideal means of ‘becoming a ghost’, over the course of the book Davi also indicates other ways, more involuntary, where this can happen to anyone, not just shamans. These include drinking banana soup in the *reahu* feast (ibid.: 148); drinking *cachaça* (ibid.: 264); during sickness and fevers (ibid.: 287); after eating unknown food like that of white people (ibid.: 319); when someone is in real pain or very angry (ibid.: 358); and in dreams. While dreaming, everyone has access to the world of the *xapiri*, but ordinary people (non-shamans) do not travel very far (ibid.: 376).

In such circumstances (the list is not exhaustive) we are presented with what anthropologists call a separation between soul and body, and what Davi calls ‘becoming a ghost’. The soul’s experience is of a journey. This journey, as Kopenawa says, also connects with other space-times. He recounts that sometimes when he ‘becomes a ghost’ he sees events from what anthropologists would call myths. For example, one day he found himself living in the time when his ancestors turned into animals (ibid.: 61). For Davi dreaming, becoming a ghost, is the way of knowing par excellence. ‘When we [Yanomami] truly want to know things we people of the forest try to see them in dream’ (ibid.: 379). In this apprenticeship, the *xapiri*, the celestial beings, souls, ghosts, are the teachers. ‘This is our way of becoming wise. We people of the forest never forget the distant places we have visited in dream’ (ibid.: 380).

Going back to the *mariná*, it seems to me that the primary effect of the period of isolation is to stimulate the girl to dream. The tiredness instilled in her during her seclusion is transformed over the course of the festival into a disposition of deep drowsiness (*nokobisa*), which in turn is experienced as a dream state. She becomes very tired, very sleepy, and for this reason ‘light’ (in the sense of ‘takeable’). This disposition enables her to ‘go’, to ‘be taken’, to meet beings from other space-times, to have experiences, to gain knowledge of the world and of the various different worlds, to encounter the *inamati* in their houses ‘there above’ and to learn from them. The elements that enable this takeable agency are sleep, the *eé* songs and snuff. Marilyn Strathern tells us that, in Hagen, rites constructed ways of knowing the capacities of the body (Strathern 1988: 103) and that the evidence for these capacities rested on the efficacy of the action, implying, in Melanesia, a relation (ibid.: 123). The desired effect of the ‘male initiation rituals’ in Hagen is to bring the body to consciousness and, in the Melanesian idiom, show the impact of people’s minds upon one another (ibid.: 131). If we turn to consider Dyimamirira’s festival and her disposition to dream, we could venture the suggestion that the *mariná* seeks to bring the ‘soul’ to consciousness, to show the capacities of the ‘soul’, to show that ‘souls’ can be ‘taken’ (*towaka*), ‘brought’ (*kaki*), ‘carried’ (*weye*) and ‘held’ (*tama*), and that these dislocations are important forms of knowledge. I believe that ‘being takeable’, ‘carriable’, is a quality potentially linked to female agency, a quality *revealed* to women during the *mariná*.

At the same time, during the festival Dyimamirira experienced a heavier, fattened body. The nocturnal dances in which she jumped energetically to make her *karakisi* (ankle shells) rattle felt the force of her weight striking the ground. This body is also beautiful – a beautiful woman is a

full-bodied woman – and, during the *mariná*, it is even more beautiful after being painted, adorned, decorated and beautifully dressed. In addition, the atmosphere is filled with beauty due to the songs and dances, and also with the ‘joy’ and ‘animation’ of the guests and hosts. In sum, it seems to me that the idea of a heavy body is not incompatible with the concept of ‘being takeable’. Shamans (*inawa*) are travellers who move about ‘carried’ on the backs (*weye*) of ‘celestial’ beings (their plant-children). These same shamans are said to have various ‘stones’ (*arabani*, *yama nakora*) inserted into their bodies over their lifetimes. These ‘souls’, which are also media used in spells (Maizza 2012), are like small pieces of gold, shining and dense, which may convey a certain notion of weight in the bodies of shamans.

Other ‘carriable’ beings in the Jarawara world – for which the terms *weye*, *towaka*, *kaki* and *tamaka* are equally employed – are children, who are transported in slings on walks until they are at least four years old; some kinds of cultivated plants, which are first planted close to the houses before being taken to the swidden gardens as saplings; prey, which are captured in the forest and carried dead to the houses; sick people who should be taken to the city; and the ‘souls’ (*kanamori*) of the dead, which are carried by their plant-children to the upper layer (*neme*). In all these cases, there appears to be no contradiction between ‘being heavy’ and ‘being takeable’. In the case of the girls in seclusion and the shamans, I believe that the use of snuff is an important factor in being taken away, but I am unable to develop this point in greater depth here.

Our way of conceptualizing the problems explored in anthropology tends to lead us to superimpose analytic categories (Strathern 1980) and to end up producing chains of premises. Very often these chains make sense only to ourselves but not to the people with whom we work, passing unnoticed both by those who formulate them and by their readers. A good example of this kind of procedure is the opposition woman/nature/domestic versus man/culture/public, discussed at the beginning of this article. In the case of the *mariná* and its effects, I would tend to superimpose the categories ‘woman’, ‘heavy body’ and ‘prey.’ One of the motives for this, perhaps, is the fact that I have taken as a basis the argument that in indigenous Amazonian societies the gender distinction is eclipsed by the dichotomies ‘humans versus non-humans’ or ‘prey versus predators’ (Descola 2001, Vilaça 2005: 451, Taylor and Viveiros de Castro 2006: 173). Thus women have sometimes been metaphorically qualified in ethnographies as ‘prey’

(Taylor 2000).

I too initially thought that seclusion and the festival of the Jarawara girls could be a way of transforming them into ‘peccary-women’. However, after participating in Dyimamirira’s festival and exposing myself to other possible understandings, I have explored the idea that the *mariná* does not place women in the position of prey, but rather that seclusion and the festivals reveal women to have a number of qualities *analogous* to those of prey, like ‘being heavy’ and the capacity ‘to be taken’. This does not make women prey, still less the ‘prey of men’: the latter formulation is perhaps more revealing of our own idea, already mentioned earlier, that nature submits to culture and that this is visible in a supposedly universal female submission. The qualities cited above are not exclusive to prey: they are also attributed to other subjects, including shamans. They point to a form of agency that enables women to journey, to leave, to acquire knowledge by means of their dreams. They bring women closer to shamanic knowledge and the complicated networks of cosmo-political relations in which shamans are inserted. In conclusion, ‘domestic’ and ‘woman’ are perhaps not categories that overlap, at least not among the Jarawara.⁷ ‘Takeable’ (*towaka*) and ‘carriable’ (*weye*) female agency projects women more towards a possible ‘outside’ than a possible ‘inside’.

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⁷ See Lea (2000) for a similar opinion concerning Mebengôkre women.

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