# SOCIAL CONTEXT AND CREATION OF MEANING IN INDIGENOUS AMAZONIAN PERFORMANCES OF MYTH AND ORAL HISTORY

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the expression and interpretation of knowledge of the past in an indigenous Amazonian society. I argue that, for the Marubo, myth and oral history are distinct genres of past-times discourse. This paper first distinguishes myth and oral history according to their distinct formal characteristics and their different contexts of performance. I then show how Marubo myths contain crucial information about proper forms of social behavior. I will show how Marubo elders interpret myths in the context of concrete, ongoing political processes. A similar analysis is carried out for oral history, showing the significance of oral-historical knowledge to the contemporary Marubo social system. Finally, I show how myth and oral history form part of one of the most important forms of Marubo ritual behavior, the great feast known as *Tanamea*. A particular indigenous interpretation of the Marubo historical experience underlies the practice of feasting. Myths are performed at the feast, ensuring that a wide audience gains knowledge of fundamental mythic motifs. Elders then draw on that knowledge to contest and negotiate modes of everyday social behavior. This paper thus describes the path taken by oral-historical and mythic information, from its performance, through its moral interpretation, to its expression in social praxis. The Marubo are conscious actors in processes of historically driven social change.

## Introduction

The way in which information about past times becomes a template for social reproduction is strongly affected not only by the social contexts in which the past is narrated or performed, but also by the social contexts in which that information is interpreted. This paper aims to show how information about the past is communicated and interpreted as part of ongoing processes of negotiating cultural value systems in an indigenous Amazonian society. The Marubo, an indigenous people of northwestern Brazil, have several discourse genres through which information about the past is transmitted. To show how Marubo knowledge of the past supports and structures social behavior in the present, I will examine two genres of Marubo past-times discourse: myth and oral history. I will show how and where these genres are performed; what type of information is conveyed and why it is relevant to social reproduction; how the information is interpreted; and how, by means of these acts of interpretation, the information in myth and oral history becomes part of an ongoing process of social production and reproduction.

Myth and oral history play crucial roles in Marubo social reproduction. However, the information contents of these two genres of past-time discourse take different pathways, from their origin in narrative discourses to their role as moral supports for various forms of social activity. Marubo myths are performed at planned feasts, before large audiences. They have content that, after being interpreted, indicates that certain moral patterns are to be valued and others are not. Due to the ritualization of myth-performance, performance and interpetation are separate acts. When elders interpret myths, they make statements of how proper Marubo should behave. In this paper, I will show how myth contains information about the cultural structuring of sexuality. I will also show how patterns of sexual morality are being constantly negotiated in concrete sociopolitical contexts. Thus, the interpetation of myth has the effect of endorsing specific patterns of social behavior, in situations where multiple options are available. Such acts of interpetation are ways of establishing what it means to be Marubo.

In contrast to myths, Marubo oral histories are narrated in unmarked social settings. Oral-historical narratives can be purely informative, but they can also contain interpretations. For example, an elder may discuss the rubber boom, give an opinion as to why the Marubo suffered demographic declines, and explain why this means that contemporary Marubo need to engage in certain patterns of social behavior that will reverse those declines. Specifically, I will show how the Marubo interpret their rubber boom experience as signifying that they should often hold feasts, both large and small. Thus, the interpetation of oral history, like that of myth, has the effect of endorsing specific patterns of social behavior, again in contexts where multiple options are available.

Although myth and oral history, through acts of interpretation, both influence patterns of social behavior,

the paths taken by the information in each genre are different. The information in myth is transmitted directly to large audiences at feasts, but is interpreted in smaller, more spontaneous social gatherings. In contrast, the information in oral history is transmitted in unmarked social settings, to groups of people much smaller than those present at feasts. But oral-historical information is interpreted at large planned feasts in ceremonial dialogues. Thus, interpretations of oral history have larger audiences than the oral histories themselves. As different as these processes are, they share one thing: large feasts are essential to both of them.

The largest Marubo feast is the *tanamea*, which can bring together in one place a third or more of the total Marubo population (as many as 400 out of a total of 1000). At these feasts, dozens of myths are performed, ensuring that most Marubo have at least heard these narratives. *Tanamea* also involve ceremonial dialogues in which the feast is presented as an interpretation of the Marubo historical experience. The practice of feasting itself is morally underpinned by these interpretations of the Marubo historical experience. Analysis of these feasts is thus essential to understanding the way information about past times affects contemporary Marubo social action.

The conceptual framework for this paper is adopted from Jonathan Hill's edited volume *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past* (Hill 1988). In his introduction, Hill argues that, in indigenous South American societies, myth and oral history are complementary modes of consciousness of the past, which are expressed in narrative and non-narrative performances, and through which people construct shared frameworks for interpreting social realities (Hill 1988:5). He shows that the evidence contradicts Lévi-Strauss' concept of "cold societies" (Lévi-Strauss 1962). Lévi-Strauss argued for a distinction between mythic consciousness and historical consciousness, where the mythic was static, eternally changeless, whereas the historical was constantly changing. Hence societies with mythic consciousness were "cold"; because myths were set in a timeless past, so too the social orders based upon them were timeless. Hill and the other contributors effectively dismantle that perspective by showing how mythic and oral-historical consciousness co-exist in indigenous South American societies, and how "shared interpretive frameworks for understanding the social situations of contact and the historical process of coping with a dominant, external society" (Hill 1988:9) result from their expression. Thus, myth and oral history become merged in narrative and interpretive acts that are embedded in conditions of extremely intense and permanent historical change.

In this paper, I pursue Hill's call to study the genres through which indigenous South American mythic and historical consciousness are expressed. I draw considerably on the vocabulary developed in studies of the formal features and semantic content of indigenous South American discourse genres (particularly Urban 1986a, 1986b, and Sherzer & Urban 1986, but also Brown 1985, Hendricks 1988, Seeger 1987). Like Hill (1987) and Urban (1991), I complement feature/content analysis with detailed observations of the social context of performances, seeking to understand the total process of information transmission and its effect on participants in rituals in which mythic genres are performed. Hill (1987) showed how ritual performances result in the dissemination of socially generalized behavioral predispositions, a finding replicated in my own research, and one well-known in ritual studies from other areas (e.g., Turner 1973). My contribution is to connect the analysis of discourse genres and their performative contexts with my research on political processes in Marubo society (Ruedas 2001). I will show how narrative performances transmit information across generations and across social space, and also how that information is used to create moral interpretations and to establish and negotiate patterns of social action in the context of specific, ongoing political processes.

I hope to suggest ways in which ethnographic research can probe deeper into the role of myth and oral history in the establishment of indigenous South American ethical systems (1). The contributions to Hill's volume (Hill 1988) were limited to showing how these genres contribute to construction of shared frameworks for approaching contact situations, but it is clear that myth and oral history relate to internal social relations as well. Hill (1987) has shown that ritual analysis can reveal how mythic consciousness relates to the negotiation of frameworks for social relationships within an indigenous society, while Nadelson (1981) and Chernela (1988) do the same through myth-analysis. But to grasp properly the way mythic and historical narratives, mediated by ritual contexts of performance and interpretation, become ideas that influence social action, it is necessary to study social contexts beyond the ritual or narrative event itself. Hence, I describe political processes related to the negotiation of a common framework for sexual morality. I find that the way meaning is created from myth cannot be understood independently from knowledge of these processes. To understand the role of past-times discourses in social production and reproduction, we must link observations of narrative and interpretative events with a broad ethnographic view of the total social system.

By applying these methods to the interpretation of my fieldwork observations, I show that Hill's

critique of the concept of 'cold societies' is fully applicable to the Marubo. Marubo myth-interpretation is an open process of negotiation. Myths do not suggest single interpretations, which, like homeostatic mechanisms, would limit social behavior to one variant, fixing social organization into an unchanging, 'correct', pattern. Myths are interpreted instead in contexts where multiple options are available and different segments of society argue for their point of view. The mythological corpus is common to all, but the interpretations vary and can change over time. Furthermore, the context in which these processes take place is one of rapid, irrevocable social change.

The Marubo underwent severe demographic trauma during the rubber boom (roughly 1890-1910 in their area). The few leaders that survived the rubber boom drew on their traditions to re-create the social order, but they consciously changed things which they felt were destructive. Hence, although the Marubo mythological corpus is supposed to be unchanging because it is memorized precisely by each new generation of experts, the social order based upon it does change. It does so because historical situations demand change as a prerequisite for survival, and some Marubo would rather change than become extinct.

This paper fits into a tradition of scholarship on Panoan societies in general (see Kensinger (1981, 1986), Erikson (1992, 1993), and Erikson et al. (1994) for background), but more specifically on Panoan mythology (e.g., Balzano 1983, Bertrand-Rousseau 1983, 1984, Bertrand-Ricoveri 1992, 1994, Frank & Villacorte 1988, Melatti 1985, 1986, Roe 1982, 1988) and its performance (Montagner 1985, Levy 1988, Frank et al. 1990). Again, the contribution of this paper is to study the meaning of myth by relating the analysis of mythic performance and interpretation to observations of ongoing political processes. In addition, in touching on the issue of how sexual morality is negotiated, this paper makes a limited contribution to scholarship on the construction of Amazonian gender roles (Murphy 1956, Murphy & Murphy 1974, Nadelson 1981, Burkhalter 1988, Chernela 1988, McCallum 1989).

I divide this paper into seven sections. First, I present ethnographic background on the Marubo. By presenting this information at the beginning, the need for distracting tangents in the main text is reduced. Second and third, I describe the formal features and social contexts of performance, first of myth, then of oral history. These two sections establish the distinctiveness of these genres of Marubo past-times narrative. Fourth, I examine some of the content of Marubo myth that renders it susceptible to interpretation as a basis for important features of the social structure. Fifth, with its content established, I proceed to describe how myth is interpreted in the context of an ongoing political process—the negotiation of sexual morality. Sixth, I describe how oral histories are interpreted as signifying that certain social practices must be carried out in the present. Finally, I show how all these processes of performance and interpretation come together in a crucially important Marubo ritual, the *tanamea* feast. The reader will thus be able to follow the path taken by oral-historical and mythic information, from its performance, through its moral interpretation, to its expression in social praxis.

**Ethnographic Background**

The Marubo are a group of approximately 1000 indigenous people inhabiting the basins of the Curuçá and Ituí Rivers. These are affluents of the Javari River, which forms the border between Peru and Brazil until its junction with the Amazon itself. The Marubo are members of the Panoan language family, with close affinities to the Katukina-Pano (Coffaci 1994) and to the Kaxináwa (Kensinger 1995). They also have slightly more distant, yet still recognizable, linguistic and cultural affinities with the Shipibo of the Ucayali River (Roe 1982).

As important as their connection to other Panoans is the location of the Marubo in the Javari River basin (see figure 1). The Javari basin is an area with great ethnic diversity. Among the area's most notable features is the presence of at least five groups that have no formal, regularized contacts with the Brazilian state. These include the Korubo, who, because of their armed resistance to intrusion on their land, have been the subject of numerous sensationalizing reports on television, the internet, and print media (e.g., Schemo 1999). In addition, there are four groups that do have formal contacts with the Brazilian state. Three of these are Panoan—the Marubo, Mayoruna, and Matís. The fourth group are the Kanamari, who speak a language of the Katukinan language family. The Katukinan language family should not be confused with the Katukina ethnic group inhabiting the Brazilian state of Acre; the latter are speakers of a Panoan language, and are known to specialists as the Katukina-Pano. The Mayoruna, Marubo, Matís, and Kanamari are members of an indigenous organization called CIVAJA, Conselho Indígena do Vale do Javari, which works to enact the rights guaranteed to indigenous people under the Brazilian constitution.

The Javari basin is remote and inaccessible even to this day. Non-indigenous people failed to

penetrate the area consistently until the late nineteenth century (Melatti 1981). Spanish Jesuits established missions on the Ucayali and Huallaga Rivers in the 1650s, including one among a Panoan group known as the Mayoruna (Figueroa 1986 [1661]), though there is no certain connection between the latter and the group currently known by that same name (Coutinho 1993). Coming from the east, the Portuguese established a military fort at Tabatinga, originally known as São José do Javari, in 1759 (Coutinho 1993:149). During much of the nineteenth century, the interior of the Javari basin was penetrated only by occasional geographic expeditions, and by merchants seeking natural products such as sarsaparilla, vanilla, cacao-bean, and others. These merchants did not go beyond the shores of the few navigable rivers, nor did they establish any permanent presence in the interior of the Javari basin (Melatti 1981, Coutinho 1993). Full-scale invasion of the area did not occur until the rubber boom.

The rubber boom had a major impact not only on the Marubo but also on most indigenous people living in the upper Amazon. It is therefore important to consider modern cultural phenomena in the historical context of the boom. Demand for rubber in industrialized nations increased steadily after the discovery of the vulcanization process in 1839 (Coates 1987; French 1991). This demand created an economic boom in much of the Amazon basin by the 1870s. A company from Belém owned the title to all the rubber in the Javari basin from 1888 to 1899 (Weinstein 1983:173). During this time, workers were hired to tap rubber, but the rubber itself was considered the property of the Belém company. In 1899, the title to the Javari basin's rubber was sold to a French concern. The French, unable to control labor, were forced to buy rubber from independent rubber tappers, rather than simply taking it from hired empoyees as had the Brazilians (Weinstein 1983:178-180). From 1888 on, therefore, there was a significant presence of rubber tappers in the Javari basin. The rubber tappers had hostile relations with the basin's indigenous inhabitants, often resorting to the elimination of entire villages to clear the way for safe tapping. The violence worsened after 1899 when the tappers became independent agents in competition with one another, rather than employees of the same company as they had been from 1888 to 1899. The rubber boom finally abated from 1911 on, when harvests in Malaysia provided much cheaper rubber to the world markets, and Amazonian rubber tapping ceased to be viable as a large-scale commercial enterprise (see also Lange 1912; Barham & Coomes 1996; Stanfield 1998).

The rubber boom affected all aspects of Marubo existence. It can be said, in a sense, to have created the Marubo. There is no evidence that the Marubo existed as a discrete ethnic group prior to the boom. Instead, oral histories indicate that a number of Panoan groups, speaking as many as three different languages, are ancestral to the contemporary Marubo. These groups responded to the increasing pressure of rubber tappers by retreating to the interior of the basin, where, by the end of the boom, all the survivors concentrated in a single remote area around the headwaters of the Arrojo River (see Figure 2). There the survivors were fused into a single group with one language and, eventually, a common identity. The term 'Marubo' was applied to these rubber boom survivors by the regions's non-indigenous people. It has only recently been recognized by the Marubo themselves, and so far it is mainly young people who think of themselves as 'Marubo'. Previously, the people who were called Marubo by outsiders identified themselves only by their descent-group membership, without any overarching group label.

It is difficult to say what the Marubo population was at the end of the rubber boom, but since the population in 1974 was 397 (Coutinho 1998), and the rubber boom violence tapered off after 1911, it is reasonable to assume that the rubber boom reduced the 'Marubo' population to less than 100. This became at once a demographic and a cultural bottleneck. A single individual, João Tuxáua, is credited with preserving a host of cultural practices from healing songs and knowledge of plant medicines to the use of shamanic trance and the telling of myths, and transmitting these practices and the knowledge behind them to the next generation. João Tuxáua was thus able to have a tremendous impact on which cultural variants survived the rubber boom.

The moral teachings of João Tuxáua are directly related to the cultural experience of surviving the rubber boom. He taught a set of beliefs and values concerning how people should behave in order for society to prosper, about which more will be said later in this paper. These values reflected and embodied João Tuxáua's reaction to the problem of reconstructing a society decimated by a generation of violence. There is evidence that he changed the cultural value system somewhat, eliminating the behaviors that he felt were responsible for their near-extinction, while retaining and emphasizing what he felt was beneficial. In a very real sense Marubo culture was produced after the rubber boom as a re-production of the area's pre-boom Panoan culture.

The experiences of the rubber boom are recalled in a corpus of detailed oral histories. In contrast, most pre-boom history is remembered in a corpus of myths. The distinction between these two genres will be made clear below.

In the Javari basin, the rubber boom gave way to what Melatti (1981:19) calls the "period of

stagnation of the rubber trade", from 1911 to 1945. For the Marubo, this could be called 'the period of isolation'. Some rubber tappers and a few rubber merchants continued extractive operations in the Curuçá and Ituí basins, but the price of rubber declined precipitously and most people left the area (clouds of blackflies in the daytime and malaria-bearing mosquitoes at night make it challenging to live there). The Marubo, however, had retreated to a very remote area. They lived in near-total isolation for a generation as they recovered from the precarious demographic situation in which they had been left. From about 1945 on, logging became a significant economic activity in the Javari basin and, once again, non-indigenous people began entering the area. However, the loggers tended to establish temporary camps rather than permanent installations.

By the time logging reached the Marubo, they had learned to work for money. The son of a Marubo woman, raised by a Peruvian rubber tapper, returned to live with his mother's kin, probably some time in the 1940s. This man brought a certain understanding of the monetary economy with him. Many Marubo began to tap rubber and sell it, or trade it for shotguns, ammunition, salt, and other products. Thus, the the advent of logging did not lead to a repetition of the rubber boom violence in the Marubo case (in contrast to the neighboring Korubo). Regular and peaceful (if unequal) commercial relations existed by the 1960s.

The long period of isolation at the headwaters of the affluents of the Curuçá ended in the mid-1960s when substantial numbers of Marubo moved to the Ituí River. New Tribes missionaries, who had first visited the Marubo in 1952, also settled on the Ituí. In the mid-1970s, the Brazilian governmental agency in charge of indigenous affairs, FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Índio), established posts on the Ituí and Curuçá. Those Marubo who remained in the headwaters area were invited to move to the main courses of the rivers by a FUNAI agent, Sebastião Amanso. A group of headwaters Marubo went down the Arrojo River to settle on the middle Curuçá. Another group of Ituí Marubo descended the Ituí to its middle area, where they became neighbors of the Korubo and Matís. The last remaining headwaters Marubo resettled to the upper Curuçá in the 1980s (see Figure 4).

The contemporary Marubo are not a homogeneous people. There are nine exogamous matrilineages. Oral histories suggest that prior to the rubber boom, these lineages were not, as they are now, grouped into a single society with a common identity. Even in the late 1990s, elders who had been raised during the period of isolation did not identify themselves as Marubo, but rather as members of their descent group. Before the boom, one set of lineages lived on the Ituí River; a second set lived on the Javari and Pardo Rivers; a third set lived on the Amburus and upper Curuçá; and still others lived along the Arrojo River. Contemporary Marubo are aware of these distinctions in ancestry: for example, many Ituí Marubo trace their ancestry to the Javari and Pardo Rivers, while many Curuçá Marubo trace their ancestry to the Ituí River. Aside from the distinct group identities of the elders, evidence that these were differentiated groups comes from statements by upper Curuçá Marubo that at some point in the past they abandoned their ancestral tongue, called *Asánkiki*, and adopted the language of the now-extinct Shainawavo, which, they say, all Marubo have come to speak.

The social organization that has emerged from these difficult historical circumstances is a variation on the generalized Panoan model (Kensinger 1995). The formal features of Marubo kinship and social structure were first worked out by Melatti (1977). There are nine Marubo exogamous matrilineages in existence. However, these matrilineages are etic constructs. Each matrilineage is divided into two units, which the Marubo call *náwavo*, 'people'. Each *náwavo* is named, generally after a natural phenomenon, as for example *Varináwavo* ('sun people'), or *Kamãnáwavo* ('jaguar people'). *Náwavo* membership alternates each generation. For example, the child of a Varináwavo woman is a Tamaoavo; the child of a Tamaoavo woman is a Varináwavo. These units were called 'sections' by Melatti (1977) by analogy with the Kariera system (Radcliffe-Brown 1930). However, 'sections' has referred in the literature to a system of four units, and the Marubo have eighteen of these. To avoid complications, I simply use the Marubo term.

The larger unit, of which each *náwavo* pair is a member, has no name in Marubo, and Marubo have no identity as members of it. Their social identity relates to their *náwavo*. The *náwavo* in fact operates as a descent group in which membership is derived from the mother's mother. Kinship term usage is sociocentric, so that one's *náwavo* membership determines what kin terms one will use for all other Marubo. The incest prohibition applies to one's own *náwavo* and that of one's mother and mother's brother. In addition, the Tamaoavo/Varináwavo and Txonavo/Shonoískovo lineages extend the prohibition to one another. The unit consisting of two related *náwavo* was called by Melatti (1977) a 'matrilineal unit', and I follow suit by referring to it as 'matrilineage'. The matrilineage's existence can be perceived only through census data since it is not emically recognized.

The vast majority of Marubo live in a type of dwelling called a *shovo*. These buildings are typically

from forty to ninety feet long and thirty to fifty feet wide. They can be thirty or more feet high. *Shovo* are usually multifamily dwellings, though a few are single-family. *Shovo* have nine to fifty-nine inhabitants, with an average of 21. The crucial significance of the *shovo* in Marubo social life has been written of by Montagner and Melatti (1986) and myself (Ruedas 2001).

Each *shovo* has a single leader, typically the individual who directed labor to construct it. This individual is called a *shovo ivo* (plural *shovo ivorasi*). *Shovo ivorasi* have considerable authority over their coresidents, though in most cases this authority is rarely used. Those who are dissatisfied with the *shovo* leadership can form a new settlement, but this is very difficult due to the labor involved.

In contrast to the recognized and near-universal role of the *shovo ivo*, multi-*shovo* leadership is rarely effective. In the 1970s, most Marubo settlements had only one *shovo*. By the 1990s, most *shovo* were grouped into larger settlements. The largest of these, Aldeia Maronal on the upper Curuçá, had eleven *shovo* and 225 inhabitants in 1997. The possibility that a person could achieve multi-*shovo* leadership and real power was definitely present in Marubo society. The leader of Aldeia Maronal had done so, and according to oral histories such people existed at various times in the past. But in most multi-*shovo* villages, inter-*shovo* politics were highly egalitarian. When an individual accumulates power and prominence beyond his own *shovo* and by traditional means (i.e., not by working in political organizations and using governmental and NGO contacts), he is generally called *kakáya*. At any given moment in Marubo society, there may be one or more *kakáya*, or none at all.

The process of political organization that culminated in the establishment of CIVAJA began in the 1980s. This process was initiated by two Marubo, Clóvis Rufino and Darcy Comapa. They began by working with NGOs to attract attention to the situation of the Javari basin's indigenous people. Then they began travelling up and down the Javari basin's rivers, arguing to all that would listen that the establishment of a multiethnic council would improve their ability to obtain the benefits (health, education, etc.) that theoretically all Brazilians were entitled to. This resulted in a series of multiethnic meetings leading up to the formal foundation of CIVAJA in 1992. Among the greatest successes of CIVAJA to date has been pressuring FUNAI to move forward with the formal demarcation of the Javari basin indigenous area. This event occurred in December 1998, giving the indigenous populations of the Javari basin official rights to use of their land. Another great success was securing funds for a radio communications system which now links most of the villages of CIVAJA's member groups.

The Marubo continue to play a predominant role in the indigenous politics of the Javari basin. CIVAJA was founded by Marubo, and continues to be led and managed, for the most part, by Marubo. The Marubo also have the largest population of any indigenous group in the Javari, which contributes to their political predominance. Marubo frequently engage in political activism, for example by attending conferences in Manaus and elsewhere, participating in the pan-Amazonian indigenous movement, staging take-overs of FUNAI headquarters in Atalaia, and engaging in other activities aimed at securing the rights guaranteed to them by the Brazilian constitution.

The land occupied by the Marubo is, for the time being, sufficient for their subsistence needs. Their economy has a horticultural basis. Plantains, bananas, sweet manioc and maize are the main crops, grown by the swidden method. Very few domesticated animals are kept, and most of the protein in the Marubo diet comes from hunting. Collared and white-lipped peccaries, deer, tapir, and black spider monkeys are among the main game animals.

The Marubo strike visitors as having a rich indigenous culture. They have many forms of indigenous music, a clearly indigenous form of kinship and social organization, large longhouses, and a very elaborate system of healing. Marubo society regularly produces shamans, called *romeya*, who enter possession trances, as well people called *keshĩxo* who are singers of magically powerful songs. The attractiveness to young Marubo of traditional modes of indigenous behavior is reinforced by the contemporary link in Brazil between visually self-evident indigeneity and indigenous land rights.

**Marubo Myth: Formal Features and Social Context of Performances**

The performance of myth in Marubo society is strongly ritualized. Speech forms and movements are determined in advance, reducing the range of opportunities for interactions among participants; because of this, discussion of meaning is not simultaneous with the performance. In other words, in the case of myth as a discourse genre, performance and interpretation are separate speech acts. Interpretation does not take place in the same social context as performance.

Marubo myths are performed as songs, called generically *saiti* (2). Myths are performed, almost exclusively, during two types of feast. Both types are planned feasts, as opposed to the impromptu feasts that take place whenever a tapir or a herd of peccaries is killed. Planned feasts include the

*akoya*—feasts for the dedication of new signal drums (called *ako*)—and the *tanamea*, a feast involving invitation of one or several villages by another village. In both cases, a great eating event is only the culmination of several days or weeks of festivity. It is during the festivities preceding the climax of the feast that *saiti* are sung. In the three *akoya* I oberved, singing proceeded for three nights before the climax; in the case of the single *tanamea* I fully observed, singing continued for eleven nights before the climax, and during the last three days, took place day and night, non-stop. A more detailed analysis of this event will be presented below.

Singing takes place typically within the confines of the Marubo dwelling, the *shovo* (only near the end of a *tanamea* does the large number of guests sometimes require that singing overflow onto the patio surrounding the *shovo*). Marubo *shovo* conform to a standard interior plan. Just within the front door, facing one another, are the two parallel benches known as *kenã*, which play fundamental roles in Marubo social life. The center of the *shovo* is occupied by an open space called the *kaya naki*. The size of the *kaya naki* is an issue of pride since the larger the space, the more guests can be accommodated at a feast. During performances of *saiti*, a knowledgeable elder is invited by the feast's organizer to sing. The singer usually sits on one of the parallel benches, on the end furthest from the doorway, while the audience circulates counterclockwise in the *kaya naki*. The elder sings one verse at a time, and the audience echoes each verse. The verses are sung in a rhythmic pattern and utilize a vocabulary that is occasionally archaic and, according to informants, broader than that of ordinary speech (i.e., covering esoteric semantic domains—for more information see Montagner 1985:363-369).

While one elder is singing, other elders sit quietly on the benches next to and in front of the singer, occasionally inhaling dried tobacco-leaf powder, drinking *Banisteriopsis* tea, and conversing in low tones. Their main occupation, however, is listening to the singer in an effort to secure their knowledge of the realm of mythic discourse. Elders take pride in the extent and accuracy of their knowledge of these discourses, and listen carefully when others perform. Discussions among elders during these performances often focus on securing understanding of the role played by a particular character or the nature of a non-human entity involved in the storyline—strictly issues internal to the mythical narrative, as opposed to issues of the significance of the entire story. Issues of overall significance of the narratives were not discussed during performances.

The words of the singer are echoed, verse-by-verse, by the audience in the *kaya naki*. The *kaya naki* audience consists mainly of young men and women; only rarely does an elder circulate and respond with the youth. The youth walk about the central space of the *shovo*, repeating every word sung by the elder. Singing typically begins a few hours after sunset and continues all night, ending only at sunrise. By sunrise, few of the audience remain; nevertheless, there are always one or two who stay on until the end, if only because the elder exhorts them. Youth may play at mock-threatening one another with burning sticks to keep themselves awake; for elders and youth alike, the capacity to avoid sleep is an issue of pride.

A second context of myth-performance is also significant. After normal work-days, Marubo men sometimes lie down in a hammock and sing a myth to their *shovo*—a monologic version rather than the dialogic version sung at feasts. These performances take place at or shortly after sunset, when the *shovo*'s population is gathered together, sometimes with visitors and guests. Often the women cook a meal to be served about this time, and people are waiting for it. It is the best time for a man to reach a sizeable audience with his song. However, much larger audiences are reached, and many more myths are sung, at feasts as compared to these individual songs.

Marubo sung myths have a formal structure that distinguishes them from ordinary speech. The formal structure of *saiti* shares many features with other formalized narrative genres of indigenous South America. Among the most evident is the fact that *saiti* are an instantiation of the category of speech acts known as "ceremonial dialogues" (Urban 1986a). The main feature of ceremonial dialogues is turn-taking. Different performers take turns speaking according to a culturally pre-determined pattern. In the Marubo case turns are taken alternately by the singer, who introduces the content, and his audience, which echoes it. This creates the type of dialogue known as "pragmatic dialogue" as opposed to "semantic dialogue" (Urban 1986a:371). In the latter, both turn-takers introduce semantic content. In the former, "the overt communicative purpose of the dialogues is semantically monologic" (Urban 1986a:381). In pragmatic dialogues of indigenous South America, the pragmatic response is usually a form of assentment by backchanneling; for example, the Waiwai respond *oho* ('yes') to speakers' statements during ceremonial dialogues (Fock 1963). Trio (Rivière 1971) and Kuna (Sherzer 1983) ceremonial dialogues fit this pattern, where the respondent's turn in a ceremonial dialogue consists of a simple affirmation, signifying that the first speaker's statement has been heard and/or agreed with.

Greg Urban found the Shokleng distinctive in that "the respondent utters the exact same syllable he

has just heard from the lead speaker" (Urban 1986a:377). Shokleng repetition-response ceremonial dialogue is modelled on the Shokleng method of teaching verbal genres, wherein the learner repeats the teacher's speech syllable by syllable. Thus, the Shokleng dialogic response serves not only to express affirmation or understanding; it also has a mnemonic function, assisting the listener's ability to remember the speaker's words. This fits with the Shokleng emphasis on what Urban (1986b) calls *replicability*—a feature of narrative genres whereby the ideal norm is for the narratives to be memorized and recited verbatim. Still, both repetition-response and affirmation-response dialogues share the fact that "pragmatic response is formally constrained... What is a variable in ordinary conversation is fixed in ceremonial dialogue. The pragmatic response may not be used to convey an opinion... or take over the semantic turn, as is common in everyday conversation" (Urban 1986a:378).

The Marubo *saiti* is a form of repetition-response ceremonial dialogue. The Marubo go even further than the Shokleng, however, in that the respondents repeat entire strophes word for word. To make this outstanding feature of Marubo sung myth understandable it is necessary to explain what is meant by 'strophe' here, which in turn requires an explanation of the structure of *saiti*. What I mean by a strophe is the entire segment of speech uttered by the lead singer before he pauses to allow the respondents to repeat what he has just said. By extension, the audience response is also a strophe. A strophe consists of between two and four lines. Each line is defined by a strict rhythmic and tonal pattern. Consider the following excerpt from the *saiti* called *Nea Rame* (I use this example because I have an accurate transcription written by a Marubo informant (3), rendering it useful for purposes of rhythmic analysis, though I do not have a translation):

1. Singer: Nea Rame, Nea Rame sheni
   E-e-e-e-e-e-e-e
2. Audience: Nea Rame, Nea Rame sheni
   E-e-e-e-e-e-e-e
3. Singer: Ino Shõpa, Ino Shõpa shakini
   Tavikia, tavikia ashõki
4. Audience: Ino Shõpa, Ino Shõpa shakini
   Tavikia, tavikia ashõki
5. Singer: Ino Vane, Ino Vane shani
   Shanikia, shanikia siroã
6. Audience: Ino Vane, Ino Vane shaniki
   Shanikia, shanikia siroã
7. Singer: Ino Vane, Ino Vane shani
   Shanikia, shanikia manosho
8. Audience: Ino Vane, Ino Vane shaniki
   Shanikia, shanikia manosho
9. Singer: Vana vana, vana vana kauai
   E-e-e-e-e-e-e-e
10. Audience: Vana vana, vana vana kauai
    E-e-e-e-e-e-e-e
11. Singer: Wai ano, wai ano tuya
    Tuimamê, tuimamê kauêsho
    Ê tsaka, ê tsaka yameta
12. Audience: Wai ano, wai ano tuya
    Tuimamê, tuimamê kauêsho
    Ê tsaka, ê tsaka yameta
13. Singer: Iki vana, iki vana vanai
    Nea Rame, Nea Rame sheni
14. Audience: Iki vana, iki vana vanai
    Nea Rame, Nea Rame sheni

The dialogic form of the Marubo *saiti* should be clear from the above excerpt. The audience response fits the formalized restraint of normative verbatim repetition, just as in the Shokleng case, but involving entire strophes rather than syllables. The audience deviates from the singer in strophes 6. and 8.; where the speaker uses the archaism *shani* the audience uses the current term *shaniki* ('having fever'). This is the same general type of dialogue as that practiced by the Shokleng, but the Marubo *saiti* is distinctive in the relatively greater length of time devoted to the response turn, as may be seen from Table 1. Marubo turns are long compared to Shokleng, Yanomamõ and Shuar dialogic turns, but are comparable in length to Kuna turns. Kuna lead turns, however, are twice as long as response turns, whereas Marubo response turns are approximately the same length as lead turns. The Marubo are the only society in the analyzed sample to devote so much time to response turns. The significance of this can be seen if we consider the mnemonic function of Shokleng repetition-response dialogue. The latter is modelled on teaching techniques and creates the opportunity for respondents to learn the narrative. This

is equally the case for Marubo respondents. The all-night rituals where young people walk counterclockwise, increasingly exhausted as the night goes on, repeating strophes nearly verbatim, are very powerful mnemonic and information-transmission tools as compared to situations in which respondents merely listen and backchannel.

Marubo *saiti* employ a variety of metrical and pitch patterns, but each individual *saiti* employs strictly consistent patterns throughout. *Nea Rame* employs one of the simplest Marubo meter/pitch patterns:

| Syllables: | Ne | a | Ra | me | Ne | a | Ra | me | she | ni |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Length: | Short | short | short | long | short | short | short | short | short | long |
| Pitch: | Even | even | even | rising | even | even | even | even | even | falling |

In some strophes, the lines have eleven syllables instead of ten. In those cases, the penultimate syllable is short and even-pitched. The final syllable of a line is always long with falling pitch. The typical line begins with two two-syllable words or one four-syllable word; where this is not the case, a vowel or diphthong can be extended from one to two syllables to maintain the metric pattern. The strictness and consistency with which Marubo *saiti* adhere to metric/tonal patterns is a key feature of this genre. Other Marubo myths utilize different, often more complex meters, but each myth is internally consistent in that each line adheres to that myth's metric pattern.

The use of parallelism is extremely important in *saiti*. The initial four syllables of a line are always repeated in *Nea Rame*; in other metric styles this is not the case, but other subtler forms of parallelism are used. In addition, parallelism is seen in the repetition of meter and pitch patterns, and in the repetition of strophes by the audience. Marubo *saiti* also display the feature Urban calls macro-parallelism, which "involves the formal similarity or parallels between larger blocks of discourse, wherein a cluster of sentences, occurring at one point in the narration, is repeated with certain substitutions at a later point... [supplying] the basis for an intricate and rather remarkable structure" (Urban 1986b:15). Macro-parallelism may be seen in the above excerpt, for example, in the repetitiveness of strophes four through eight, or in the recurrence in strophe thirteen of the first line (in fact this line is not only the first line of the first strophe but also the last line of the last strophe). Strophe thirteen is repeated exactly as strophe thirty-nine. There are also macro-parallelisms that involve substitutions rather than exact repetition, as in the similarities between strophes nine and thirteen. A detailed analysis of macro-parallelism in Marubo myth is not germane to this paper; here what is important to note is that macro-parallelism is one of the distinctive features of Marubo *saiti*.

Repetition-response dialogic structure, replicability, consistent metric and tonal/pitch patterns, parallelism, and macro-parallelism are formal features of *saiti* that are sufficient to set this genre apart from other Marubo verbal genres and from ordinary Marubo speech. It is important to note that the *saiti* genre shares these features with other Amazonian ceremonial dialogue genres (Urban 1986a), including the Shokleng *wãñeklèn* (Urban 1986b), as well as with certain non-dialogic specialized genres of indigenous South American speech such as the Aguaruna *anen*. *Anen* are "songs with the power to act directly upon the natural and social worlds" (Brown 1986:70). Brown calls these 'magical songs', primarily used in hunting, horticulture, and courtship. These songs "share the elements of repetition, parallelism,... regular rhythm, and special poetic language" (Brown 1986:73). In addition, it is best to perform *anen* while intoxicated with tobacco water (Brown 1986:72); Marubo *saiti* are typically performed while intoxicated with tobacco powder (*romepoto*) and a tea made of Banisteriopsis vine (*oni*). This shows that the Marubo *saiti* genre is in many ways typical of indigenous Amazonian specialized speech genres, and resembles not only other modes of myth-performance and dialogue, but also non-narrative (i.e., magical) genres.

TABLE 1
Notes: Turn and cycle lengths measured in seconds.
One cycle is the full time from the start of one lead-turn to the start of the next.
Source: For non-Marubo data, Urban 1986a:376. Marubo data is based on analysis of *Nea Rame* myth (52 total strophes).

| | Kuna | Shokleng | Yanomamö | Shuar | Marubo |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lead-turn length | 11-12 | .30 | .31 | 1.37 | 6-14 |
| Response-turn length | 5-7 | .30 | .27 | .42 | 7-13 |
| Cycle length | 16-21 | .60 | .58 | 1.79 | 14-27 |
| Syllables per lead turn | 25 | 1 | 1-3 | 7.40 | 18-44 |
| Syllables per response turn | 2 | 1 | 1-3 | 1.2 | 18-44 |
| Overlap between lead and response turns | yes | no | no | no | no |
| Overlap between response and lead turns | yes | no | no | some | no |

**Marubo Oral Histories: Formal Features and Social Context of Performances**

Oral histories of the rubber boom and subsequent events are not told in formally structured language, but rather in ordinary speech. In specifying what this distinction means, I follow Urban (1986a). The Marubo *saiti* is a marked speech style. It is marked by the limitations imposed on the use of certain pragmatic variables, such as intonation contour, stress, and rate of syllable metering, and by the formalized use of frequent parallelism. In ordinary conversation, these variables can be freely manipulated by individuals according to their specific rhetorical purposes—the unmarked condition of speech—whereas in *saiti*, as in other specialized Amazonian speech genres, these variables are subject to culturally imposed restraints. More important to this paper are the limitations related to dialogic form. In the ceremonial dialogue, respondents may not use their turns to convey opinions or to "take over the semantic turn" (Urban 1986a:378). Introduction of semantic content in *saiti* is limited to the main singer. In contrast, during performances of oral history, because they utilize ordinary conversational speech, multiple speakers may introduce content, correct one another's facts, and make statements of opinion linked to supporting evidence. This is an extremely important fact to keep in mind, because Marubo myth, as I will argue shortly, contains important information about the way the social order should be produced and reproduced. And yet, during the transmission of such information, semantic creativity is not allowed. This is also the case for similar genres in other Amazonian cultures (e.g., the Shokleng *wãñeklèn*). In the narrative genres through which indigenous Amazonians transmit such crucial information, interpretation and the creation of meaning cannot take place simultaneously with transmission of information.

The differences between myth and oral history in terms of formal features parallel the differences in the social contexts of their performances. Myth is a marked speech style, subject to formal constraints on how the narrative can be performed. Likewise, the context of performance is socially marked. Myths are performed at special, distinctive events—feasts that gather together multiple residences, often multiple villages. Just as *saiti* are much more structured and ritualized than everyday conversation, feasts are more structured and ritualized than daily life. The instances in which I heard and saw oral histories narrated were mostly spontaneous events in the course of everday life. Another important distinction is that most of the oral-historical narrations that I observed were directed at me (although many were unelicited), whereas myth-performances were taking place independently of my presence.

I will list a selection of instances of oral-history performances in order to illustrate the contexts of these events. I first entered Marubo land by boat from Atalaia do Norte, travelling up the Javari and Curuçá Rivers in July 1997. Travelling up the Curuçá one passes the locations of numerous rubber boom-era Marubo villages. The Marubo have preserved knowledge of each of these locations and the incidents that led to their abandonment (see figure 2). The boat I was on was owned and operated by CIVAJA, the indigenous political organization of the Javari basin. It was the Marubo members of CIVAJA who first told me the rubber-boom oral histories, as we passed each spot where a significant event had occurred. This is interesting because it is a form of landscape-based history, where particular stories are elicited by passing certain locations (cf. Basso 1995:32-38; Santos Granero 1998; Whitehead

1998, forthcoming). Memory of the events is reinforced by the fact that this is the main trade route for the Curuçá Marubo, who therefore pass by these historically significant locales over and over again in the course of their normal economic lives. I should also note that these stories were told to me in Portuguese.

When we reached the lowermost habitation of Aldeia Maronal, on August 1st, we encountered one of the oldest living Marubo, Carlos (elicited birthdate: 1924). During our visit, Carlos discussed some of the things 'white people' (by the Marubo, non-indigenous people are called, in Portuguese, *os brancos*, and in Marubo, *náwa*, and my use of the term 'white' should be understood as referring to the Marubo conception of it, not to a 'real' racial category) had done to the Marubo during the rubber boom. Carlos spoke Spanish, and that was the language he used to address me.

I first heard specific stories in full detail after I was installed in a dwelling at Aldeia Maronal. My host, José Barbosa, participated in a three-day healing ritual from the 14th to the 17th of August and had the afternoon of the 17th free from work. He visited me and during our conversation asked if it was true that some *náwa* had walked on the moon. I told him it happened in 1969. He began to reminisce about what he was doing in 1969, and proceeded to give me a detailed life history. When he was done, he went back and detailed three separate incidents that had taken place during the rubber boom, including the most salient of rubber boom oral histories, that of the capture, escape, and subsequent murder of the shaman Tamani Romeya and the other inhabitants of the Kariya River, by invading *náwa* (see section on content and interpretation of oral histories, below). The entire long set of narratives was a spontaneous, unsolicited event lasting several hours and directed exclusively at me, in José's very good Portuguese.

On August 28th, the elderly Carlos stopped by José's *shovo* on his way to visit his sons-in-law in a nearby residence. That day the village elders, including José, were preparing for another healing ritual and thus were not engaging in subsistence work. José and I were sitting on the *kenã* benches in his *shovo*, and a number of José's children were also present. When Carlos arrived, José suggested that I ask him about the rubber boom. I did so, but his answers were brief and uninformative, suggesting to me that I was not asking the right questions. José began to ask Carlos questions directly, clarifying certain details of boom and post-boom history, then briefly translating the results of his inquiries for me. It became clear then that José was actually interested in hearing Carlos' stories himself, and my presence was a good excuse to elicit these. While this took place, José's children gathered around and soon they began to ask Carlos questions about rubber boom history. Carlos spoke to José and his children in Marubo, and I received translated synopses. On this occasion, therefore, I was not the primary focus of the oral history performance; rather, the information transmission was directed to José and his children, from the oldest man in the village. The event was unplanned and spontaneous, in ordinary conversational Marubo.

Events such as Carlos' explanation of oral history to José and his children occurred regularly. Carlos was of the oldest generation of living Marubo, whereas José was of the generation of elders that were politically active at the time of fieldwork. The younger, politically active, elders often took advantage of the presence of very old, politically retired, men to ask the latter for information. Such conversations typically took place on the *kenã* benches. They were not planned events; generally the men would gather together for a different reason, perhaps just to visit one another or for a healing ritual, and a discusson of oral history took place spontaneously. This was not the only realm of knowledge in which the very old men sought to instruct the younger elders, but it was a prominent and recurring one.

On May 14th, 1998, José asked his full brother Pedro and his classificatory brothers João and Miguel to help him pull weeds from a swidden. Once the work was over, in the early afternoon, João and Miguel came to rest in one of José's houses, where I had my hammock set up. I came out to converse with them. Soon José joined us. They were waiting for José's wives to finish cooking lunch for all those who had helped with the weeding. José began to tell me about the origins of the Marubo, how they came to the Javari basin, and what took place during the rubber boom. Like many of José's oral history narrations, this one was spontaneous and unelicited; I can only assume that he felt it important for me to hear these histories. On this occasion, he was not the ranking elder present, in terms of knowledge of esoteric information. His brother Miguel was older and was a former trance-possession practitioner who was considered a highly knowledgable elder. As he explained aspects of Marubo history to me in Portuguese, José occasionally stopped to ask Miguel for clarifications on key points. Miguel explained these points in Marubo, addressing himself to José and João. Whenever Miguel finished clarifying an issue, José would return to Portuguese and explain to me what had been said. Miguel's explanations to José occupied as much conversational space as José's explanations to me. This was also a fairly common type of event. I served as a trigger for an elder to start narrating oral histories, but the event became as much a discussion among elders as a narration directed towards me. The discussion among elders took place in ordinary conversational Marubo.

Through all these examples, it is clear that my presence as anthropological inquirer strongly affected the contexts of oral-historical narration. None of these events are 'pristine' events, where I simply observed an oral-historical narration that was taking place independently of my presence. Instead, I seemed to be a trigger for such narrations. However, once narrations or discussions of oral history were underway, even if my presence had been the initial trigger, I often seemed to fade into the background as elders of varying levels of knowledge transmitted information to one another and worked to establish mastery of this field of knowledge. The aforementioned examples are only a sample of all the contexts for oral-historical narrative that took place during my fieldwork, but they represent the main types of contexts for these events.

The final context for oral-historical performance that arose during my fieldwork was a unique one in which I played an important role. In 1998 the indigenous leaders of the Javari basin were concerned with securing the official demarcation of their land. Demarcation is the process established in Brazilian law for the purpose of identifying areas inhabited by indigenous people and setting aside their land as a federally protected reserve for their use. The procedure began with a map of the proposed area which was approved by the Javari indigenous leaders (Marubo, Mayoruna, Matís and Kanamari) in March 1998. Once agreed to by the indigenous leaders, the proposal was approved by officials at FUNAI, and finally by the Minister of Justice. After its approval by the Minister of Justice the proposal was published in official federal and state bulletins. Following a controversial clause in the demarcation law, ninety days were then allowed so that any non-indigenous people who believed that land had been wrongly designated as indigenous could file challenges to the demarcation proposal. The indigenous organization, CIVAJA, followed these developments with great interest. When the 90-day challenge period began in May 1998, CIVAJA warned the indigenous communities of the Javari basin. At Aldeia Maronal, where I was staying, a meeting was held to discuss the issue on May 30th, 1998. Those present at this meeting agreed that a written document of their oral-historical knowledge should be made as a means of bolstering their claim to traditional usage of the land they lived on.

The following day, the headman's son (Txanõpa) invited five elders to the hut I was staying in. Accompanying Txanõpa was his father's brother's son, Kanãpa. Both of these young men had learned to use my tape recorder and microphone. Thus, I sat and listened while Txanõpa asked the elders questions and Kanãpa taped the conversation using my recording equipment. Txanõpa elicited a list of the rivers where the ancestors of the Marubo lived during the rubber boom, along with the names of the leaders and the clans they belonged to. I wanted more information, because I knew that for most of these historic locations, there are rich and detailed stories of the violent encounters that led to the indigenous inhabitants' dislocation. Txanõpa, however, felt that the mere fact of knowing the true names of the rivers was sufficient in and of itself to prove traditional occupancy, and he controlled this recording session.

One week later, on June 7th, Txanõpa returned to my quarters. Together, we worked out a translation of such information as he wanted included in the final document. I tried to organize this information into a document that a judge or a government official could understand, but I found that I was unclear about the locations and eventual destinations of certain rubber boom population nuclei. I asked my host, José, to help me answer these questions. José and his mother's sister's daughter's son, who was older than he was, spent an evening clarifying issues in Marubo rubber boom oral history for me. As closely as I could reconstruct it, I then wrote the story of the Curuçá and Ituí Panoans during the rubber boom. It showed, as the Maronal Marubo had intended, that the areas now claimed as indigenous had been occupied by indigenous people at least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century.

From the information provided above, it may be seen that Marubo oral history performances are very diverse in their contexts, contents, and narrative or dialogic styles. They range from reminiscences by Marubo travelling on boats and dramatic tales of violence and genocide told to an anthropologist on a hot afternoon, to long explanations from one elder to another and informal conversations among elders. Occasionally—as when the written history was being produced—oral history performances had specifically political purposes. But all of these situations involved language that was very 'everyday' or unmarked relative to the performances of myth described earlier. The contexts of performance were generally spontaneous and unritualized. Oral history performances had a conversational openness that was very different from the predetermined speaking roles of myth performances. While some oral history performances were mostly monologic, many were spirited discussions rather than simple recitations of fact.

It should now be clear to the reader that myth and oral history are two distinct genres of Marubo discourse concerning past times. They have very different formal features, and very different contexts of performance. With these two genres identified and differentiated, it becomes possible to ask how the

information about the past contained in these genres becomes a template for social reproduction. To address this issue, I will first identify some of the information in myths and oral histories that seems to lend itself to interpretation as a guide to contemporary Marubo social behavior. I will then describe specific cases of indigenous interpretation to show how knowledge of the past is involved in the negotiation of contemporary systems of cultural values.

**Marubo Myth and Marubo Ethics**

It is a common assumption in anthropology that myths contain information on the categorization of the social world and on proper ethics in relation to that world of social categories (e.g., Taggart 1983). The Marubo are no exception, as we find myths explaining, and thus reifying, the descent group system; the negative consequences of violating exogamy rules; the behaviors that lead to the soul's transformation into a harmful spirit after death, as well as the behaviors that lead to the soul's transformation into a beneficial entity; and the reasons for other important social values. Marubo myth is thus anthropologically classical in containing a template for social production and reproduction. To understand how this ethical content is transformed into social praxis, it is first necessary to gain an idea of what that content is. To approach this issue, I will discuss two myths. The first is the origin myth, *Wenia*. The second is the song that describes the path taken by human souls after death, *Vei Vai* (4). Both these myths report events set in the past that either explicitly or implicitly suggest how Marubo people should behave in the present.

The sources I will use are Melatti (1986) for *Wenia* and Montagner (1985) for *Vei Vai*. It is important to specify the nature of the data in these sources. Melatti and Montagner did not translate these myths word-for-word from the song version. Such an endeavor would have been extraordinarily time-consuming because of the length of the song versions. Melatti and Montagner instead published versions that had been narrated in Portuguese, or were free translations in Portuguese of recordings in Marubo. The same applies to my own data on Marubo myth. I do have many recordings of myths, but the main focus of my dissertation research—to understand Marubo politics as a whole—precluded the investment of time necessary to obtain word-for-word translations. Like Melatti and Montagner, I recorded some Portuguese versions, some spoken, abridged, Marubo versions, and some free translations of the latter. While the limitations of these data preclude a formal analysis of mythic semantics, the data do give us access in broad terms to the information content of these two important Marubo myths. This is sufficient for the purposes of this paper because it allows us to understand how the information in these myths can be applied to determining and negotiating correct patterns of social behavior.

The following discussion of the ethical content of Marubo myth will make it clear that Marubo myth contains information about the way culture should impose order on human sexuality. Myth reflects and supports the entire system of kinship, affinity, and socialized sexuality. It was precisely during an ongoing process of negotiating sexual morality that I heard and observed *Vei Vai* being mentioned as a basis for valuing certain patterns of social action and devaluing others. I did not see *Wenia* used this way, so my assertion that *Wenia* is relevant to Marubo social reproduction is an etic one, but in the following discussion the relevance of this myth to cultural control of sexuality will become evident. A framework for such control is suggested in the episodes narrated in *Vei Vai* and *Wenia*, and indeed I saw that arguments over how a proper Marubo should behave can occasionally involve interpretations of myth.

The Marubo origin myth, *Wenia*, begins with the emergence of the first ancestral Marubo from the ground. Most of *Wenia*, however, narrates the journey taken by the ancestral Marubo from their place of emergence to the area they inhabit today. On the way, these early humans learn the fundamental practices of their culture. Episodes describe, for example, how they first learned which wild foods were edible and later how to cultivate plants; others describe how certain specialized linguistic skills were acquired, such as healing songs, ritual wailing, and the use of personal names and kin terms. There are also episodes that describe the process of learning correct sexual behavior. Two of these are especially salient: firstly, the establishment of the named descent group (*náwavo*) system, and secondly the establishment of lineage exogamy. These institutions have an important impact in structuring Marubo sexuality, and society in general. Unless otherwise indicated, the information I present below is from Melatti (1986). I will specify when data come from my own research.

*Wenia* begins with the emergence of the *náwavo* from the ground. The emergence of each *náwavo* is a separate event. Each emergence-event begins when a substance falls on the ground. This causes the first members of each *náwavo*, who were under those spots in the ground where the substances fell, to start wailing. Then, using a tapir's bone, they climb out of a hole and onto the surface of the earth. The

first to emerge is a brightly decorated leader, followed by his kin. The structure of the emergence-narratives is very uniform; variation is in the details, such as the particular trigger-substance, or the name and decorations of the leader.

The substances that fell on the ground to cause humanity's emergence were quite varied. Some were natural objects such as parrot feathers, bird feces, or flowers falling from trees, others were the blood of animals, and still others (according to my informant) were the dregs of drinks made by powerful beings. For some of Melatti's informants, these substances all fell on the ground naturally. For one of his informants and for several of mine, however, the substances were placed on the ground on purpose by certain beings, specifically to cause the emergence of humans. These beings were *romeya*, shamans; they were directly descended from the creator being, *Kanavoã*, they predated the existence of humans, and they had astonishing powers that we would call magical. One of them is named *Kanavoã*, and this creator-shaman, whom Melatti (1986) calls a culture-hero, should not be confused with his "grandfather," the first creator. Whether the substances fall or are placed there, each contact between substance and ground leads to the emergence of a *náwavo* through a hole at the point of contact.

After emerging, the humans heard the call of a *vinoã* bird (I do not know what bird this is). They began to walk in the direction of the call (northwest). According to my informants (the elder Misael and Aldeia Maronal headman's son Txanõpa), the younger Kanavoã told his brother Kuĩtaoshwire to meet these first people and name them. So the wandering groups came to where Kuĩtaoshwire was waiting. Kuĩtaoshwire sat each group on a bench and gave each their name. Thus the *náwavo* were named. A little further, a couple named Wãmani and Wãmaya gave sets of personal names to each *náwavo*. Thus, a person's *náwavo* membership can usually be determined by knowing their personal name. Kin term usage also depends on relative group membership, rather than on specific genealogical connections. Thus, *Wenía* establishes that, from the time humans first walked the earth, the ancestors of the Marubo have been organized into *náwavo*. They emerged already organized into *náwavo*; the naming events formalized this structure.

The ancestral Marubo learned the sexual relevance of the *náwavo* system when they came to cross the caiman-bridge. This bridge is called *Kape Tapã* by Melatti (1986:70-74). *Kape* means 'caiman' (this word has a silent p that is realized when speaking of things belonging to the caiman, as for example its heart (*wĩti*), called *kapepwĩti*). *Tapã* refers to a fallen log, which is the most usual sort of bridge in the area. In Portuguese this is called the *ponté-jacaré*, 'bridge-caiman'. This event is also narrated in Katukina-Pano mythology (Kennell, personal communication). A similar event is also narrated in Shipibo myth, but with important differences (Roe 1982:65). Again, I take the details of this event from Melatti (1986), using the simplest of the multiple versions he presents.

Up until they reached the caiman-bridge, many people had sexual relations with members of their own or their mother's *náwavo*. When the people arrived at the bridge, they saw that it was covered in brush. The Varináwavo leader, Wakapanã, had certain people cut the brush, and told a woman to sweep it away. The caiman then demanded to be fed prior to allowing the humans to cross over it. It was fed a deer, but was unsatisfied and demanded a human. It ate the human but, still unsatisfied, demanded a second human. It consumed the second human, and was finally satisfied. Then Wakapanã took across a set of people he had selected, all of whom had sexual relations with real or classificatory cross-cousins. Then he called to all the others to cross. When this second group was half the way across, he cut the bridge and those who had practiced incest fell in the water, to be eaten by various creatures, including piranhas. Only individuals who were correctly exogamous remained. The correct incest taboo was thus extended to the whole of society, and knowledge of this correct sexual behavior passed on to all subsequent generations. Thus, *Wenía* establishes not only the fundamental reality of the descent-group system but also its connection to the rule of exogamy.

Of equal significance to *Wenía* as a guide to socialized sexuality is *Vei Vai*. The song *Vei Vai* tells the story of how a dangerous path was created for souls to travel after death. For the details of the contents of this myth-song I base myself on Montagner (1985); I will specify when information comes from one of my informants. I will refer to the myth-song in italics (*Vei Vai*); while the path itself will be written Vei Vai.

*Vei Vai* is the name of the path followed by souls after death, as well as the name of the song that tells of its establishment and of the dangers along it. In fact, as Montagner (1985) first wrote, Marubo commonly believe that they harbor multiple souls which have differing destinies after death. One part of them, however, undergoes an arduous journey towards *Shoko Nai*, its ultimate resting place. Upon reaching *Shoko Nai*, the soul is transformed by an entity named *Roka* into a purified *yove* (beneficial spirit). The *yove* then takes its place in a *shovo* with kin from its own *náwavo*. Much feasting takes place in *Shoko Nai*. Certain *yove* can intercede to bring good luck or health to living humans. At first,

there was only one straight, easy, path to *Shoko Nai*, a path called *Yove Vai*. But then, a woman named *Vei Maya* died as a result of mistreatment by her husband (Montagner does not provide details, nor was I able to find any). She called on two orders of spirits to kill a snake and set it up as a second path to *Shoko Nai*. They set the snake up to zigzag and twist, in contrast to the straight *Yove Vai*. And they placed a set of dangerous traps along the path, designed to ensnare souls by tempting them with forbidden pleasures.

Marubo with knowledge of this topic say that everything you see on earth can be found along Vei Vai—forests, trees, *shovo*, people, food. But along Vei Vai, these things have owners or guardians (in Marubo, *ivo*), and these guardians are *yoshĩ*. These are a class of harmful spirits that can cause illness and accidents. Along Vei Vai, the *yoshĩ* try to seduce the soul into abandoning its journey to *Shoko Nai*. If they succeed in this, the soul becomes a *yoshĩ* instead of proceeding to be transformed into *yove*.

The Marubo are aware of what awaits them along Vei Vai because their shamans can enter a type of trance during which their own soul leaves the body and travels. In this condition, shamans can navigate the dangers of Vei Vai. It sometimes happens that a soul cannot find the path, or finds it but is too terrified to travel it alone. These souls stay among humans and can cause serious illnesses, afflicting the living in order to secure a travelling companion. When this occurs, a shaman can be called upon to guide the soul along the path, or certain songs can be sung that serve the same purpose.

The traps of Vei Vai all work by arousing a desire of some sort in the travelling soul, tempting it to partake of some attractive lure. Always, the key to bypassing the trap is self-restraint. Most of the traps provide the soul with an opportunity to engage in behavior that is forbidden among the living. Indulgence in these behaviors while travelling Vei Vai will lead to the soul's transformation into a *yoshĩ*. Other traps simply provide opportunities to eat or drink or sleep, and the soul must know exactly how much is permitted and restrict itself to that much, then move on, or else it will be trapped and turn into a *yoshĩ*. For example, some *yoshĩ* have set up palm trees along Vei Vai. From these palm trees' fronds, as the soul walks by, valuable beads drop to the ground. The soul is permitted to reach down and scoop a few up as it goes, then move along quickly. But if it should stop to gather the beads, it will become a *yoshĩ*. Souls that will stop here are those of people who, in life, stole beads rather than making, trading for, or buying their own. Others will not be tempted at that point. Thus, an antisocial habit in this life is connected to a terrible fate in the next. Each encounter with a *yoshĩ*'s trap tests the soul's virtue and wisdom. Certain qualities must be cultivated in this life to secure success in the next.

Several *yoshĩ* offer sexual temptations, and the nature of these temptations offers a glimpse into Marubo sexual morality. One of the most salient locations on Vei Vai is the *Tani*, a pit of boiling water. The soul approaches a clearing wherein sits a *shovo*. The *shovo* is surrounded by nettles, so that it is impossible to go around it. The only way through appears to be in the front door and out the back door. Inside is a woman, and some hammocks. According to Montagner, there is also a pit of boiling water there; according to my informants the pit is hidden at first. The woman invites the soul to come rest in a hammock. But if the soul lies down she pulls the hammock and the soul falls into the pit (according to Montagner and some of my informants), or the pit opens at that point and the soul falls into it (according to one my informants). Either way, the soul's journey to *Roka* is over. According to both Montagner's and my informants, the behavior most likely to lead to falling into the *Tani* is excessive womanizing. If a man is accustomed to seeking out sex all the time, he will see the woman's invitation as an opportunity, and thus his soul will be lost. If he is accustomed to self-restraint, he will have no interest in the woman, only in moving on. Lazy people may also be swayed by the woman's invitation. People who do not suffer from these defective habits will look into the *shovo*, but will not enter. Instead, they will find they are able to jump over the nettles and rejoin Vei Vai on the other side.

A little further on the path is *Vei Yama Tapã*. This is a bridge that shortens itself as the soul crosses it, so that the soul falls in the waters of a river to be torn apart by a prawn and a crab. According to Montagner, this happens to the souls of people who married kin. If the soul was correct in its behavior in life, it will be able to jump to the other side as the bridge shortens, or use certain items of personal decoration to extend the bridge and so get across. It is interesting to note that in the after-life as in the origin myth, a deadly bridge separates the incestuous from the correctly married.

A few obstacles after the *Yama Tapã*, the soul encounters *Vei Yura*. These are "men and women who take the souls of married men and women who had extra-conjugal [sexual] relations" (Montagner 1985:155, my translation). One of my informants described dreaming of these as extremely beautiful women who came down the path towards him. They walked up to him. One of them put her hands on his shoulders and pushed down. He sat on the ground, and the women walked on. He found he was stuck to the ground. However, after a time a beneficial entity came from behind him and set him free. I conclude that the soul must give these people a wide berth or be trapped, and the souls that will walk

right into the trap are those of adultery-minded people.

One of my informants emphasized the fact that the powerful *yoshĩ* who guard the traps on Vei Vai can see right through one to one's true character. It is very difficult (though not impossible) to fool them. Hence their ability, in the *Vei Vai* story, to target people based on their particular weaknesses.

A final test awaits "the soul of the married man who indulged excessively in women" (Montagner 1985:157, my translation). Three women, including *Vei Maya*, lure the travelling soul into sexual relations. Souls who accede will turn into animals and will never reach *Shoko Nai*. Similar spirits pose as men in order to snare women who share this character flaw.

It is important to note that *Wenía* and *Vei Vai* differ somewhat in terms of their temporal link to contemporaneity. This is because *Wenía* is really a story about something that happened in the past. *Vei Vai* is also like that on one level, since it talks about how Vei Vai was established. But that path still exists today, so *Vei Vai* is in a sense about the future of each Marubo. And it is sometimes in the present, too, since Marubo shamans can visit Vei Vai in trances, and other Marubo can dream of it.

From this summary of selected *Wenía* and *Vei Vai* episodes, it should be clear that Marubo myth does in fact contain crucial information on the proper organization of society and the behavior of individuals in that social framework. I have focused on sexual morality because the structuring of sexuality is one of the most basic roles of human culture, and I wanted to show how the Marubo cultural structuring of sexuality is reflected in the information content of their mythological corpus. In *Wenía* and *Vei Vai* we can see a set of parameters restricting certain forms of sexual behavior and guiding Marubo sexuality towards classificatory bilateral cross-cousin marriage. The ontologic reality of the *náwavo* system is established, and exogamy with respect to the matrilineage is firmly set. Furthermore, individuals are warned of the consequences of extramarital sex and excessive womanizing. Only the development of sexual self-restraint and conformity to socially proper marriage can assure a soul's passage to the point of being cleansed by *Roka*.

**Social Context of Myth-Interpretation**

In this section, I will examine the social and cultural context of a single instance of myth-interpretation, in order to show how interpretations of myth can form part of an ongoing process of negotiating cultural values. This involves following a string of connections from one social event to broader processes of political competition among Marubo and between Marubo and non-indigenous people. By following the connections I will show the meaning of the event. The political processes I will discuss are concerned with a variety of topics, but I will focus on conflict over correct sexual morality. I will begin on May 13th, 1997, with comments made by an elder concerning *Vei Vai*. I will then link *Vei Vai* and other *saiti* to Marubo concepts of ethics and leadership. These concepts, in turn, will be linked to discussions over differences of opinion between the Ituí and Curuçá Marubo. I will close the circle by showing how these differences of opinion relate closely to the comments made by the elder on that day in May.

On the evening of May 13th, 1998, seven elders gathered on the *kenã* benches in the *shovo* of my host, José Barbosa. Their purpose was to sing *shõki*, healing songs (see Montagner 1986), over the wife of José Barbosa's brother, Pedro. Pedro's wife, Nãke, suffered from what was probably rheumatoid arthritis, a terrible ailment in the absence of adequate pain management. In addition to the elders, José's son-in-law Wilson was sitting on the *kenã*, as was I. One of the elders present was Miguel, who was a retired shaman. According to José, Marubo shamans tend to lose the ability to enter trance at some point in their lives. Miguel had ceased to enter trance before my arrival for fieldwork. But he had spent years as an active shaman and had firsthand knowledge of many places in the Marubo cosmos that are accessible only in trance.

It was well known that I had an interest in *Vei Vai* because an elder and I had begun taping a version in February (a task that was unfortunately never finished). As the elders sat preparing to sing, Miguel started talking about Vei Vai. Wilson, sitting near me, told me in his fluent Portuguese that Miguel had been to and seen Vei Vai and therefore spoke from firsthand experience. Speaking in Marubo, Miguel discussed coming before *Popo*, a large owl that wields a bow and arrow. As you approach, Miguel said, *Popo* threatens to shoot you with an arrow. You are tempted to turn and flee. If you do so, you cannot pass. You have to know *Popo* and understand what it is. If you know *Popo*, you can go before it, stand, and make a statement about how you lived, and that you lived in accordance with Marubo ethical wisdom. Then it will let you pass. This is exactly as Montagner had described the encounter: "The soul engages in dialogues with [*Popo* and other *yoshĩ*],... highlighting its qualities and convincing them to let it pass... It is difficult to trick the *vei yoshĩ*, because they immediately identify the unrighteous soul"

(Montagner 1986:155). Montagner did not mention what qualities a soul should highlight. Miguel, however, demonstrated how he would speak to *Popo*. Among the statements he made were "I did not look at other men's wives" (*wetsarasĩ aĩ ninivrã ea wima*) and "I did not mess around with a lot of women" (*aĩvo ãtsaka meskoima*). He also specified that he had never had sex with women he called *ewa, natxi*, or *txitxo*, kin terms that place women in categories where sex is considered incestuous.

Miguel was establishing what he considered to be the parameters of properly socialized sexuality. This includes adherence to the incest taboo and the rules of exogamy, but it also includes other forms of sexual self-restraint. For example, other men's wives are off-limits. Sheer excess also seems to be frowned upon. In effect, Miguel indicated the forms of socially disruptive sexuality that will get you shot by *Popo* on Vei Vai. Excessive womanizing and adultery are both practices that are likely to lead to conflict; this fact is reflected in Marubo ethics, as expressed by Miguel; and these ethics are reflected in the statement of exemplary righteousness made by Miguel.

Miguel's speech to *Popo* was not meant to be replicated word-for-word, as a *saiti* might; rather, it was intended as an example of the type of speech one might make under those circumstances. Hence, it is an interpretation, from knowing the existence of an entity that will examine one's actions after one's death, to the specific statement of righteousness that will get one past the entity. It is a movement from myth to myth's implications for social life.

Miguel's speech was based on his knowledge of something called *ese*. When I first asked one informant what this meant, she said it meant 'custom' (Portuguese *costume*) or 'counsel/advice' (Port. *conselho*). A second informant translated *ese* as 'law' (Port. *lei*). The context of this latter translation is significant. The headman of Aldeia Maronal, Alfredo, had been involved in a lengthy but eventually successful healing ritual. During the ritual a woman who had adopted some beliefs from the missionaries had told Alfredo that his healing songs would be ineffective. When the patient, after days of singing, improved considerably, Alfredo confronted the woman and told her the songs were effective. When he returned to his *shovo* he began to speak to his coresidents about the value of Marubo traditional healing and other forms of knowledge and practice. I was sitting a short distance away from the *shovo*, talking to Alfredo's son, when the speech began. "Let's go inside", he said, "my father is going to give us *ese vana*". I knew what *vana* meant—words, or speech—but I asked him what *ese* meant. "Law", he replied.

Wilson also equated the concept of *ese* with that of 'law'. On one occasion he compared Marubo *ese* to *nawã ese* ('non-indigenous people's *ese*'). He said that Marubo *ese* does not change, whereas *nawã ese* changes every year as new laws are passed and old ones are changed. Wilson showed a clear understanding that non-indigenous people's behavior is regulated by law, thus implying that *ese* plays the same role in Marubo society. Hence, I loosely translate *ese* as 'Marubo ethics'. But *ese* is also a quality that one can have in varying quantities, or conversely not have at all. A person that has plenty of *ese* is called *eseya*. In this sense (as a quality one has) it implies not just correct behavior but also knowledge of how a correct Marubo should behave, which in turn implies knowledge of such things as healing and feasting, which are crucial aspects of correct behavior. Healing ability also implies extensive knowledge of cosmology, whereas feasting necessitates knowledge of mythology, since myths are sung at feasts. Expression of *ese* whether in healing, feasting, *ese vana*, or simply correct everyday behavior, also implies various specialized linguistic abilities. More than simply 'ethics,' *ese* is also, therefore, 'ethical wisdom,' where wisdom implies knowledge and experience linked to skillful and correct social action.

In Marubo concepts of political leadership, being *eseya* is very important. One prominent *shovo ivo*, Sinãpa, told me that all *shovo ivorasi* have to be *eseya* because they are responsible for watching over the behavior of their coresidents. The exemplary *shovo ivo*, Sinãpa said, has to watch over sick people to make sure they don't die; refrain from aggressive and harmful behavior and watch that his coresidents do the same; tell everybody what kind of work they should be doing (this signifies watching over the economic productivity of the household); and invite people to eat, serving his guests good food.

Other evidence suggests that leaders who are *eseya* have a role in guiding their coresidents' sexuality in the correct direction. One day in May 1998, Wilson told me that in the old days, when all the Marubo lived on the headwaters of the Igarapé Maronal, only older men, forty years of age and above, had wives. Girls were carefully supervised and accompanied everywhere they went. When they went to bathe, an older woman went in front and another behind. For a young man to have sex at all was very difficult. Today, Wilson said, things have relaxed. Any time, a girl can just walk off to take a bath alone. Sexual encounters among youths are commonplace, and most men aged 20-30 can find a wife. This statement suggests that control of sexuality is a well-established aspect of Marubo leaders' roles, though the control has been relaxed over the period from 1965 to 1995.

My host, José, said that the role of Marubo leader involves finding women for unmarried men. This

in turn implies knowledge of the kinship system and the correct forms of marriage and socialized sexuality. This is very important, since successful leadership, as reflected in demographic growth, is largely based on successful management of marriages and patterns of postmarital residence. Every *shovo ivo* wants his *shovo*'s population to grow, and the way to do this is to secure marriages and make sure that married couples stay put and raise their children there. There are a number of different ways of assembling kin and affines into a successful and growing *shovo*; most *shovo ivorasi* have settled on a particular strategy. For example, some villages have settled on virilocality, so that every *shovo* accepts the loss of its women in return for the receipt of others'; other areas favor uxorilocality, and a few social configurations are conscious attempts at creating what we would call dual organization (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949]:69-83). Each type of pattern has certain requirements: individuals must select marriage partners from a limited number of people, and accept limitations on postmarital residence patterns, or the social configuration which the leaders' growth strategies are based on will be disrupted. Leaders thus have a vested interest in directing sexuality. What is interesting is that there is disagreement as to how and to what extent such control should be applied.

Differences of opinion over sexual mores existed on all levels during my fieldwork: between men and women, within *shovo*, between *shovo* within villages, between villages, and at the level of the Ituí-Curuçá division. The Marubo code of ethics supplies a framework for sexual behavior, but no more; there is room for interpretation. Interpretations are made by individuals in relation to numerous contextual factors. To understand the significance of Miguel's interpretation, it will be necessary to consider some differences of opinion between the Ituí and Curuçá Marubo in 1997-1998.

As explained above, the Ituí and Curuçá Marubo trace their ancestries to different areas of the Javari basin and maintain somewhat distinct identities. The Ituí Marubo have had a permanent missionary presence since the 1960s, the Curuçá Marubo only since the 1990s. The elders who are generally considered most knowledgeable in areas such as mythology, oral history, and healing are concentrated on the Curuçá. The Ituí and Curuçá River Marubo frequently exchange marriage partners, and a large number of affinal relations link the two rivers. With these affinal relations come a host of tensions.

Since every leader has an idea of a pattern of expansion his *shovo* will ideally follow, when individuals break from this pattern the leaders are not happy. Yet for every leader who loses a part of his growth strategy, another gains one. For example, there was a *shovo ivo* on the Ituí, whom I will call P., who led a *shovo* together with his nephew, K. These men, P. and K., were known for advocating tight control over female sexuality. A young man from the Curuçá, J., was visiting kin on the Ituí when he struck up a liaison with V., a young girl from the *shovo* of P. and K. When he left, J. took V. with him back to the Curuçá, without any consent from her kin (though with V.'s full consent). This had occurred sometime in early 1997. Since J.'s father was a prominent and independent man, P. and K. could do little. Then, in late 1997, a *tanamea* was held on the Ituí River. Another young girl of P. and K.'s *shovo*, M., had been promised to an elder of a nearby village. She took advantage of the *tanamea*, and fled to the Curuçá with some of her kin when they left after the feast. This occasioned some reaction on the part of P. and K.: they held radio conversations asking for the return of their women, but those who had received the girls were unwilling to part with them. The conflict between the Ituí leaders' plans for organized sexuality and the individual transgressions that were taking place was thus becoming acute. The blame was placed on women who ran off rather than adhering to their social duties. The successive cases of V. and M. meant that the issue of women's sexual independence was in the sociopolitical forefront by early 1998.

The problem became so acute that Ituí leaders apparently held a general meeting to discuss it in February 1998. The event that triggered this meeting was an alleged sexual encounter between a married missionary and a Marubo woman. Because of this alleged encounter, the missionary was to be removed (by the mission) from the area. Thus, some Ituí leaders felt that a valuable social relationship had been disrupted by yet another unruly woman. One day I went to the radio at Aldeia Maronal and Alfredo's son Txanõpa (the same who had first identified *ese vana* to me) told me about the incident with the missionary. He said that as a result, the Ituí leaders were going to have a meeting to discuss the issue of women. He said that women should not remain single for long, because it causes complications for the community. Women should marry by the age of fifteen, he opined, and men by the age of eighteen. If girls do not get married, the leaders should assign them husbands. That is what our ancestors did, Txanõpa said. That is our law, he concluded, using the Portuguese word *lei*. Perhaps leading him, I then asked Txanõpa if his use of the term "our law" would apply to the content of *Vei Vai*. He agreed, saying "that is our law". It was only later, when Txanõpa translated *ese* as 'law', that I realized he equated the two concepts. The link is clear: *ese* involves knowledge of correct behavior, *Vei Vai* contains a great deal of information about correct behavior, therefore knowledge of *Vei Vai* is an important part of having

*ese*.

José, my host and a *shovo ivo*, also equated *Vei Vai* and *ese*. One evening in May 1998, he was comparing me, an anthropologist, to the missionaries. The difference, he said, is that I understood and respected Marubo *ese*, while the missionaries did not. "I don't teach you stupid things" (Portuguese *besteiras*), he said. "I teach you *Vei Vai, Wenia*, and other good words", he concluded. Then he and a group of elders gathered with him commenced to discuss the naming episode of *Wenia* among themselves. José thus equated my understanding Marubo *ese* with his having taught me about *Vei Vai* and *Wenia*. This implies that these myth-songs both contain *ese*, and in a sense are *ese*.

José was not the only elder to move straight from a discourse on *ese* to a discussion of the virtues of *saiti*. Still in May 1998, José decided to organize an *akoya* feast. He invited a group of elders to his *shovo* to discuss the issue. After the discussion of feasting logistics was over, the conversation turned to a Marubo man who had been down the Amazon to Manaus for a meeting of indigenous schoolteachers. This man had said that at the meeting, they were told it was important to find ways of incorporating indigenous cultural forms into the curriculum, and he mentioned specifically *ese* and indigenous healing practices. When this was mentioned, Sinãpa had just finished taking a substantial helping of tobacco powder, a verbal stimulant in Marubo culture. He then delighted his audience with a speech on the benefits of *ese*. In this discourse, he mentioned various 'traditional' cultural practices, including *saiti*. He called these latter *shinãvana*, where *vana* means 'words', and *shinã* can mean 'thought', 'memory', 'intelligence', 'soul', or 'life'. Thus, Sinãpa explicitly linked *saiti* to *ese* and expressed his opinion that *saiti* contain wisdom (interpreting *shinã* as 'intelligent/thoughtful').

Having shown the link between *Vei Vai* and sexual morality, and between *Vei Vai* and *ese*, it becomes possible to show how discussions about proper sexual morality, embedded in broader discussions of correct behavior, can take the form of efforts to specify what *ese* means for a particular social situation. The issues raised by the Ituí leaders provide the context for linking the interpretation of *ese* to the negotiation of sexual morality, which in turn will illuminate the significance of Miguel's interpretation of *Vei Vai*, thus closing this hermeneutic circle. In providing the context for a discussion of sexual morality, I aim to show that such negotiation does not take place in isolation from other issues, and positions taken relative to sexuality are connected to opinions in other matters, embedded in complex, ongoing, political processes. It is impossible to disentangle the issue of Marubo sexual ethics from, for example, broader issues of self-restraint relative to physical desires (issues which are dealt with symbolically in *Vei Vai*), or concerns over the proper power differential between Marubo and non-indigenous visitors. There is an ongoing process of negotiating the cultural value system with respect to these issues, and the significance of Miguel's comments relates to his comments' embededness in this process.

A clear connection between *ese* and sexual morality was made by José at a meeting held on May 30th, 1998. To understand what went on at this meeting some background is necessary. Firstly, it must be understood that between Ituí and Curuçá Marubo there were different interpretations of the alleged encounter in February between a missionary and a Marubo girl. To some of the Ituí Marubo, this was connected to the issues of V. and M., and thus classifiable as a case of excessive female independence in sexual matters. The solution was to reinforce control over women, in order to avoid the social disruptions caused by said independence. Some Curuçá Marubo, however, believed that the girl's father had set her up with the missonary, as part of a system of exchange of goods and services between the two men. It was not caused by lack of control, it was caused by misguided control. Thus, while most Marubo men felt that women's sexuality should be subject to control mechanisms, there were differences of opinion as to how that control should be applied.

Some men felt that control of women's sexuality meant that women could be offered as gifts and as part of exchange arrangements prior to being married: "She is my daughter, so why shouldn't I do with her as I please", K. once told me. On the other hand, some felt that control meant precisely preventing sexually-based exchange relationships between Marubo and non-indigenous people. My impression is that this latter opinion is related to broader concerns over relative power differentials between indigenous and non-indigenous people. By May of 1998, many prominent Curuçá leaders were leaning towards the second opinion as being more consistent with *ese*.

The meeting of May 30th was sparked by a broader issue—whether an indigenous or a non-indigenous person should be the agent of FUNAI in Marubo land. Hitherto, all FUNAI agents in the area had been non-indigenous. In late December, however, the Marubo, together with the other groups of CIVAJA, requested that current agents be replaced by indigenous ones. The Curuçá Marubo named a candidate for the position on their river (José's son, Manoel), and requested that he be hired. By May, this appointment was caught up in political squabbling. A faction had emerged favorable to the old non-

indigenous agents, and this faction was maneuvering in Atalaia to torpedo Manoel's appointment by claiming that most Marubo still wanted a non-indigenous person watching over them. When word of these maneuvers reached Aldeia Maronal, a meeting was held to discuss them.

The issue of having an indigenous FUNAI agent must be understood in the context of the long-standing prejudice on the part of many Brazilians concerning indigenous people's supposed innocence and ignorance. Many of the non-indigenous FUNAI workers felt that indigenous people were not educated enough to guide FUNAI policy in their areas. They felt that the indigenous people still needed guidance from non-indigenous people. This attitude was itself linked, in my opinion, to deeper prejudices about indigenous people's intelligence, or the alleged lack thereof. The general attitude at Aldeia Maronal, however, was that it was non-indigenous people who were lacking in wisdom and in the ability to understand and respect indigenous needs. Many times I heard Maronal residents say that the Marubo would be better than any non-indigenous 'guide' at determing their future. All these issues were close beneath the surface when, at the meeting, the elders were informed of the news coming from Atalaia: that the Maronal elders were allegedly saying that a non-indigenous FUNAI agent would be better.

The headman's son spoke first, saying that he had heard no one at Maronal speak such words (he called them bad words). He attributed the false rumors to a faction in another village that didn't want José's son to get the position. He said the bad words originated elsewhere, not at Maronal.

Sinãpa then spoke. He said: "the *náwa* speak that way about us"—referring to the fact that some whites say Marubo are uneducated and want non-indigenous guidance. "But they are not indigenous, and this is indigenous land," he said. "The *náwa* are like biting dogs. We have to watch that they don't bite us." The implication was that the *náwa*'s advice was dangerous and not to be trusted.

Further critiques of the *náwa*, always in the context of supporting the idea of indigenous self-control and autonomy, took the form of saying the *náwa* are not *onisi*. This latter word signifies 'solidarity' or 'mutual identification' by evoking the concept of shared sorrow. Pedro said that when a Marubo speaks he is *onisi*. "We have to learn from ourselves, not from the *náwa*. They say to us: you have learned nothing, you know nothing. They tell us what we should do. But we are indigenous, here we do things our way. The *náwa* have different thoughts." A second elder, I., said that they should avoid being tricked out of their resources. "We should have our brother watch over us", he said, "someone who is *onisi*, who listens to the elder's words. The *náwa* do not listen to the elders' words." Thus, these elders expressed their concern that non-indigenous policies and guidance had little relation to the Marubo conception of what their future should be. Pedro was aware that the *náwa* believed Marubo to be ignorant, but secure in his belief that 'our way' (the Marubo way) of doing things was better.

Finally, José linked all these concerns to the issue of sex between indigenous and non-indigenous people. This is of great interest because it was not the focus of the meeting. It had, however, been a major topic of discussion ever since the alleged incident with the missonary. Apparently it was not a new issue, because one FUNAI agent who had worked on the Curuçá—call him C.—had, according to José, had numerous relations with Marubo women. He said that C.'s closest associates had been N., a Mayoruna man married to a Marubo woman, and R., the son of a mixed couple who had spent much of his life working on ranches in Acre. José followed up I.'s comments about how whites do not listen to the leaders' words:

> Our elders have always spoken good words. C. never heard these words because he listened to N. and R. These two, N. and R., told C. what was happening, but these were not *yurãvana* ['indigenous people's words'], these were *nawãvana* ['non-indigenous people's words']. From these words, C. got a mistaken view, a mistaken understanding of what Marubo want. But Marubo have *ese*. We watch over our women to prevent them from having sex with non-indigenous people, but R. and N. told C. that such sex is normal among Marubo. Our elders' words contain wisdom, while the white people's words do not. Elders' words must be listened to. We have heard many bad words coming from the Ituí River. Ignorant words come from the Ituí River. They give women to *náwa* for money and beads. FUNAI should watch that this does not happen. People who are going to watch that this does not happen should be made FUNAI agents.

The associations made by José in his speech are central to my argument that the negotiation of Marubo sexual morality takes the form of discussions over what exactly *ese* means for a given social situation, and that because myth contains and is *ese* the interpretation of myth becomes a part of that process of negotiation. José linked listening to elders' *yurãvana* to understanding *ese*, and linked *ese* to the prevention of certain forms of sexual relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people—impermanent relations, involving the exchange of goods and money for sex, that occurred mainly with *náwa* who were in Marubo land to work, whether for FUNAI, for a mission, to vaccinate, or to fumigate for mosquitoes. The initiation of these relations was associated with hearing *nawãvana*,

which lack *ese*.

I do not think that José's opposition to the exchange of sex for goods with outsiders was a moral decision concerning the act itself; rather, it seems to be an instantiation of the broader category of social relations with *náwa* in which differential power is involved, and it is as such that he opposed it. In a previous conversation, José listed a number of ways in which young people were getting *nawãvana*, including the radio and television, but also the mission with its church services, hymns, and bible classes. He bemoaned the fact that youth were increasingly deaf to *yurãvana*. There were two established missions among the Marubo in 1998: the Ituí mission had been there for some thirty years, whereas the Curuçá (Maronal) mission had been around for only three. On the Ituí, the mission had achieved a position of predominance such that the Marubo in that area had no authority over it. On the Curuçá, the Marubo were anxious to prevent the mission from achieving any such power.

Exemplifying the difference in indigenous-mission power relations was the Marubo relation to the two airstrips that existed on Marubo land. On the Ituí, the airstrip was built by Marubo labor paid by the mission. It was therefore controlled, or 'owned' by the mission. In contrast, the Curuçá airstrip was built by Marubo labor marshalled by the Maronal headman, utilizing the indigenous system of inter-*shovo* labor exchanges. Therefore, the Curuçá airstrip was owned by the Maronal headman. As a consequence of this, when the Maronal missionaries wanted to hire Marubo labor to extend the airstrip, the headman acted to impede them because he did not want them to have any claim to controlling it. On the Ituí, the missionaries could do anything they wanted to the airstrip and needed no indigenous approval.

Maronal elders and some youths repeatedly expressed, both to me and among themselves, a concern over maintaining balanced missionary-Marubo power relations at Maronal, and preventing the development of the unequal power relations that prevailed on the Ituí, of which the case of the airstrip was but one example. The alleged incident with the Ituí missionary pointed out the clear connection between unequal power relations and the trade of sex for goods. At the May meeting, the issue of unequal power relations was being discussed in relation to FUNAI. As elders were discussing the need to establish Marubo control over FUNAI policy in Marubo land, José pointed out that non-indigenous presence combined with lack of *ese* generates certain types of sexual encounters, and these should be prevented. Because of the context of his comments, I think that the issue of sex with outsiders is linked to the general issue of power differential relative to outsiders, rather than being a moral issue in and of itself. This has to do with the link between such sex and *nawãvana*.

Several Maronal informants told me that *náwa* visitors had a well-established system for procuring sex with Marubo, and that FUNAI and health workers in the *náwa* towns passed on information among themselves about how to do so. One informant was drinking with health workers one night when the latter discussed among themselves specifics of what people in what villages would trade themselves or their daughters and for what kind and quantity of goods. A missionary on the Ituí once told me that I shouldn't bother making genealogies because in a Marubo *shovo* everyone has sex indiscriminately with everyone else. From this I interpret that the missionary believed the Marubo to have no rules about sexuality, and believed that everything was permitted to them. Thus, there was a general perception, in a certain sector of the regional *náwa* population, that the Marubo value system endorsed casual sexual relations with *náwa*. Furthermore, a significant sector of the Marubo population did in fact practice, or at least refuse to condemn, these relations. Some men I spoke with saw this as an exemplification of their tight control over sexuality—that they could offer their daughters in this way—and not as an exemplification of lack of control. The Maronal elders saw it as misguided control. But they also saw the link between the issues of sex and of power.

What linked the issue of sex with outsiders with that of relative power differences with respect to outsiders was precisely the question of control. In the discourse of the missionary who spoke with me, there were no rules restricting sex in Marubo *shovo*. José believed that the missionaries were spreading this latter belief. I found evidence to confirm this because this was precisely what the Ituí missionaries had told me, and non-indigenous visitors to the area also reported to me similar experiences, suggesting that Ituí missionaries did indeed tell outsiders that Marubo had sexual relations freely with anyone, native or outsider. Thus, to some Maronal Marubo, the *náwa* belief that Marubo had no rules concerning sex and the fact of non-indigenous people having access to Marubo girls were linked. This link was conceptually inscribed in social spaces where the *náwa* had unequal power relative to the Marubo: in missionaries who were independent of Marubo authority and in FUNAI agents who were applying a non-Marubo theory of development in Marubo land. To José, the spread of *nawãvana* was an aspect of this situation of inequality, and easy access to Marubo girls for outsiders was a consequence of it. So while his disapproval was not a self-enclosed moral issue as would be a Christian condemnation of prostitution, it was understandable as a reaction to a perception that I would state thus: José felt that non-indigenous

people's claims about Marubo having no sexual rules are a form of ideology designed to gain access to Marubo women and to justify such access as being consistent with indigenous morality.

The differences between Ituí and Curuçá in sexual morality were attributed by one informant to an unequal distribution of *eseya* elders. A young man married to the daughter of a Maronal elder told me:

> The Ituí is like that. It's different from the Curuçá. In Atalaia, I heard a [pest control worker] say that he likes the villages of [X.] and [Y.] because people come to him with offers of young girls in return for cheap gifts or a little money. [A political organizer named D.] once told me that he went to a meeting at [village X.]. A woman brought D. her daughter to sleep with... D. said no, but the woman left her in the hut he was sleeping in. He says he let her stay there but did nothing with her. This is because on the Ituí they have no elders who are *eseya*. That is why over here, on the Curuçá, it's different. That is why the [pest control workers] don't like to come to the Curuçá. Over here, you can find an elder to explain almost anything.

Having established its sociopolitical context, it becomes possible to interpret Miguel's interpretation of *Vei Vai*. Clearly, Marubo sexual morality is in a state of constant negotiation. At the time of fieldwork, there was considerable disagreement over what kinds of sex were right and what kinds were wrong. Furthermore, there existed a belief, among certain non-Marubo, that the Marubo have no cultural rules about sex, but rather engage in indiscriminate free-for-alls. This is not, of course, factually true—the Marubo have an intricate system of rules governing sexuality, rules encoded in their myths; in addition, the frequent occurrence of violence related to sexual jealousy indicates that partner-sharing is as emotionally problematic for the Marubo as for anyone else. And the notion, so clearly present in *Vei Vai* and in Miguel's interpretation thereof, that sexual self-restraint is a high value, finds its analogue in the morality of the closely-related Kaxináwa, where sexual excesses can result in ostracism (Kensinger 1988). Certain Marubo have come to see the belief in putative Marubo animal-sexuality as a set of words disseminated by non-indigenous people whose aim is to gain and retain access to Marubo girls. This dissemination in turn, is part of an overall process whereby the *náwa* establish and maintain unequal power relations relative to the Marubo. But the same elders perceive that *náwa* are sorely lacking in *ese*, which Marubo have in abundance; therefore there is a need to counteract the *nawãvana*.

In José's view, control over female sexuality was certainly a respectable goal, but the purpose of such control should be to secure demographic growth in Marubo *shovo*, not to obtain goods and money from non-indigenous people. On the Ituí, K. thought he was getting something good in return for sexual access to his daughters; on the Curuçá, José thought K. was being taken advantage of. It is in this context that we need to understand Miguel's statement about what he would say to *Popo*. Miguel wasn't just saying that he had exercised sexual self-restraint in his life; he was saying that any genuinely wise Marubo also does so, because it is the only way to get past such beings as *Popo*. He was establishing the fact that *ese*, in the field of sexuality, signifies accepting that one's sexuality will be restricted to socialized, non-disruptive channels. Given the sociopolitical context, Miguel was also denying the *náwa* point of view concerning Marubo sexuality, and thus striking a blow in a power struggle over control of access to Marubo women. He was denying a belief which (according to informants) missionaries and health workers were spreading, and which was causing deviations from his moral ideals for sexual behavior. He was simultaneously asserting pride in Marubo culture, as exemplified in Marubo rules for socialized sexuality; asserting pride in Marubo intelligence; asserting pride in Marubo *ese*; and claiming the right of Marubo to control their own future.

Miguel's statement to *Popo* was an interpretation because there were many different opinions concerning proper Marubo sexual behavior, and Miguel was staking his reputation for having *ese* to one of these opinions. This shows us that Marubo sexual morality is in a constant process of negotiation; such negotiation takes the form of discussions over what exactly *ese* means in a given social situation; and because myth both contains and is *ese*, the interpretation of myth becomes a part of that process of negotiating a culturally accepted value system. From this, and from the preceding discussion, a number of interesting conclusions can be drawn:

(1) Meaning in Marubo myth is constructed by specific individuals enmeshed in concrete sociopolitical contexts, rather than being handed down in identically replicated form, as the myths themselves are.

(2) Across Marubo social and geographic space, there are significant differences in patterns of morality, key points in ethics, and the interpretation of *ese*. Still, the idea that there is a correct way for Marubo people to do things is persistent. This is embodied in the very concept of *ese*; hence the importance of defining what *ese* means for specific situations. The Curuçá River critiques of Ituí River sexual morality can be seen as an argument over the definition of 'Marubo-ness', and over the definition of proper Marubo ethics towards *náwa*.

(3) Marubo value systems are in in a process of continuous negotiation. While Marubo values are structured by a core set of beliefs, this structure does not give an answer to every moral quandary. Thus, acts of interpretation are necessary to determine what type of behavior is correct in any given situation. These acts are inseparable from the processes within which they are embedded.

(4) Because moral interpretations are made by specific people in specific contexts, individuals' opinions on one matter are related to opinions on others. Discussions of female sexual autonomy were related to arguments over indigenous/non-indigenous sexual relations, and these were related to ongoing discussions of indigenous/non-indigenous power relations, which in turn were linked to discourses concerning the relative value of Marubo and *náwa* words.

(5) Myth plays an important role in Marubo social reproduction in that it is a source of information for elders seeking to determine the proper cultural structuring of sexuality.

**Marubo Oral History and Marubo Ethics**

Oral history plays a very important role in the transmission of social practices across generations. To understand the significance of oral history in Marubo social reproduction, I will examine the interpretation Marubo elders have of episodes of violence in the oral-historical narratives. The oral histories relate numerous violent incidents, by whites towards indigenous people, by indigenous people towards whites, and internecine violence in both indigenous and non-indigenous camps. Such episodes have become subject matter for contemporary Marubo discussions concerning the negative impact of violence on group health and prosperity. The rubber boom violence becomes an example of what happens when social practices aimed at group cohesion and prosperity are neglected. The main such social practice is the feast, a sign of economic success and prosperity in Marubo society. Another is the extensive indigenous healing system. The rubber boom oral histories are often cited in explaining the significance of healing, and even more so the importance of feasting in Marubo social life. To show how this is so, I will summarize key aspects of the content of Marubo oral histories, then explain how some elders interpret this content to signify that certain social practices should be valued and others suppressed.

Western and Marubo historians have different theories of the rubber boom. Our historians believe that it was caused by an increase in demand for rubber in industrialized nations. This raised the price of rubber and gave an incentive for people to use violence in order to secure rubber supplies. The end of the boom came about when the British succeeded in growing cheaper plantation rubber in Malaysia. José, however, had a different perspective:

> First there were only indigenous people (*yura*) from the Juruá to the Solimões and over to the Ucayali. Then a *keshĩtxo* [singer of magically potent songs] sang and the *náwa* increased in numbers. The *náwa* found the shotgun and started killing the *yura*. Some *yura* retreated to the headwaters of the Igarapé Maronal. There were only five *shovo* there: Dionísio, Ernesto, Júlio, Domingos, and João Tuxáua. But, though there were few people, they liked to feast. They held *akoya* feasts. They were so few that the women helped carry the *ako* [signal drum] along with the men. João Tuxáua's father, Tomás, sang over a bowl of genipap dye [a common form of body paint in Amazonia]. Then he went around to all the places where the *náwa* were, and spread the genipap there. He also went to the headwaters of all the igarapés and put the genipap in so that it washed downstream. As it did so, it washed the *náwa* away as well. The *náwa* vanished. Once again, there were only *yura*, until the loggers came.

Marubo oral histories record the exact locations of their ancestral groups at the start of the rubber boom, the events that led to the extinction or decimation of these groups, and the patterns of forced migration that led to the post-rubber boom aggregation of the Marubo. These processes are shown in Figures 2 and 4. In the background section of this paper, I explained that the Marubo as a cohesive ethnic group did not exist before that period of aggregation. The term 'Marubo' is thus anachronistic when used to refer to rubber boom people. To avoid this, I will use the term 'proto-Marubo' to refer to groups that are ancestral to the Marubo.

Figure 2, based on Marubo oral histories, shows that during the rubber boom, each group of proto-Marubo either disappeared completely or moved to a very remote area at the headwaters of the Arrojo River and Igarapé Maronal. Each of these moves was the result of violence that made permanent settlements impossible. Consciousness of these violent incidents forms the basis for a system of oral-historical interpretation that underlies the practices of feasting and healing. I will describe a selection of these incidents that is sufficiently representative as to make the elders' interpretations comprehensible.

Some of the violence consisted of direct assaults by non-indigenous people on proto-Marubo villages. Many of these assaults resulted in the near-total extinction of entire clusters of villages. One

attack that features prominently in Marubo oral histories is that on the three villages of the Kariya (Igarapé Setiacho) which occurred around 1905. In this attack, a group of *náwa* impersonated merchants to lure the Kariya proto-Marubo to a large boat on the Pardo River. Once there, the *náwa* threatened the Kariya people with shotguns, tied them up and chained them to the sides of the boat. Two men managed to get away during the night, with the help of one of their wives. These people made their way back to their villages, now reduced to just a few men, mostly old or infirm, and a small number of women and children. A few days later, the same *náwa* returned and shot everybody they could. Only one man, his wife, and his daughter survived, witnessing the shooting from the forest. None of the prisoners were ever seen again. I interpret this incident as a raid by the slave-traders of Iquitos, who supplied the labor markets of the Putumayo during the rubber boom (see Hardenburg 1912; Collier 1968; Stanfield 1998). The three Kariya villages probably had at least sixty people between them, of which only three survived.

Oral histories describe the acquisition of firearms by the proto-Marubo. Some firearms were stolen, but others were given away by rubber tappers. Rubber tappers found allies among the proto-Marubo. They exploited existing rivalries by arming some groups and encouraging them to attack others. Many proto-Marubo embraced the violent conditions and participated fully, attacking other proto-Marubo when they had the chance. For example, in February 1998, José's brother Pedro said:

> First there was only one *shovo* on the Upper Igarapé Maronal. Later, there were four, because Domingo, Júlio, and Dionísio built *shovo*. But at that time, there was a lot of violence. Dionísio's family was finished off. Relatives of [a man named] Mashepa wanted the women of Dionísio's household. They killed everyone else but the women. Dionisio and his sister were children. They were given to Peruvians. They were raised by Peruvians. Dionísio's sister was the mother of my wife. Then my father [João Tuxáua] invited all the people who were left to move to the headwaters of the Maronal. But a lot of *náwavo* never made it.

Dionísio's village was thus another one that was decimated by rubber boom violence. Only two people survived from this village to reach the Marubo aggregation point in the headwaters area. Indeed, this is the recurring pattern, whether non-indigenous or indigenous people are involved: a population nucleus is reduced by violence to one, two, or a handful of survivors, who after a long and circuitous route, end up invited by João Tuxáua to the Maronal/Arrojo headwaters, there to help reconstitute their social system.

As a result of these violent events, a large indigenous population was reduced to a set of scattered remnants. João Tuxáua is credited with gathering up these scattered remnants in a single place. I present this narrative as a final example designed to illustrate the Marubo conception of rubber boom conditions.

João Tuxáua followed a man named Chico Tuxáua to the Maronal/Arrojo headwaters. Chico had had a fight with some Peruvian rubber tappers. The Peruvians kidnapped Chico's pregnant wife and his grandson, Ernesto. Many years later, Chico's sons located the kidnap victims and brought them back to their home village. Fearing that the Peruvians would give chase, they fled to a river named Yapãua, an affluent of the Arrojo. João Tuxáua's family lived nearby and, fearing violence also, fled with Chico and his family. It was shortly thereafter that Tomás sang over the genipap and the *náwa* invasion receded. Some time after that, João Tuxáua undertook a series of journeys around the Javari basin. He located as many groups of proto-Marubo survivors as possible, mostly tiny, decimated families; in one case he found a single man, living in isolation. All these people were invited to live at the Yapãua. Thanks to this, a population size was reached that was sufficient to permit demographic recovery.

It is obvious from the oral histories that the proto-Marubo population of the Javari basin was sharply reduced as a result of the rubber boom. Many events resulted in decimation rates of 90% or worse. Only a few knowledgeable elders and shamans (*romeya* or *keshĩxo*) were left. This select group included João Tuxáua. These people had a unique opportunity. Deep in isolation in the forest, they raised new generations of Marubo. In doing so, they were able not only to reproduce a social order, but in many ways to create one. The production of Marubo society was a reproduction of proto-Marubo society but with changes. It is here that the issue of interpretation comes into play, for the rationale behind many changes was the necessity to emphasize demographic growth against all other objectives. To plan a strategy for demographic growth involved an analysis of the causes for the demographic reduction they had experienced. João Tuxáua is credited with thinking these issues through and leaving behind an ethical system geared towards economic prosperity and demographic growth.

According to his sons, as well as other informants, João Tuxáua did more than just gather the proto-Marubo survivors together to form the modern Marubo nation. He also taught his people how to behave both individually and socially in such a way that the population would grow. The essential aspects of this lifestyle, for the men, were to engage in healing and feasting. I was extremely impressed by the variety and depth of the Marubo healing system, which includes singing by *keshĩxo* (songs called *shõki*,

analyzed in depth in Montagner 1985), possession trances involving the sucking of objects by shamans (*romeya*), and an extensive botanical healing system with multiple sub-branches (fever remedies, diarrhea remedies, etc.). Pedro told me that much of this was new knowledge obtained by João Tuxáua directly from spirit-messengers, rather than by trial and error or enculturation. One day in January 1998, José confirmed Pedro's opinion of their father:

> My father learned about plants when the spirits entered inside him. Then his soul would leave his body. The possessing spirit would speak through him. The spirits would teach us many kinds of *nirao* [botanical healing] and *shõki*. My father also learned how to cure people when he travelled while his body was possessed. He would lie down in a hammock above the *ako* and the spirits would come get him. They would take him to their villages. He came to know the spirit world. The spirits showed him all the things that existed there, and taught him what these things were. When he returned to his body, my father would tell people what he saw, or sing his visions. My father's father [Tomás] was also a great healer. He helped people. But he wasn't as much of a healer and helper of people as my father. My father was the one that gathered all the Marubo who didn't fight in one place. He cured people. He sang songs. He organized feasts. Women loved him. He had many wives and many children. I don't know how many children he had. Those leaders who had thoughts like his, like Domingos, Júlio, and Ernesto, joined him. The others were finished [died out]. The 'Marubos bravos' who always fought one another, fought other kinds of *yura*, and fought with the *náwa*, they never joined my father. They disappeared. My father would never stop talking. He was always telling stories. He drank *oni* [Banisteriopsis tea] almost every night. He would walk from *shovo* to *shovo* singing, and everybody listened. That's how we all learned. My brother and I, and Sinãpa and Wanõpa and Misael. My father taught us.

In José's discourse, his father's lifeways are contrasted with those of the 'Marubos bravos'. In Portuguese, 'bravo' glosses as courageous, but also wild and furious. João Tuxáua was a non-violent man, who focused on healing, on feasting, and on his numerous wives. In contrast to João Tuxáua are the 'bravos', who never made it to the aggregation point. The 'bravos' were excluded when the Marubo nation was formed, because João Tuxáua invited only those who 'thought like him', i.e., people with whom he could live in peace. João Tuxáua then proceeded to spread his belief system by teaching the new generations to heal and to feast. It is apparent that the younger Marubo—who were the elders when I visited—bought into João Tuxáua's ethical philosophy. Consider Miguel's explanation of the *tsai ĩki*, a ritual dialogue associated with feasts:

> All my father's children learned healing. But only I learned to be *romeya* like my father. I have an object in my left pectoral. I look through the *rewe* [long tube used for inhaling snuff] and I can see what is causing any disease. I need really strong snuff to do this. [Pause.] Do you know that *tsai ĩki*? Have you heard people do *tsai ĩki*? In the old days, everyone used to fight. Everyone tricked one another. Everyone argued. This is bad. Everyone was sad, everyone was hungry, everyone was dying, people died all the time. Then they received words from God [using the Portuguese word *Deus* and pointing to the sky]. Then they stopped fighting. They grew food. They hunted. They ate. They had feasts. A big belly makes people strong so they can work. This is what we say when we do *tsai ĩki*.

Miguel's statements reinforce the structural oppositions I deduced from José's narrative. The *tsai ĩki* is a ritual dialogue that is mostly performed during the large *tanamea* feast. In these dialogues, according to Miguel, the speakers establish equivalency between fighting/trickery/arguments and sadness/hunger/

death. This nexus of phenomena is contrasted with food/eating/feasting. Furthermore, the transition from a violent, deadly society to a full-bellied, feasting society is associated with the receipt of words from a supernaturally valuable source, 'God'.

Later the same day, I asked Pedro what Miguel might have meant when he said that God sent words. He said that one class of *yove* [beneficial spirit] are the *rewepei*. The *rewepei* took messages from Kanavoã, the Marubo creator-entity, to João Tuxáua. Pedro explained that it was the *rewepei* who taught João Tuxáua the *shõki* and *nirao*. I asked him if Miguel meant that Kanavoã, through the *rewepei* and João Tuxáua, had told them to stop fighting and to feast instead. Pedro assented to this interpretation. However, while Miguel had emphasized that 'God' told them to stop fighting, Pedro emphasized that Kanavoã had taught them much of their healing knowledge. In any case, João Tuxáua's beliefs are not considered merely human thoughts, but rather are guidance from a wise and powerful supernature.

A final quote from José (22 February 1998) will clarify the way João Tuxáua affected contemporary Marubo society. Again, violence is explicitly contrasted with eating and healing:

> In the old days, people were much more 'bravo' than they are today. When they did not agree over something, they fought. Many of the old leaders were like that. But my father changed that. That's why my brothers and I are the way we are. My father would go singing to all the *shovo*. He would invite everybody to feast at his *shovo*. He would take children by the hand and sing to them to teach them. When children

> were crying he would give them pieces of meat to quiet them. When the women ran out of meat but the men still had some, my father would bring the women meat from the men's meal. My father used to take people into the forest to teach them forest medicine. That's why he was able to gather a following, because he was like that. He gathered together a group of eleven men, because everybody liked him. That's why we're not like our ancestors were. My father changed all that. My father used to say that when we were fighting and making war, all we ate was wild fruit and game. Then he would point to all the maize, bananas, and manioc they had and say, "now things are better."

Although there were other contributing factors, João Tuxáua seems to have played a major role in helping Marubo society grow after the rubber boom. The leaders who fled to the headwaters of the Arrojo River near the end of the rubber boom faced very grim prospects for social reproduction. There were very few Marubo left—almost certainly less than 100. However, there were women of nine exogamous matrilineages left, and the kinship system that regulated marriages during this time was effective in arranging reproduction so that by 1998, eight of these exogamous lineages were not only still present, but growing at equal rates (Ruedas 2001:748). The population reached 400 by 1975 (Melatti 1977) and 875 by the time of my 1998 census. More significantly, these 875 people related to one another according to an undeniably indigenous and recognizably Panoan sociocultural system. However, in the immediate aftermath of the rubber boom violence, the surviving elders faced a crisis of social survival. In this context, João Tuxáua taught his children the value of feasting and healing for social prosperity.

The link between warfare and hunger was evident to João Tuxáua and to his sons. Warfare interfered with agriculture, as evidenced by the statement that when they were warring, they ate only wild foods. This is probably because in time of war they were subject to raids and to frequent forced migration. A state of constant mobility was necessary, which led to a foraging lifestyle. Food production was thus irregular and people were hungry all the time. This process, whereby a horticultural group converts to foraging under conditions of warfare, is known from other areas of the Amazon and is called 'agricultural regression' (Balée 1992).

Poor diet and poor health are explicitly linked in Marubo thought, and so the consequences of violence are clear: the women and children were hungry, sad, and ill, while the men were dying in raids and counter-raids. The behavior of the 'Marubos bravos' is held up as an example of an activity pattern with low survival value: those who embraced the violence disappeared, while those who shared João Tuxáua's thoughts survived and even thrived.

Feasting represents values opposite to violence. Feasting is a sign of plentiful food, healthy people, and overall prosperity. I observed feasting as a constant feature of Marubo social organization. In a village such as Aldeia Maronal, which is physically and demographically large by Marubo standards, with twelve separate *shovo*, feasting integrates the village socially and politically by bringing the different residential units together for a common purpose. Feasting can often serve to resolve differences between affines and among kin, and can replace a sense of atomization with a sense of integration.

João Tuxáua engaged in frequent feasting after the end of the rubber boom. He must have excelled at organizing labor for maximal food production, and he evidently delighted in inviting all the different *shovo* to feast. He led the guests, especially the children, in singing myths, and actively endeavored to ensure that everyone's belly was full. This program of feasting was consciously held up as the superior opposite of the violent activities of the rubber boom. The extraordinary demographic productivity of these times—João Tuxáua had at least 20 children survive to adulthood—was visible proof of the validity of feasting as a pathway to group prosperity.

The value of healing was, like that of feasting, explained in the context of the rubber boom violence. From the quotes above, it is clear that healing was a very important part of João Tuxáua's ethical philosophy. He learned a great deal about healing and he worked to teach the younger generations how to heal. With feasting, healing forms part of the new Marubo leaders' role, which, João Tuxáua argued, was much better than the violent behavior of the old leaders.

For contemporary Marubo, the value placed on feasting and healing is directly connected to their interpretation of the facts recorded in oral histories. During the rubber boom, many (proto-) Marubo were violent. This led to hunger, sadness, and death. All these 'Marubos bravos' died out. In contrast, João Tuxáua organized feasts and fed people. He was a great healer. With constant feasting and good healing, everybody's belly was full. People were in good health, had children, and the children grew up strong and healthy. Things are much better this way. Feasting and healing, in this interpretation, have been the engines behind Marubo demographic recovery. This lifestyle was not just invented by João Tuxáua: he was advised by Kanavoã through the *rewepei*. Feasting and healing are therefore extremely vital aspects of Marubo social activity, and the interpretation of oral history plays a vital role in Marubo social reproduction as the generation that learned from João Tuxáua teaches the next generations how

proper Marubo should behave (5).

**Feasting as a Context for Transmission of Information**

Marubo feasts provide a context for the transmission of large quantities of mythical and oral-historical information in verbal and kinetic forms. In my description of myth as a narrative genre, I mentioned that myths were mainly performed at planned (as opposed to spontaneous) feasts. In order to understand how the information content in myth is disseminated to a wide audience, it is therefore necessary to describe at least one form of Marubo feast. I will describe the *tanamea*, the largest type of feast, during which nearly half the Marubo population could be in one place at the same time.

The *tanamea* is a context for myth-singing, but also for performances of *tsai ĩki* dialogues containing oral-historical knowledge and moral interpretations. Feasting is among the highest of Marubo values, part of the moral framework derived in the aftermath of the rubber boom from what Miguel called 'words received from God'. It is in this context that much of the mythological corpus is performed before large audiences, and oral-historical knowledge and interpretations are exchanged by elders, also before large audiences.

One effect of the *tanamea* is the transmission from elders to youth of information crucial to Marubo social reproduction, ranging from the rationales behind cultural controls over sexuality to the importance of feasting and healing. Jonathan Hill has argued that the Wakuénai *pudáli* feast is the setting for a "collective construction of the... space-time of mythic Beginnings" (Hill 1987:201). His analysis of the *pudáli* shows how a succession of symbolic expressions and group feasting activities act first to highlight, then to dissolve, opposed social categories—thus giving the participants a certain ability "to control and change empirical social realities" (Hill 1987:221-222). He shows how the *pudáli* permits manipulation of social reality by reference to "the key organizing metaphors of Wakuénai social reproduction" (Hill 1987:222). The Marubo *tanamea* is similar in its relation to social reproduction, but different in a key aspect. The *pudáli* constructs the mythic primordium during the feast, whereas the *tanamea* transmits information that allows the elders to construct parts of the mythic primordium after the feast.

Despite the performances of myth-songs, the reality constructed by the Marubo feast is a historically contextual one, not a timelessly mythic one. During the *tanamea*, the frequent occurrence of *tsai ĩki* highlights the fact that a re-orientation towards feasting occurred in the aftermath of the rubber boom. The feast takes on significance due to its historical context—the aftermath of the rubber boom—in which emphasis on food production formed part of a social ideology geared towards population growth. Therefore, the feast is an effort to construct a new reality in a particular historical context, rather than an out-of-time mythic reality.

The performance of myths is a prominent feature of Marubo feasts, and most especially of the *tanamea*. However, I have shown, through my analysis of myth-performance and interpretation, that the ritualization of myth-performance precludes simultaneous interpretation and that translation of mythic content into social praxis is a part of the ongoing processes of normal social life. Hence, while the Marubo feast does not construct a mythic primordium on the spot, it does serve to transmit, and perhaps to legitimize, the information that elders use in their ongoing efforts to maintain a cultural value system that is based on the *ese* contained in myth.

The system of praxis encouraged by the elders is given a certain immediate value by the fact that it is the system that allowed the Marubo to survive the rubber boom. The *tanamea* strikingly contrasts images of violence and of prosperity, both in the *tsai ĩki* and in other symbolic forms I will describe shortly. It is also a context for the exchange of prestations among affinally related groups with potentially dangerous differences of opinion on key issues in ethics and politics. It is thus an almost perfectly Maussian phenomenon, much like the Yanomamö feast (Chagnon 1968:97-117).

In making his argument that gift-exchange is the fundamental basis of all economic systems, Mauss stated that separate social groups exchange gifts in order to avoid violence:

> In all the societies that have immediately preceded our own,... there is no middle way: one trusts completely or one mistrusts completely... This was because they had no choice. Two groups of men who meet can only, either draw apart, and, if they show mistrust toward one another or issue a challenge, fight—or they can negotiate... The people of Kiriwina told Malinowski: 'The men from Dobu are not good like us; they are cruel, they are cannibals. When we come to Dobu we are afraid of them. They might kill us. But then I spit out ginger root, and their attitude changes. They lay down their spears and receive us well.' Nothing better interprets this unstable state between festival and war. (Mauss 1990[1950]:81-82)

In extending Mauss' theory to explain marriage exchange systems, Lévi-Strauss gave the same fundamental rationale for the existence of such sytems, drawing on Tylor's concept of 'marry out or die out':

> The respective attitudes of the strangers in the restaurant appear to be an infintely distant projection,... of a fundamental situation, that of individuals of primitive bands coming into contact for the first time or under exceptional circumstances meeting strangers... Primitive peoples know only two ways of classifying strangers. They are either 'good' or 'bad'... A 'good' group is one accorded hospitality without question, and given the most precious goods. A 'bad' group is one from which one expects and to which is promised, at the first opportunity, suffering or death. With one there is exchange, with the other, fighting. (Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949]:60)

The Marubo are consciously aware that feasting represents an alternative to, and even a preventative for, violence. Ituí and Curuçá Marubo are social categories that are potentially and really opposed—geographically, politically, and affinally. Like the Wakuénai, the Marubo respond to this situation with feasting. But whereas the Wakuénai resolve the problem of opposed social categories by dissolving them ritually, in the Marubo case the categories are not dissolved; rather, the relationship between them is ritually re-organized so as to follow a pattern geared towards overall group growth and prosperity. The existence of the categories themselves is never questioned; it is a matter of influencing how the categories interact. In this sense, the *tanamea* is analogous to the Eastern Tukanoan *poali*:

> The poali, a ritual practiced by sibs in the northwest Amazon of Brazil and Colombia, articulates Eastern Tukanoan interpretations of historical relations of guesting, feasting, and warfare. In it, two agnatic descent groups engage in ceremonial insult and mock warfare, recalling antagonisms of a prior period and defining alliances in the present. The discourse is a reflexive model through which local groups locate themselves vis-à-vis their neighbors and outsiders. The language and ritual brings groups, formerly distanced, into social proximity, as the ritual is a vehicle for reinventing relations. (Chernela 2001)

The Marubo *tanamea* begins with an invitation phase (for a political analysis of the *tanamea*, refer to Ruedas 2001:619-627; for another example of Panoan feasting see Frank 1987). In the case of the September 1998 *tanamea* at Aldeia Maronal, this began when the organizer, José, went downstream to invite the other village on the Curuçá. With this invitation successfully issued, José began to come back upstream with the guests, gathering as many baskets of turtle eggs and shooting as much game as possible.

Twelve days after José's departure, his brother Pedro organized a hunting ritual back at Aldeia Maronal. In this ritual, the *vina atxia*, hunters grab a certain type of wasp-eggs from the nest, receiving the wasps' hunting prowess through a sort of sympathetic magic. After the stinging, the youth gathered together in a *shovo* to echo an elder's *saiti*. This lasted until dawn. The elder, I. (mentioned earlier as a participant in the meeting of May 30th, 1998), selected short *saiti*, and performed nineteen of them during the night. The morning after the *vina atxia*, the young hunters headed into the forest, while Pedro headed overland to issue invitatons to the Ituí Marubo.

Arriving on the Ituí after three days of walking, Pedro went to each individual *shovo* to issue invitations to the feast. There were fifteen *shovo* on the upper Ituí at that time. In each one, Pedro walked in the front door, stood next to the *shovo ivo*, and performed a *tsai ĩki*. The *tsai ĩki* was reciprocated, and sometimes the dialogue went on for multiple turns. Then guests and hosts ate together.

José returned from the middle Curuçá the day after Pedro's departure. He brought with him some guests as well as some of the food collected on the way. One guest, Cassimiro, was an elder. Cassimiro started to sing at night on September 12th. He sang *saiti* all night as others circumambulated the *shovo* and echoed his words. From then on, at least one elder sat in or outside José's *shovo* every night, singing *saiti* until dawn.

Guests continued to arrive from the middle Curuçá in steadily increasing numbers over the following week. Many of them formed part of the food-collecting crews, which José had organized together with the headman of the middle Curuçá. Thus, they arrived loaded with smoked meat and turtle eggs. The young hunters of Aldeia Maronal also returned from their hunting expedition, bringing various types of meat. José's *shovo* had already been stocked with plantains, corn and sweet manioc. Women from around Aldeia Maronal moved into José's *shovo*, setting up cooking fires which burned constantly. Large cauldrons of the corn drink *wáka* were brewed, and the supply of cooked plantains and manioc was kept constant to complement the supply of meat. Everybody from Aldeia Maronal, as well as the guests, ate all their meals at José's *shovo* for the duration of the feast—perhaps three hundred people eating, where normally there were twenty.

For one week, the Curuçá Marubo feasted and awaited the arrival of the Ituí guests. The elders

formed a sort of rotation of singers. An elder who got tired after several nights of singing could rest for a night or two while another took his place. As the crowds increased, the singing moved from the *shovo* interior to the more spatious outer patio. One night, two elders started singing simultaneously, one outdoors and one indoors. This became the norm for a few days. The Curuçá Marubo were soaked in mythology. I recorded forty-four songs that week; however, as I became increasingly exhausted I could not keep up with the elders' sleep deprivation, and I could not record two elders simultaneously, so many more were sung than those I recorded.

On September 20th, 1998, Pedro returned from the Ituí. He had guided the guests from the Ituí to a point less than a day's walk from Aldeia Maronal. The guests remained there to prepare their ritualized entrance. Pedro went ahead to warn the hosts of the guests' imminent arrival.

The guests had brought gifts for the hosts. These consisted mainly of spears, bows, and arrows, made specifically as gifts in the months leading up to the *tanamea*. Some of these were distinctly non-utilitarian, such as a double-tipped spear with annatto dye prepared for José by Ituí *shovo ivo* Paulino. On September 21st, the guests prepared even more gifts. During their walk through the forest over the previous three days, they had killed as many birds as possible for their plumage. Now, they made headdresses using these feathers. They painted themselves with genipap and annatto dyes, some quite elaborately. They also made large digging sticks of peach palm wood.

While the guests prepared in the forest, the feast reached apotheosis in the village. José's *shovo* and its patio were filled all night as two elders sang simultaneously. Nearly the entire Curuçá population attended and participated. Young people engaged in furtive sexual encounters: nine months later several illegitimate children were born. Everybody ate smoked meat and turtle eggs and drank *wáka* as often as they wanted.

On September 22nd, the guests headed towards the village for the climax of the feast. In late August and early September, José and Pedro had led work parties into the forest to prepare a long, wide path, with four clearings, for the guests to follow. The clearings were at evenly spaced intervals from the village. On the morning of the 22nd, a group of Maronal youths went to the outermost clearing carrying clay jars full of *wáka*.

At the clearing, the youths awaited the guests. The guests arrived an hour later, warning of their arrival with loud hoots. Guests filtered into the clearing, engaging hosts in greetings and conversation. Then, one host picked up a guest by the waist, hoisted him up, and carried him around, hooting "i-i-i-i-i." After half a minute or so, the host put the guest down, and the guest picked the host up and carried him around, also hooting. Soon everybody was picking everybody else up, and the clearing was a chaos of people carrying each other around and hooting. One young guest decided to make a game of it and held on to a tree, refusing to be picked up. Maronal youths converged on this man, playfully wrestling with him until they managed to pry him from the tree and carry him around. This picking up and carrying around is just one of the forms of mock violence seen at a *tanamea*.

Following the pick-up-and-carry phase, the guests received drinks of *wáka* from the hosts. The hosts then left the clearing, returning to the village. In the village, *saiti* singing was still in full gear, with large audiences.

Back at the village, the hosts got more *wáka* and headed back out towards the second clearing. This time, many prominent elders went along. The guests were waiting, forming a solid wall. The hosts entered the clearing and faced off against the guests. Elders faced one another and proceeded to engage in *tsai ĩki* dialogues, while the youth picked each other up and carried each other around. Thus, even as mock violence took place among youths, elders reflected on the opposition of feasting and violence and verbally established the moral value of the feast. Once the dialogues and carrying were done, the hosts again returned to the village. Back at the village, they picked up cooked meat and baskets of turtle eggs, as well as more *wáka*. They returned to the third clearing with these gifts. There, more *tsai ĩki* and carrying around took place. Then the guests were given a full feast. The hosts withdrew to the village again.

One last time, the hosts gathered up jars of *wáka* and headed towards the last clearing, a short distance from the village. Here, the elders engaged in an extended session of *tsai ĩki* dialogues as the youths carried one another around and the host youths distributed *wáka* to guests. The elders had been preparing their *tsai ĩki* for weeks, if not months, and they relished the opportunity to display their verbal prowess and their knowledge of *ese*. Following this last exchange of words, food, and gestures, the hosts returned to the village to await the guests' entrance.

The guests were ferried across the Curuçá in groups. As they accumulated on the shore, a group of hosts approached and a further round of *tsai ĩki* took place. Then the hosts stood aside and the guests headed into the village in one large group. A series of acts of controlled violence ensued. Blank shotgun

shells were shot in the air, and one young guest took a machete to a small tree and cut it down, eliciting hoots of approval from the other guests. The guests went around to the patios and doorways of two *shovo*, and the men with digging sticks tore up the ground and made holes in the doorways.

Finally, the guests approached José's *shovo*. Like most *shovo*, it was ringed by a set of small swiddens containing plantain trees and manioc plantings. Some young guests split off from the main group, ran hooting through the swiddens, and chopped down the plantain trees with machetes. They were fast and aggressive; all I saw was a sort of wave of falling trees and the occasional glimpse of an apparently furious young man raising and lowering his machete. They destroyed the swiddens as thoroughly as possible. Other men, aproaching the *shovo*, tore up José's pepper bushes. Finally they reached the *shovo*.

At José's *shovo*, the men dug holes in the ground near the doorways. They took their digging sticks and ripped up the thatch walls near the doorways, then tore down the thatch rain-awnings. As the guests engaged in this damaging behavior, a group of host women engaged in ritual defense. They were led by Tamasai, an elderly woman who had been kidnapped by Mayoruna as a young girl. She and some young girls wielded small sticks. Using standardized footwork, they danced their way up to the aggressive men and poked them in the ribs with the sticks. The men responded by threatening them with the large digging sticks. The women retreated, but always circled back to poke the men in the ribs. Nobody really hurt anybody else: the whole thing was more like a very energetic dance.

Some guest men finally entered José's *shovo*, where they cut down the *ako* drum, rolled it outside, and smashed it to pieces. They also smashed to pieces the *kenã* benches and dug up the *kenãshesha*, the space between the benches. Finally, all the guests entered the *shovo*, occupied its center, and walked around in circles, chanting songs led by their elders. Then they all sat down on what was left of the benches and were served meat, manioc, plantains, and large baskets full of turtle-eggs, as well as more *wáka* and the banana drink, *manimotsá*. As the guests ate, the hosts went around picking up the gifts—the bows, arrows, spears, and feathered headdresses. In the subsequent months, José proudly displayed these gifts in various places of his *shovo* and surrounding huts.

José's *tanamea* was over, and it had been a resounding success. Traditionally, the feast should have ended there, but the young men had added a component, the post-climactic 'festa *náwa*.' A stereo was produced, the village generator cranked up, bottles of pharmaceutical alcohol came out of the woodwork to be mixed with water, sugar, and lemon juice, and the youth danced all night to the tune of Latin dance music. Most of the guests headed back into the forest the next day, though many lingered for weeks or months on various kinds of business, such as helping kin construct *shovo*, or courting potential wives and affines.

Following a classically reciprocal pattern, each *tanamea* generates another *tanamea*. The Ituí had to throw a *tanamea* for the Curuçá, or they would be ridiculed as being incapable of producing enough food or working hard enough to organize a feast that size. The Ituí's *tanamea* was held in December. Each *tanamea* also generates two *akoya*, since the destruction of the *ako* drums in each host *shovo* creates the need for two new *ako* drums, and the manufacture of an *ako* requires an *akoya* feast.

It should be clear from the above description that the *tanamea* addresses, like the *pudáli*, the issue of opposed social categories. However, unlike in the *pudáli* where the symbolic construction of a mythic primordium breaks down opposed categories, in the *tanamea* these remain opposed. What the *tanamea* does is simulate an armed invasion of the village. The invasion increases in intensity right up until the guests enter the host *shovo*. Upon arrival at the center of the *shovo*, however, the guests sing a song from the same mythological corpus as the hosts have been singing for days, establishing a sort of unity of ancestry and worldview. Instead of a final violent confrontation, the invasion ends in an exchange of gifts as the guests are fed and the hosts take the guests' weapons and headdresses. And during the leadup to this climax, the elders' dialogues explicitly state the rationale for the whole ritual, contrasting the benefits of feasting to the consequences of violence, against the backdrop of their rubber boom historical experience. Thus the categories remain socially contrasted but are morally and culturally unified as they agree to feast one another rather than to fight.

The *tanamea* is a striking example of a Maussian exhange system. The Marubo face conditions of potential violence among dangerously separate social groups. They respond with a ritually organized feast at which exchanges of gifts replace exchanges of blows. Their explanations for the value of feasting might as well be quotes from Mauss, and these explanations are explicitly verbalized throughout the feast.

From the perspective of this paper, what is most important is to recognize the crucial role played by the *tanamea* in the transmission of information in Marubo society. I should note that the many myths sung during the *tanamea*—perhaps eighty or more—reach only the host river's inhabitants (because the

all-night singing ends when the guests arrive). Still, it is a unique opportunity for elders to be heard by youths from many different *shovo* at once. The guests affirm their knowledge of the mythic corpus by singing at the center of the host *shovo*; during their own *tanamea* the roles will be reversed and they will listen to their own elders sing for days. Combining *saiti* with *tsai ĩki* performances, the *tanamea* provides a context for elders to disseminate the main moral bases of Marubo social organization. The information is transmitted intergenerationally. The feast is thus a key element in Marubo processes of social reproduction.

**Conclusions**

Marubo knowledge of past times becomes part of the processes of social production and reproduction through performative and interpretative acts that occur in both ritualized and unmarked social settings. Oral-historical knowledge, disseminated in a multiplicity of everyday situations, is interpreted into a system of ethics geared towards prosperity in food-production, good health, and demographic growth. The cornerstone of this system of ethics is feasting. Interpretations of oral history are encoded in ceremonial dialogues performed at certain large feasts. At the same feasts, myths are performed for large audiences. The myths are backchanneled word-for-word, ensuring substantial mnemonic permanence. Elders draw on this common mythic consciousness to make statements about how proper Marubo should behave. Thus myth, like oral history, comes to play an important role in the transmission of important values across social space and across generations.

Marubo myth-interpretation is an open process. In accordance with the principle of replicability, myths are transmitted across generations by rote; meanings, however, are subject to individual construction. The process of meaning-construction takes place in concrete sociopolitical contexts. Hence, the way value systems are interpreted from myths is dependent on the individual's social position and the group's historical situation. The link between myth and values cannot be understood independently of context. To ask a set of elders what they think, and to deduce from these answers "society X's unchanging mythic charter", would ignore the fact that elders are engaged in ongoing political relationships and their opinions are inseparable from their total conceptions of self-interest. Thus, Miguel's position that sexual self-restraint is a fundamental Marubo value was connected to his belief that Marubo people should determine their own development policies. However, I noted that this was not a universal position: there were people who felt that non-indigenous FUNAI agents should continue to guide the Marubo. FUNAI supporters were typically positioned, through personal alliances, to benefit materially from continued non-indigenous FUNAI presence, while the other side stood to benefit from the old-guard's replacement by indigenous agents. Thus, one's social situation and one's particular system of social alliances affect one's opinion concerning Marubo autonomy versus FUNAI guidance; this in turn affects one's opinions concerning proper sexual morality, which affect the way one will interpret the myth-songs. The way meaning is constructed from myth is intimately related to the sociopolitical positioning of the interpreter.

Marubo society is not a 'cold' society by Lévi-Strauss' definition (Lévi-Strauss 1962:279). The links made by contemporary Marubo between myth and values are not necessarily the same ones made by their ancestors. In fact, there is good evidence that Marubo social structure changed during and after the rubber boom (Ruedas 2001:696-747). The rubber boom destabilized the Javari Basin Panoan social system, threatening its very existence. The few elders that remained did not merely replicate the old social system. They were creative. Things that did not work were changed; systems of relations that were untenable were abandoned (particularly certain prescriptive marriage alliances between *náwavo*); and emphases within the value system were changed. If, as I have argued, the system of kinship and affinity is related to the origin and afterlife myths, then to allow for socio-structural flexibility, interpretations of these myths must have changed, too. And a whole new basis for the formulation of value systems was added: the interpretation of the historical trauma that had just occurred.

A possible reason for the flexibility of myth-interpretation is precisely the continual traumatic change experienced by indigenous Amazonians for at least the past five hundred years. Kinship systems contribute to social reproduction by distributing marriage partners in a way that is conducive to group survival; the very perpetuation of a system across generations is evidence of its survival value. This is particularly the case under conditions of intense, cyclic, demographic trauma, as in post-Columbian Amazonia. Yet with conditions as variable as those prevailing in Amazonia, where waves of disease, boom-bust cycles of resource exploitation, warfare, and population displacements have been frequent, one may expect that inflexibility would have low survival value. The Marubo show explicit understanding that the purpose of their value system is to ensure survival, and that the logic of survival

supersedes the importance of continuity and tradition (6). Therefore, even if the mythic charter remains unchanging, the precise systems of social relations based on the myths can change considerably over time.

Interestingly, the argument that kinship systems must be flexible to ensure survival under difficult historical conditions was made by Lévi-Strauss (1969[1949]:76-80), though this would seem to contradict his later concept of the 'cold society' (Lévi-Strauss 1962:279). Lévi-Strauss argued that systems of dual organization are reflections of the principle of reciprocity. Their significance is in barring each section of society from keeping its own women, thus contributing to group survival by forcing exchanges which distribute marriage partners more broadly across social space. He argued that the institutions through which the principle of reciprocity manifests itself are constantly changing according to historical circumstance, with only the underlying structure of dual organization remaining. We should not "confuse the principle of reciprocity... with the often brittle and always incomplete institutional structures continually used by it to realize the same ends" (Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949]:76). The principle is independent of the "temporary institutions through which it is expressed" (Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949]:78). Thus, Lévi-Strauss showed a clear understanding that institutional structures change through time even if the basic principles they are based on do not.

Even after having asserted the 'cold' nature of societies with mythological consciousness, Lévi-Strauss recognized the extremely fluid nature of indigenous South American social systems:

> A group such as those which are the object of our investigation... owes its character to the fact that it has... crystallised in a semantic environment... the elements of which had been used for all sorts of combinations... to permit small but numerous societies to affirm their originality... by exploiting the resources of a dialectic of oppositions and correlations... Such an interpretation... rests evidently on historical conjectures: great antiquity of the peopling of tropical America, repeated displacements in all directions of numerous tribes, demographic fluidity and phenomena of fusion creating the conditions of an ancient syncretism from which have been produced the observable differences between groups, which do not reflect at all, or hardly at all, archaic conditions, but are, more often, secondary and derived. (Lévi-Strauss 1964:16-17; author's translation).

The people who are now Marubo have undergone radical changes to their social organization and value system over the past century. Sets of *náwavo* with formerly discrete identities, and probably also languages, fused together into a single 'Marubo' society after the rubber boom. An exceptional leader, João Tuxáua, selectively changed the emphasis of the Marubo value system to reflect his interpretation of the rubber boom's lessons. The contents of *Wenía* must have been changed to reflect the new situation; in its structure it is an adaptable myth, such that new *náwavo* can be incorporated and extinct ones dropped without damaging the integrity of the whole. With change in the mythic structure, value system, and social organization, consciously made in relation to changing historical conditions, the Marubo can hardly be considered cold despite their enduring production of a totemic mythic consciousness and descent-group system.

Marubo society in fact resembles Lévi-Strauss' definition of a hot society more than that of a cold society. In a cold society, present-day actions are thought to replicate eternally the actions of the ancestors in the mythic primordium (Lévi-Strauss 1962:281). Social reality is conceptualized as unchanging, made out of customs taught by the ancestors (Lévi-Strauss 1962:282). But the Marubo have made a clear break from their ancestors' habits. The new value system is validated since it comes from *Kanavoã* through the *rewepei*. In addition, the very concept of cold society would seem to imply an entity that has a long past as a discretely bounded thing. This is not the case with the Marubo, who are a recently fused social entity with a new identity. On the other hand, hot societies "resolutely internalize historical becoming [*le devenir historique*] in order to make it the engine of their development... They accept [historical change] willingly or not and, by the consciousness which they gain of it, amplify its consequences" (Lévi-Strauss 1962:279-280). The Marubo have internalized the becoming of history, are conscious of it, and have amplified its consequences through that consciousness.

The historically contextualized, or 'hot' qualities of Marubo society can also be seen in the process of information transmission linking Marubo structure and event. The feasts are morally underpinned by the interpretation of a particular historical event. This interpretation has resulted in an increase in the frequency of feasting relative to rubber boom times. The feast, consciously revitalized by João Tuxáua as a device for securing social and cultural prosperity, creates the context for the intergenerational transmission of myths. The large audiences afforded by feasts allow the spreading of common mythic knowledge—and hence consciousness—across social space. The elder-interpreters draw on this common basis to mold a social system they know to have changed and to be, thus, potentially changeable.

While the findings in this paper imply that Marubo society is not a cold society, thus confirming the

findings of Hill et al. (1988) that native South Americans in general have well-developed historical consciousnesses, they do not imply that structuralism as a whole is worthless (7). In contrast to Fabian (1983:52-69), I have taken pains to separate the foundations of structural theory (Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949], 1964) from the concept of the cold society (Lévi-Strauss 1962). The latter concept is a conclusion made by Lévi-Strauss based on his research, and not a main aspect of structuralist theory. The statements made by Lévi-Strauss about constant change in kinship systems (1969[1949]:76-80) and in related mythic systems (1964:16-17) are confirmed, not contradicted, by the Marubo case.

Where structuralism can be faulted is in its notion of ethnographic contextualization. For Lévi-Strauss (1964), this is necessary in order to elucidate the meaning of myths, but what he means by contextualization is to relate myths to synchronic depictions of social orders. The findings in this paper imply that, in order to understand the way meaning is created from myth, ethnographic contextualization must be diachronic and historically contextual. Myth-interpretation should be understood both in the context of ongoing social relations between real individuals, and in the context of the historical framework of those social relations.

By relating formal performances of myth, informal interpretations of myth, and ongoing social processes that, superficially, appear unrelated to myth, I have shown the type of method which, I argue, could more broadly shed light on the structure-event link in native South American societies. This paper builds on the method suggested by Hill: "careful study of the full range of genres that give expression to mythic and historical... consciousness [as a means of studying how] indigenous people have constructed shared interpretive frameworks" (Hill 1988:9). From the application of Hill's methods comes my analysis of oral-historical and mythic performances. However, while oral-historical performances transparently display their implications for present-time social action, mythic performances are opaque in that sense. To fill in these blanks, mythic performances must be related to ongoing events outside of them.

Methodological differences explain the differing conclusions of this paper and of Hill (1987) concerning the role of feasts in linking myth and social organization. Hill argues that the Wakuénai *pudáli*, while it lasts, establishes the social order of the mythic primordium among its participants. However, whereas the Wakuénai *pudáli* recreates the social order of mythic times, the Marubo *tanamea* constantly recreates a historically contingent, post-boom reality. The *pudáli* establishes mythic behavior on the spot, while the Marubo *tanamea* simply serves to establish a common basis of mythic knowledge. Efforts to turn that knowledge into forms of social action take place outside the feast, in a multiplicity of everyday contexts. Thus, ritual is only a part of the process whereby consciousness of past times affects social reproduction. Ritual is essential to that process, but still only a part of it. To better understand the role of ritual in affecting social reality, we must go beyond the analysis of ritual symbolism, studying the way individuals who participate in the rituals draw on that symbolism in everyday contexts outside the ritual.

My use of the categories of myth and oral history to structure this paper should not be taken to indicate that I am unaware of the danger of reifying these. In arguing that the methods in Hill (1988) are useful, I mean that we should continue analyzing indigenous genres of past-times discourse to see how they form part of processes of negotiating shared cultural frameworks, not that myth and oral history are 'real' categories. The categories of myth and oral history, when applied to indigenous societies, should be seen as convenient labels for classification and discussion, and not as descriptions of reality. The reality that is encountered in the field is an indigenous classification system, and it is this system of named past-times discourse genres which should form the basis for subsequent analysis. In my observations of Marubo social life, I noted a variety of discourse genres, many of them previously noted by Montagner (1985:249-250), and I noted the indigenous names for these genres and some statements concerning the purposes of each genre, along with observations of performance and interpretation. I found that expressions of knowledge of the rubber boom resemble our analytic category 'oral history', while expressions of knowledge of the more distant past closely resemble the Western category 'myth'. Yet in another sense, what I call myth is simply a more remote oral history. Thus, while I do think that the distinction has some validity in the Marubo case, this does not mean that we can apply these categories *a priori* to the description of cultural systems. Different cultural contexts should be approached first by seeing what are the indigenous categories, not by bringing in preconceived categories and squeezing the data into them.

The methods suggested in Hill (1988), provided reification of categories is avoided, have significant value for understanding the changes that are taking place in contemporary indigenous Amazonia. In some cases, indigenous Amazonians continue to suffer from instability brought on by land invasions. In other cases, state recognition of land rights has led to conditions that permit steady demographic growth

for the first time in centuries. In either case, change in the social system is occurring. Hill has shown, and this paper confirms, that indigenous Amazonians confront these situations, in part, through their historical consciousness. To understand the way indigenous Amazonians are recreating their social systems in tandem with their improving knowledge of the non-indigenous world, and their interpretations of past relations with that world, continued attention should be paid to genres of past-times narrative and symbolic performance, and to their contribution to social consciousness and reproduction. However, the analysis of these genres should go beyond the actual contexts of performance, by relating these contexts to the political processes that provide the motives for translating past-times knowledge into systems of practical ethics.

## Endnotes

1. In using the term 'myth' to refer to a genre of Marubo past-times discourse, I do not intend to make any judgment as to the accuracy, truthfulness, or rationality of Marubo expressions of knowledge of the past. Basso (1995:61) has argued that the distinction in Hill (1988) between myth and oral history reflects a judgment that history is more accurate and logical while myth is metaphorical. In taking up the term 'myth', I am simply making it clear that the narratives I refer to are comparable to to the phenomena described in Roe (1982) and Lévi-Strauss (1964). Previous scholars (Melatti 1985, 1986) have called these Marubo songs 'myths', and they closely resemble what is known in the literature on indigenous Amazonians as myth. However, I reject any semantic association of 'falsehood' that may be attached to the word 'myth'.

2. Montagner (1985) calls these *seiti* rather than *saiti*. Likewise, I wrote down the Marubo word for 'feasting' as *sai iki* while Montagner (1985:44) writes the same word "*seiqui*". These differences may be due to the fact that Montagner worked on the Itui River while I worked on the Curuçá. Fieldwork among Curuçá Marubo in July-August, 2002, confirmed that the correct pronunciation is *saiti*."

3. This portion of *Nea Rame* was transcribed by a Marubo informant, a man with the equivalent of a seventh grade education. I reproduce it here with his own spelling and the diacritics precisely as he wrote them.

4. The sound which I represent with the letter 'v' is actually a voiced bilabial fricative. To me, this sounds more like a 'v' than like a 'b' because 'v' is a continuant while 'b' is a stop. However, Montagner (1985) represents this sound with the letter 'b'. Hence, she calls the path of the dead souls "*Bei Baĩ*".

5. The Marubo experience is not entirely unique in the Amazon basin. Ellen Basso (1995:17-23) has pointed out that the Kalapalo have undergone a similar transition from violence to peacefulness. Kalapalo oral histories decribe their violent past and commentators discuss the contrast: "In the stories they tell about how their ancestors lived, they reveal that in important ways the distant past is somewhat abhorrent to them... they have freed themselves from activities they see continued by their violent neighbors" (Basso 1995:17). In addition, the Kalapalo moral transition took place as multiple groups, fleeing from violent neighbors, gathered together in a refuge zone, which is exactly the way Marubo society formed. This shows that groups of indigenous Amazonians who have historically engaged in warfare but, for whatever reason (particularly demographic losses and inability to engage in agriculture), have found that warfare to be unprofitable, can undergo fairly radical changes in their ethics concerning violence. This is also a clear indication that no society or culture should be considered 'essentially' or 'inherently' violent. Finally, the analogy with the Kalapalo case indicates that the necessity of coexisting with 'strangers' (however these are culturally defined) to survive may increase the chances that a historical experience of violence will be culturally responded to with a transition to an ethical system that idealizes the absence of violence.

6. The case of the Arawété (Viveiros de Castro 1992) appears similar in that the society allowed numerous deviations from certain kinship rules, including a variety of reclassifications that permitted technically incestuous marriages, in the context of a demographic low and facing the need for rapid population growth to ensure cultural survival.

7. A similar point has recently been made by Peter Gow (2001). Though his logic and his conclusions are different from mine, he also points out that some of the critiques of Lévi-Strauss in Hill (1988) appear oversimplified, and calls for a deeper reading of Lévi-Strauss, particularly the *Mythologiques*. Gow also provides a thoughtful and stimulating critique of Hill (1988). I received his book too late to address his arguments in this essay.

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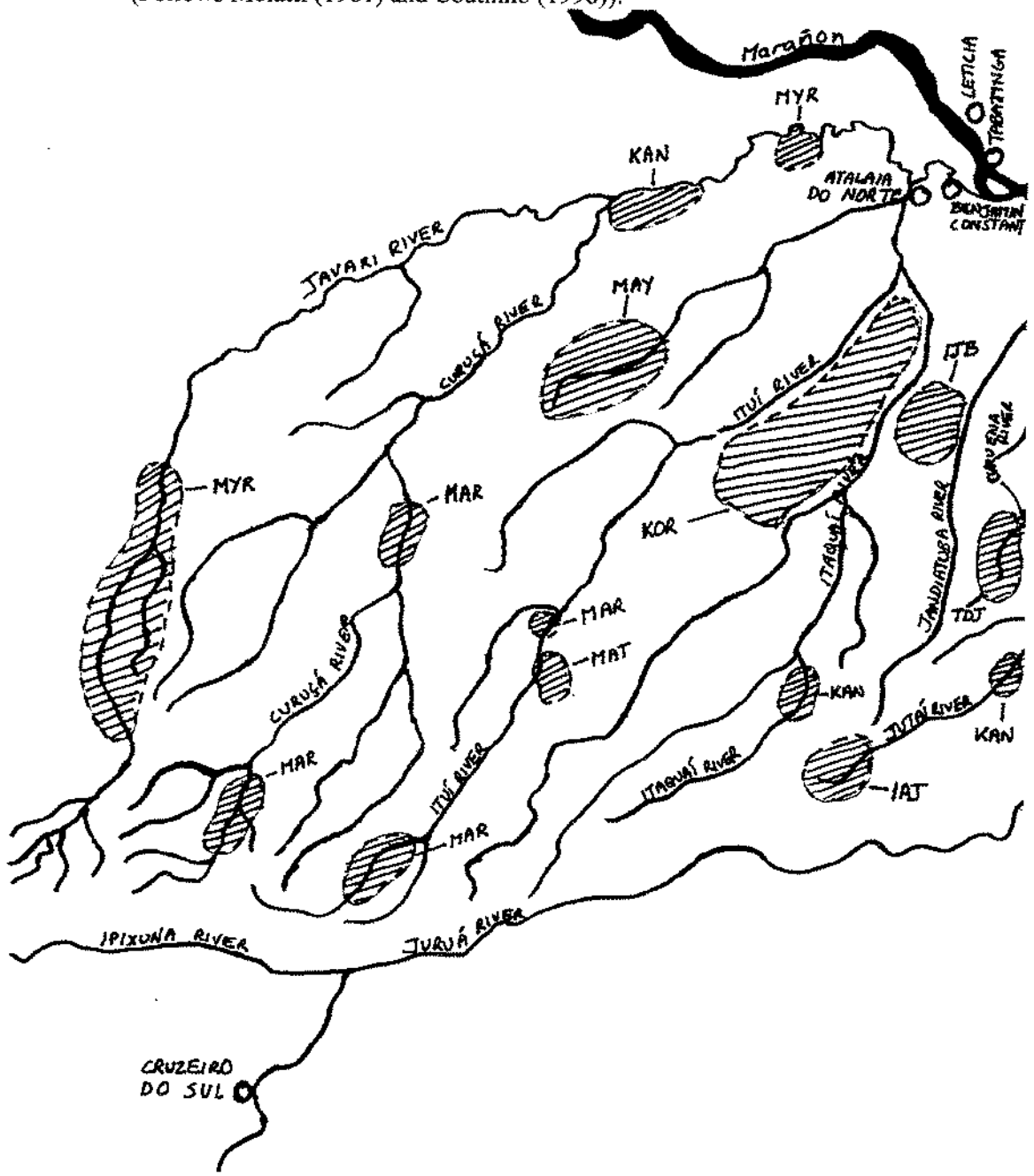
## Biographical Sketch

Javier Ruedas obtained a Ph.D. in anthropology from Tulane University in 2001. He wrote this paper while employed at Tulane. He currently teaches anthropology at the University of New Orleans.

**FIGURE 1**: Indigenous groups of the Javari basin.
(Follows Melatti (1981) and Coutinho (1998)).



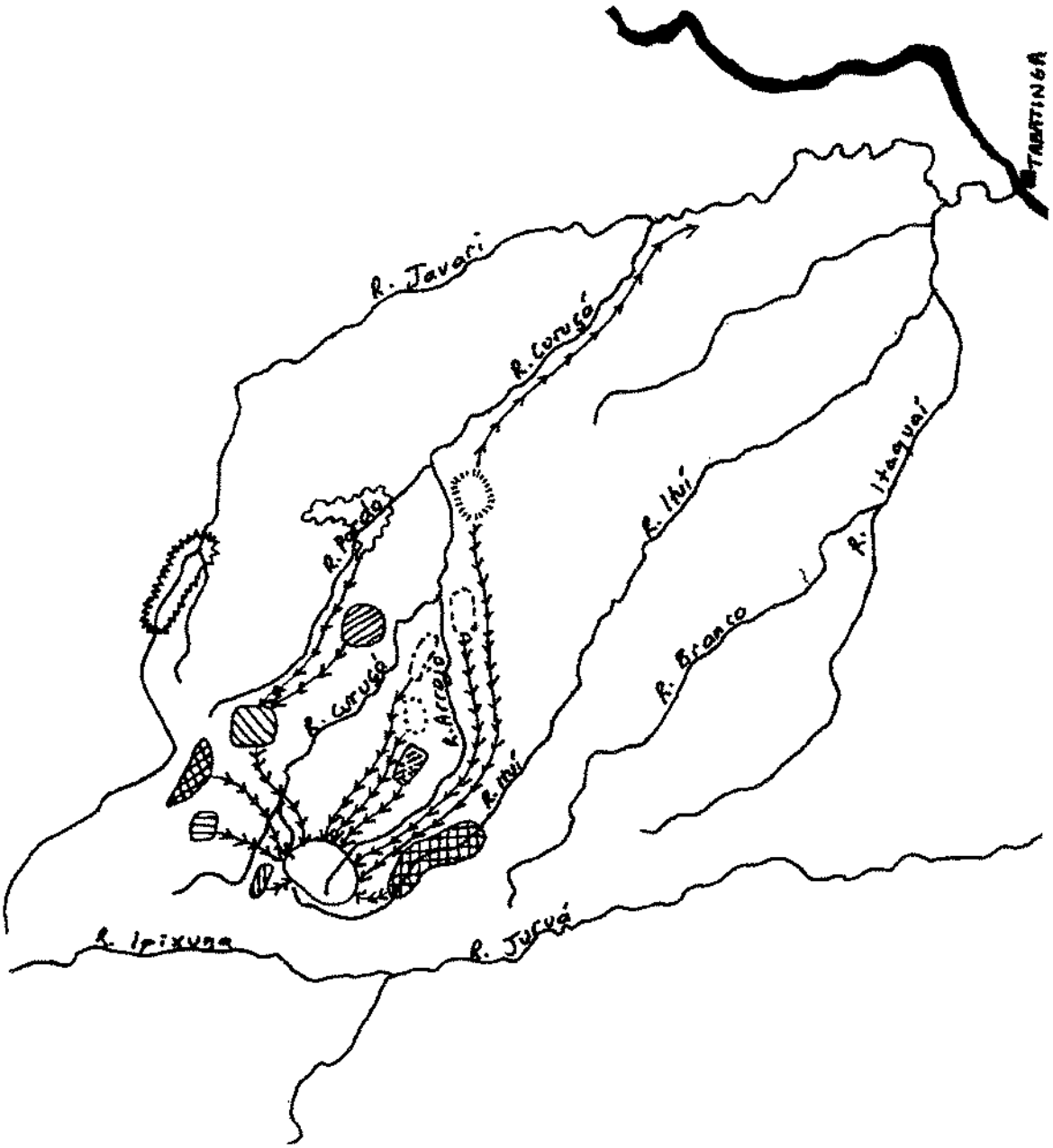

Groups with regularized contact situation

KAN—Kanamari
MAR—Marubo
MAT—Matís
MYR—Mayoruna

Isolated Groups

IAJ—Isolados do alto Jutaí
IJB—Isolados do Jandiatuba
KOR—Korubo
MAY—Maya
TDJ—Tsohom Djapa

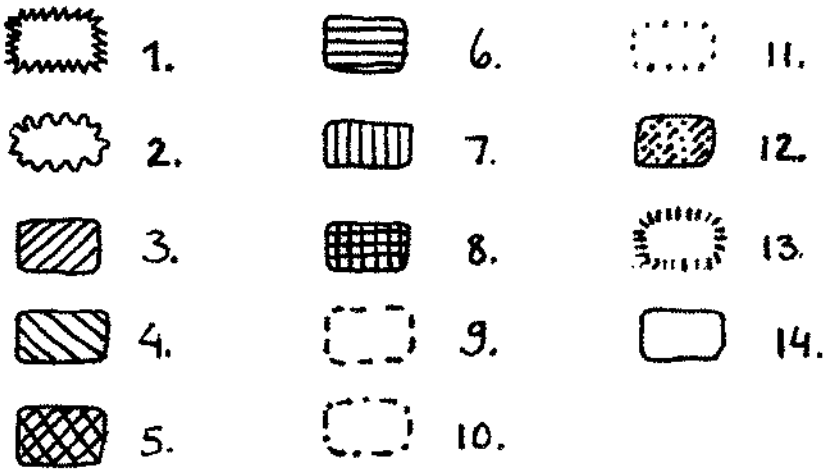
**FIGURE 2:** Movements of Panoan groups during the rubber boom according to Marubo oral history




Locations are approximate, based on descriptions by informants.

Key is on following page.

**FIGURE 3:** Key to figure 2.




1. Inonáwavo/ Wanĩvo/Kananáwavo of the Javari River (extinct).
2. Inonáwavo/ Wanĩvo/Kananáwavo (escaped)—Júlio's people.
3. Kariya—Iskonáwavo, Noĩkoavo, Nináwavo. Tamani Romeya's people.
4. Satanáwavo—Dionísio's people.
5. Nináwavo, Ranenáwavo, Satanáwavo, Rovonáwavo—Ernesto and Domingo's people.
6. João Tuxáua's family.
7. Kapeya (Igarapé Jacaré)—Wanĩvo, Iskonáwavo, Txonavo.
8. Variwaka—Varináwavo, Tamaoavo, Shanenáwavo, Iskonáwavo, Varikayõvo, Wanĩkeyapavo, Atashenivo, Shawãvo.
9. Kanãway—Earlier, Satanáwavo; later, Shawãvo.
10. Txunãwaya—Shawãvo, Nomanáwavo, Ranenáwavo.
11. Mapopotatiya—Nináwavo.
12. Tekõya—Shainawavo, Yenenáwavo (extinct); Rovonáwavo.
13. Shashoya—Shanenáwavo, kidnapped to Palmari.
14. Marubo rubber boom gathering point.

**FIGURE 4:** Geographic expansion of Marubo, 1965-Present.