

Kanaima and the Preacher: Taurepáng Cosmology

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Introduction

Inhabitants since immemorial time of the lands adjacent to Mount Roraima, Pemon and Kapon are not exactly two Indigenous peoples, but two ‘great ethnic groups’ with internal variations. The Pemon live in the lands to the west and southwest of Mount Roraima and are subdivided into Arekuna and Kamarokoto, located in the Caroní river basin, in the Venezuelan savannah, and Taurepáng, who live further south, on the Brazil-Venezuela border (Thomas 1982). The Kapon, on the other hand, live in the mountains to the north and east of Mount Roraima, subdivided into Akawaio, Patamona and Ingarikó (Amaral 2019). Despite employing dialectal variations among themselves, the Pemon and Kapon collectives constitute the largest Caribbean-speakers Indigenous populations living in the Guianas region (Rivière 1984). Its traditional territory of occupation was overlapped by the triple border Brazil-Venezuela-Guiana, an area known as circum-Roraima (Butt Colson 1985). They are related to the Macuxi, with whom they share a very similar cultural complex (Santilli 2001).

A widespread phenomenon in the circum-Roraima area is *kanaima* – *kanaimé*, *kanaimë*, *kanaimî*, *kanaimü* or *kanaimo*. Polyvalent in nature, it is as much a mechanism of accusation between non-relatives as the desire for revenge itself (Carvalho 2016, 15). However, alongside these immaterial qualities, *kanaima* is also the expression of an ‘assault shamanism’ in which the aggressor uses specific sorcery techniques to hunt, mutilate and murder his victims (Whitehead 2001, 238; 2002, 1).

The objective of this chapter is to relate the *kanaima* phenomenon with the Christian experience of the Taurepáng, a Pemon subgroup that has practiced the Seventh-day Adventist religion for decades. If *kanaima* is an evil for which “there is not enough protection” (Butt Colson 2001, 233), Taurepáng preachers, in turn, encourage community unity and transmit the word of God about eternal life to be achieved in paradise after death. While one brings separation, the other hope. In this contrast, aspects of Taurepáng cosmology – and, at the limit, Pemon and Kapon – come into play, such as the way in which the ritual word can transform people.

After a brief presentation of general concepts of the Adventist Taurepáng practice, the analysis turns to a shooting that took place in early 2019 in the community of San Francisco de Yuruaní, henceforth called Kumarakapay, located very close to Mount



Roraima, in Venezuela. This episode caused twenty-nine families to cross the border to the Brazilian side, in search of refuge in the Bananal community. Migration brought a series of challenges to the socio-political organization of Bananal, and the refugees do not intend to return to Kumarakapay. In the neighboring country, they suffer from the misery of years of economic crisis, but their main fear is with *kanaima*, whose cases, they claim, have multiplied in the Venezuelan savannah.

Finally, I discuss the performance of Taurepáng preachers, religious leaders responsible for transmitting words of care and teachings that would lead the faithful to reach paradise in heaven after death. Although the Taurepáng Adventists condemned the activities of the shamans, we will see that the performance of their preachers evokes a background shamanism that underlies the Christian experience of this Indigenous people.

The ritual word

The cults are ceremonial meetings of great importance for the Taurepáng, whose structure is divided into three sections, all permeated by many prayers. The initial part of the cult is called the ‘singing service’, a period of approximately one hour that precedes the preaching. During the singing service, the church gradually fills up with the arrival of the faithful, who add voice to the collective communion choir. The next section is the actual preaching, which lasts between half an hour and 45 minutes. Finally, the shortest section takes place after the preacher has left the pulpit. In it, the congregation sings a few more hymns and, before the end of the meeting, if there is any community report, it is at that moment that it is passed on. Thus, in addition to being a religious meeting, cults are also a privileged moment for transmitting relevant news about the community.

The religious hymns that Taurepáng sing so vigorously are provided by the Associação Amazonas-Roraima (AAMAR), the institutional arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brazil, which is active in the Brazilian Amazon in particular.¹ For material support, AAMAR keeps 40 % of the value of the tithe collected in the Bananal church, deposited every month by the community treasurer in a bank in the city of Pacaraima. The remainder is for church expenses, such as repairs, renovations and painting.

In addition to the hymns, AAMAR provides handouts on religious teaching, lessons that in theory the Taurepáng should study during the week, and the ‘sermonary’ book, for the exclusive use of preachers, as it contains the theme of the sermons for the semester. It is a homogeneous material, printed in Portuguese and distributed by AAMAR to Adventist churches throughout the states of Amazonas and Roraima, regardless of whether they are located in urban, rural or Indigenous communities. The particularity of the Taurepáng resides in their sociocultural specificities. It is an Indigenous people who practice the Adventist religion in their own way, transforming it in this process in order to give meaning to the Christian experience they live.

1 <https://amar.adventistas.org/> (10.01.2024).

In summary, what is conventionally called Indigenous Christianity are religious expressions that combine elements of the Christian tradition, whether Catholic or Protestant, with the sociocultural specificities of the catechized Indigenous peoples. A field that reflects, in turn, the polyvalence of the set of Christian signs and symbols transmitted by the missionaries (Hefner 1993; Montero 2006; Robbins 2011; Robbins, Schieffelin and Vilaça 2014).

These forms of Christianity are associated with the incorporation of Christian liturgy into Indigenous traditions and practices, that is, their cosmogonies, cosmologies, anthropologies, and eschatologies (Wright 1999; 2004). For example, the interpretation of the Bible from the cultural perspective of the catechized peoples, the holding of Christian services in an Indigenous language and the use of traditional dances and songs in Christian festivities. There are also cases of inclusion of angels and Catholic saints in the portfolio of spirits that help shamans in healing sessions (Vilaça and Wright 2009, 89; Capredon, Cernadas, and Opas 2023, 1).

As for the Taurepáng of Bananal, they consider themselves to be *apurandin*, which I translate as ‘believers’, because *apurandin* is those who have *apurantok*, ‘faith’, that is, those who believe and trust in the Bible and the ‘word of God’: *poturiito maimü*. Practitioners of the Seventh-day Adventist religion for decades (Andrello 1993, 33), in Bananal they do not allow the consumption of alcoholic drinks or the meat of animals prescribed as ‘unclean’ by Adventist doctrine, such as peccary or fish with scales. The Taurepáng also do not have shamans, called *piasán* in their language, since tobacco consumption and shamanic healing sessions are practices condemned by Adventist doctrine. On the other hand, on Saturdays they never work in the farm and don’t even turn on the television at home. It is a day reserved exclusively for the worship of God, *poturiito*, understood by these Indigenous peoples as the creator of human beings. It is to *poturiito* that they pray for protection and care, for this reason they also call him *paapay*, ‘our father.’

In addition to the Saturday cult, known as the Adoration Cult, the main ceremonial meeting of the Taurepáng, the Bananal community’s schedule is guided by the holding of at least three other weekly cults. On Sunday, the Evangelism Cult, with a preaching aimed especially at brothers and sisters who are away from the church. On Wednesday, the Prayer Cult, where the faithful ask the congregation to pray for the rehabilitation of the health of a sick person, in particular, or for the resolution of more general problems, such as “the hunger that affects our relatives in Venezuela.” On Friday, the ‘advent’ of Saturday is celebrated by the Sunset Cult – for Adventists, the transition from one day to the next occurs at 6 pm.

There are 17 preachers in Bananal: ten men and seven women. Both are *ekamanin*, a term composed of the root *ekama*, ‘to tell’ or ‘to say’ (derived from *ekare*, ‘news’, ‘message’), plus the suffix *-nin*, which indicates the subject of the act. Whether male or female, *ekamanin* is ‘the one who tells the message’, but not just any message. For all intents and purposes, they are the emissaries of the ‘word of God’, *poturiito maimü*, to the members of the congregation, and the *chochi*, the church, is the ritual house where the religious meeting takes place.

Without deviating from the pre-established theme of the AAMAR book, at the moment each *ekamanin* prostrates himself on the pulpit, he preaches in his own way. In general, the sermons are delivered in the Taurepáng language, but it is not uncommon that words in Portuguese or Spanish are used by the preacher at the time to transmit the message. Mixing languages is fluid; it's not a hindrance.

There are basically two types of preachers. Some literally read the printed sermon line by line in Portuguese and translate them into Taurepáng as they go along. The cult gets tiring, the congregation is not enthusiastic. Others, endowed with greater oratorical eloquence, synthesize the main message of the sermon and transmit it in a powerful way. The light and dynamic style of these preachers contrasts with that of mechanical, rigid reading, eventually without even lifting one's head from the paper.

Preaching lightly is a skill that requires 'knowing by heart' *poturüto maimü*. The Taurepáng say that the firmer the word of God is in the heart of the *ekamanin*, greater is the fluidity with which the message will be transmitted, so that the words come out of his mouth without effort. But for that to happen, the preacher needs to be a 'living example' of what he is talking about. There is no point in preaching about a certain subject and, in his private life, acting in the opposite way. If that happens, the preacher becomes the target of criticism, declining in prestige. Influential preachers, in turn, are often invited to preach in neighboring communities, always well received by the hosts.

A good *ekamanin* must be the embodiment of the 'transforming power of God', something the Taurepáng call *merundan* in their language and 'Espírito Santo' in Portuguese. Without *merundan's* action, they say that the *ekamanin* can fall into incoherence or something worse: reading the pages of the Bible and do not understand God's message. Furthermore, if the action of *merundan* does not act in the environment of *chochi*, the faithful listen to the preaching but the word of God does not penetrate their hearts, failing to transform the person.

If the person is not transformed by the message given by the preacher, he will continue on the 'broad path' of perdition, that is, he will continue to be *makoyí-pe*, 'sinner.' It is important to note that if the Taurepáng call God *poturüto* or *paapay*, Satan is called *makoy*, understood as 'the chief of demons', 'the great enemy' of God and human beings. Thus, when classifying sinners as *makoyí-pe*, the Taurepáng are saying that these people 'carry *makoy*' with them, that is, they carry Satan in their body. That is why they live on the 'broad road' of perdition, sinning by consuming tobacco, alcoholic drinks, the meat of 'unclean' animals or by not keeping the Sabbath.

In cults, preachers are always transmitting messages that preach collective well-being and unity. Let's see an excerpt from a sermon given by the preacher Claudia, recorded on a Wednesday night, at the Prayer Service. Shortly before the end of the singing service, the church already considerably full, Claudia positioned herself on the pulpit and waited for us to close the praise. She organized her papers, waited for everyone to be seated, opened her Bible and began:

1. *Söröwarö inna senupantokoman* nossas contabilidades para com os outros
(Today we are going to study the subject of our accounts towards others)
2. *Mörö pok senupantokompe oração kupainmokon*
(But first let's pray)
3. Querido Jesus gracias *taurönöman merundan tawörö inna entendematopennöra aprende-
mapenöra cumprimatope*
(Dear Jesus, we thank you and ask for the strength of the Holy Spirit so that we can understand, fulfill and practice it)
4. *Auyepö Cristo ponarö inna komekatope kamapöra. Jesus yese dau, amém*
(Until Christ comes, we must proclaim Your coming. In Jesus' name, amen)
5. *Apukatök mörö poturüto maimü dau* Tiago 5:16
(Let's open the Bible to Tiago 5:16)
6. *Sé'dö taurepö nawa: orai uns pelos outros para ser curado, muito poder e eficácia a súplica
do justo. Taurepöman sé'dö poturüto maimü.*
(Here it says: pray for each other to be healed, much power and effectiveness to the supplication of the righteous. It says here in the bible)
7. Quem são algumas pessoas especiais por quem devemos orar?
(Who are some special people we should pray for?)
8. *Anök kin maimonan especial-pe tok nainnök ök pök tok ponak inna purumatokchi*
(Special people are relatives, friends and neighbors. We should pray for them)
9. *Atönoö kin mörö epürümantok anak dan ponak* parentes e amigos *taureröman sé'dö
etrawasoma tok chi* trabalhar para *poturüto*
(Relatives and friends who want to work for God must start in their own family, in the neighborhood, among friends)
10. *Tapöman sé'dö* nem trabalhar para pastor nem *yuurö yuwanope* para ancião *yuwanope*
para Deus
(It is saying here that we must work for God. The work is for God, not for the elder or for the pastor)

There are many considerations that can be drawn from this sermon. Note, for example, the fluidity with which words in Portuguese, Spanish and Taurepáng are mixed, demonstrating that switching languages does not interfere with the transmission of the ceremonial message, something quite different from the Mapuche case (Course 2018). Or, in line 3, the invocation of *merundan* at the beginning of the preacher's speech, so that the 'transforming power of God' is present in the environment of the *chochi*. It is as if the preacher were invoking the presence of God from a specific ritual name, aiming to produce certain transforming effects during the cult. This aspect would resemble Claudia's speech to the *modus operandi* of tarén magic formulas, the 'enchanted word' that the Pemon and Kapon utter to directly influence people's lives (Armellada 1972, 23; Santilli 1994, 295).

However, due to constraints of space, suffice it to say that although the theme of the sermon is pre-formatted by the AAMAR book, it adjusted perfectly to the reality of Bananal. In early 2019, more than a hundred Taurepáng emigrated from the community of Kumarakapay, located in Venezuela, to Bananal, which made the local population jump from 300 to just over 420 residents. The migration took everyone in Bananal by surprise. When the 29 families arrived, there was not even a place to shelter them, nor food to appease their hunger. After months of living in makeshift sheds, the Taurepáng from Kumarakapay were finally able to build their own homes with wooden boards and tarpaulins provided by UNHCR (UN refugee agency) and ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency). Their permanence in Bananal, however, still depends substantially on the support provided by these institutions, especially food.

As it is located at the foot of the Pacaraima mountain range, there are not good areas available in the Bananal for all the newcomers to cultivate. And even if there were, felling and burning the forest, plowing and planting the land is a time-consuming process. Hunger, on the other hand, does not wait. Therefore, although on a different scale than what happens in the Taurepáng communities in Venezuela, devastated by consecutive years of economic crisis, hunger also began to be present in the Bananal. At first, the refugees were completely dependent on the meals provided by the hosts. As the months went by, given the limited availability of food for everyone, some began to accuse the hosts of being stingy, saying that they didn't want to share all the food they had. Simultaneously, cases of theft began to occur, whether of chickens, tools, clothes or money. These are unprecedented challenges for the socio-political organization of Bananal, which until then had not had problems of this nature, at least not in the frequency with which they arose.

It is significant that the interlocutors stated that something similar happened in Kumarakapay. It is said that the tension and internal rivalry reached such intensity in that community that its residents were divided into two groups: one in favor and the other against the government of Nicolás Maduro. In the midst of consecutive years of crisis and increasing poverty, those in favor of the government said that the suffering was temporary, that things would soon get better. Opponents argued that the crisis will only get worse as long as Maduro remains in power.

On February 22, 2019, faced with the prospect of delivering 'humanitarian aid' to the Venezuelan people,² a battalion of the Bolivarian National Guard (BNG) was deployed to close the border with Brazil. The shipment was scheduled to arrive in Venezuela via Pacaraima, a Brazilian city located on the border and only 25 kilometers away from the Bananal community. But before reaching the border, the BNG military found the access route to Brazil, a road that crosses the community of Kumarakapay, blocked by the Taurepáng opposed to the Maduro government, favorable to the delivery of the shipment.

2 Controversial operation led by the United States in conjunction with Colombia, Brazil and the Netherlands. See: <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2019/02/21/entenda-como-a-ajuda-humanitaria-oferecida-a-venezuela-ficou-no-centro-da-disputa-politica-no-pais.ghtml> (10.01.2024).

According to people who were there and now live in Bananal, a vehicle approached and told the demonstrators to clear the road. There was no agreement, the riot police came. In the ensuing clash, three Taurepáng were killed and at least twenty were wounded. In Bananal there are five refugees from Kumarakapay who still carry shrapnel from the bullets fired by the BNG. After the Kumarakapay shooting, I didn't meet any immigrants who expressed a desire to return to live in that community.

Therefore, in view of the new reality that has been established in Bananal, Claudia's preaching sought to encourage a certain care for the so-called "special" people, notoriously "relatives, friends and neighbors" (lines 7 and 8). As a religious leader, the message she conveyed within the *chochi*, the ritual house, was intended to articulate aspects of morality, kinship and alliance in order to encourage community unity. It was a 'counseling' (Gibram 2020, 48) that aimed to combat the growing state of animosity and tension that gradually settled in the community in recent years.

After the arrival of the Taurepáng from Kumarakapay, the population of Bananal seems to have been divided into two groups: the *patamona*, that is, the 'old residents', and the *yepesakon*, the 'refugees' or 'immigrants.' Even if implicit, the division also marks a distinction between those who 'have something' (good farms, jobs, belongings, food) and those who 'have very little or almost nothing.' Members of the first group accuse those of the second of being people more prone to envy, since most *yepesakon* arrived at Bananal only with the clothes on their backs. That's why they would covet what the *patamona* possess.

Claudia is aware of the dangers that such an internal division can entail. In fact, in addition to *ekamanin*, another term that the Taurepáng use to refer to preachers is *mannapatan*, which means 'watchman', 'sentinel.' Claudia knows that a state of tension and animosity between neighbors is dangerous, as it carries with it the potential for the outbreak of the *kanaima* phenomenon.

It is important to point out that in addition to a specific technique of murder sorcery, an 'assault shamanism' (Whitehead 2000; 2002), *kanaima* also covers the immateriality of the feeling of envy and the desire for revenge for an offense suffered, related even to the lack of correspondence in normative reciprocity (Carvalho 2016; Whitaker 2021). Because it is considered a becoming, "um risco ao qual todos os indivíduos estão sujeitos" (Sztutman 2005, 189),³ the *kanaima* is able to emerge within the community bringing fear, terror and death (Janik 2018). Apparently, a united community, whose residents are concerned with each other, with the collective well-being, would neutralize the appearance of this evil. However, this does not prevent *kanaima* from coming from outside the community.

Almost four years after the migration of the Taurepáng from Kumarakapay, some matrimonial arrangements united the newcomers with members of the Bananal's main families, which seems to have mitigated part of the community's internal conflicts.

3 "A risk to which all individuals are subject."

However, for the *yepesakon* who were not married in their new place of residence, a return to Kumarakapay is not in the plans. In Venezuela they fear inflation and lack of perspective, but their main concern is the fear of *kanaima*.

Although Kumarakapay is also an Adventist community, even older than Bananal, there the *yepesakon* say that *makoy* (Satan or evil) “has taken over”, because people no longer want to share what they have and “only care about with what is yours.” Still according to the refugees, in recent years cases of *kanaima* have multiplied in the Taupéang communities located in Venezuela, in direct proportion to the worsening of the crisis. Fearing for their lives, a Kumarakapay return would make the job easier for those who wish them harm. At Bananal they say that this does not happen, it is a community of ‘real brothers.’

Terror

It was night. The children were asleep and the last lights were about to go out. After a hard day at work, João felt his body tired. His legs ached, but the worst was his back. Carrying thirty kilos of cassava for almost four kilometers was no easy task. At least he felt satisfied. Despite the fact that the farm was not his and little experience in farming, working for others was better than no work at all. Bananal’s relatives took him in and now his family had enough to eat. In Venezuela, this had long been an uncertainty.

Before going to bed, he noticed that the dog was looking intently at the dark woods. The animal began to growl at something that did not reveal itself. All it took was the snap of a branch for the dog to bark ferociously. João immediately ran into the house and grabbed the machete. The children woke up, the mother tried to calm them down. When the neighbors came out to see what was going on, he shouted: “There’s a *rabudo* over there!” Armed with a machete and a shotgun, the group of men ran into the woods. But it was too late, the *kanaima* disappeared without a trace.

On the Brazilian side of the border, the *kanaima* is often called *rabudo*,⁴ but this is not an approximation to the popular figure of the devil. According to Farage, the term *rabudo* spread among the Indigenous peoples of the Roraima fields in reference to the peoples of the mountains. Due to their later contact with the whites, for a long time the people of the mountains continued to use a long, red-dyed cloth wrapped around the pelvic region, the ends of which hung over the buttocks, similar to a tail (Farage 1997, 109 en Amaral 2019, 319).

Despite the fact that the garb has fallen into disuse, even today the people of the mountains are considered by those of the fields as excellent sorcerers. In fact, *kanaima* is a blaming mechanism. Koch-Grünberg (1979-1982 vol. I, 187) wrote that a single person, an entire village or “an entire tribe” can be accused of *kanaima*. Therefore, from the point of view of the Indigenous people of the fields, who had been in contact with the whites for a longer time, the *rabudos* of the mountains were all *kanaima*. Another possible explanation

4 Person with tail.

for the term *rabudo* has to do with the *kanaima*'s ability to transform into animals with a tail, such as a dog, jaguar or anteater (Thomas 1982, 123). The transformation takes place through the magic of the *tarén* (Lewy 2017, 17), but it is not without dangers. If attacked or killed in animal form, the sorcerer directly suffers the damage received.

For Whitehead (2001, 238), who worked with a Kapon subgroup called Patamona, inhabitants of the Guyana mountains, it is impossible to determine the temporal origin of the *kanaima*, as its presence dates back to at least two hundred years in colonial sources. Despite the difficulty and even the fruitless exercise of insisting on the question, let's see three different versions that complement each other about the emergence of the first *kanaima*.

Muxumuxu is a Wapishana who moved from Guyana to Brazil after having two sons killed by *kanaima*. He tells us that the ancient Patamona (neighbours of the Wapishana) used plants of power to hunt deer and wild pigs. After the hunt, in a dream, the plant visited the hunter and asked for portions of the blood of the slaughtered animal as food. Due to their success, their use became frequent and the Patamona no longer hunted without them. However, endowed with a will of their own, the plants of power gradually began to demand human blood. For Muxumuxu, the firsts *kanaima* appeared when the ancient Patamona stopped using plants of power to hunt animals and started to hunt other people, to offer their blood to the plants that guaranteed them success in the hunt (Machado and Pereira 2020, 12-13).

Muxumuxu's sons were murdered out of envy, as the abundance of their farms bothered other people. As mentioned, the feeling of envy between neighbors is the leitmotiv for the emergence of *kanaima* within the community, which leads us to the other two versions. The following story was told to me by a Taurepáng who lives in Venezuela, but who at the time was visiting his relatives in Bananal.

In the old days, said the interlocutor, there was an abundant fishing river. One family lived above and the other below the watercourse. On one occasion the fishes began to become scarce. To avoid problems, local chiefs decided to establish a large *samaúma* (*Ceiba pentandra*) as a motto: from the tree upwards one family would fish, from the tree downwards another. But those who lived downstream understood that the best fishes were caught upstream. Then, in the dark of night, they fished upstream. Discovered and warned, successive animosities were created between the two families, until one person was killed. From that case, a cycle of revenge erupted between the two families, one trying to repay the other for the damage received.

Lastly, according to a Taurepáng preacher, my privileged interlocutor to discuss the matter in question, *kanaima* does not just happen in "indigenous culture." It is present "all over the world" because it is part of "the nature of the human being." He explained that "wherever there are people, there will be *kanaima*." His understanding is based on the Bible, in the passage where Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4: 8-10), murder provoked by envy that one brother felt of the other for his relationship with God. For the *ekamanin*, *poturüto maimü*, the Bible, 'does not lie', and this would be the first known case of *kanaima* in history.

The three versions bring us some lessons. In all the feeling of envy is present. In the Indigenous world, the feeling of envy is driven by miserliness, selfishness. In the face of avarice, the *kanaima* is the countermeasure that brings death. But it is only in the story of Muxumuxu that the use of plants of power is mentioned, a technique therefore specific. Let's move forward on this issue.

In general, it is common in the Brazilian Amazon to associate certain plants with the ability to cure or ward off harm. They are considered as plants of plants, popularly called *pussanga*. For the Taurepáng, *pussangas* are classified into two types: *muran* and *kumi*. Although they are not discriminated against, the ownership and use of these plants is secret. There are basically three ways to obtain them: i) find the plant while wandering through the forest; ii) it 'simply born' in a person's farm, as I was told; iii) by exchange. Despite being an extremely valuable item for the Indigenous people, plants of power are never sold, because they die if sold (Farage 1997, 74-79).

The power of *muran* is in the leaf of the vegetable, that of *kumi* in the tuber. Its use can help practically all daily activities, such as working vigorously in the farms, walking long distances without getting tired, attracting game animals, fish or seducing a spouse. For this purpose, sexual and dietary protections are necessary, as well as rubbing the plant in scarifications carried out on specific parts of the body, such as knees, chest, wrists or temples (Monticelli 2020, 54-55).

There are *muran* for each of the main animals hunted in the forest and in the fields. Upon its use, the hunter must kill only the animal that the plant attracts. If he kills another type, he runs the risk of becoming *panema*, that is, unlucky in hunting, as well as subject to the plant's revenge. As said by Muxumuxu, plants of power demand the blood of the slaughtered animal, food that nourishes them. If there is no blood donation, the Taurepáng say that the *muran* warms the hunter's body, causing fever and generalized boils. On this subject, Farage wrote that if *wapananinao*, the plants of power used by the Wapishana, taste blood, they will always want it. If they run out of hunting blood, they will seek to satiate their will with human blood, even attacking those who care for them (Farage 1997, 86). For the Wapishana, southern neighbors of the Taurepáng, without the donation of blood the hunter becomes prey.

In the history of Muxumuxu, the appearance of the first *kanaima* is the result of the counterpart of the plant. The desire to kill people did not come from the ancient Patamona, it was the plant's desire for human blood. When discussing this issue among the Pemon in Venezuela, Levy comments that if the *kanaima* does not satiate the bloodlust of its plants of power, he could end up being killed by them. Thus, the performance of the *kanaima* would be more like that of a "slave" who lives to support the vice of plants (Levy 2003, 2, note 2). In this logic, there would be no 'ex-*kanaima*', as the man-plant relationship only ends with the death of the sorcerer. Then the plant is reborn in another location, looking for a new slave.

With regard to the *kanaima* attack, the Taurepáng say that it only occurs when the victim is alone, either working in the farm, in transit between the farm and the community or close to home. It can also occur when the person goes to the bathroom at night, which is why many

go with a relative. Being in the company of another person is a condition that practically nullifies the possibility of a *kanaima* attack, as it reduces the chance of success of the aggression and the killer can have his identity witnessed. If the *kanaima* attack is successful, the victim has several purple bruises across the joints of the body and mutilated tongue and anus.

Death, however, is not immediate. The victim is unconscious the entire time while his body is mutilated. Upon waking up, feels an indescribable malaise and cannot remember what happened. The Taurepáng say that a person attacked by *kanaima* will only be able to talk about what happened if they are served ‘pestle tea.’ For this purpose, the pestle and grain pillar stopper are washed, the water is strained and given to the victim to drink. The ‘pestle tea’ makes the person talk, but does not prevent your imminent death. Not even the most skilled shamans can reverse the damage caused by a successful *kanaima* attack. Although the victim breathes and speaks, there is nothing else that can be done. The relatives of a person attacked by this shamanic assault technique (Butt Colson 2000; Whitehead 2000; 2002) are left with only the possibility of revenge. But as the Taurepáng do Bananal are all Adventists, revenge is not encouraged by the preachers, who work so that blood is not paid for with more blood.

In the time between the attack and death, the victim agonizes in a feverish state, unable to eat and suffering from intense diarrhea. The victim does not eat because his tongue was perforated and the diarrhea does not stop because there is a *pussanga* in his intestines poisoning his body from the inside. The Taurepáng say that this *pussanga* gives off a sweet and sour odor, similar to that of a rotten pineapple. At the same time that this odor configures an aggression that is impossible to reverse, it indicates that there is a possibility that the victim’s grave will be visited by the killer. In this way, the relatives of a person killed through this shamanic technique of murder watch over the grave of the murdered relative for about three days after the burial, on the lookout in case the killer appears.

According to the interlocutors, the *kanaima* visit the victim’s grave to taste the ‘dead man’s *caxiri*’, that is, the ‘dead man’s beer.’ It is for this reason that the killer waits three days to go to the grave, that’s the time it takes for the *caxiri* to ferment. They say that the accession of the *kanaima* to the defunct is not done in human form, as this would facilitate their identification. It usually occurs in the form of a dog. Dogs that carry the *kanaima* spirit have red eyes and typically angry behavior, called by the Taurepáng *awoinürüpö*, ‘evil spirit.’ It is interesting to note that Armellada and Salazar (1981, 26) translate *awoineripue* as “a fantastic being with nocturnal habits, which feeds on corpses.”

Another point to highlight is that regardless of the context, the *kanaima*’s action is never seen as ‘legitimate’, and whoever kills one of these sorcerers does not suffer reprisals from the community. As I once heard, killing *kanaima* is a ‘good deed’, as the world becomes ‘less worse.’ In this sense, in July 2017, a man was stabbed to death while drinking in a bar in the municipality of Alto Alegre, Roraima. The reason for the crime was to have been recognized as a *kanaima*. Two years earlier, in 2015, a trial held in the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Land, also in Roraima, cleared two Indigenous people involved in the death of another *kanaima* (Folha Web 2017).

Revenge, however, is not unilateral, after all *kanaima* also have relatives who sooner or later may want to reciprocate the aggression. From then on, as described in the story of fishing on the great river, a blood feud unites the two families: on the one hand, the relatives of the murdered *kanaima*, on the other the relatives of the *kanaima* victim.

The increase in revenge cycles of this type has worried the leaders of the Taurepáng communities located in the Venezuelan savannah. In Maurak, a large Adventist community located very close to the Brazilian border, a special meeting brought together local leaders concerned about the growth of blood feuds caused by accusations of *kanaima*. To deal with the problem, local leaders adapted an old maize and bean warehouse, which was deactivated in Maurak, to function as a prison. Although it is used to imprison offenders of various types of crimes, the old warehouse is also serving to imprison people accused of *kanaima*. Through this measure, Indigenous leaders intended to control the customary murder of these sorcerers, in an attempt to reduce the cycles of revenge that have occurred in the Venezuelan savannah.

The measure did not have the desired effect. Rather than reducing conflicts, imprisoning *kanaima* accused exacerbated animosities. In Venezuela, political leaders are called *capitanas*, and in the context of the arrest for *kanaima* in Maurak, the *capitana* of that community began to suffer threats. They come both from the relatives of the victims of *kanaima*, who prefer the sorcerer's death to his imprisonment, and from the relatives of the arrested person, who allege his innocence. The situation is complicated, since, it is worth remembering, *kanaima* is also a mechanism for distinguishing between kin and non-kin, not being necessarily linked to the use of *muran* or *kumi* to hunt human beings.

If the imprisonment in Maurak did not attenuate the cycles of revenge, it revealed the existence of a network of killers. As the accused *kanaima* are detained, 'awaiting trial', some reported having been instructed to commit the crimes at the behest of others. That they did so aiming at a prearranged reward, payment usually made with gold, money or industrialized food, so that the killer and his family have something to eat.

Therefore, in addition to the 'common cases of *kanaima*' conveyed by the literature, sorcerer-murderers who act out of 'pure evil' (Butt Colson 2000, page?; Whitehead 2000, page?; Carvalho 2016, page?), the worsening crisis in Venezuela seems to have made *kanaima* a 'hired killer.' According to the Taurepáng of Bananal, both old and new residents, the consecutive years of the Venezuelan crisis have transformed the *kanaima* into a mercenary who acts for pay. Amidst a scenario of scarcity of basic products, unemployment, inflation and lack of food, the motivation of these killers would rest on providing a momentarily better material condition for themselves and their families. After all, as I heard several times, "*kanaima* are people too."

Another important consideration made by the interlocutors is about the proliferation of mining camps in the Venezuelan savannah. They have multiplied around the Taurepáng communities and this would be another factor of great relevance for the increase in cases of *kanaima* in that region. Since there are local leaders who are against mineral exploration – aware of the problems arising from this activity in the vicinity of communities, such as

deaths from being buried, an increase in cases of drunkenness, prostitution and violence in the vicinity of mining fields – there is, on the other hand, people interested in eliminating these leaders in order to establish mining. By resisting, such leaders end up becoming a preferred target for *kanaima* whose payment, as a rule, is made with gold taken from the mining fields themselves. Mining in this case implies death, and death encourages mining.

With the worsening of the crisis in Venezuela, the shortage of basic products and currency devaluation, mining remained as one of the few subsistence options for the Indigenous people. Behind these manual workers are the buyers, generally non-Indigenous people who encourage the Indigenous people to persevere in mining. And if there is a network of killers, the interlocutors point out that it is because there are those who teach. As they point out, “nobody learns to be *kanaima* alone”, “it takes a master.”

Refugees in Bananal claim that there are *kanaima* masters teaching young people and adults in Venezuela, which would constitute an alternative income for those destitute due to the misery of not having anything to eat. But this is a trap, they warn, because afterwards the apprentice cannot simply stop being a *kanaima*. This is because there would be no ‘*ex-kanaima*’, and if the person stops feeding his plants of power with human blood, the sorcery himself becomes the prey.

According to the *yepesakon*, one of the main *kanaima* masters in the Venezuelan savannah lives near Kumarakapay. The interlocutors even say that the *capitana* of Kumarakapay has not been murdered yet because he is a friend of that *kanaima* master. By all indications, a person cannot become the target of *kanaima* if his death is not authorized by another more experienced *kanaima*.

Thus, even before the confrontation with the Bolivarian National Guard in early 2019, tempers among the residents of Kumarakapay were quite heated. In addition, the knowledge that there is a *kanaima* master living in the vicinity of the community, who has been teaching young people and adults in assault shamanism, has turned local tensions into explicit accusations of *kanaima*. So, if the *kanaima* phenomenon is able to emerge within the community precisely from the feeling of anger and revenge for an offense committed, it was an explosive combination. This is the main reason why refugees do not want to return to Kumarakapay. They fear that their lives are in the sights of desperate people, who, in the midst of consecutive years of crisis, would spare no effort to harm them. An environment, therefore, ‘dominated by *makoy*’, that is, by evil, Satan, in which unity and collective well-being are far from being achieved.

Light

Preachers convey messages of care, which encourage unity and collective well-being. Before the influence of the Associação Amazonas-Roraima material in Bananal, the Bible was the only instrument used by the *ekamanin* to preach. Nowadays, along with the Bible, they also use the AAMAR ‘sermonary’ book.

In both cases there are fixed words on paper and written in a language other than Taurepáng, that is, Portuguese. At the moment of ritual speech within the *chochi*, the

ekamanin translates the content of the paper into the Taurepáng language. But translation is not always efficient, as members of the congregation may not clearly understand the content of the transmitted message. After the cult, there were cases when I asked the interlocutors about what the preacher had said, so they answered me “I didn’t understand anything”, that *ekamanin* “speaks confusedly.” That is, in cults, there is apparently the possibility that God’s message is not transmitted with the intended effectiveness. Thus, the transposition from printed Portuguese to oral Taurepáng, which takes place in sermons, can vary significantly.

The performance of the *ekamanin*, therefore, is close to what Carneiro da Cunha (1998) wrote about shamanism in the Amazon. For the author, one of the main attributions of the shaman is precisely the ability to translate, but not the mere transposition of meanings from one language to another. Rather, it is a rearrangement of relationships that creates new connections and produces new meanings.⁵ Since shamanism is understood as a “communication and mediation system”, Sztutman (2005, 153) described shamanic action as “a translation activity that can be transposed from the supernatural to the socio-political level.”

So, Taurepáng cosmology is strongly influenced by the Adventist religion, in which the themes of the end of the world and the second return of Jesus Christ are systematically reiterated. Let us return to Claudia’s sermon, which in line 4 in prayer says “*auyepö* Cristo *ponarö inna komekatope kamapöra*. Jesus *yese dau*, amen” (Until Christ comes, we must proclaim Your coming. In the name of Jesus, amen). Faced with the impacts of the Venezuelan crisis, the misery that affects relatives on the other side of the border and the migration of residents from Kumarakapay to Bananal – which brought several implications for community life –, the work of the *ekamanin* consists of translating the messages of the Bible and the AAMAR sermon in an attempt to assign meaning to the broader events in which they are inserted. They are religious leaders who “builds worlds” (Overing 1994, 101-102), establishing connections and rearranging relationships that multiply, give meaning and enrich the understanding of the faithful about the imminent end of the world and the consequent return of Jesus Christ to Earth, whose tragic events recent events would bear witness.

But when we talk about shamanism in the Indigenous Amazon, it should be noted that this practice covers a significant internal difference, classified by Hugh-Jones (1994, 39) in terms of the distinction between ‘horizontal shamanism’ and ‘vertical shamanism.’ The contrast between the two types is evident in peoples such as the Bororo in Central Brazil or the Tukano and Arawak in the upper Rio Negro, among whom there are two well-defined categories of shamans. The performance of the shaman classified as horizontal turns to the outside of the *socius*, a condition that imbues them with aggressiveness and moral ambiguity. Vertical shamans, on the other hand, are specialists in chants and incantations that lead the processes of reproduction of relationships within the group, such as birth ceremonies, naming and funerals.

5 For the reader interested in the ontology of Amazonian spirits: see Viveiros de Castro (2006).

Having established the distinction, Hugh-Jones (1994, 78) considers that the Tukano and Arawak prophetic movements that occurred in the Northwest Amazon region, from the middle of the 19th century, were all led by shaman-prophets with a ‘horizontal’ profile. Viveiros de Castro, however, suggests that the distinction to be made would not be so much between two types of shamanism, the shaman “widespread in the Amazon” (horizontal) and the “priest-shaman” (vertical), but between “two possible trajectories of the shamanic function”, that is, the prophetic drift and the priestly drift. For this author, the prophetic drift of the shamanic function would produce a “historical warming of shamanism”, while the emergence of a well-defined priestly function would result in the “political cooling of shamanism”, where cosmic power and political power converge in a single person (Viveiros de Castro 2002, 101).

The suggestion is interesting and opportune for us to think about the Christianity practiced by the Taurepáng. Adventist preaching became an indispensable quality of their political leaders, the *tuxauas*. For example, Bento, the founder of the community of Bananal, held the position of *tuxaua* for decades; influential preacher, he was also one of its main religious leaders. The same happened with Avelino and Lazaro, his sons who in the past occupied successively the position of *tuxaua* of the community, and today with Tercio, grandson of Bento, preacher and current *tuxaua* of Bananal.

Thus, although not every preacher among the Taurepáng is a *tuxaua*, every *tuxaua* is recognized as a preacher, which certainly allows him to concentrate political power, evoking the figure of the priest mobilized by Viveiros de Castro. But the role of *tuxaua* is provisional, while that of preacher is associated with a permanent and growing skill in terms of the knowledge conveyed by *poturiüto maimü*. It is also significant that shamans with a horizontal profile, the *piasán*, currently do not exist among the Taurepáng Adventists, since the various components of this practice (heavy consumption of tobacco and contact with various classes of dangerous spirits from the mountains and waterways) are incompatible with the doctrine of the religion they adhered to. The residents of Bananal even say that the *piasán* are “lying people who mess with diabolical spirits.”

When we compare the performances of *ekamanin* and *piasán*, we notice certain points in common, but there are many more differences. This is because *maimü* means both ‘word’ and ‘voice’ (Armellada and Salazar 1981, 116), so that *ekamanin* and *piasán* convey the word-voice of others entities. In the environment of the *chochi*, the first transmits the *maimü* of God, *poturiüto*, whose abode the Taurepáng conceive as located in the sky, *kak*. On the other hand, through the throat of the second conveyed the *maimü* of the Mawarí and other spirits who ‘sit’ on the *piasán* bench, called *dapon*, during the shamanic healing session (Koch-Grünberg 1979-1982 vol. III, 180; Abreu 1995, 107; Lewy 2018, 105; Amaral 2019, 225).

In both cases, therefore, the ritual specialist is just a vehicle for cosmic communication, connection takes place through speech, a sound phenomenon (Lewy 2012, 58). And for the transmission of the *maimü* of such entities to be efficient, *ekamanin* and *piasán* need to practice a constant process of bodily production. The *ekamanin* abstains

from the consumption of alcoholic drinks, tobacco, the meat of animals prescribed as ‘unclean’ and keeps the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship of God. The *piasán*, in turn, must consume a lot of tobacco, low-fat foods and, from time to time, protect himself socially and sexually. These are their similarities, in addition, the *ekamanin* does not “shake the leaves”, as the shamanic performance of the *piasán* is known (Rabelo Filho 2012, 79), and its performance takes place in a public and illuminated environments: the church. As a counterpoint, the environment in which the *piasán* performs the healing sessions is restricted and marked by complete darkness (Andrello 1993, 157).

Another relevant difference is that the words that the *ekamanin* utters in church are heard by all. On the other hand, in healing sessions the *piasán* performs *tarén* to rehabilitate the sick person’s health, magic formulas that must be uttered in whispers. Since its content is covered up, as it is loaded with metaphors and metonymies that are difficult for lay people to understand, people are not sure whether the words ‘breathed’ by *piasán* are in fact to promote healing or further aggravate the disease. Its performance is ambiguous, which is not seen in the *ekamanin*. Finally, *piasán* is understood to be the opposite of *kanáima*, when not accused of being *kanáima* themselves (Koch-Grünberg 1979-1982, vol. III; Thomas 1984; Cooper 2015; Janik 2018; Whitaker 2021). Such an association never occurs with *ekamanin*.

Good preaching builds prestige for a preacher and his influence increases as he is invited to preach in other communities. To some extent, therefore, these specialists refer to the figure of the “good shaman”, an expression that Thomas (1976, 47) used to describe the Taurepáng prophets of the past, especially since the domain of knowledge to which they turn is not marked by moral ambiguities, as with *piasán*. For the residents of Bananal, the *ekamanin* shows the “narrow path to eternal salvation”; path taken from the words of God written in another language.

Let’s look again at line 3 of Claudia’s sermon: “Querido Jesus gracias *taurönöman merundan tawörö inna entendematopennöra aprendemapenöra cumprimatope*” (Dear Jesus, we thank you and ask for the strength of the Holy Spirit so that we can understand, fulfill and practice it). The term *merundan* is uttered at the beginning of every preaching, recurrently glossed as ‘Holy Spirit.’ The word *merundan*, however, does not appear in the Pemon-Spanish dictionary by Armellada and Salazar (1981). But the authors indicate that *merunte* and the variations *merunte-ta*, *merunte-pa* mean, respectively, “strength, give strength and strengthen” (Armellada and Salazar 1981, 125) Thus, translated as Holy Spirit, *merundan* would possibly be a force. But what is its most precise nature?

As stated, *ekamanin* can be more or less skillful with words. Some preach ‘clearly’, others ‘confused.’ When that happens, the message of God would not ‘penetrate’ the heart of the believer, would not ‘transform’ the person, who would continue to live in sin. Or rather, on the ‘broad way’ (*tanotak êmak*) to perdition. Its opposite is the ‘narrow path’ (*etakak êmak*) that leads to ‘eternal life’ (*kowannötök tericheparak*).

For a person to be able to walk the ‘narrow path’, *poturüto maimü* must penetrate his heart and ‘enlighten’ it. Since in Claudia’s prayer the term *merundan* is preceded by

taurönöman, plural of *tauron*, ‘to say’, it seems to me that the expression *taurönöman merundan* would indicate something related to the ‘power of the spoken word.’ Was it the specific force of the word spoken by the preacher? If so, what relationship would there be between the strength of the spoken word and those printed on paper and in another language? What does the latter transmit to the one, which would be able to penetrate the hearts of the faithful and thus transform the person? It is interesting to note the great interest of the Pemon peoples in the written papers of the whites since the end of the 19th century, with which they were able to invent a series of cults that preceded the more orthodox practice of Adventism from the first decades of the 20th century (Andrello 1993).

On the other hand, the passage from written to oral that takes place in Taurepáng preaching would provide an ‘illumination’ of the person, enabling the faithful to walk the ‘narrow path’ (*etakak émak*) of souls towards heaven. The theme of light is recurrent in ethnographies dedicated to the prophetic cult of Aleluia among the Pemon and Kapon of Monte Roraima (Butt 1960; Abreu 1995; Cooper 2015; Amaral 2019; Whitaker 2016), which also refers to the ‘heavenly paradise’ prepared by God. The Taurepáng conceive this post-mortem abode as *wakü patá*, a ‘good place’, ‘beautiful’, where there will be no more deaths, illnesses or suffering. They say that in paradise their bodies will be transformed into *auká*, which they translate as ‘glory’ or ‘light’, but a different light from everyday life, *iwiyu*, which contrasts with the dark, *waröpo*. They explain that *auká* is a ‘glorious light’ that exists only in the paradise (for more on the native concept of *auká*, see Butt Colson and Armellada 1990, 15).

Thus, we have a direct association between listening to the spoken word in preaching and the enlightenment, so to speak, of the person, the consummation of which would be his total transformation into light in the afterlife. Therefore, from the visible word in written records to the audible word translated and uttered by the *ekamanin* in the *chochi*, the Taurepáng seem to envision a means through which their souls could potentially transform themselves into bodies of light after death, exhibiting an apparently unattainable degree of visibility in earthly life – marked, in turn, by the opacity of the countless spiritual beings that inhabit this level and whose voices can be heard in the darkness of shamanic healing sessions.

In this sense, the ritual speech uttered by the *ekamanin* seems to greatly transcend the communicative or referential functions of language (Chernela 2018; Hauck and Heurich 2018; Course 2018). In the *chochi*, the words of the religious leader act as a “body manufacturing technology” (Lolli 2014, 300), as they are associated with qualities that are both empowering, *merundan*, and imagery, *auká*, capable of transforming the body of the believer. However, conversion only makes sense for the Taurepáng if it is a collective phenomenon (Vilaça 2007, 18), which is why in the Bananal community the meat of ‘unclean’ animals is not consumed, alcoholic drinks, tobacco use and *piasán* are not allowed. In addition, all residents observe the Sabbath, a day reserved exclusively for rest and worship of God. As I heard from an interlocutor, it would be a ‘tragedy’ to live in paradise without the company of relatives, referring to his father, mother and brothers.

There is, on this point, a significant difference between the Taurepáng and the Palikur, an Indigenous people who live on the Brazil-French Guiana border. For the Palikur, the interest in Christianity and its practice of evangelical Pentecostalism rests especially on the desire to incorporate the Holy Spirit, which even allows the believer to dance and speak in ‘angelical language.’ The Christian experience lived by this Indigenous people is related to “religious ecstasy” (Capiberibe 2007, 27; 2017, 319). Something like that does not occur among the Taurepáng, mainly because the religion they practice does not incorporate the Holy Spirit. Their interest in Adventist practice rests on the desire to overcome the condition of existence in this land “spoiled” by Satan (Monticelli 2020, 29), where people suffer, get sick and die. To do so, through a series of shelters they hope to reach eternal life in a paradise in heaven after death, a place they claim is being prepared by God and reserved exclusively for those who remain faithful to the message transmitted by the preacher inside the ritual house.

Final considerations

The crisis that Venezuela is going through has reached catastrophic proportions. Taurepáng communities located in the Venezuelan savannah began to suffer from hunger and increased internal tensions among their residents. In early 2019, a shooting promoted by the Bolivarian National Guard made more than a hundred Taurepáng from the Kumarakapay community migrate to Bananal, on the Brazilian side. The lack of structure to house the *yepesakon*, as the newcomers became known, provided unprecedented challenges for the socio-political organization of Bananal, revealed in the form of accusations of stinginess and theft within the community.

Aiming to combat the growth of animosities, Bananal preachers have worked to reduce the internal conflicts that began to be present in the place. Inside the *chochi*, the ritual house, they preach care and solidarity with others. The preachers’ action can be interpreted as an attempt to neutralize the outbreak of the *kanaima* phenomenon. But *kanaima* is not just rivalry between neighbors, it is also a murder sorcery technique. According to the Kumarakapay refugees, the misery caused by years of the Venezuelan crisis turned the *kanaima* into a mercenary, a killer who acts for reward, usually industrialized food. According to these interlocutors, there are masters in the Venezuelan savannah who have taught young people and adults to be *kanaima*.

The Adventist practice of the Taurepáng is directly related to this crisis scenario. They classify the world they live in as ‘spoiled’ by Satan, whose end is imminent. While the return of Jesus Christ does not materialize, they are meeting inside the church several times a week, to hear the preaching of the *ekamanin*, pray and praise God. That would be the reason for his Christian experience: incorporating the words of *poturüto* that lead to ‘good living’, transforming the person to walk the ‘narrow path’ of eternal salvation. However, full salvation will only be achieved after death, in the heavenly paradise prepared by God, where they hope to be pure light and immortal.

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