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Politics and belief in the nineteenth century millenarian movements of the Northwest Amazon

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"This land, this land where people die is bad. We ill prepare another land, we will turn over the earth, for the world to become better, the land to be good."

- Song of the Cross, Dessana tradition

Introduction

The far Northwest Amazon region, border of Brazil-Colombia-Venezuela, has for long stood out in the hixstcaol ethnography of Amazonia for its millenarian rebellions of the 19th Cectury. Recent studies (Wright 1981; Wright & Hill 1986, 1988) have provided detailed ethnohistoric reconstructions of these movements and have systematically demonstrated their links to indigenous religion, especially for the Arawak-speaking Baniwa/Wakuenai. These studies have shown how millenarian leaders improvised on the symbolism of indigenous myth and ritual to formulate a strategy of resistance to the oppressive political-economic conditions imposed by non-native peoples and institutions.

In this paper, I shall give greater attention to the perception and development of these movements among Tukanoan peoples of the Vaupés River and its tributaries throughout the latter half of the 19th Century. After tracing their antecedents to the various forms of 'resistant adaptation' (Stern 1987) to Europeans from the 18th to the mid-19th centuries, I shall

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examine in detail the movements led by Alexandre Christu and others on the Vaupés and Xié rivers in 1858, which immediately followed those led by Venancio Kamiko among the Baniwa. The rebellions led by Alexandre were more typically characterized by the government as militant and as armed resistance; hence they were perceived as greater threats to national security in the Northwest Amazon region. Yet they faced difficulties from the start - from church officials who threatened the rebels with imprisonment and military reprisal; from the Tukano who, over time, became less convinced of Alexandre's leadership and revolutionary millenarianism; and from the Baniwa who prevented the millenarists from taking refuge in their territory. After a government commission was sent to investigate, Alexandre's movement dispersed and later, Wanana (Tukanoan) Indians took one of his disciples prisoner and turned him in to the authorities.

Oral histories of the Dessana[1] (a Tukanoan-speaking people) clarify Tukano perceptions of these movements and hence are a fundamental source for interpreting such questions as why Alexandre failed to convince his following or how Tukanoan millenarianism was based in traditional religious belief. After considering these movements through both documents and oral traditions, we then show their continuities and transformations among both Tukanoan and Arawakan peoples up to the present. Major political federations have been formed recently among Indians of the Upper Río Negro, consolidating indigenous interests vis-à-vis state development policy and mining interests. Far from being "responses" to the contemporary situation, we see these developments as the evolution of a much longer and wider struggle by the Indians of the Upper Río Negro for autonomy, self-determination, and the guarantee of their rights against external forces.

Our analysis thus follows the methodological directions suggested by Steve Stern (1987), specifically for the Andes but adaptable in certain cases to lowland regions, for understanding native rebellions by incorporating multiple time scales into analysis. That is, relatively short time frames ('conjuctural' and episodic) to understand the recent changes that make rebellion or insurrection more likely and possible and to appreciate dynamic changes that emerge during the course of violent conflict; and longer time frames spanning centuries to understand the historic injustices, memories and strategies that shape the goals, consciousness, and tactics of the rebels... (1987:11).

Secondly, Stern suggests that by paying particular attention to the "culture history" of the area under study, and by "treating native

[1] The Dessana tradition "O Canto da Cruz" (The Song of the Cross) to which I will be referring at numerous points in this paper was recorded by the French anthropologist Dominique Buchillet, from a Dessana Indian, Wenceslau Galvão, of Santa Maria village on the Papury River in January 1987. Versions of parts of this tradition have been published in the journal Ēnēmini, of the Salesian mission of Jauaretê.

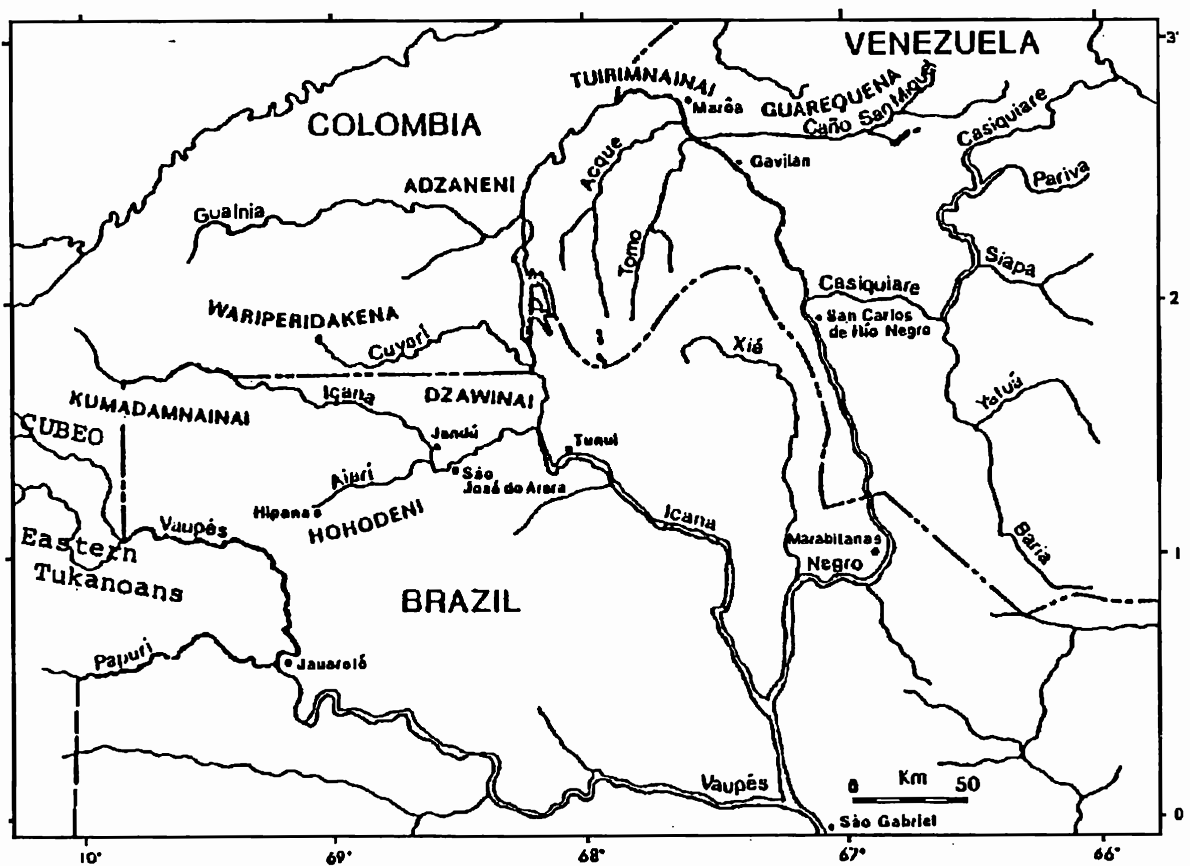
consciousness as problematic rather than predictable," we understand what exactly has been at stake in the rebellions and movements. We show that the Northwest Amazon messiahs have above all sought *empowerment*, principally through the militant appropriation of Christian symbols but on the Indians' own terms; that this has meant, in many cases, a reversal of the hierarchical and power relations between Whites and Indians; and that, where cargo has been a concern, this should be interpreted as part of the more general issue of empowerment. The difficulties of sustaining millenarian strategies (ritual dances in expectation of miraculous events) among large followings and over time may have undermined the viability of these movements, but the consciousness of resistance has been fundamental to the development in recent years of pan-tribal political strategies.

Thirdly, the perspective of this paper is located within the recent and fruitful discussion in Anthropology and the History of Religions on the relationship of mythic and historical modes of consciousness. The stories about millenarian cult activities we shall cite are not merely memories of the past; rather, they provide "a store of alternative ideas, interpretations and courses of action with potential applications to the present" (Hugh-Jones 1988:151). These stories not only serve to represent the contacts between Whites and Indians but also influence its outcome in the present by forming the basis for Indian resistance to White oppression. They do this by inverting the perceived, unequal relationship of White and Indian society and, just as the messianic movements themselves, by asserting the superiority of native over Western society (see Turner, in Hill 1988). At the same time, by casting these relationships in mythic and ritual terms (that is, through the categories of time and space inherent to the indigenous vision of world creation and destruction), the messianists expect their own meanings to prevail through the disastrous experience of the present, "in the hope that their own self-understanding gives the true account of their suffering." (Sullivan 1987:585).

Antecedents: 1730-1850

To situate the movements of the mid-19th century requires a panorama of indigenous history beginning with the first sustained contacts in the 18th century. This sketch seeks to demonstrate that a specific conjuncture of historical conditions, developing from the late 18th century, provides a basis for understanding Indian rebellions and protests.

European penetration of the Upper Río Negro valley began in the first half of the 18th century with the slave trade. While it is difficult to estimate numbers, one source from the 1750s plausibly suggest that as many as 20,000 Indians of the Upper Río Negro were taken in slavery during the height of Portuguese activities between 1740 and 1755 (Szentmartonyi, in


VENEZUELA
COLOMBIA
BRAZIL
TUIRIMNAINAI
Marôa
GUAREQUENA
Caño San Miguel
Casiquiare
Gavilan
ADZANENI
Acque
Gualnia
Pariva
Tomo
Siapa
Casiquiare
San Carlos de Río Negro
WARIPERIDAKENA
Cuyari
Xié
Içana
DZAWINAI
Yatuá
KUMADAMNAINAI
CUBEO
Tunuí
Aiari
São José do Arara
Hipana
HOHODENI
Içana
Vaupés
Eastern Tukanoans
Marabitanas
Baria
Negro
Papuri
Jauaretê
Vaupés
Km
50
São Gabriel
3°
2
1
0
70°
69°
68°
67°
66°

Wright 1981:604). By the 1760s, several very large nations of the Río Negro had been exterminated and vast sections of the lower and middle Río Negro were left depopulated.

Yet the history of the slave trade on the Mid-to-Upper Río Negro was marked by the resistance of a few powerful tribes such as the Manao who, under the leadership of Ajuricaba in the 1720s, organized a confederation of Manao subgroups to prevent the Portuguese from gaining control of the slave trade on the Upper Río Negro. After the defeat of the Manao and the death of Ajuricaba in 1727, the "Mayapena" and other allied tribes of the mid-to-upper Río Negro continued the resistance against the brutal onslaught of the Portuguese. And in 1757, Manao survivors made their last-ditch effort to drive the Portuguese out of the Northwest Amazon altogether. Even long after the suppression of that rebellion, visitors on the Río Negro reported that the caboclos on the river retained a messianic belief "that Ajuricaba was still alive and would some day return to lead them against the European intruders" (Sweet 1974:597). Among the Indians of the Upper Río Negro, there were various manifestations of resistance to Portuguese penetration but, on the whole, the principal causes of depopulation were the competing alliances powerful chiefs had with the Spaniards and Portuguese to provide slaves and induced warfare (Wright 1981:132).

Throughout the latter half of the 18th century, Spaniards and Portuguese began colonizing and laying claims to territory in the Upper Río Negro and Orinoco valleys. Spanish efforts were, for the most part, limited and unstable as the missionaries and military were scarcely able to establish a permanent colonial structure. One important industry, boat-building, was introduced to the Spanish Río Negro in the late 18th century, but otherwise the region remained economically marginal and its commerce limited. Similarly, forced relocation of Indians to mission settlements (*reducciones*) met with little success. Very few missionaries were available to work in the region until the late 18th century, and their efforts to control the Indians often met with resistance (Wright 1981:166).

Portuguese colonization was more systematic and its impact more widely felt. Throughout the latter half of the 18th century, hundreds of Upper Río Negro Indians were relocated to colonial settlements where they worked in plantations and in extraction of forest spices. In the 1780s, major epidemics devastated vast sections of the Río Negro and Japurá putting a heavy strain on the *descimento* (descent, relocation) system to replenish the settlements. Given the deteriorating conditions of colonial villages, the Indians more often than not fled ("deserted"); a strategy frequently used throughout the 1780s. Consequently, soldiers often used armed force to relocate the Indians (Wright 1981:149-153). By the end of the 18th century, however, the Río Negro government at Barra (Manaus) underwent a virtual economic and political collapse, leaving the Indians

free to return to their homelands and recoup their losses, and the colonial government admitted its utter failure to realize its objective of "civilizing the Indians" of the Río Negro.

Throughout much of the early 19th century, the Brazilian Upper Río Negro remain a source of labor, forest spices, and certain staples for the sustenance of colonial settlements. The provincial government attempted with little success to institute a labor system and tax on manioc cereal which was to be enforced by government-recognized Indian chiefs. In the 1830s, Brazilian traders (*regatoes*) began operating around São Grabriel and Marabitanas on the Upper Río Negro, and by the 1850s, when the merchant system had become firmly established, they were conducting a prosperous business with their Venezuelan counterparts (Primov n.d.:40; Wright 1981:210-211).

The territorial government at San Fernando de Atabapo in Venezuela essentially left the administration of the Río Negro area in the hands of local officials, or commissaries, who were usually the local Creole merchant class. As in Brazil, Indians were exploited in trade and often forced to provide free labor (Primov n.d.:42; Wright 1981). The abuses of this system became so flagrant that by the early 1840s, the Venezuelan government attempted, unsuccessfully, to introduce reforms. Indians again sought refuge from the harassment and exploitation by retreating to the forest.

By the 1850s, the Río Negro of Venezuela had become the most active economic center of the territory, primarily due to the flourishing boat-building industry at San Carlos and Maroa, the roap-making industry, and trade with Brazil. Riverine settlements had an air of prosperity and were attracting many non-Indian settlers, both Venezuelan Creoles and Brazilians. Yet, despite this apparent prosperity, the permanent settlements were barely able to sustain themselves, suffering chronic shortages of food and a lack of currency. Indian laborers were often kept in severe debt to the Creole boat-makers and were apparently kept at work only by liberal supplies of alcohol (Spruce 1970:377-378, 475). Ethnic relations between Indians and non-Indians were based on class differences in which the non Indian merchants and local officials oppressed and exploited the Indian population and those of Indian descent. The Indians were not at all complacent about this situation, however. As the English botanist, Richard Spruce, reported during his travels on the Upper Río Negro in 1853, the Baré of San Carlos were "preparing a general massacre of the Whites" to take place on St. John's Day, when "old scores would be paid off. Some said they had submitted long enough to the Whites and it was quite a common thing to kill a White man and throw his body into the river..." (Spruce 1970:348-349).

In the early 1850s, the newly-formed state government in Manaus launched a major program for the "civilization and catechization" of the

Indians of the Upper Río Negro valley. The government revived the system of Directorates of the Indians, increased its numbers of missionaries, and instituted a program of "public service" labor, in which government-recognized chiefs were expected to send laborers and children, who could be raised into "civilization", to Manaus. Official government policy classified native peoples as forest Indians (*gentios*), settled Indians (*aldeados*), and "civilized" Indians. Directors and missionaries were charged with the responsibility of attracting forest Indians to the main rivers, where they were more accessible, while settled Indians supplied labor for the "public service" programs. To accomplish these objectives, Directors relied on the support and alliance of the traders and several powerful chiefs of the Vaupés River, who acted as middlemen in negotiating resettlement, providing children and adult laborers, and organizing punitive raids against tribes who resisted. In mid-1853, the Director of Indians on the Vaupés reported that he was meeting with resistance from chiefs of the upper Vaupés who refused to relocate for, they said, resettlement was only a pretext for a later *descimento*. Their resistance, however, was quickly suppressed through imprisonment. Numerous other abuses, instances of violence and the use of armed force against the Indians were documented for this time (see Wright 1981: pt.II, D.). Compounding these abuses, traders and Directors exploited Indians in boat-building, extraction of forest products, and public service. Consequently, the Indians of the Vaupés and Içana were unable to provide for their own subsistence needs. In 1853, Spruce reported a situation of near famine on the Vaupés; and in 1857, the Baniwa of the Içana complained to the authorities of their extremely miserable conditions, hunger, exploitation by merchants, and military abuses (Wright 1981:271).

In this context, the Indians of the Upper Río Negro - beginning with the Baniwa of the Içana and Guainia, and followed by the Tukanoans of the Vaupés, and Warequena of the Xié - decided to take matters into their own hands, seeking to reverse the profound inequalities of power between Indians and Whites. The sources of their discontent were deep enough as to demand a more effective solution than simple flight or retreat into the forests. They thus turned to their principal and traditional sources of power in matters of external forces - their high-shamans, masters of magical contest and, in some cases, the very embodiment of their heroic deities of myth who had rid the world of evil and chaotic forces at the beginning of time. The first to arise was Venancio Kamiko.

Benancio Kamiko and the Baniwa rebellion

Venancio Anizeto Kamiko had been raised by a famed evangelist preacher of San Carlos but he had also been trained in shamanic arts (for a more complete account of Kamiko's life and Baniwa legends of his deeds,

see Wright 1981; Wright & Hill 1986). His deep experiences of debt identified him with the oppression of most native peoples at this time. His bouts with the sickness catalepsy and miraculous recoveries he interpreted as divine callings, occasions when he would journey to heaven and speak to God, who empowered him to absolve peoples' debts and guide them to their salvation. Through his extraordinary shamanistic powers, Kamiko became identified with Baniwa mythical heroes who in primordial times succeeded in ridding the world of dangerous, threatening forces, overcoming them by their incredible knowledge and miraculous powers. Yet Kamiko went beyond this, skillfully appropriating Christian symbols of suffering, purification, salvation, and immortality and linking these to powerful symbols of indigenous myth and ritual. Thus, he prophesied the end of the world through a cosmic fire - an important theme in Baniwa creation mythology - to occur on St. John's Day (June 24, 1858) - a saint-day of ritual purification, as well as having political connotations, as we mentioned above, when God would descend to earth and usher an era of happiness. This great rite of passage was to be provoked by intense ritual and dancing with crosses and by chanting songs derived from Baniwa myths of the cataclysmic world-destruction by fire. In preparation for the event, Kamiko encouraged disciples to avoid the material goods and ideas brought by Whites, preaching rather that they give full allegiance (economic, spiritual) to him as the only way to break the stranglehold in which native peoples were caught at that time and hence to gain salvation. By casting his orders in the form of Christian symbolism, Kamiko (or Venancio Christu, as he was known) created a new sense of religious authority and power, free of missionary interference.

Kamiko's influence extended over a great part of the Upper Río Negro region among a large following of caboclos, Arawakan and Tukanoan peoples. In late 1857, however, the local military brutally repressed the millenarian dances on the Içana forcing Kamiko and his followers to flee *en masse* to Venezuelan territory, and to seek refuge in inaccessible areas. Despite later military efforts to persuade them to return, many Indians refused to do so, preferring to resist the interference of the Whites and maintain their political and economic autonomy. In Venezuela, Kamiko was taken prisoner on several occasions but each time managed to escape and pursued his messianic activities until his death in 1902.

Elsewhere (Wright & Hill 1986, 1988), we have discussed in detail the several legends the Baniwa tell of Kamiko's miraculous powers and struggles against the Whites, and the authority by which he maintained his movement together. We demonstrated there that what Kamiko's movement accomplished was a reorientation of indigenous social and economic relations in which the refusal to cooperate with the external, dominating order of the White man became elevated to the status of a sacred, cosmological postulate, redefining indigenous religious processes into a cult of historical opposition to external domination.

Kamiko's movement had by early 1858 spread to the Tukanoan peoples of the Vaupés and Warequena of the Xié. Large-scale millenarian dances were reported in half-a-dozen locations, led by Tukanoans and other Indians of the Upper Rio Negro. These movements were described in the documents as being more "militant and disposed to resist" White interference. Before we examine these latter movements in detail, we wish to point out that Tukanoan peoples also remember Kamiko as the initiator of a millenarian cult, called "The Song of the Cross", among them. As for the Baniwa, Kamiko represented for the Tukanoans the victory of native power over Western exemplars. The following excerpt from the Song of the Cross tradition, told by a Dessana (Tukanoan) elder in the early 1980s, illustrates this clearly:

"It was Kamiko who began to sing the Song of the Cross. He is God Himself, the Whites said. They swept his house clean, took out everything from his house, but even so he had everything. When night came, he lit up his house, even though he had nothing to do it with. He had everything, breech-cloth, viollas. His house was well-lit. After three days, the Whites opened his house. There he had all sorts of food: bananas, pineapples, manioc bread, farinha, etc. "It is he that speaks of God. 'It's he that works miracles, he makes food,' the Whites said. He had everything, coffee, rice, everything. Although they swept his house clean, he had all kinds of goods. They said that he was really God. They left him in the house, thus he found everything, they said.

Then they made a box of boards and nailed it shut and put it in the river. They put him inside the box and threw it in the river; they didn't even leave a bit of food inside the box. They put the box in the river. When night came, he transformed the box into a big canoe and it came buoying up on top of the water. He played music with his violla all night long. Then he disappeared at the bottom of the river. The next night, the box they had made and that he had transformed into a canoe, came out of the water again. The Whites saw it. Kamiko knew they wanted to drown him. He sent a written message to them: 'If I were to drown you, would you survive?' he wrote. Then they were afraid. 'I will drown you,' he said, 'I will do the same thing to you.' They were learned men. They saw he had sent a message to them. 'Let's take him out of the water,' they said. They went to the port and looked: he had all kinds of food, pineapple, bananas, manioc bread, sweet potatoes, farinha, rice, beans, etc. 'He is the one who speaks of God,' these learned men said. Saying that, they began to believe in him. They gave him clothes, ribbons, necklaces...'

In this excerpt, we see how in Tukanoan thought, the unequal relationship between native and Western society in the existing situation

of contact is inverted. Kamiko is more powerful than the Writes and triumphs over them despite their efforts to destroy him. The specific aspect that serves as the medium or instrument of the victorious transformation - a house full of food and goods - clearly manifest basic relations or principals inherent to the Tukanoan conception of social reproduction. As Christine Hugh-Jones (1979) has demonstrated in her book-length analysis of Tukanoan symbolism, processes of food production serve as extended metaphors for social reproduction in Tukanoan society. To the Tukanoans, Kamiko embodied these principles in his house which he controls through his shamanistic powers. The nailed box, or coffin, by which the Whites attempt to destroy Kamiko is thus merely a negative transformation of Kamiko's productive house, since it is a manufactured product of Western society, and represents death. Kamiko triumphs by re-transforming the coffin into a reproductive house and emerging from his submersion in the river. He thus asserts the superior power of the *reproductive principles* of native society, of life over death, and the ability of native society to prevail over the inversion of that principle by Western society into a principle of social destruction. Finally, as Kamiko succeeds in convincing the Whites of his superior power, he also gains Western goods for native society (although cargo is a secondary concern, an afterthought of the myth, and not its principle objective).

Kamiko no doubt was the most effective and influential of the numerous messianic leaders who arose in the second half of the 19th century. But it is instructive and important to understand how other proclaimed messiahs, including Kamiko's closest disciples, developed his millenarian ideology and practice. The movements on the Vaupés and Xié were interpreted by government officials as "a kind o conspiracy against civilized people." This was consistent with the government's ideology of "civilizing" native peoples of the region and for which the millenarian movements represented a clear threat. To what extent this threat coincided with the intentions and strategies of the rebels in confronting outside forces sent against them is a question that will be examined in the following section. As we shall see, internal divisions among the rebels, and disbelief in the new messiah, Alexandre Christu, ultimately defused the movements, although not resistance, through millenarian expectations which continued throughout the rest of the 19th and well into the 20th centuries.

Alexandre Christu and the rebellions on the Vaupés and Xié

According to the sources, in late February - early March, 1858, Alexandre, a Baniwa Indian from the Orinoco, proclaimed himself to be Christ and was holding millenarian dances among the Indians of the lower Vaupés, between Ipanoré and Jauareté. As a youth, Alexandre had been

raised by a Portuguese trader, Marques Caldeira, near Marabitanas on the Upper Rio Negro. In 1857, Alexandre had participated in Kamiko's dances on the lower Içana and was thought to have been among the leaders or close disciples of Kamiko, although he was not noted for any special shamanistic abilities.

Following the military raid on the Içana in 1857, Alexandre decided to move to the Manau stream near Jauareté Rapids on the Middle Vaupés, and went to the Vaupés to persuade his kin to settle with him. When he returned to Marabitanas, he found that he had been robbed of five bushels of farinha and was told that the thieves were two women who needed the farinha to pay off their debts to the military. Highly vexed, Alexandre set fire to his house in Marabitanas and returned with his family to the Vaupés where they took up residence in two Tukano villages. While the Indians of both villages had impressed A. R. Wallace in the early 1850s with the exuberance of their ceremonial life (Wallace 1853:193), they had also known and felt the oppression of the White traders. They may have participated in Kamiko's cult dances and, after the military raid in 1857, the Tukano of the lower Vaupés fled to the forests in fear of a second raid on the Vaupés. The Director of Indians and Commander of the military detachment at Marabitanas, Captain Joaquim Firmino Xavier, met these Tukano on the Içana during his reconnaissance mission in mid-1858.

> "...having fled from the persecutions of Captain Mathias, who... sent to the Rio Vaupés to look for chickens, pigs and birds, without paying, and to take young men and women to serve him, such that at the mouth of the Vaupés, there were no Indians, and other chiefs had fled to the Içana." (Xavier-President, *AA*, II, 4:123).

Xavier assured them that under his administration, life would be more agreeable; yet, Xavier proved to be little better than his predecessors for even the residents of Marabitanas, including Friar Salgado, the Vicar, and Friar Romualdo, his assistant, decided to move to the lower Vaupés, along with a number of families, to escape Xavier's arbitrary authority. When the missionaries arrived, they learned that on the river above, the Indians were engaged in millenarian activities with their proclaimed messiah, Alexandre Christu. Romualdo reported that there were:

> "assembled many people, even to the forest Indians of all nations, venerating the christ, who there realized the same as occurred on the Piraivara on the Içana, that is, baptizing, marrying, etc.; that this assembly consisted of more than 1,000 people with firearms and poison-arrows disposed to resist... in case there would take place what happened on the Içana" (*AA*, II, 7:85-6).

(Conceivably, "more than 1,000 people" could include the entire populations of up to ten Tukano and Tariano villages from the mouth of the Vaupés up

to Jauareté. Traditionally, large-scale dance festivals numbered upwards of several hundred participants. (War arrows, lances, and sometimes shotguns were at times used in these dances). The rituals Alexandre had started up took place in houses he had specially constructed (estimates of the sizes of these houses varied between 32-36' by 10' and 39' by 23', both rather small in comparison with the traditional malocas on the Vaupés).

The rituals were hidden from the missionaries because the Indians knew they would suppress them, and were convinced of their own abilities to conduct ceremonies of baptizing, marrying, etc., without the missionaries. Hence, when Salgado and Romualdo made known their presence on the Vaupés, the Indians sent back a message that "they did not need any Padre for they already had their own." (*AA*, II, 7:86).

Frei Salgado decided to investigate. He proceeded with a party of about seven people, armed with five shotguns, in the last week of March, 1858. In Alexandre's village, they were received coldly and no one claimed to know anything of the messiah's whereabouts. Salgado began preaching among the "multitudes" of men and women united in the chief's house, showing them the large metal cross hanging around his neck, preaching about the "true Christ" and ordering them to kiss the cross, "in respect and veneration." The people coldly turned their backs on the Friar and walked away (*AA*, II, 7:86). Later, Salgado asked why they did not bring more children to be baptized and they replied that they had no use for Salgado's baptisms because they had already been baptized. Sensing a distinct hostility towards his presence, Salgado decided to return and requested that the chief assist him by ordering people to help in portage over the rapids of Ipanoré. The chief responded there was no one to help, no one wanted to accompany them (*Ibid*:86-7). Salgado pleaded and insisted, becoming indignant and hot under the collar as the people continued to walk away. Salgado called for help from his armed companions who took out their guns and directed themselves at the chief, threatening him with gunfire if the people made any move against them (*Ibid.*:87). The people had by then all but disappeared into the forests surrounding the settlement, leaving only the chief, his son and two others whom the Friar ordered to help with their canoes.

Salgado's version of the story is that when they reached Ipanoré Rapids, the group disembarked to pass the canoes over the portage trail when the chief suddenly went to the woods. Immediately afterwards, guns fired from the forest into their midst. One of their party fell wounded, and Salgado was hit lightly on the leg. The others took their guns, hid behind a clump of rocks and made a small fire, as a diversion tactic. The assailants continued to shoot from the forest, using both guns and poison-arrows (*AA*, II, 7:87). After a half-hour skirmish, two of the assailants were apparently fatally wounded, and the skirmish stopped. Salgado's party received about four wounds, one being near-fatal.

That night, while Salgado's party stayed in a downstream village, caring for their wounds, three Indians came to the village with the news that two of the assailants had died from the morning skirmish. They were informed that Salgado had gone to São Gabriel to get military troops and would return shortly for battle. The Indians returned upriver to inform Alexandre Christu of their imminent return. Needless to say, the news sowed about as much confusion among the Tukano as the rumor of a second military invasion from Marabitanas had among the Baniwa a few months before. Most sources suppose that Alexandre had sent people to fire on Salgado at Ipanoré. Whether or not this was actually true, people had to prepare for the probable consequences.

It was precisely after this incident that Padre Romualdo wrote to the Governor of the Province about "a conspiracy against the civilized people" recommending as a course of action:

> "...to capture the Christ, the chief, and the principal ones to be punished... for... this business of sainthood which is already generalizing in other villages,... seems to be a kind of conspiracy against the civilized people." (*AA*,II, 7:88-89).

Control and punishment of the leaders would eradicate the "evil" which the missionaries perceived to be a very grave and growing threat to the presence of "civilized" people in the region.

Two weeks after these events, Captain Firmino Xavier received the first reports that there were millenarian dances taking place on the Xié River. It is possible that Alexandre left the Vaupés River soon after he heard the rumors of approaching military in order to join the Xié movements. Many rumors floated around from then until October or so as the Indians and officials alike tried to figure out what the other was doing. It was a complex time in which the scenes shifted and the actors moved on and off the stage quickly. The following reconstruction is based heavily on the reports left by the Municipal Justice, Marcos de Sousa, who determined a great deal of these 'facts' during his investigatory mission in mid-1858.

After the incident at Ipanoré Rapids, Alexandre, his family and a number of followers fled the Vaupés River in fear of a military reprisal. They sought to join Venancio around the Acque River below Manoa, probably going by trail through the woods to the Içana River. The Baniwa who lived in the forest regions at the headwaters of streams between the Yaviary River and connecting tributaries on the lower Içana, however, turned the fugitives back, blocked their passage, resisting their migration and persuasion to join forces. The Municipal Justice determined that they were blocked by the Baniwa "para que não os fossem novamente arruinar, como dizião' (Report of the Municipal Justice 1858: leaf 64).

Alexandre's group then returned to the Vaupés and tried to sort out what their move would be. By then, some Tukano and Tariana chiefs were

reaching a point of serious questioning and doubt of Alexandre's position and authority. Alexandre had preached to them that "manioc and manioc from heaven" would come to them on a certain day, if they remained true followers (*Ibid.*). The day passed and nothing appeared. It was in April and the rainy season was beginning, a time when hunger on the Vaupés would be harsh. The people were in for another long season of famine, they were tired, had enough, and were not convinced of Alexandre's sanctity. So, many left the movement and returned to their homes. One of the group quarreled bitterly with Alexandre about the incident at Ipanoré Rapids, calling Alexandre and "assassin" and not a saint. Rumors spread that Alexandre had this person killed and his body burnt (Report of the Municipal Justice 1858: Doc. 5).

Alexandre was not undone by the loss of following, however. He began to preach a new message through which he justified the failure of this initial promises. The new message was a statement of how his rhetoric became one of revolutionary transformation:

> "Alexandre tried to escape collision (with the chief of Juquira-rapecuma) by assuring him that his promises had not been fulfilled because God had taken the new measure of substituting them, whereby the *tapuios* would transform into Whites and these into those by whom they would be governed, with the same power and riches, in compensation for the time for which the Whites had governed them." (Report of the Municipal Justice 1858: leaf 64).

Alexandre's new ideology did focus on the relation between Western and native society, as Romualdo had supposed, but precisely to overturn the political and economic relationships of power which were known and felt to exist. This ideology moved in a different direction from Kamiko's catastrophic end-of-the-world evangelism by predicting an inversion of the economic powers held by the merchants and the political powers held by the military and government. Religious festivals were directed by native priests who had the authority to baptize. This in itself gave people strength and self-determination in important matters. Through Alexandre, God had determined that people would gain total control and get back the powers to determine the conditions of their lives, in this world and not another. Instead of eliminating the Whites in the fires of São João, or by the threat of massacre, there would be a trade-off of places. This had a righteous tone to it, because the Whites would learn how to suffer and how it felt to be ordered to serve and to work. No doubt this contributed to a renewal of Alexandre's followers' allegiance to the movement, for if God fulfilled these promises, there would be no worry of retribution from the military. The people would be invulnerable.

Alexandre managed to keep together a group of about 40 followers until June of 1858. The dances continued and the group awaited the

outcome of the second prophecy. Soon, difficulties again arose between Alexandre and his followers forcing him to relocate down-river but by then, a government commission sent to investigate the movements was already on its way to the Upper Rio Negro. At the same time, rebellions had been reported on the Xié River. Briefly, the story is as follows:

In mid-April, 1858, Captain Fireman Xavier was informed (by a soldier, Elisbão Melgueira, of the military detachment at São Marcellino, at the mouth of the Xié) that new dances were taking place at São Marcellino and Santa Anna (below the mouth of the Içana). The participants were dancing with crosses and were being led by another "new Christ" and assistant "padre santo" (Correspondência dos Ministros da Justiça 1858, N° 63, cop. 2).

Xavier ordered the soldier Elisbão to summon the residents of São Marcellino, while he went down-river to Santa Anna on the Río Negro. He claims that he walked into the village while the people were in the middle of a dance: "more than forty people each one with a cross", led by a police guard, Domingos Antonio. Xavier took away the crosses, scolded the participants, ordered them to return to their homes and to quit such "idleness" (*vadiação*) as they were engaged in (Correspondência dos Ministros da Justiça 1858, no. 63, cop. 2).

Xavier was informed that in fact, Bazilio Melgueira, a "desertor" from the military detachment at Marabitanas, had joined the dances at São Marcellino and proclaimed himself the "new Christ". Claudio José, an Indian of São Marcellino, acted as Padre Santo, while Cypriano Lopes was a disciple of the messiah.

After the dancers had dispersed, Bazilio and his followers (people of four villages) reportedly went on their way up the Xié River where they could continue their dances in peace. Xavier had reports that upwards of 150 people had joined together at the headwaters of the Xié River where, it was thought, they were joining forces with Kamiko, Alexandre, and all their followers (Corr. Min. Just. 1858).

By mid-May, Bazilio was reported to be in Venezuela with a number of people from the Xié. All of them had been reported at the fort of San Carlos, which had been virtually abandoned by the military a month before. Even though Bazilio was out of reach of the military, Xavier was convinced that upwards of 100 people were still meeting on the upper Xié and that the meetings had "converted into armed reunions" ready to resist any military force sent out after them (Report of the Municipal Justice 1858: Doc. 5). A long time later, Xavier got hold of several witnesses who swore to this, one of them being the daughter of the "sorcerer" Cypriano Lopes. She testified that the "meetings" were located at Inamuim, on the Xié River, and that:

> "Many men and women not only of the village of São Marcellino, but also of São Felippe, occupied themselves in daily dances, with

fermented drinks, dancing with crosses, having for a chief the Indian Claudio, who called himself Padre Santo, marrying and baptizing at his fine pleasure, and they had three shotguns, and many poisoned darts, to oppose themselves to whatever force sent out against them." (Report of the Municipal Justice 1858: "Auto de Perguntas")

Furthermore, the local magistrate at São Marcellino affirmed that the residents of São Marcellino had fled up the Xié where Claudio José was located and that Claudio had "for a long time been engaged in this 'idleness' and was even on the Içana with Venancio Christu when Cadete Araújo was there." (*Ibid*).

From May to September, 1858, the provincial government intervened in the Upper Rio Negro region as a direct result of the "disturbances" on the major tributaries. To the government, it was not a question of a handful of rebels, and in light of revolutions in Venezuela at that time, a great deal was at stake. It was not a question of foreign spies or a missionary, or "speculators playing on the credulity of ignorant Indians"; it was rather a question, for the government, that their authority in the region was about to be driven out by the movements.

In May, 1858, several important articles appeared in the major newspaper of Manaus, the *Estrella do Amazonas*, about the messianic rebellions. Clearly, the affairs on the frontier were a public concern, and there was mounting pressure in the capitol to capture and punish Venancio Kamiko, Alexandre, and Cypriano Lopes for their reputed "crimes." The President of the State of Amazonas, José Furtado, instructed the Delegate of Police and Municipal Justice, Marcos Antonio Rodriguez de Sousa, to organize an expedition to the region, where they would seek the help of the missionaries and try to persuade the Indians, without the use of force, to return to their homes. Above all, De Sousa was instructed to use persuasion to make the Indians see their errors. Furtado advised, however, that should persuasion fail, military force could be used. De Sousa would have thirteen military units (about 75 men) accompanying him up the Rio Negro, and if more forces were needed, he could call on the National Guard and all other military detachments on the Rio Negro (Correspondência, Furtado-de Sousa cop. 1).

After several delays, De Sousa and the troops arrived in São Gabriel da Cachoeira in early July, where they formulated careful plans for proceeding with the mission (Report of the Municipal Justice 1858: Docs. 3-4). Xavier's news that the movements on the Xié had become armed, however, forced De Sousa to change his plans and proceed to the Xié while two other emissaries would go up the Vaupés to determine the state of affairs there (*Ibid*: Doc. 5). On the Xié, De Sousa was told by a Warequena chief that everyone on the Xié had fled to the headwaters because they feared the military, and that a rumor had spread that Xavier was coming

to capture everyone and take them away. De Sousa assured them that this was not so and persuaded the chief to go after his people and attempt to convince them to return (*Ibid.*). He ordered Cypriano Lopez taken prisoner and then left for the Vaupés being convinced that he had left all "in complete tranquillity" and that the "dancers of Christ were more worthy of condolence than punishment." (*Ibid.*)

While passing through São Marcellino, the commission heard that Alexandre and company had been on their way down-river on the Vaupés to conduct dances but that when news of the commission reached them, they panicked and went into hiding on the Içana. The Baniwa, however, told De Sousa that Alexandre was not in fact on the Içana but had fled south of the Vaupés and was somewhere on the Tiquié River.

Back on the Vaupés, De Sousa preceded with caution, respect, and reserve. He found the people of one village engaged in a traditional dance-festival (of sacred flutes) and decided to leave them be because the presence of soldiers would surely have been disastrous. While passing by Taraquá, at the mouth of the Tiquié, the Indians immediately fled when they saw the soldiers. De Sousa sent gifts and requested they return, promising a religious festival if they did.

The two emissaries of the commission who had preceded De Sousa had managed to get together "five chiefs and 150 of their people" for a meeting in a village above Ipanoré. Among the people were Alexandre's son Angelo and a disciple of Alexandre named Caetano whom De Sousa called Alexnadre's "Captain of the Honor Guard." De Sousa determined from them that Alexandre had left the group entirely and had gone with his wife and younger son to the Tiquié. A Maku Indian had seen the group heading through the forest in an easterly direction towards São Joaquim and the Rio Negro, reportedly to a hideaway where Alexandre had gardens. De Sousa sent a group of five people, including Caetano and Alexandre's son, Angelo, to look for the fugitive messiah, but when the group showed signs of rebellion, the soldier leading the group was forced to return.

In the end, Alexandre and his family were never located. In fact, he remained in hiding for over a year and a half and no one knew exactly where. De Sousa hypothesized that he would either re-appear on the Japurá River and there renew his activities or "he would quiet down in his gardens and hope his crimes would be forgotten with time" (Report 1858: leaves 64-5). In February, 1860, Alexandre emerged from hiding and was reported in São Gabriel where he made promises to the Director of Indians to "live from then on in peace and at his work" (Corr. Ministros da Justiça, 2/3/60). He requested that he be allowed to live at Santa Ana on the Rio Negro, and as far as is known, the request was granted.

In De Sousa's meeting with the peoples of the Vaupés, he delivered the official message that it was a "crime against religion" to have accompanied Alexandre; it displeased the Governor, "paying him evil for his good

wishes." The government understood, nevertheless, that they had been "deluded, as the poor people that they were." They would not be punished this time, but the next time they would be (Report 1858:37). If caught, Alexandre would be used as an example of the type of punishment the government could give. De Sousa assured them that if in the future they felt they were suffering from persecution, they should seek out the help of the local authorities and not seek refuge in the woods. With that, he ended his message and his mission on the Vaupés, but he immediately returned down-river for news had reached him that there were new disturbances on the Xié River.

At the end of July/beginning of August, Xavier wrote that the people of São Marcellino expressed their resentment of Cypriano Lope's imprisonment and that one person had said:

> "If the Governor wanted to build houses, he should build them himself, because Your Excellency has deceived them with words and has taken away Cypriano" (Report 1858: Doc. 20).

Xavier further asserted that, with one exception, no Indians were coming to work at public service, and no farinha was being sent (*Ibid.*)

De Sousa went to Nossa Senhora da Guia, where Cypriano had a house, to determine the truth of Xavier's report, and found that instead of new disturbances, things were quiet, Cypriano's family and other residents were working on new houses, and that people were surprised to find out why De Sousa was there again. De Sousa concluded that there was reason to doubt there had been any new rebellions on the Xié and that Xavier had distorted the truth on this as on so many other occasions. This was the view De Sousa urged President Furtado to accept, and Furtado himself wrote in 1859 that there were "some doubts" about the Xié rebellions ("Relatório..." Relatórios da Presidência, II: 218).

De Sousa concluded the Commission's work in September, being convinced that in the course of several months, a sort of truce had been restored between the government and the Indians of the Upper Rio Negro. At least, so it seemed; and it was perhaps gratifying to the public to know that several months later, Wanana Indians (Tukanoan) captured Caetano, Alexnadre's disciple, because he was agitating again, and turned him in. According to the news report:

> "On December 24 [1858], a military express arrived from the upper Rio Negro and it reports that part of our border enjoys tranquillity; withal, an Indian by the name of Caetano, an emissary of the celebrated Alexandre, wandered about on the Vaupés, seducing its inhabitants to follow his sect; being taken prisoner by the chief of the village at Caruru Rapids, he was taken to the Subdelegate of São Gabriel who sent him by the same express for disposition of the chief of Police. This Caetano... threw himself in the river above

Santa Izabel at midnight on the eighth day of the voyage, bound by hand and foot as he was, and his corpse did not appear until the next day... (*Estrella do Amazonas*, 12/25/58, N° 316).

Neither Caetano's suicide (apparently an act of desperation), nor the Caruru chief's turning of the leader in (apparently an act of repudiation of Alexandre) are readily interpretable through the documents. The Dessana "Song of the Cross" tradition, however, sheds important light on both leaders, on the significance of Caetano's act, and the perception of Alexandre as a messiah.

The tradition remembers Alexandre as a disciple of Kamiko "who wanted to be his equal" but unlike his master, the tradition states, Alexandre did not triumph over Western society, nor, more importantly, over death and destruction. Rather, Alexandre was seen by his followers as *not to have the powers of his master*:

> Kamiko taught others. His disciple was called Alexandre, a Baniwa from the Orinoco. Kamiko grew old and died. They buried what was his body when he descended again on earth. His soul went home to heaven. It transformed into a child and came down to earth, singing, and beating a drum. When it was descending to earth, they buried his body.
>
> Alexandre wanted to do like Kamiko, to be equal to him. But he came to earth after they had buried his body. "Where did you leave my body?" Alexandre asked. "We've already buried it." they answered. "You don't like me," he said, "so you've buried my body." "I will return," Alexandre said. Saying this, he went near the port and began to rise to heaven, beating his drum. Then he disappeared for good. If they had not buried his body before his return, then the same thing would have happened to him as happened to Kamiko: he would grow, become old, and die; then he would become little again and come back down again to earth. When he was about to arrive, they would bury his body. If they had done this, he would have been like Kamiko.

The power to overcome death, to act as if and with the perspective that the dead are alive, to turn death over into life, are all marks and images of the figures the Dessana remember as their first messiahs. One later "shaman of the cross", for example, taught his followers that "this land where people die is bad, we will prepare another land, we will turn over the earth, for the world to become better, the land to be good." It was because of Alexandre's perceived inability to overcome death that he was not recognized as an equal of Kamiko. And if people did not believe he had this power, it may have been because he lacked the extraordinary shamanistic powers that Kamiko, for example, had to "die" and later return to life. Without

that, there was no basis for them to believe in the message or prophecies that he offered. Further, his acts belied his inability to maintain his authority over, and provide an effective symbolic imagery for guiding, his disciples. He was ultimately dependent on Kamiko as the source of his millenarian inspiration; thus, it proved impossible for either the Tukano or the Baniwa to give him credence.

Caetano, on the other hand, who threw himself into the Rio Negro after being turned in by the Wanana, was, according to the same tradition, also a disciple of Kamiko and had the power to act as if the dead were alive and taught others to do the same. But, one day, the tradition states,

> He went with the Whites. He got to Diaimipawii, above Barcellos on the Rio Negro, put on a straw hat, clothes, shoes, and threw himself into the river. He went to the bottom but later, beating a drum and singing, he rose up to land. He didn't die; there is his house.

Caetano's death in fact replicated the messianic belief in the famous Manao chief, Ajuricaba, known to the peoples of the Upper Rio Negro, who, after his defeat in 1727 at the hands of the Portuguese, threw himself bound in chains into the Rio Negro rather than face the execution which awaited him in Pará (Sweet 1974:545). Like Ajuricaba, Caetano 'did not die' but came to symbolize for the Tukano the hybrid White-Indian society (hence the straw hat, clothes, shoes) of the middle Rio Negro who share in the millenarian hopes, the roots of which are essentially indigenous.

Continuities and transformations: 1860s-1980s

The "Song of the Cross" messiahs continued to appear amongst Tukanoan peoples throughout the latter half of the 19th century and well into the 20th. The Dessana traditions describe among others the miraculous girl Maria, a Dessana, and the cross cult which arose around her in the last decades of the 19th. Documents left by naturalists and travelers describe in the same period the cross cult led by an Arapaço shaman, Vicente, who, like Maria, foretold the coming of missionaries to the peoples of the Vaupés and who predicted "the elimination by force of all White people who mistreated Indians" (Hugh-Jones 1981:34), proclaiming, like Alexandre and others before him, an inversion of the social order to one in which the Indians would be bosses and the Whites their slaves.

Further historical work is needed to clarify the interrelation of these movements, yet it is clear from the traditions that these messiahs succeeded in bringing together numerous people of different Tukanoan-speaking groups to participate in the cross cult rituals and songs. The movements, however, suffered constantly from the fatigue and doubt of their followers, leading in some cases to the killing of the messiahs. As one messiah is said to have explained: "I did these things but couldn't bear it.

When people want to do these things, then many people will come together. They watch and after watching a lot, they become tired and envious." The messiahs repeatedly warned their followings of impending threats, of the imminence of destruction, of horrifying events that would come to pass, and urged them to observe harsh restrictions, to hasten the new world through song and dancing. But the rigors and strains of the millennial fervor seemed to work against a sustained and widespread following. As the traditions state, "they wanted to do like the messiah, but it only worked for him."

The Tukanoan cross cult movement continued unknown to Franciscan missionaries on the Vaupés in the 1880s who instead directed their evangelizing crusade against the indigenous ancestor cult of sacred flutes and masks (see Wright 1981, Part II. E.; and Hugh-Jones 1981). The end of the cross cult messiahs (according to the tradition, in the early 20th century) coincided with the rubber boom on the Vaupés, a time of terror and violence and in a sense, a fulfillment of the messiah's prophecies of destruction. Salesian missionaries began working on the Vaupés in 1914, offering protection to the Indians against the cruelty of the rubber-workers. For the next 70 years, the Salesians built a virtual empire among the Tukanoan people; nevertheless, the Indians continued their hopes in the powers of the crosses left by the messiahs of previous generations. The Salesians discovered the location of the main surviving cross in 1970 and had it transported to the mission center at Jauareté, on the Vaupés, where it became a mere memory and tourist attraction.

Among the Baniwa and other Arawak, Kamiko's influence lasted into the early 20th century, as noted by the German ethnographer Koch-Grünberg in his travels on the Içana in 1902; and the governor of the Venezuelan Rio Negro territory, who met the messiah in the same year, the year of Kamiko's death. Koch-Grünberg and later researchers mention a messiah "Anisetto" on the Cubate River whom they treat as different from Kamiko; but, from their descriptions, Anisetto was none other than Venancio Anisetto Kamiko.

Years after Kamiko's death, the Baniwa of the Cubate River continued following the messiah's doctrine of avoidance of the Whites, as Nimuendajú, who visited the Cubate in 1928, noted. Similarly, in 1912, the governor of the Venezuelan Rio Negro territory recorded that in Curripaco initiation rites, ritual specialists counseled male initiates of the treachery and deceit of the Whites and to hide their "hatred of the Whites for it is strong and know they are traitors" (Matos Arvelo 1912:86).

One of the long-term effects of Kamiko's movement, then, was the transformation of indigenous ancestor cults into a consciousness of historical opposition to external domination. As we have shown elsewhere, the memory of Kamiko's extraordinary powers also served as a powerful source of opposition to the tyrannical regime of the rubber baron and

military governor of the Venezuelan Rio Negro territory in the 1920s, Tomás Funes (Wright & Hill 1986:46-7). In short, the lasting effects of Kamiko's cult were most deeply felt in interethnic relations and symbolic forms of consciousness.

The virtual absence of missionaries among the Baniwa until late in the 1940s meant that there was little or no interference or transformation of these beliefs (unlike what probably was occurring among Tukano with Salesian conversion campaigns). Thus, when Sofia Muller, a charismatic North American evangelical missionary of the World Evangelical Crusade arrived among the Baniwa of the Içana in 1949, the Indians' millenarian expectations were quickly revitalized. Her uplifting message, campaign against witchcraft, and faith-healing had an immediate impact on the Baniwa, many of whom saw in her a messiah, flocked to hear her message and convert to the new faith. Her morality (strict avoidance of alcohol and anything that weakened the soul) also recalled Kamiko's laws of strict ritual observance to gain salvation. As we and others have shown (Wright 1989a; Journet, n.d.), the Baniwas' rapid conversion represented in many ways a transformation of their long-held millenarian beliefs. On the other hand, Muller's radical campaigns against traditional religious institutions (shamanism, the ancestor cult) provoked a crisis of belief, a deep and long-standing division between evangelicals and non-evangelicals or Catholics, fueled by propaganda campaigns. The non-evangelical messianic leaders who arose in the 1960s were powerful shamans (*dzauinaithairi*, Jaguar Owners) but found themselves the brunt of attacks by radical crentes and had to assure their followers that the crentes' dismal prophecies of imminent world destruction would not come to pass (for the crentes had no authority nor knowledge to proclaim the event). Like the messiahs of the past, these shamans were widely reputed for their extraordinary powers of curing and prophecy and were considered to be like the Baniwa Creator, "our salvation." At the time of my fieldwork on the Içana, the memory of one recently-deceased shaman-prophet was still vivid and his prophecy that in the near future, "the Whites were coming" was considered fulfilled with the building of military airstrips in the region in the 1970s.

Over the last decade, the Indians of the Upper Rio Negro have been forced to confront a new level of penetration by Western society into their territory, represented by powerful national security and mining interests. Invasions by gold-panners, pressures from multinational mining companies, and military development projects have all represented a veritable siege of the Indians' territory, creating situations of violent conflict and massive pressures on Indian communities, including the co-optation of leaders to enter into "agreements" with state and corporate interests and to bargain for their land and resource rights (see Wright 1989b). Faced by this situation, in 1986, indigenous leaders felt the need to organized a regional assembly of Indian communities to debate their

projects and interests with corporate and government representatives. On 28 April, 1987, more than 300 Tukanoan, Baniwa, and Maku leaders met in the municipal capital, São Gabriel da Cachoeira, for the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of the Upper Río Negro. Representatives of the government, church, mining companies, and indigenist non-governmental organizations were also invited to participate and debate the major problems of the region. This Assembly, considered by some as an historic landmark, resulted in the creation of a Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Río Negro (FOIRN), affiliated to the Union of Indian Nations, the national Indian organization of Brazil. The leaders of the Federation prepared a final document which expressed their common position for the guarantee of land and resource rights.

The emergence of a new, pan-Indian political unit is most significant in the light of the long history of resistance and millenarian movements in the Upper Río Negro. Far from being a mere "response" to historical circumstances, it represents an evolution of a much longer and wider struggle by the native peoples for autonomy, self-determination, and the guarantee of their rights against outside forces.

Compromising these goals of pan-Indian unity, however, are the divergent strategies Indian leaders see as necessary to attain their visions of a future. Several key Tukano leaders have pursued negotiations with the state and "good neighbor" politics of companies; others, mainly of the Federation, prefer grass-roots mobilization, direct confrontation, and denunciation of state policies. The Federation now includes numerous local associations representing a complex and shifting array of interests and positions.

There is no doubt, however, that the present moment is characterized by the formation of a regional political movement, gradually defining and consolidating blocks of alliances. Indigenous political consciousness, to be sure, has been shaped by a variety of non-indigenous influences (the church, parties, labor unions, etc.), as well as the national and international indigenous rights movement. Yet, for the Indians of the Upper Rio Negro, the roots of this consciousness derive from the visions their ancestral messiahs had of the dawning of a new era.

Conclusions

In concluding, I would like to draw attention to some of the thematic similarities and differences among the millenarian movements of the Northwest Amazon.

One of the most striking elements of the movements is a preoccupation with Christian symbols and paraphernalia. The incorporation of Christian symbols, especially the cross, was far from being a form of "impoverishing syncretism", as Pierre Clastres lamentingly saw it (1987:160-1). Rather,

this should be seen as a vigorous effort to take control over Christianity from the Whites, while reshaping it to meet the spiritual needs of the Indian peoples. Venancio Kamiko/Christu and other who followed him took on priestly roles to save their followers from the apocalypse that would destroy all except those who followed the messiahs in a final conflagration. The cross, a dominant symbol in all movements, represented the son of the Creator through whom the world would be saved. Through the miraculous powers of the cross, the Indians likewise expected salvation.

The messiahs and their followers, however, pursued their interest in Christianity by following paths laid down by traditional mythology. Leaders of the movements were most often shamans who were most thoroughly versed in traditional religious practices. Their appropriation of traditional Christian symbols thus served to empower their movements, by wresting control of Christian practice and reformulating it in their own terms. Where they failed to do so, as in the case of Alexandre, it was precisely in their perceived inability to forge an effective symbolic imagery based on traditional religious powers.

Beyond this, the important themes that figure in the Northwest Amazon movements include: 1) the nature of social hierarchy, 2) the trajectory of Indian-White relWtions, 3) the source and proper use of material wealth, and 4) the proper strategy for ushering in the new era.

Kamiko sought to eliminate the dependence of the Indians on the Whites and institute a new form of ranking in which tribute would be given to him. Alexandre, and later Vicente, sought to revise this model by anticipating a reversal in the status relations of Indians and Whites. Kamiko's solution 'worked', in a sense, because he was of a status of shamans highly-ranked and rewarded in traditional Baniwa culture. Alexandre, on the other hand, was not, nor does traditional Tukanoan culture accept such a concentration of power as readily as the Arawakans (sėe Hill 1984). Hence, Alexandre and other Tukanoan messiahs were unable to sustain their powers over long periods of time and were either rejected as leaders or killed out of 'envy.'

While Kamiko sought autonomy from/avoidance of the Whites, (who were considered irredeemably evil) first by elimination and second by control through magical superiority, the Tukanoans sought reversal in the status of Indian-White relations. The strategies for achieving this radical transformation were variable: Kamiko's movement first awaited the millennium through chanting and dancing, then sought retreat, separation, and the maintenance of their separation through the ancestor cult. Alexandre imitated Kamiko's ritual dances but his movement fell apart when confronted by the threat of military reprisal and his inability to provide a long-term strategy for his followers. Armed struggle sanctioned by divine power was *never* really seen as an adequate strategy either by

the Tukanoans or the Arawakans. Thus, the reports left by military officials of armed resistance from the Tukano and Warequena misrepresent the millenarists' strategy for, outside of one minor skirmish, neither peoples ever sought to actively resist the outsiders' presence by military force. Even in the one case where military tactics were used, the results were disastrous.

The Tukanoan movements showed certain cargo cult tendencies, although material wealth was always a secondary concern in relation to the more powerful effort to appropriate Western Christian symbols of power (especially the cross and priests), and to end the exploitative relations that were forcing Indians to work so hard to get modest amounts of the goods that the Whites seemed to have in abundance. Hence Kamiko's denial of the validity of White debt-claims against Indians; and the Tukanoan perception of Kamiko's claims as being more related to inversions of power (that the native form of social reproduction is superior to the Westerns form) than acquisition of goods. The Tukanoans' preoccupation with overcoming death (which could be read as, the death of their peoples through epidemics, or their culture) was far more important to their vision of the new era than their transformation into a wealthy elite.

Finally, we have argued that the millenarian consciousness of the 19th century must be seen as formative in the long-term political adaptation of the native peoples of the Northwest Amazon to external forces. The prophets of the past drew followers from different ethnic groups, thus setting the stage for new and larger political units. To be sure, traditional political-military alliances sometime crosscut ethnic divisions, but never to the extent achieved by the messianic leaders. As the Tukanoans saw it, however, the rigors of the cult activities militated against the formation of an organization, but not against the consciousness of resistance. The long sequence of cross cult movements, spanning at least 50 years, and hidden to the missionaries until the 1960s, was unquestionably crucial to the formation of a pan-Indian political consciousness, albeit with diverse strategies, in the present.

Abstract

The far Northwest Amazon region, border of Brazil-Colombia-Venezuela, has for long stood out in the historical ethnography of Amazonia for its millenarian rebellions of the 19th century. Recent studies of these movements (Wright & Hill Ethnohistory, 33 (1), 1986) have provided detailed reconstructions and have demonstrated their links to indigenous religion, especially for the Arawak-speaking Wakuenai (Baniwa). The present paper gives greater attention to the perception and development of these movements among Tukanoan peoples throughout the latter half of the 19th

Century. After tracing their antecedents to the various forms of resistant adaptation to Europeans from the 18th to the mid-19th centuries, the paper reconstructs in detail the movements led by Alexandre Christu and others on the Vaupés and Xié Rivers from 1858 on. Tukanoan traditions about these movements clarify indigenous perceptions of why Alexandre's movement failed and the nature of Tukanoan millenarian beliefs. The continuities and transformations of millenarian consciousness among Arawakan and Tukanoan peoples are then traced up to the present, demonstrating that the recent political movement of Northwest Amazon Indians is a development on their long-term struggle for autonomy, self-determination, and the recognition of fundamental rights.

Resumen

La región ubicada al extremo noroeste de Amazonas, colindante con las fronteras de Brazil, Colombia y Venezuela se destaca a través de la etnografía histórica por las rebeliones que sucedieron durante el siglo XIX. Investigaciones recientes referentes a estos movimientos (Wright y Hill, Ethnohistory, 33 (1), 1986) han brindado una reconstruccion detallada y han demostrado sus vínculos con la religión indígena; especialmente para los Wakuenai (Baniwa) del habla Arawak. Este artículo presta más atención a la percepcion y al desarrollo de estos movimientos entre los Tukano a lo largo de la segúnda mitad del siglo XIX. Después de haber trazado sus antecedentes para llegar a las variadas formas de adaptación de la resistencia indígena hacia los Europeos desde el siglo XVII hasta la mitad del siglo XIX, se reconstruyen en detalle los movimientos guiados por Alexandre Christu y otros en los ríos Vaupés y Xié desde el año 1858. La tradición Tukano sobre estos movimientos aclara las percepciones indígenas del por que el movimiento de Alexandre fracasó y la naturaleza de las creencias milenarias de los Tukano. La continuidad y transformacion de la conciencia milenaria entre los Arawak y Tukano hasta el presente siguen demostrando que el reciente movimiento político de los indígenas del noroeste de Amazonas es un desarrollo en su larga lucha por su autonomía, autodeterminación y el reconocimiento de sus derechos fundamentales.

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