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Weaning and the rendering of substances nourishing: food shamanism amongst the Warekena of north-western Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the nurturing and nourishing practices of a small group of Amerindians, the Xié river dwelling Brazilian Warekena, and focuses on the gradually expanding diet of infants, babies and toddlers. Unlike other instances of food shamanism, the rituals surrounding infant feeding, and in particular during weaning, are topics that have received little attention. This paper provides ethnographic detail of the Warekena's infant feeding practices and offers an alternative perspective on food shamanism: one that is based on the Warekena's own insistence on mediating vital processes, through attention-directing practices, such as when eating. In particular, the paper seeks to throw light on food preparation, the ritualised consumption of foods, including the prior bathing of infants and the blessing of new foods introduced in the infant's diet. Working within animic relationality, the focus here is on the mediation of foodstuffs and of the vital processes of the body itself, so as to promote the cosmological and bodily balance that engenders the good health of infants.

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Introduction

Little fish (G.¹ *pirá miri*), that have been carefully prepared and boiled in river water under the watchful eye of the mother are, at six months, the first real food a baby will eat. The moment is often marked by a spell-blowing elder (P. *benzedor*), called on especially for this occasion. I witnessed one such blessing when Lino, the uncle-in-law of my friend Sueli, took a tiny plateful of the fish dish (G. *daiquiri*) and, in a quiet corner of their comfortable one-room residence, muttering something unintelligible, blew a spell over the food. The blessing was intention-laid and although it only lasted a few minutes, it shifted the tenor in the household from one of mundane sociality to that of quiet composure. Henceforth *daiquiri*, and all other small fish, were considered harmless for the infant to consume. This type of blessing is said to forestall attacks by ancestral spirit animals (G. *maiwa*), protecting the infant and his family from them. In particular, it protects the child from the G. *mira* of the animal eaten, that is, the animal's invisible aspect or 'spirit' (P. *imagen*, or 'image') commonly manifesting as a reflection or shadow of the animal.

This article explores the nurturing and nourishing practices of a small group of Amerindians, the Xié river dwelling Brazilian Warekena, and focuses on the gradually expanding diet of infants, babies and toddlers. The consumption of food, including breast milk, is a carefully mediated process. As with the Warekena's food blessings that protect

against the 'image' of the ancestral animal spirits, the overt aim of controlling consumption is to mitigate against the attacks of their descendants, the potentially malignant and infirming 'animist' agents: the *maiwa*. Such rituals involve spells, blessings and/or practices of thanks-giving, or 'seek[s] permission and offer[s] placation' (Tawhai 1988: 101 cited in Harvey, 2006:55) to 'animist' agents who will be eaten, thereby allowing for the safe consumption of foodstuffs, be they agri or horti-cultural produce, fish or meat. In Amazonia and in the wider context of food proscriptions, the specific ritualization surrounding the sourcing of wild foodstuffs (i.e. hunted fish and game), rather than food preparation (processing and cooking) or consumption, has formed the focus of 'food shamanism'.

Unlike other instances of food shamanism, the rituals surrounding infant feeding, and in particular during weaning, are topics that have received little attention. This paper provides ethnographic detail of the Warekena's infant feeding practices and offers an alternative perspective on food shamanism: one that is based on the Warekena's own insistence on mediating vital processes, through attention-directing practices, such as when eating. In particular, the paper seeks to throw light on food preparation, the ritualised consumption of foods, including the prior bathing of infants and the blessing of new foods introduced in the infant's diet. Working within animic relationality, the focus here is on the mediation of foodstuffs and of the vital processes of the body itself, so as to promote the cosmological and bodily balance that engenders the good health of infants.

The article begins by locating the subject of weaning within the greater Amerindian literature on human-nature relationships so as to suggest how this may relate to wider cross-cultural debates, on the

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¹ Throughout the article, words prefixed with G. are in the Géral language (a modified form of ancient Tupi) and words prefixed with P. are in Portuguese.

evolution and psychology feeding (i.e. Fouts, Hewlett, & Lamb, 2005; also see Trivers, 1974; Daly & Wilson, 1988), and in particular, to asymmetric relations of mastery between the feeder and fed therein. The article then turns to the ethnography, and describes the feeding practices of Xié river dwellers, the Warekena.

Balance and temporal asymmetry in relations of caring for and feeding others

There are three aspects of feeding infants that are of particular interest. The first is the sociality of who takes, who gives, when and to whom, and what this says about the type and category of person one is. The second is the 'what' of feeding: who eats what and at what point in their lifecycle - and life state (e.g. infirm or convalescing) - they do so. The third is to do with the practical arrangements of preparing and consuming foods, or feeding and making them available to others.

Caring for and feeding others is an essential part of hospitable human life, but carers are in an asymmetrical relationship to those for whom they provide for. As Peter Gow (1989) has shown amongst the Arawakan Piro, people aim to achieve the status of a married adult, with children, precisely because this will engender the production of an independent family unit. A husband who hunts, and a woman who gardens and processes manioc, evince a gender complementarity that is the basis of Amerindian sociality, and as respective providers of protein-rich meat and carbohydrate-rich manioc, men and women may make demands on one another, and enter into the commensal relations of production, sharing, circulation and the consumption of foods that defines 'subsistence' sociality (Overing, 1989a, 1989b; McCallum, 2001).

The laborious task of processing manioc has been an important precursor to this research. Two landmark articles by Peter Rivière (1984, 1987) address the question of processing the otherwise toxic bitter manioc tuber, but to a more exaggerated degree in stratified Amerindian societies than in egalitarian ones. He argues that in the marked patrilineal ideologies of northwestern Amazonia - such as that of the Warekena - where women marry into agnatic clan groups, the trivial and time-consuming labour of manioc processing is as a key means of controlling women's labour and limiting their sphere of influence. This contrasts to the egalitarian and complementary gender relations in more egalitarian societies where manioc processing is observed to be less intensive. At face value, this would appear to be the case. On the other hand, women's ability to convert otherwise toxic tubers into a diet staple can be seen as an example of their technical prowess, and thus a source of prestige (Heckler, 2004). Part of reason for the sidelining of this debate has been the greater cosmological importance given to the caring of manioc.

Manioc is a curious crop. According to Amerindian epistemologies, it demands attention and care-giving level to what children require to ensure their healthful growth and development. Christine Hugh-Jones (1979) was one of the first to comment upon the intimate relationship northwestern Amazonians perceive between manioc gardening and processing, and human reproduction and fertility, with the manioc garden an apt place for childbirth. Elsewhere, based on work amongst the Makushi, Rival (2001) has demonstrated the relative power women yield as only they, and the Cassava 'mother', have the power to care for manioc. Further, the abundance and size of cultivated manioc is spoken of in terms similar to children, requiring the same energy and input of care (Rival, 2001: 70; Ewart, 2005). Amongst the Colombian People of the Centre, the parent's proper 'feeding' and raising of both children and cultigens (for men, tobacco and coca; for women manioc, chillies and cool herbs) is a manifestation of their personal knowledge and moral worth (Londoño-Sulkin, 2012: 81–82.) Descola (1986) has argued that women develop consanguinal-type relationships with the plants they cultivate, and later in his seminal work on animism he gives the example of blood-sucking manioc that menaces young Achuar infants, suggesting that a woman has two sets of offspring to care for, the manioc

and her children, both competing for her attention (Descola, 1994: 206). The notion of care-giving - and competition for it - is thus extended to relations with plants, and other non-human persons.

Relations of mutual care define both human-human relationships (Overing & Passes, 2000), but also human relationships with plants or animals. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1976) and Århem (1990, 1998) in particular have noted how the extension of personhood to animals generates an ecologically sustainable attitude that mitigates against the exploitation of natural resources. They have emphasised how people take care not to exhaust forest reserves - by respecting the autonomy of the beings that live in them - because they also depend on them.

Considering human-nature relatedness, Århem (1996) draws on his ethnography amongst the northwestern Amazonian Makuna to define food shamanism as a way of transforming slain animal-persons into food for humans by means of a blessing. Such rituals are necessary in the animist context, where animals share the same generic and primordial vitality as humans. Because of this, food is understood to be both life-sustaining, but also as a source of illness. In order to mitigate the dangerous effects inherent in the act of consuming other beings, 'the blessing must know and in his silent chanting recount the mythic origin of each class of food' (1996: 194). These blessings define the animal's generic identity and they describe its embodied powers (their 'weapons', e.g. feathers, blood, saliva), distinctive to its species, which could negatively affect the person who consumes the food. It is thus that food shamanism allows the Makuna to overcome these dangers while still incorporating the animal's life force. Eating is then a 'metaphysical act of incorporating the creative powers of the gods' (ibid.).

Århem (1996: 195–199) distinguishes between four types of Makuna shamanism: preventative (*queare*), protective/regenerative (*wanore*), curative (*quenore*) and destructive (*rohare*). Food shamanism is a preventative (*queare*) measure, because it enables harmful substances to be removed from the food; but it is also a regenerative (*wanore*) measure as, by sending the animal soul back to whence it came, it enables that animal's rebirth. Out of the contexts of food blessings, shamans also perform ongoing protective acts of offering shamanic foods (coca, snuff and beeswax) to the Spirit Owners of the animals, in compensation - or anticipation - of their reciprocity: the provision of fish and game for humans to eat. It is in light of this environmentally conversationalist attitude that the Makuna's 'proscriptive food system' (Århem, 1996, 1998: 94–96) and practices of food shamanism are understood to form part of the 'cosmic food web'. The observation of special diets, acts of food shamanism, food processing and cooking are all key ways of at once detracting the potency of others and maintaining relatively balanced relations with them. Early on, as Overing and Kaplan (1988: 402) pointed out for the Piarora, food prohibitions and hunting magic and songs, all serve to protect people from the diseases 'owned' by animals. They are necessary because inherent dangers exist between unequal spheres of being.

Viveiros de Castro's (1998) perspectivism, as the term suggests, highlights the extent to which Amerindians see other species as leading the same type of life they do, when viewed from their perspective. However, these animal-others are not equals per se, and neither are they fully human persons. From the normal human perspective these animals' morality is questionable. They do not engage in cool-minded and intimate, carefully managed convivial co-resident relations, and hence, they are worthy of becoming food. More importantly perhaps, as Londoño-Sulkin (2012) has demonstrated for the Colombian People of the Center, is the fact that the substances that these animals consume are deemed - from the human perspective - to be immoral, provoking, for example, indiscriminate behaviour, a foul temper and promiscuity. Because people are what they eat, only virtuous substances should constitute properly human bodies, making animals inherently (substantially) inhuman.

The newborn infant too, while it has the capacity to develop into a human person, is something of another species. Initially it occupies this space of a potentially immoral other or, at the very least, of an

unknown guest (Rival, 1998). Writing on the Arawakan Piro, Gow (2000: 47) has noted that birth is a definitive moment in which to assess the potential humanity of the child. “Is it human (*yineru*)?” Piro ask, or has it succumbed to predatory agents and assumed the form of a fish, tortoise or “an animal nobody had ever seen”. Given the animistic potential for non-human sociality and both human and non-human kinship, commensality and care can help babies assume their proper human form; otherwise, they may well remain limp, fragile, in-firm and leaky (Rahman, 2015a; 2016), all signs indicative of an unbalanced and immoral constitution. It is for this reason that neglecting to attend to proper growth, by following dietary, but also technical and behavioural proscriptions, can fundamentally affect one's constitution, or that of the life one is carrying.

For the Warekena one's diet during pregnancy can affect the behaviour of the child as s/he grows up, so that many foods, including the meat of the *zogizogi* monkey, an animal known for its heated and erratic behaviour, is not eaten during pregnancy to prevent these qualities forming part of the child's personality. Similarly, in reflection of its meagre body mass, the caiman should not be eaten during pregnancy, for its consumption is noted to produce overly thin babies. All animals that have ‘an ugly way of being/moving’, as Warekena father-of-four Emilio explained to me, should be avoided so as not to contaminate the baby and cause child deformation and disability (known as *G. machira*, or *P. deficiente*). From a plethora of potential beings, fetuses and neonates must be made to assume and develop the essential human form and way of being that will then define them as real persons (Vilaça, 2002). Food proscriptions are a key means to achieving these ends, as Fausto (2007: 505) clarifies: ‘the postpartum period is crucial to defining the baby's species: father, mother and kindred all strive to fabricate it as a human and as kin’, further clarifying that: ‘Eating like someone and with someone is a primary vector of identity, much like abstaining for or with someone else...food sharing and the culinary code fabricate people of the same species’ (Fausto, 2007: 502; Carsten, 1997).

In the meantime, within perspectivism there is a temporary asymmetry for those who find themselves in the impotent ‘prey’ category, vis-a-vis those occupying the position of ‘predator’ and this dynamic dichotomy is repeated within various relationships. Thus Fausto (2008) has emphasised the unequal status of the master vis-a-vis the mastered, prevalent not only in marked servanile relationships, but also as part of child-parent relations, pet-keeping (‘adoptive filiation’; on the breast-feeding of pets, see Erikson, 2000: 8) and including that of the eater-eaten (Fausto, 2007). In a more recent treatment of feeding, Fausto and Costa (2013) suggest that, when feeding provokes a change in diet and becomes a vital necessity, it establishes a bond that is asymmetrically dependant. Thus, the relationship between the feeder-fed, as the Kanamari say, is one of “internal necessity” towards the person who provides’ (ibid. 2013: 157). What we are witnessing here is not an age or gender inequality, but an asymmetry that manifests as a result of the embodiment of divergent perspectives, proper to certain species.

Arhem (1996: 193) and Fausto (2007) emphasise the need for food shamanism, performed by men and female culinary activity - cooking - as necessary in transforming potent animal-persons into food. Fausto (2007) sees food shamanism as an important way of mastering and thus lessening the potentially infirming power of potent predators (animals and enemy others), once having killed them. Food rituals remove the potent subjectivity, what he calls the ‘jaguar part’ of the animal, thus allowing for the consumption of the prey part of the victim without being negatively affected by its predator part. From the enemy-hunter's point of view, ‘what we want is not their subject part but their object part’ (Fausto, 2007: 508). With the agentive part removed, passive and pure matter (flesh) remains. But blood must also be removed, and thorough cooking (by women) is the chief means through which to do away with any traces of blood. Turning potential foodstuffs into life-enhancing substances thus requires the input of both genders; and the importance given to the art of cooking - and not just to food processing - is a theme I attend to in this paper.

The Amazonianist themes that I have discussed - the generalised provision of care to both humans and non-humans, infant carers as hospitable hosts providing for potentially inhuman/immoral others, and relations of mastery - are important framing references for this article. For current purposes, however, and with food shamanism in mind, I would like to focus on the *time and attention* given to the preparation and consumption of infant food as part of this wider animist ontology. I am thinking of the specific type of intersubjective relationality (Toren, 2001) that forms part of animist ontology (Bird-David, 1999; Ingold, 2006), one that is, as Bird-David (2008) suggests, is part of larger pre-text of care-giving and ‘nurturing’. My concern here is the concern that Warekena themselves have with preparing, eating, feeding and generally, with consuming substances in such a way as to make them life-enhancing. Removing the potency of animals is key to doing this, but in this paper I suggest that simple attention-directing techniques, used by women when cooking and by men when shamanizing foods, ensure that the potential harm of consuming otherwise potent substances is effectively limited. The special, mindful, attention given to carefully preparing, feeding and consuming food is the nexus of this argument. When the ritualised acts that surround feeding practices are viewed in this light, the special measures that are taken to ensure that food is life-enhancing, rather than life-devouring, reveal animism (mindful subject-subject relations) to be a mode of perception awake to keeping the body in balance.

The Warekena, and fieldwork with them

Xié River dwellers live in the Amazon basin, in the microregion known as the Upper (Alto) Rio Negro. This region of northwestern Amazonia is formed by a dense expanse of tropical forest, floodplains and waterways defined by the upper course of the Rio Negro and its effluents. There are some 35,000 indigenous peoples living here, who can roughly be divided into twenty-four distinct ethnicities, with nearly as many languages. These languages and ethnic groups can be classified into three main linguistic groupings: Arawakan, Tukano and Makú. With a more complex material culture than other groups, and a marked hierarchy characteristic of other status-conscious river-front Arawakans, the Warekena with whom I worked, contrast to more egalitarian forest dwellers (i.e. Makú groups), who rank lower in the regional hierarchy. The former are divided into agnatic sib groups, which are characterised by a man's ranked membership into the male-dominated jurupari flute cult. This is a special feature of Arawakan northwestern groups, where residence tends to be patrilineal.

Men fish and hunt and engage in forest extraction (principally, *piassava* palm) for exchange with river merchants. Women - today often with their husband's assistance - cultivate manioc. The labour-intensive production of manioc derivatives, including the staples of manioc flour (*P. farina*) and manioc bread (*G. beijú*), are processed almost exclusively by women. This is necessary for the otherwise highly cyanogenic *manihot esculenta* Crantz variety that these groups consume. Manioc flour is the principal product for exchange with river merchants too, and is a formidable source of income, albeit at a depreciated rate of exchange.

The Brazilian Warekena live in riverfront locations in communities whose sizes vary from one extended family, to over 300 residents. The mid-river island of Tunu Cachoeira, where I conducted the greater part of my fieldwork, is a community of around 50 people. In this community, I had the opportunity to observe the cooking and feeding practices, and food shamanism, that took place with those children who were infants and toddlers at the time of my fieldwork (2010–2011). In addition to observing them, I also casually enquired and interviewed several mothers, asking what infants were fed, when, why, how and by whom. I also participated in infant feeding and engaged in participant-experience: I entered the field pregnant, in the company of my husband and son, and my daughter, Sofia, was born there. I breastfed Sofia, followed the advice of mothers and grandmothers, and I also began weaning her there.

Keeping the foetal and infant body in balance

During the perinatal period, and especially during the post-birth period known as the *couvade* (see Rivière, 1974; Butt-Colson, 1975; Rival, 1998), both parents follow special dietary and behavioural proscriptions. During this period of fasting (*P. jejum*), the main diet consists of bland, unassuming, *pirá miri* (little fish) with manioc bread. Chilli pepper, salt and fish, especially large fish with spores, such as *G. mandi* and *G. zoribi*, must not be eaten by the parents. Forest pig (*G. tiyjitú*), a nocturnal animal, should be avoided because, even if blessed, it will cause the baby to be wakeful. Fruits with 'milk', such as *P. cupucu*, are also to be avoided lest they cause a white frothing of the mouth in the baby, known as '*G. jurupari bejú*' (literally the manioc bread of the mythic figure, the *jurupari*) or *G. 'zapiño*'.

A wide range of actions should be avoided post-birth and with the woman already confined to the home, the onus falls on the father. All forceful ('hot') actions, objects, sounds and heated social states should be avoided, as should radically overly cool ones. These include not hunting, hammering, hitting (dogs) or playing football as well as not the cutting of the *G. karanā* plant used to make *tipiti*'s for manioc processing. Cutting the *karanā* plant will cause the baby's umbilical to grow out, rather than inwards. When cooking, it is dangerous for fathers enhance the first by blowing into it, as this will cause burning on the child's skin, known as *P. cataporinha*, *G. bestega* (*P. forte*), a common native illness similar to chickenpox which assumes the same name as the more deadly form. Fathers should also avoid rain (or cover one's head), to prevent overcooling, and the aforementioned *zapiño* in their new-born baby; and the father should avoid submerging in the water. These observations are an important means of detracting the attention of the spirit animal ancestors who will otherwise have their 'eyes opened' and start 'moving'. After a week or so, after the performance of the *G. iyumi* infant bathing ritual, these observations are gradually lessened, and the parents begin to assume a normal adult diet.

The logic behind these alimentary guidelines, as well as numerous other observations on substances, actions, contexts and beings, is grounded in animist 'contagious magic'; but it is also subject to, as Butt-Colson (1976) has pointed out, binary classifications, such as those used in humoral systems (Butt-Colson & de Armellada, 1983). Humoral perception is not based on a categorical hot-cold classification according to a person's gender or their state of life, and nor does it exist as a rigid taxonomy of substances, places or actions (Mathews, 1983). Rather, it oscillates around a 'moral-medico nexus of moderation' (Horden & Hsu, 2013) which, in Amerindia, has received much attention as the basis of the balancing act between the wise shaman and wicked sorcerer, the dual axis of Amerindian sociality (Whitehead & Wright, 2004). As lower-Xié resident Irineu explained to me when he was telling me about his disturbing encounter with a sorcerer in the forest, these 'people' merely 'appear' to have a 'body like one of us'. Sorcerers (*G. machi*) lack humanity, and as the Warekena say, deal with 'hot' substances like poison, suffer 'hot' emotions such as envy, and their scruffy appearance is evidence of their immorality. Ordinary people - one's co-resident kin - follow basic preventative measures to ensure that they do not suffer hot emotions, but rather retain their body in balance.

People in hot states avoid more of the same, but they also avoid extremes that are radically opposed to their current state. Infants, whose heated vital state is an important part of their capacity for rapid growth, require cool foods to offset and redirect their vitality. Pregnant mothers, who are 'hot' due to the inflated state of gestation, also avoid more of the same, seeking out 'cool' (tranquil) rather than 'hot' (fiery) contexts; while those in weak states take cool foods as they lack the personal potency that would allow them to mitigate the potentially negative effects of consuming something so radically opposed to them: namely hot foods.

In the hot and humid tropics of northwestern Amazonia, in order to balance the mind-body in preparation for eating, people cool themselves down by bathing. In such a state, the body is ready to receive

foods. With the exception of manioc flour drink (*G. chibé*), all alimentary substances, prior to consumption, require a person to first cool himself by bathing. This is true of all proper persons, including the inchoate (*babies*), who are bathed before they are breastfed. Only those with a fever (overly hot) or in weak states such as that of post-partum maternity (overly cool), are absolved of this precaution. Pregnant women, who are full of blood and hot, bathe more frequently than others and they are evaluated as morally upright by doing so. Babies too, full of vitality, are want to bathe with frequency and this is the key means that will enable them to become proper 'moral' persons.

Bathing takes place before each meal, and everyone, including infants, are bathed before sunrise and breakfast. Bathing is common fare during the summer, when people are industriously engaged in manioc garden labour, and hence sweat more. But even during winter, bathing is at least a thrice daily affair.

People who fail to bathe before eating are observed to be ill-tempered, suffer from a range of ailments, including constipation or diarrhoea, and in more extreme circumstances, may be subject to the wrath of the forest-dwelling *G. kurupira*. The *kurupira* is a type of custodian of the forest, or forest-owner, who will occasionally attempt exchange interactions with those he encounters in the forest. Transgressions, such as failing to bathe before eating - which exist to promote human wellbeing - greatly annoy him as they upset the balance which ultimately allows all beings to live well.

The *kurupira* takes the form of a small dwarf about the height of a child, with back-to-front feet, and a long and beautiful mane that looks like the fibres of the piassava palm. As a forest-dweller, the *kurupira* is renowned for his remarkable physical strength, his knowledge of forest remedies and of the mountain locations of (precious) crystals and minerals. He is even fluent in several indigenous and non-indigenous languages. Multi-morphic by nature, the intrinsic elusiveness of outward forms or shapes and appearance is part of *kurupira* shape-shifting (see Rivière, 1994) and in the face of human indiscretions, he will unexpectedly emerge.

Father of four, Irineu, made the link between bathing, health and sickness explicit to me when he stated that his mother had always told him, 'bathe before all consumption, otherwise you'll get ill'. Sickness, for Amerindians, includes misfortune and may even manifest itself in physical form. To illustrate the point, Irineu recounted to me a story which he also told his children:

A mother and father decided to go to their manioc garden and work, while the eldest daughter, of 18 years of age, stayed home to look after the younger children. The father said, 'Look after the children properly while I am at the manioc garden. If the children cry, pick them up, take them to bathe and then offer them something to eat.' This was important as, in the past, there were a lot more [enchanted and potent, forest-dwelling] *kurupira*. The parents went off to their manioc garden. One of the children, a 2 year-old, went to sleep and woke up crying. The elder sister said, don't cry, I am going to climb up the *inga* fruit tree for you. There was a lot of *inga* fruit in that tree. She took the child to the foot of the *inga* tree and up the tree she went to get the *inga*. The other child also collected *inga* and gave it to the crying child.... Shortly afterward, the elder sister heard that the *kurupira* was on his way. She quickly climbed down the tree, got the children and went to the port. There was no canoe there to cross the river. What now? Well, the river wasn't so deep and the cataracts could be crossed by walking. She got the children and the sleepy two-year-old and went walking through the shallow waters. They just reached the other side and the *kurupira* arrived at the port.... Then the father returned home to see all the children on the other side of the river. 'How is it that that animal nearly ate you all?' He asked. The eldest daughter explained how she had gone to get the *inga* from the tree to eat....

This story has a moral: children should bathe before eating. Indeed, children are the subjects of an intense bathing routine that begins at birth. Post-birth, infants are immediately splash-washing, fed and then

laid in the hammock. This routine continues at least five times a day and often two or three times a night and continues until the baby can sit up (around six months). Bathing occurs when an infant cries for food, and an infant's hunger is rarely sated unless he or she is first bathed. Together with breast-milk, bathing allows an infant to become plump and well-watered, rather than 'dry' and brittle (i.e. emaciated). In the same way in which river water penetrates the womb of pregnant mothers when they bathe, generating abundant amniotic fluids that ease birth, river water also permeates the skin of infants, positively constituting them as firm (upright) and fluid (flexible) people. As I have examined elsewhere, river water is as an important nourishing substance as breastmilk (Rahman, 2016; 2015b).

Xié dwellers, like many other Amerindians, are highly attentive to the mediation of vital processes such as breathing, urination, defecation, digestion and metabolic processes. In general, they attend to orifices (Hugh-Jones, 1979: 119); and the mode, manner or way in which things come in and go out of them. Indeed, all substances and things that go in and out of the body are the subject of punctual attention, and especially so during infancy when their functioning is just being firmed up (see Rahman, 2015b).

If the body is perceived as an integrated vessel through which things flow in and out, the way that it consumes foods is highly relevant (See Hill, 1993: 73). Bathing is required to cool bodies in preparation for taking in any food or liquid. When eating, the oral orifice is occupied, and so foods are consumed in silence, from one communal plate or served into individual bowls. Fish bones are removed while eating, making everyone attentive to the task of chewing and masticating; and mothers are careful to remove the bones from any fish dish their children eat. Carefully drinking the stock - so as not to spill any of it - is also considered fortifying. Fish, meat, and different fruit and vegetable varieties should not all be thoughtlessly eaten at the same time, lest the person suffer diarrhoea or blemished skin. Taking rapid scoops of manioc-based drinks with the hollowed plant gourd spoon (*G. cuyupi*) marks the end of the meal, and the word *jawe!* - 'it's over' - is pronounced.

The etiquette displayed by Xié dwellers contrasts with that of their occasional (non-indigenous) guests, who range from health professionals to local politicians and who, in the eyes of Xié dwellers, gobble down their meals, mixing up food types and not properly regulating the ingestion of liquids. From the Warekena's perspective, foreigners suffer from ill-health because they eat from both meat and fish dishes, and instead of taking the cold manioc drink (*chibê*) at the end of the meal, they drink it at intervals between the hot dishes they are consuming; and, because they talk, they lack attention when eating. More importantly, they do not bathe before eating. And as Xié dwellers well know, a lack of mindful action and a failure to respect these guidelines compromises health and provokes animist agents to attack.

Breastfeeding, and *karibé*

Babies, in their first few months of life, are fed almost exclusively on breast milk. Immediately post-birth they are bathed at home, by their grandmothers, in a basin-full of river water fetched for that purpose. If and when they cry out, demanding food, they are fed, but only after bathing. During the first feeds of new mothers, the mother-in-law, or increasingly her own mother, will position the infant alongside the mother in the hammock and take the breast and carefully manoeuvre the nipple (*G. kambí chi miri*) in the baby's mouth. The baby is the sole focus during early breast feeding, receiving the mother's all-consuming attention. After feeding the newborn is returned to his own hammock. Mothers do not expect extended physical intimacy with the 'hot' baby, when they themselves are in a weakened and 'cool' post-partum state; and they appear markedly aloof to their newborns.

Having lost blood during delivery, the mother requires the heat of the fire and a high intake of hot fluids to restore her health. Milk production is instigated through the consumption of warm *G. karibé* (manioc bread drink), a heavily processed manioc-based beverage which



Fig. 1. Cleocilda taking *karibé* post-birth.

resembles breastmilk in colour and is slightly more fibrous in consistency. Warm *karibé* must be consumed in quantity throughout the day and parents ensure that they have sufficient manioc bread (the basis of this drink) pre-birth to sustain them in the post-birth diet. In terms of post-partum recovery and breast feeding, *karibé* is considered a type of super-food, a vitality replenishing substance that should be taken in abundance (see Fig. 1).

While it is simmering, a flannel may be placed atop of the steaming *karibé* so as to penetrate it. Placing this flannel on the breast can help initiate milk production and enhance flow. Other mothers told me that hot *karibé* or manioc porridge (*G. mingão*) should be rubbed and massaged directly onto the breast to generate milk production. These techniques are also employed in the case of mastitis or *G. kunha perewa kambí*, to reduce hard, engorged breasts and the fever they generate. The grated bark of the water-rich *cajú* fruit tree may then be taken as an oral infusion and applied directly to the breast. The mother's breasts may also be massaged or firmly stroked with a plastic hair comb in order to relieve them. The most important element of these remedies is the thermic qualities (heat), which liquidify, and friction, which warms and increases the milk flow. In the community of Campinas, José explained to me how his wife, after bathing, would siphon off the watery foremilk and rub it over the baby's face, feeding the infant only the 'stock' of the thicker mid and hind milk. The inability to produce sufficient breast milk, however, may require feeding by other mothers or in the case of one underweight baby, being fed *G. capim santo* (similar to lemongrass) on a spoon, which I was told was later supplemented with dissolved powdered milk.

To sustain a mother's milk, the broth (*P. caldo*) of mostly chicken and bird soup (*G. pirikita*) - but also small fish - together with *karibé*, should be consumed frequently and in quantity; and the same term '*caldo*' (broth) is used to describe a mother's rich and plentiful supply of milk. Breastfeeding my two-month baby in the field, our host Magdalena, a respected grandmother, would exclaim 'look at that broth!' when observing the continued suckling and swallowing of Sofia. Sofia's extremely chubby appearance reinforced Magdalena's impression. However, Magdalena was bewildered by the fact that I produced such a lot of milk but did not consume *karibé* and fish broth in quantity: 'for us, you shouldn't have this amount of milk.'

During feeding, the baby is initially held in the crook of one arm, in a position similar to cross-cradle, but at a more acute angle. As they grow, they increasingly take an upright seated position on their mother's lap and the mother will assume a purposeful, upright posture to breast-feed her child, ensuring that her breasts are protruding and her shoulders are back. When infants more readily help themselves, mothers begin to occasionally engage in light conversation while feeding. Once they are toddlers, young children will approach and freely access the breast, lifting up any clothing in their way. Children come and go as they please, sitting, standing or otherwise hanging on to and sucking their mothers' breast, while she continues whatever she was doing (e.g. the conversation and filtering manioc mass) (see Fig. 2). In this setting - and at this age - the normal practice of bathing before feeding is hard to maintain. Incessant feeding - in this manner and in public - draws a stern rebuke from the child's mother and this is also true for mothers trying to wean their children off the breast altogether. More often than not, it is the lack of bathing that incites the greatest conflict. I witnessed my friend Sueli push her two year old over as she started moaning at her mother's advice to go and have a wash first.

Weaning, and babies that fast

Exactly what people eat is determined by both their phase in their life course and their personal state at that given moment in time. The predominant diet of river-side dwellers, such as the Warekena, is fish. Adults, who have accumulated a more substantial degree of personhood, enjoy the meat of large predators, including diverse species of fish and game animals such as tapir, jaguar and monkey meat in winter. Overwhelmingly, fish and game are made into chilli-spiced (piquant) broths or stews, accompanied by manioc flour or manioc bread, or both. The combination of the fruits of gendered labour is what constitutes a proper meal (see for example, Gow, 1991: 101–103; also see Echeverri, 2015). The diet of children is, however, a more delicate act of balancing. The meat of large game animals is considered too dangerous for them, as are fish with spores, and weaning slowly stipulates an itinerant diet which expands from 'cool' bland foods made by women, towards more potent 'hot' ones hunted by men. Women are responsible for preparing both.

For women, cooking is a delicate undertaking, at once necessary in order to prepare wholesome foods but also understood as an art in self-cultivation. Cooking is an activity that requires compound resources: a place to cook (i.e. in one's house or adjacent kitchen), firewood or manufactured coal, a receptacle in which to cook and of course, something to eat, ideally some game or fish. When cooking, women are sure to have all the materials they require at hand, as the fire is to be constantly watched (-and the gruel for breakfast frequently stirred-), removing, adding or adjusting sticks to regulate the temperature and blowing to re-ignite or spread the fire. In the cool early hours of



Fig. 2. Breastfeeding while her mother filters manioc in the community of Vila Nova.

the morning and evening, women pay great attention to how they cook, and carelessness has serious consequences.

When singeing the hairs of the seasonally available monkey (whose hairs must be burnt prior to cooking), individuals take care not to wet the still warm hair of the monkey in the cool river water as this can provoke *maiwa* (ancestral animal spirit) attacks. If the food boils over from the pot, this food should not be consumed, but thrown away, otherwise the seasonal and cosmic giant armadillo (*G. Tatu wasu*) will cause instant death. Over-boiling foods incites the wrath of the forest-dwelling *kurupira*, who is attracted by the foul smell, with potentially fatal consequences. When it comes to cooking, multi-tasking and the maladroitness are considered simply to lack attentiveness; and cooking well is, in itself, a shamanic act. The preparation of infant food is a particularly delicate affair, but feeding is first instigated when a baby shows interest in eating with their kin.

Weaning begins when a child is seen to be looking at food. If a child is seen to be observing others eating, it is a clear indication that the child also wants to be fed: the baby is aware of what eating and being fed is, and he/she too also wants to participate. When we took a trip down-river, from the community of Tukano back to Tunu Cachoeira, Simão and his canoe - 'our ride'-observed how our own little Sofia was 'o *mayco*' (watching) - at only two months old. Taking a minute quantity of warm manioc bread drink (*karibé*) freshly prepared by his wife, he scooped a small offering into the hollowed gourd (*cuyupi*) that floated in the recipient's centre, and offered her a little. As he tipped the gourd towards her mouth, the contents touched her lips but dribbled down her chin and onto her bulging thighs. She wasn't quite ready to start taking foods.

From around the time a baby reaches three months, a mother may feed it *karibé*.² It should be made from the finest quality white manioc bread (rather than the yellow manioc variety) and the child is fed from its own tiny *cuyupi*, (hollowed plant shell), specially sourced and primed for this purpose (see Fig. 3). When I asked about feeding Sofia, I was instructed that babies who are just beginning taking solids should be fed first at midday and then again at sunset.

At about five months a baby may begin eating 'the child of tapioca' (*G. tapioca korea*, see Fig. 2). Tiny tapioca balls - a labour-intensive manioc derivative - are separated from the larger ones and are then placed in a shallow pan of cold water. Just as they are brought to the boil, they are removed from the heat, allowed to cool and then fed to the baby. Some babies will also take powdered milk and eat manioc bread (*beijú*) as early as three months. However, none of these substances are what adults regard as real food that makes a person potently strong (*kirimbawa*) and it is not until sitting (around six months) - and they have visibly become poised and filled out - that babies begin to take on a properly human diet.

At important developmental stages, when the baby is becoming 'hard' enough to sit, and sufficiently strong (*G. kirimbawa*) to crawl or walk, the baby will initiate a 'fast' (*G. kuaku*) and produce liquid faeces (*G. puruka*). My neighbour Mercilla explained to me that at these times the baby 'will cry because he is hungry, but will not want to eat because he knows [he need not in order to grow]'. That is, the baby will decline food precisely because he is 'fasting'.

In the same way that initiates, menstruating women, sick people and parents (post-birth) fast in order to facilitate their own transformation into parents and their child's into 'persons', babies and children are understood to fast so as to help themselves to grow and develop. This prevents displacing the vital aspects of self - the soul (*G. anga*), body-soul (*G. mira*) and small, to-be-developed child's body (*G. pira miri*) - when they are in a period of rapid realignment (Rahman, 2015b). The main intake of liquids during fasting, for babies and adults alike, is *karibé*; and at

² While visiting medical teams recommend babies begin weaning at six months, Xié dwellers contend that outsiders simply don't know when the right time is and when their babies are hungry for food.



Fig. 3. Sofia, at 4 months, taking an early infant food (*tipiaca korea*) with the plant gourd (*cuyupi*).

ten months and over, the less processed and cold beverage of manioc flour drink (*chibé*).

Such fasts are often broken by the introduction of a new food, such as a plateful of small boiled fish and its broth. This first real food must be blessed with a spell, which allows the new food to be consumed without harming the infant. The consumption of small fish may shortly be followed by a lumpy wild chicken (*G. jacu*) broth, thickened with manioc bread and resembling *karibé* (manioc bread drink) in both colour and consistency, but this too is blessed the first time that it is introduced to the infant's diet. Babies are then said to sleep through the night because they have begun to eat proper food and are 'big'.

At this age a child may also consume unprocessed foods from the manioc garden, including bananas (*G. patau*) and black potatoes (*G. cará*). (Even at this young age, however, children should not eat two bananas growing from the same stem. This is to avoid having twins in later life.) Upon reaching seven months, the baby can be offered small game animals (*G. cutiwaya* or *P. paca*) to eat. The particular type of meat offered will depend on what the father has been able to catch. Larger fish, such as *G. zoribi*, and all 'fish with spores' may also be introduced. At eight months it is considered appropriate to include hot chilli peppers in the infant's broth; and at ten months babies can start to eat larger game animals, such as monkeys, if the father catches them. Each new type of food must be blessed before consumption. In the same way in which bathing primes the body for eating by cooling it, food blessings direct attention to the act of eating, consecrating this delicate moment for the human organism by attending minutely to the substance to be consumed and to the act of eating. Food precautions, taboos and food shamanism can, from this perspective, be understood to be a compression and condensation of daily norms that mediate bodily functioning - to ensure proper metabolic functioning - as a means of preventative health.

As their diet expands, young children continue to suckle and feed on the breast and there is no particular age or developmental marker at which a woman will stop breast-feeding a child. However, while mothers will readily feed another's child, they avoid doing so when their own child has been weaned on to fish or game. Breastfeeding two children, one weaned onto real foods and the other still in early infancy, is understood to have a negative impact on the health of the eldest.

Breast-feeding usually ends with a mother's subsequent pregnancy. She will stop breastfeeding a month or more prior to birth and begin leaving the baby in its own hammock (as she did immediately post-birth), rather than have it sleep with her (which begins around three months). This prevents feeding during the night. The subsequent pregnancy is often well-planned, since ideally a mother will not have another child until the previous one is at least three. As my friend Sueli explained to me, this is because 'if you become pregnant while breastfeeding, the first child won't grow'. To ensure there is sufficient

time, attention and breast-milk to secure a child's personal growth and development, and the mother's own wellbeing, parents space the birth of their children through sexual abstinence and plant remedies that thwart conception.

Individuals asked how it was that my husband and I had achieved 'good' birth-spacing between my eldest son, who turned five in the field, and our youngest daughter who was born there. One woman in Campinas observed that, as a result of child spacing, my son now just came home to eat (as he should), but then went off again, and 'didn't give me work' now that I had another little one to care for. Such spacing was approved of. Closely spaced children reflect the parent's 'vice' and lack of self-control, as having numerous children, such as the twelve-strong family of prolific *pajé* (shaman) Jesus was disapproved of. The often achieved and well-balanced ideal is four children, each with three or more years between them and often in the context of one or more infant or child deaths.

With the last-born child (no subsequent pregnancy), women allow the child to suckle at the breast for as long as it chooses, until it 'doesn't want to anymore'. In one admittedly extreme instance, the last female child of Tunu's former captain Marcelino was breastfed until the age of nine. By contrast, the last child of the new leader, at the time of my fieldwork, was fed until two years of age. Lemon juice and chilli peppers are sometimes applied to the nipple to discourage feeding, particularly when a mother wishes to wean her child, which is often because she wants to spend more time working in the manioc garden.

Mothers sometimes leave older babies at home, in the care of an older sister, when working in the manioc garden. Mother of five, Marlene of Campinas, said she preferred to work just a few hours in the early morning, usually with her husband, before returning home to care for the baby. Her brother-in-law, José, explained that when he accompanied his wife to the manioc garden, they would always know that when her breasts began leaking milk, it was time to return home.

For others, there is a more marked tension between manioc farming and child-care, as one Tunu described to me the case of her niece: she would periodically rise at 2 a.m. to grate her manioc. But, as I was told, she 'liked grating manioc so much that she lost her finger' in the manioc grater. This mother, when explaining an eight-year gap between her two children, complained to me that 'children were a bore', 'because they are always getting ill' and 'don't let people get on with their work (i.e. manioc farming and processing)'. Some mothers will also give their daughters a plant remedy that prevents conception altogether, explaining that this is so the daughter can continue working, unburdened, with their mother in the manioc garden.

Village co-resident, Devina recounted one case of two neglected siblings, aged two and three, who were left in the village, day after day, while their mother went to work in the manioc garden. Children this young left in the village often do not eat until their parents return and prepare food, which may not be until the mid-afternoon. These two became ill, blood was found in their diarrhoea and it was thought they had been poisoned (*P. estrago*). When the children died, however, the blame was placed on the mother who was deemed to have been working too hard. Instead, she should have listened to the advice of elders and either worked shorter hours or taken her children with her to the garden. Because of her intransigence (and her bloody-mindedness), the mother was said not 'to care for them' and so 'they were given back to God'.

Conclusion

The politics of feeding is based on relations of sharing, demand and generosity. When a baby cries it demands feeding and feeding others asserts one's capacity to competently care for others. It affirms one to be a morally upright person and asserts a willingness to make 'kin out of others' (Vilaça, 2002). This is an important point in Amazonia because this category of person is one that is continually affirmed and asserted: persons in Amerindia are *continually being made* (Conklin & Morgan, 1996). Here, 'social relations determine substance' (Vilaça, 2002: 6),

rather than the other way round, and kinship is constituted by the community of food-sharing. This is a process of special intensity during the perinatal period, when feeding infants is a means to co-author others as persons: nurturing and nourishing such incipient persons (foetuses, neonates and babies) is the only way they can achieve humanity.

The Warekena live in a world which includes both human and non-human relationships, and with them, different modes of relating to others. The Warekena are hierarchal, conscious of their rank and position within their social group and without it. The asymmetry evinced in human-human relations is also apparent in human-other relations, including those with the human infant. While infants do depend on their feeders, the dynamic of feeding manifests within the more generalised importance placed on care-giving, or one might say - hospitality - extended to the infant 'guest'. Moreover, the Warekena overtly state that they have children because they want to enjoy their company, and while infants are initially entirely dependent, if they are cared for properly, they will soon grow to become productive members of their communities, capable of rendering substances nourishing for others. Comparative research into the infant feeding practices and the feeder-fed dynamic of more egalitarian groups, such as the Makú, may establish whether asymmetrical relations and inferior rank in the social hierarchy bears any relationship to their specific forms of intersubjective relationality. In the meantime, the attitude that many Amerindian groups take towards morally inferior non-human-persons suggests that a degree of temporal asymmetry is indeed apparent.

In this paper, I have employed a phenomenological understanding of animacy, one that allows me to examine food shamanism as part of humoral logic activated by specific techniques and actions which potentialise its effects and whose aim is to keep the body in balance. Rather than analysing food shamanism as an animist 'schemata of praxis' (Descola & Pálsson, 1996: 87) which informs a 'proscriptive food system' - and which may indeed be its ultimate cosmological expression - I have understood animism to be a means of mindful perception. That is, it is not a schema, a cosmivision (or mental model) layered onto the world, but rather an active way of engaging with the world (Ingold, 2000: 107) in which mindful attention is a key component.

The shift in relationships that weaning marks, substantially and socially, is both subtle and more amplified than food consumption alone. It is a process that occurs over time and is part of an expanding relationship with the world and all of the substances, flavours and textures that form part of it. Rituals such as those that occur during food shamanism mark shifts in these relationship, but more importantly, in the mode of perceiving and relating to the world. Mediating bodily processes, regulating the openings of orifices and hot-cold states is key to achieving a healthful life.

Eating real food that has been lovingly cultivated, harvested and processed by one's kin is seen as instrumental in the process of becoming a person, and one that facilitates the evolution of the baby's loose form (*pira miri*) into that of a properly upright human body (*G. pira yane*). The first foods offered to an infant are highly prized cultigens, the fruit of hard labour, by family members. They begin with mild and bland, proximate, cultivated, heavily processed, 'cool' foods; and both food preparation, as well as feeding, is attended to with cool concentration.

Cool and creamy-looking *karibé* can be seen as a kind of super-food and appears as the most basic substrate of foods for binding soul to body, producing fleshy substance and fat at the most basic level of corporeal existence. Because the production of manioc derivatives is extremely labour intensive, involving sustained and cool-minded attention, manioc may be understood as an ensouling substance that has the capacity to shape and nurture incipient human beings. Certainly this is the perspective of many Xié dwellers who, when enquiring into what kind of food people eat in my country, concluded that they would surely die without manioc, for which there is considered no substitute.

Other foods are gradually incorporated into the infant's diet to include the highly valued fish and game eaten by his kin. This increasing variety moves along a continuum towards a diet of the wilder, bloodier forest-dwelling animals, and hot piquant foods, which are the proper foodstuffs of human persons (e.g. small fish; small game; chilli pepper; large fish from the seasonal lakes; large game).

The same complementarity we observe is subsistence sociality is evinced in the prowess required to render food nourishing. Lengthy and painstaking culinary preparation and the process of cooking itself should be understood as a skilled, alchemical and hence shamanic endeavour. Men also play their part in overcoming the potent personalities of larger predators, through food blessings and rarely does anyone forgo what is perceived as a sensible precaution. For some families, a good spell-blower (*benzedor*) can bless one type of fish and this is sufficient for all other types of fish. If there is no powerful *benzedor* available, however, each new food subtype is blessed before the child consumes it. In the presence of the child's mother, the blesser speaks a few quiet words over a small offering of food, and the food is then eaten by the child. Food shamanism directs attention to the act of consumption, facilitating the introduction of new foods into the bodily vessel, simply by attending carefully to this process.

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