

Spirits, Shamans, and Stars

Perspectives from South America

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Body and Spirit Among the Sanumá (Yanoama) of North Brazil

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This paper is a discussion of one aspect of the supernatural beliefs relating to the shamanism of the Sanumá Indians of the upper Auaris river valley in the northwest of Roraima territory in northern Brazil.¹ This has to do especially with the nature of the relationship between one category of the assistant spirits used in Sanumá shamanism — the faunal *hekula* — and human society.

The Sanumá are tropical forest slash-and-burn horticulturalists who also depend considerably on the results of regular hunting of game birds and animals and the gathering of wild forest products. Their main crops are bitter manioc, plantains, and bananas; their more important game animals are tapir, peccaries, monkeys, paca, agouti, and armadillos. They are still an isolated group, their only regular contact with outsiders being with missionaries and Makiritare Indians (known as Maiongong in Brazil). They are one of four main subgroups (Yanomami, Yanomam, Yanam, and Sanumá) of the Yanoama² of north Brazil and south Venezuela. This is a linguistic division, each subgroup consisting of the speakers of one of the four closely related languages of the Yanoama language family (Migliazza 1972).

¹ My understanding of shamanism as practiced in the upper Auaris region shows a number of differences of detail from that reported for other subgroups of the Yanoama, and even for other Sanumá. It should be understood, then, that this paper is based on my own data and observations. My information was collected primarily in two settlements (Auaris and Kadimani) and is based on regular observation throughout a twenty-three-month period of fieldwork (between April 1968 and September 1970), including five months during which I devoted some half of my interview work to certain aspects of shamanism.

The fieldwork was conducted jointly with that of Alcida R. Ramos, and I am much indebted to her for useful comments on this paper. Some preliminary results of our research are: Ramos (n.d.;1972); Taylor (1971a, 1971b, 1972).

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² Also known in the literature as Waika, Shiriana, Guaharibo, Shamatari, etc.

The shamanism of the Sanumá of the upper Auaris region is based entirely on the use of assistant spirits (*hekula dibi*) to act on the shaman's behalf. Shamanism is used primarily in curing, which involves the destruction or chasing away, by the shaman's *hekula*, of those other spirits (which can be of several different types) which have caused or which intend to bring about sickness and death. It can also be used to ensure hunting success. Another possibility is to "shamanize," that is, to ask certain *hekula* (which can also be used in curing, etc.) to attack and kill the enemies of one's group. In each case the shaman's role is simply to call the appropriate *hekula*, from the many at his disposal, and present them with the problem at hand.

The relationship between the *hekula* and their shaman, and that between the people of his village and allied villages, is one of benevolent, helpful cooperation. With certain qualifications this seems to be true of all *hekula*, but it is particularly so in the case of those which are the spirits of dead animals.³ It would not, however, be correct to say that these faunal *hekula* exist simply to serve mankind. In fact, by no means do all faunal *hekula* do so. The demography and life spans of animal and human populations are such that there are always more faunal *hekula* available than there are shamans to use them. This remains the case even after allowing for the fact that older shamans often have several *hekula* of a given animal species living in their chests — one, or one pair, from each of several specified distant territories. When it comes time for a shaman to call a *hekula* to his service, to come and live in his chest, there is always a plentiful supply of faunal *hekula* in any given house of their species. Nevertheless, those faunal *hekula* which do function as assistant spirits to a shaman do so in a highly cooperative, helpful way.

I am describing the faunal *hekula* of Sanumá shamanism as essentially helpful and cooperative. This can be compared with the equivalent information, where available, as contained in other researchers' reports. Zerries (1955:81) mentions use of the *hekula* only in terms of their being induced "to bring mishap and sickness to the enemies of the village." Wilbert (1963) speaks of both the killing and curing powers of the *hekula*, but explains that he has the impression that the actions of the *hekula* are only in response to the wishes and direction of the shaman. De Barandaran, who criticizes other missionaries for calling the *hekula* demons or evil spirits, says that they are at all times on the watch and waiting for the shaman's call for help. His account deals almost exclusively with curing shamanism, though he does include the introduction of a "hostile" *hekula*

³ The Sanumá category which I refer to here as "animals" — *salo bi* — may be more accurately glossed as "edible fauna." It includes birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, some insects, snakes, etc. For a more detailed discussion of the concept, see Taylor (1972:217-220).

into the body of the patient, by an enemy shaman, as one possible cause of sickness (1965:26)

Chagnon emphasizes the contribution of the *hekula* to the pattern of intervillage hostility, in their causing sickness and death. Their function in curing he mentions only in passing, and evidently considers the *hekula* to be essentially evil, calling them "demons" and "evil spirits" (1968:24, 45, 51, 52, 90). The incidence of intervillage raiding and associated hostile relations is very much lower for the Sanumá than for the Yanomami of the Mavaca river area. Thus the enemy-killing function of the *hekula* can be expected to receive less emphasis among the Sanumá. Nevertheless, I would insist that the difference must be one of emphasis only and the general nature of the *hekula* (helpful and cooperative, whether in curing one's kinsmen or in killing one's enemies) remains the same for both the Sanumá and the Yanomami. Whatever evil is involved is human. The *hekula* simply oblige by doing what the shaman asks of them.

In the soundtrack to the film *Magical death*, Chagnon (1971) gives a more satisfactory impression of the *hekula*. The film is, of course, specifically about a session of shamanism for the purpose of killing enemy children, but in the soundtrack full recognition is also given to the curing function of the *hekula*, and it is also made clear that their action in either curing or killing is entirely at the behest of the shamans. Goetz (1969) gives a well-balanced account of the *hekula* as assistant spirits which help the shaman both in attacking and interfering with the food supply of his enemies, and in protecting, helping, and curing his own people. Helena Valero's information on Yanomami shamanism, in Biocca (1971), also tells of the *hekula* as spirits which are used by shamans both against enemies and in curing fellow villagers. Thus, in spite of differences of detail and fullness of information, and with the exception only of Chagnon (1968), there is general agreement that (at least for the Sanumá and Yanomami subgroups) the *hekula* act only at the request of the shamans and in such a way as to cooperate with them in their intra- and intervillage relations.

My purpose is, then, to attempt an explanation, within the terms of the Sanumá belief system itself, for the especially cooperative character of the faunal category of *hekula*. The explanation I shall suggest is not expressed as such by the Sanumá, but it is implicit, and can be readily discerned, in the series of beliefs concerning the mythological status, and the present-day life cycle of the faunal beings. In mythological times the ancestors of animal species, just as the other beings of that time, were corporeal, humanoid in both body and spirit, and indestructible. When they were transformed into animals they lost this condition, becoming animaloid and destructible. The cooperative nature of the faunal *hekula* can, then, be understood as part of an attempt on their part to reestablish,

to the extent that present-day circumstances permit, the situation of their mythological ancestors, i.e. that of humanoid appearance, indestructibility, and corporeality.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF SANUMÁ SHAMANISM

The Several Types of Shamanism

I have data on five principal types of shamanism. These are:

- (1) curing shamanism;
- (2) protection from evil spirits, etc.;
- (3) festival hunting shamanism;
- (4) other hunting shamanism; and
- (5) shamanism to attack enemies.

* CURING SHAMANISM. A Sanumá becomes ill as a result of the action of evil spirits, ghosts, the spirits of dead animals offended by the breaking of taboos, or human enemies using supernatural means of attack. One of these means of attack is the type of shamanism in which certain *hekula* can be sent to cause sickness in enemy villages. Supernatural attack also includes that of night raiders (*ōka dibi*) using magical preparations and techniques. This kind of attack is not responded to with shamanism, and so does not relate to my topic in this paper.

In most cases of illness, where the cause is spirit action, the *hekula* used in shamanism are, if powerful enough in a given case, able to cure the victim by killing or scaring away the offending spirit and by extracting or ejecting the illness (which may involve a pathogenic object) from the patient's body. This shamanism for the purpose of curing is, in fact, a fairly constant occurrence. It was by far the most common type of shamanism observed during the fieldwork.

Curing shamanism is, however, only one of several kinds of shamanism used. These all follow the same basic procedure of calling the *hekula* for assistance, and turning the matter over to them for their action.

* PROTECTION FROM EVIL SPIRITS OR ENEMY HEKULA. When there is reason to believe that *sai dibi* [evil spirits] are in the vicinity of the village (typically, if not invariably, with the purpose of causing sickness), shamanism is used to scare these spirits away, or at least to divert their attention to some other village. On one occasion when a neighbor had spent most of the night shamanizing, he said it had been because his *hekula* had awakened him to warn him that the *sai de* which causes malaria had been on its way to the village. He was able to persuade it not to harm anyone at his

community (Auaris) and had sent it off to the north, to a village of Sanumá who rarely if ever have any contact with the Auaris people.

In certain circumstances *sai dibi* reveal their presence to humans. Once when a young man returning from evening hunting heard what sounded like a baby crying in an empty fieldhouse, it was realized that it must have been the *meeni dibi* (one type of evil spirit) on their way to cause harm at Auaris. To prevent this an older man shamanized that night. When a shaman's *hekula* warn him that enemy-sent *hekula* are approaching, he will shamanize to ward off their attack (see below).

* FESTIVAL HUNTING SHAMANISM. We also observed numerous times the use of shamanism in preparation for the ritual hunt which is always a part of a "Festival for the Dead." Shamanism of this kind is always a group performance, during the day, and always with the use of snuff.⁴ A supply of snuff is usually prepared especially for the purpose. It was only in performances of this kind of shamanism that we ever saw men who are not shamans (or novices) taking the snuff. Festival hunting shamanism is primarily to call on appropriate *hekula* to help ensure success in the hunt. Many of these *hekula* are of species which in their living (*salo*) phase do in fact kill the animal which is desired by the hunters. *Hekula* of this kind are called in connection with a long list of animals and birds which it is hoped may be caught during the hunt. For example: the *kokoimane* [buzzard] *hekula* can help the hunters catch the *paluli* (Portuguese *mutum* "bush turkey"), the largest and most prized game bird in the area; and the *kitanani* [cougar] *hekula* can help in the hunting of deer.

Other *hekula* called are those able to protect the hunters from dangers such as snakebite and the attack of evil spirits. For example, the *uli dili dibi* (one type of evil spirit) can be called, just as if they were *hekula*, and asked to refrain from their usual practice of blowing magic dust at hunters moving through thick undergrowth. Also called are spirits which can influence the weather for the duration of the hunt. For example, the *sano* ("thunder," Sky People) *hekula* can be called and asked not to make rain during the hunt. Again using appropriate *hekula*, the shamans will rid each other, and any nonshamans (especially young men) who are also going on the hunt, of "bad aim." This is considered a supernaturally caused condition (one possible cause is the nonobservation of certain food prohibitions by the hunter's wife). It can be dealt with, by *hekula*, in what is in effect a minor "curing" interlude in the hunting shamanism session.

⁴ Three varieties of snuff are used in the Auaris area. These are: *sagona sai*, made from the inner bark of a tree; *palalo*, from the seeds of a tree; and *koali nagi*, from the leaves of a small shrub. The generic term "*sagona*" is applied to all three. It is thus evidently the equivalent of the generic term "*ebene*" used by the Yanomami subgroup (see Chagnon et al. 1971).

OTHER HUNTING SHAMANISM. Shamanism can also be used for everyday hunting, calling the *hekula* which can ensure one's intercepting a particular kind of animal, or successfully killing a bird or animal if encountered. This is not a common practice, at least while the hunter is at home in the village. It is, however, made more use of when a family (or larger group) is on a hunting trip and staying at a forest camp.

SHAMANISM TO ATTACK ENEMIES. The people of Auaris have *hekula* sent to attack them, especially by the Samatali (possibly a Yanomami subgroup) to the southwest. They usually sent the *waduba ausi* ("vulture," Sky People), *modogi* ("sun," Sky People), and *sanuna* [supernatural jaguar] *hekula*. To fight off these *hekula*, one young Auaris shaman told me he would use the *soinan dibí* ("bee," Sky People) *hekula* and the *pasoliuwí* ("spider monkey" — not clear if of animal or mythico-ancestral type) *hekula*. A number of other *hekula* would also be called to encourage them. This same young shaman said that he himself did not know how to do this sending of *hekula* to attack other people, but that the Kadimani village headman's father, who died a few years ago, had been especially good at it, and that his own father, an old man and a very important shaman in his day, and another senior man at his father's village could both perform that kind of shamanism.

The Acquisition of Hekula

The initial transfer of *hekula* to the novice is typically done by a senior agnate, preferably the father or father's father, or else a classificatory father.⁵ When the *hekula* donor is an elder brother, or classificatory brother, he should evidently be in the "middle-aged adult" population segment, or older.

Shamanism for this purpose is done at night, and snuff is used by all involved. There is often more than one experienced shaman present, and more than one of these may give *hekula* to the novice. There can also be more than one novice at such a session. The donor shaman calls his *hekula* in the usual way and then, by the novice also performing the chant(s), *hekula* are transferred or "cross over" to the novice. When the time comes for the transfer of the novice's first *hekula*, he is expected already to know the necessary chants. This is so in spite of the fact that, no matter how many sessions of shamanism he may have attended and at which he may have participated in the taking of the snuff, he will not have been given any opportunity for formal practice of these many and lengthy chants.

⁵ See Ramos (1972) for analysis of Sanumá social structure and kinship terminology.

Once a shaman has received an initial set of *hekula*, and if he goes on to become an active and effective shaman, he can then call new *hekula* to himself. This is done without necessarily using snuff. In some cases *hekula* will come to a shaman and offer him their services. *Hekula* are sometimes given, or exchanged, between experienced shamans as an act of friendship. Certain *hekula* (e.g. Sky People and evil spirits, when used as *hekula*) are considered particularly powerful and dangerous and will only be taken by an older shaman.

The Performance of Shamanism

The one invariable feature of Sanumá shamanism, of whatever type, is the chanting by which the shaman calls the *hekula* to his aid. This chanting (with interludes, as described below) is the main feature of the performance, whether this is done by day or at night, accompanied or not by the appropriate dances or with or without the use of the hallucinogenic snuff. The snuff is taken either by oneself sniffing pinches of the powder, or by having someone else blow a dose of snuff through a short tube into one's nostrils, each in turn. This snuff is much enjoyed, by both men and *hekula*. When the snuff is taken by the shaman, his *hekula* also enjoy its effects, become intoxicated, dance, sing, and are always more than willing to attempt whatever the shaman has in mind. In general, the snuff is only used in the daytime, in which case the participating shaman(s) usually do the dances of the *hekula* they are chanting to summon.

Shamanism at night (when the chest-dwelling *hekula* are in any case already awake and active) is usually done without any need of snuff. Sessions for the transfer of a novice's first *hekula*, however, are held at night and the snuff is used. Conversely, if curing shamanism, or shamanism to ward off evil spirits, is urgently needed during the day, at a time when there happens to be no snuff available, this can be done, thanks to the cooperative goodwill of the *hekula*. This, in fact, I did observe several times. Apart from the occasions of transferring *hekula* to a novice, when several experienced shamans may take part, shamanism at night, for what ever purpose, is typically a solo performance.

When the snuff has been prepared for a session of daytime shamanism, this is invariably a group session, with any visiting shamans invited to take part. This, of course, they always do, not only because the snuff is considered highly enjoyable, but also because an experienced and active shaman always welcomes any opportunity to chant to his *hekula*. No matter how many shamans may be chanting and/or dancing at one time (I have often seen sessions with four to six shamans taking part and two or three actually dancing at any one time), this is never done in unison. Each

shaman proceeds with his own series of chants and his dances are quite unsynchronized with those of the other shamans.

The sessions of group hunting shamanism, which are an integral part of any "Festival for the Dead," are always performed by day, using snuff. Individual hunting shamanism, on the other hand, is likely to be a solo nighttime performance, without the use of snuff.

On two occasions we also witnessed sessions of group shamanism by day, using snuff. It was insisted that these sessions were for no specific purpose, but simply for the pleasure of it. Both times, at the Kadimani village, this was the project of older shamans from the Mamugula village some distance to the south. They brought with them a supply of the *palalo* type of snuff, which is not available in the vicinity of Kadimani. These sessions were referred to by the term *polemo* ["to make like a jaguar"] rather than by the common generic term *ōkamo* used for the usual types of shamanism for specific purposes. Regular afternoon snuff-taking, with shamanism and/or chest-pounding duels, as Barker (1953:453), Zerries (1964) and Chagnon (1968:90–91) have described for the Yanomami subgroup, is not practiced by the Sanumá of the upper Auaris. This may be related to differences in the supply of the snuff. Not all known varieties are locally available, and in this area there is no domesticated or semi-domesticated source of snuff, such as Chagnon et al. (1971) have described for at least some of the Yanomami villages (cf. Biocca 1971:146–148).

I have only limited information as to the content of the shamanism chants. The language used is not that of everyday speech, but a distinct, possibly archaic, form reserved for this use. What is definite is that for each *hekula* called, the same tune is sung many times over, and each time it is what might be considered a different "verse" of the total chant. It seems to be the case that, depending on the nature of the *hekula* in question, the content of the chant is either an account of the events surrounding the death of the animal or person involved, or a recounting of the myth, or a myth, associated with the being whose *hekula* is being called.

In curing shamanism, soon after he has begun his performance, the shaman may go through a sometimes lengthy and elaborate period of "diagnosis." This may or may not involve questioning the patient as to his signs and symptoms, and often entails the recognition by the shaman — intoxicated by the snuff, and receiving information from the *hekula* — of the precise procedures, movements, approach and departure routes of the spirit responsible for the illness. In curing, the interludes between the "verses" of the chants involve the vigorous massaging or rubbing of the patient's body, typically from the head downwards, ending with a clap of the hands and a throwing movement. This is all part of ejecting the illness and is accompanied by loud growling, gargling noises, and rapid-fire

recitative-like speech, as distinct from the chanting proper. Certain illnesses, when duly diagnosed, require the sucking out of pathogenic objects inserted in the patient's body by ghosts (*nĩ pole bi dibĩ*) or evil spirits (*sai dibĩ*), to cause the illness. This is best done by a *lala de* [anaconda] shaman, whose dangerous and rare anaconda *hekula* is expert at this task. Other shamans who are not *lala de* shamans say that they can also do this, using other spirits, but not well.

In general it seems that shamans are duty bound to perform cures and to ward off evil, without receiving any kind of payment or remuneration, in material goods, for these services. In terms of social status and prestige, on the other hand, they do receive considerable advantage from their shamanism. When people are visiting in another village, the shamans among them will very commonly be asked by their hosts to take part in any group curing sessions which may become necessary. Important shamans may be asked to go to another village to try to cure a very sick individual. A sick person who is able to travel will, on occasion, make a special visit to another village to ask an important shaman to perform for his or her benefit.

Types of Hekula

The *hekula* used in shamanism are of the following different kinds:

- (1) animal,
- (2) human,
- (3) mythico-ancestral (to animal species),
- (4) mythico-ancestral (to human kin groups),
- (5) Sky People (humanoid, animaloid, and celestial phenomena),
- (6) *sai dibĩ* [evil spirits],
- (7) plants, and
- (8) artifacts.

The most important and constantly used *hekula* are those of the first five categories. Only a very few plants and artifacts have *hekula*. These seem to be items acquired (or known about) as a result of culture contact with other Indian groups, or with whites. Regardless of the nature of the object, being, or spirit in question, its appearance as a *hekula* is always humanoid. *Hekula* look like miniature men, from ten inches to three feet or so in height.

ANIMAL HEKULA. When a shaman takes an animal *hekula* (almost invariably he takes a pair of brothers), they go to live inside his chest until he either dies or passes them on to a novice or friend. During the day they sleep in their hammocks inside his chest. At night (which is daytime for them) they are awake and alert for any approaching supernatural danger.

If evil spirits or enemy-sent *hekula* do approach, they strum on the strings of the shaman's hammock to waken him so that he will shamanize to avert the danger.

HUMAN HEKULA. The spirits of dead people are already humanoid in form, but they do somewhat correspond to the *uku dubi* phase of an animal's existence in being also disposed to harm living people. Such spirits are known as *ni pole bi dibi* [ghosts]. The ghosts typically do harm to their own surviving relatives, usually in revenge for some offense committed during their lifetimes, though it is often many years after their death before they find an opportunity to take this revenge. Ghosts can also attack their killers if ritual seclusion after the killing is not correctly observed. Disposal of the dead is normally by cremation. If the body of a dead person is incompletely cremated, his ghost can be especially dangerous: *ni pole bi dibi* are said to live in a home far off to the south in what is nowadays unoccupied territory (De Barandiaran 1965: 2-3).⁶ They can be called from there to become a shaman's *hekula* and also to live in his chest.

MYTHICO-ANCESTRAL HEKULA. The mythical ancestors of both animal species and human kin groups, after turning into animals and humans, as recorded in the myths, evidently continue to exist in spirit form and can also be used as *hekula*. They live in the forest, far to the south, where the events described in the myths are believed to have taken place.

SKY PEOPLE HEKULA. The *hudomosi liuwi dibi* [Sky People] live on the level-above-earth (*hidi hendua*) of the universe.⁷ This level-above-earth has as its lower surface the visible sky.

Certain of the Sky People have humanoid bodies, e.g. Omawí, the creator twin and Salagazoma, his wife; some are celestial phenomena, e.g. sun, moon, sky, stars; others are animaloid, e.g. the white vulture, the (celestial) buzzard, the *koliomoni*, a large cranelike bird. These celestial birds appear from time to time on earth. I have myself seen celestial buzzards, and once a *koliomoni*, and heard hunters speak of a dead tapir that a white vulture was feeding on.

All Sky People, whatever kind of bodies they may have, have humanoid "souls," which can be called by shamans to act as *hekula*.

SAI DIBI [EVIL SPIRITS] HEKULA. Some, possibly all, of the *sai dibi*, which live on this level of the universe and exist to do harm to human beings can, nevertheless, be used as *hekula* in shamanism. Young shamans are afraid

⁶ Note that this does not agree with Chagnon (1968:48), who reports for the Yanomamí that the *ni pole bi dibi* go up to *hidi hendua*, the level-above-earth of the universe.

⁷ Cf. Chagnon (1968:44-45), but note that while, for the Yanomamí, the scheme of four layers of the universe is identical, the inhabitants of these layers are not entirely the same as for the Sanumá.

to do this, but an experienced shaman has always at least a few such *sai dibi* that he can control in his shamanism and make to operate on his behalf as *hekula*.

The Relationship Between the Shaman and His Assistant Spirits

It is clearly the case that the shaman-faunal *hekula* relationship benefits the shaman and his people. The *hekula* protect, and cure the sicknesses of, his friends and, in the case of certain types of *hekula*, obligingly kill his enemies. The human beings derive considerable benefit from and, in fact, are in several ways entirely dependent on the help of the *hekula*. It seems reasonable, then, to ask what benefit the *hekula* derive from the arrangement.

Sanumá informants do indicate that the *hekula* enjoy and approve of the relationship, specifying two aspects of this approval. They say that *hekula* like the house inside the shaman's chest and also that they much enjoy the hallucinogenic snuff (*sagona*) which they have ready access to when this is taken, in part on their behalf, by the shaman. Several authors speak of the use of the snuff as indispensable for the shaman's establishment of contact with the *hekula* (e.g. Chagnon 1968:24, 52; 1971:2; Goetz 1969:41; Biocca 1971:45). Among the Sanumá, at least, this is by no means the case. I have personally observed numerous sessions of curing shamanism — both at night and by day — in which no snuff was used, but a long list of *hekula* were called to assist the shaman. What does seem to be the case, however, is that the *hekula* which are thus willing to operate without snuff are those which live in the shaman's chest. These include, of course, the faunal *hekula* I am discussing.

Chagnon goes so far as to speak of a symbiosis between shaman and *hekula*, "For man cannot destroy the souls of his enemies without the aid of the *hekura*, but the *hekura* cannot devour the souls without the direction of men" (1971:3).⁸ Unfortunately, he does not specify to which category or categories of *hekula* this applies. He later mentions one particular *hekula*, *hedumisiriwä*, which is used "to destroy the souls of the [enemy] babies with fire." The name of this *hekula* is cognate with the Sanumá *hudomosi liuwi*, which means both the *hekula* of the sky, and also the inclusive category of "Sky People" *hekula* (see above). The specific *hekula* mentioned in my data as used by the Sanumá, or against the Sanumá, in enemy-killing shamanism are:

- (1) the *hekula* of the sun;
- (2) the *hekula* of the white vulture (considered a supernatural being which lives in *hidi hendua* (the "level-above-earth")); and

⁸ I am much indebted to N. A. Chagnon for kindly providing me with a soundtrack transcript of his film *Magical death*.

(3) the *hekula* of the *sanuna* jaguar.

The first two of these are Sky People; and the third, while from our point of view probably only an exceptionally large jaguar, is for the Sanumá not a game animal (*salo a*), but an inedible and dangerous being. None of the three, then, is a faunal *hekula*. It should also be noted, however, that all of these three enemy-killing *hekula* are also regularly used in curing shamanism.⁹ They do not specialize exclusively in the killing of enemies. Thus, the particular symbiosis (or aspect of a symbiosis) which is mentioned by Chagnon — in which the *hekula* benefit by being enabled to devour human souls — does not seem to apply in the case of the faunal *hekula* category. But, as I have pointed out, these are the *hekula* which are particularly cooperative in their relationship with human society.

THE NATURE OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL BEINGS

In mythological times, those beings which were eventually to be the ancestors of present-day fauna had the appearance of human beings. In the myths they are described as behaving just as do the present-day Sanumá. For example, the myths tell of them hunting animals, chopping wood, going on visits, dancing and singing, etc. They looked and acted like human beings and, also like human beings, they had solid bodies and immaterial, humanoid spirits. Like the other beings of mythological times, they were potentially immortal. At this stage of existence they were not distinguished from other mythological beings, including the ancestors of present-day human beings. They were simply human like all of their contemporaries and lived in harmony with the other (human) beings of that time.

In fact, they were ancestral beings and destined to become the first animals. Instead, then, of continuing in existence unchanged (and able to enjoy their immortality) something went wrong and they were transformed (*išwanižo*) into the fauna of the present day.

The other beings of mythological times still exist today, some of them quite unchanged, though they now no longer live in human territory. Many of them live on the level-above-earth of the cosmos, the *hidi hendua*; these are the Sky People discussed above.

The characteristics common to all mythological beings are, then,

- (1) humanity,
- (2) corporeality,
- (3) indestructibility.

⁹ Cf. De Barandiaran (1965), where of a list of forty-one *hekula* used in curing, eight are Sky People *hekula*. Of these, one is the *hekula* of the sun and one that of the white vulture.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ANCESTORS

When the animal ancestors were transformed into the original animals of the normal present-day type, their humanoid "soul" components separated to continue an immortal spirit existence. These spirits form one of the eight categories of *hekula* available for use in shamanism. Thus when certain Yanoama myths speak of the origin of *hekula*, it is *hekula* of this particular type that they refer to.¹⁰ The corporeal component of the ancestral being was transformed into the animal. All present-day animals have mortal animal bodies and potentially destructible animaloid spirits.

The transformation of animal ancestors is always referred to by use of the verb *išwanižo*.¹¹ *Išwanižo* also occurs in a different but related context. In the case of certain of the faunal food prohibitions (see Taylor 1971a, 1972), the penalty for nonobservance of the prohibitions involves the attack of the animal's ghost or animaloid spirit (*uku dubi*) in a particular sense. This is when the *uku dubi* makes the victim (in some cases the eater of the meat; in others, his or her child) become, to a greater or lesser extent, in some way like the animal in question. For example, a pubescent may become "piebald" like the markings of the eaten *amotha* ["paca" or "labba"], or one's child may get a twisted wrist like that of the eaten *šimi* or *saulemi* (the two species of sloth in the Sanumá area). Such penalties are referred to as cases of *išwanižo*.

There is reason to suppose that the *išwanižo* transformation is not just a matter of "turning into" an animal, but rather one of an undesirable loss of a preferred condition. This is suggested by the nature of the situations which, in the relevant myths, precipitate the transformation. The number of adequately elaborate versions of animal-origin myths available to me is still quite limited (a total of only sixteen myths,¹² which tell of the origin of forty-one faunal categories¹³).

Nevertheless, I feel that there are strong indications in the common structure of these myths (and of certain other myths which tell of explicitly undesirable happenings of other kinds) that the *išwanižo* transformation to animality occurs as a consequence of behavior which would

¹⁰ For example, in the Yanomami myth as recounted in the film *The myth of naro* (Asch and Chagnon 1971), where the origin of *hekula* is referred to without distinguishing the particular category of *hekula* involved.

¹¹ On one occasion when a very old man went somewhat berserk and developed the habit of wandering off alone into the darkness of the night (extremely abnormal behavior by Sanumá standards), this was also spoken of as *išwanižo*. One other application of the term is in the case of cotton thread or threaded beads becoming snarled up. I am indebted to Mr. Donald M. Borgman, missionary at Auaris, for first pointing out this usage to me, and for his comments on the meaning of *išwanižo*.

¹² The sources of these myths are: Borgman (n.d.) for the majority, with corroborating versions in my own field data and other authors; Chagnon (1968); De Barandiaran (1968); Wilbert (1963); and Becher (1959).

¹³ Some of these are species, but several appear to be higher level categories, e.g. that of all macaws, parrots and parakeets (*ala bi*).

be judged incorrect by present-day standards. This, of course, is also true of the food prohibition penalty usage of *išwanižo*, where it is explicitly the nonobservance of the prohibition which leads to the *išwanižo* experience. In one of the myths this is also expressed quite explicitly: "Because a woman was forcibly led out [to dance] while she was menstruating, the [mythical ancestors] said, 'We're becoming dehumanized'" (Borgman n.d.: "The Waikas who go underwater"). In fourteen of the sixteen myths there are instances of such "incorrect behavior" explicitly or implicitly precipitating the transformation of mythical ancestors into animals.¹⁴

The mythological *išwanižo* transformation does not, then, occur as an arbitrary, inexplicable development. In most, perhaps (with more complete versions of the myths) all, cases it is directly preceded by behavior which would, nowadays, be considered at the least improper, if not in fact prohibited. In the myth of the origin of man's access to fire, for example, as discussed by De Barandiaran (1968), the alligator-man from whom the fire is stolen is, thereupon, transformed into animal form, becoming the first alligator. This alligator-man had been keeping the fire for his own exclusive use, guarding it in his mouth. A party was thrown with the purpose of making him laugh, so that the fire in his mouth could be stolen. With some difficulty, this was eventually done and the fire was carried to the top of a tree of the type which is used by Sanumá in making fire by the fire-drill technique.

De Barandiaran does not discuss those elements of the myth which represent what I am calling "incorrect behavior." These are possibly three. First, the alligator-man is stingy¹⁵ in his keeping the fire exclusively for his own use. Second, when he is eventually made to laugh and thus to open his mouth, the fire is stolen (rather than requested in trade) from him. Quite apart from the fact that these two offenses appear somewhat to cancel each other out, they are less dramatically incorrect than the third. This has to do with the way in which the alligator-man is finally made to laugh — by the *hășimo* bird-man exploding a discharge of feces in his face. By present-day standards this is truly inconceivable behavior. While it is true that the Sanumá are extremely casual about where they urinate, defecation is always an extremely private and concealed act,¹⁶ and it is considered most objectionable to have to see someone else's feces. Thus the *hășimo*-man's behavior was outrageous and the

¹⁴ Compare, for example, Wilbert (1970) where in thirteen of fourteen Warao animal origin myths (those in his index under "Punishment: transformation into animal" and "Creation of animal life") the transformation occurs following incorrect behavior. See also Lévi-Strauss (1970), where twenty-five of twenty-seven animal origin myths follow the same pattern.

¹⁵ See Chagnon (1968:48) *re* the undesirable afterlife to be expected by someone who is stingy. In trading situations, Sanumá are afraid to be stingy as a disappointed visitor can be expected to retaliate by using magic to attack his stingy host.

¹⁶ Cf. Goetz (1969:108).

alligator-man's experience was deeply shaming. In fact, the version of the myth presented by De Barandiaran does say, without specifying why, that the alligator-man, *avergonzado* [shamed], went to live in the water and become animal.

A particularly elaborate animal-origin myth is the one Borgman (n.d.) has called "The fall of the possum."¹⁷ In this myth the transformation into animals of some fifteen faunal categories (see Note 13) and, in the process, their acquisition of distinctive anatomical features of taxonomic significance, is described. I have elsewhere discussed how this and other similar myths present an explanation of faunal "taxonomic features" (Taylor 1972:178-183) and shall here concentrate on the question of the "incorrect behavior" precipitant of the *išwanižo* transformations described.

The myth tells of how the possum-man, the mythological ancestor of one or possibly both of the two species of possum (*pumodomí* and *pumodomí tanama*)¹⁸ known in the upper Auaris region, kills a bee-girl (*samonama* species — *yamonama* in the Yanomami dialect) who has offended him, precipitating the origin of the *samonama* bees. The possum-man is then chased into hiding at the top of a tree (a mountain in the Yanomami version). After much effort, a large gathering of animal-ancestors manages to chop down the tree (mountain) and the possum-man falls to his death.

At this point, appropriate behavior — by present-day standards — would involve the cremation of the body by the dead person's relatives and ritual seclusion (*kanenemo*) by the killers. In the myth, however, the killers and others with them proceed to desecrate the dead body by using its blood, brains (and feces in the Yanomami version) to paint their bodies as if for a festival. They immediately *išwanižo* into animals, with colored plumage, hair, etc., in accordance with the body-painting selected by their respective ancestors.

The other instances of "incorrect behaviour" are: three cases of taboo-breaking by a menstruating woman; two cases of personal insults; one of stingy behavior; one of throwing away food in a fit of temper; one of deceiving a mother-in-law by giving blood instead of honey (cf. Goetz 1969:30 *re* horror of rare or bloody food); one of disobedience to a father-in-law; one of wife-stealing; one of making a nursing infant go

¹⁷ I refer to six different versions of this myth: three recorded at Auaris, and kindly made available to me, by Don Borgman; another I recorded myself at Auaris (all four from different informants); one I recorded at Kadimani; and the Yanomami version shown in the film *The myth of naro* (Asch and Chagnon 1971). I am much indebted to N. A. Chagnon for kindly providing me with a transcription of the soundtrack of the film.

¹⁸ Chagnon was so kind as to show me *The myth of naro* in New York, November 1971, at which time we discussed the similarities and differences between this Yanomami version and the Sanumá versions. Chagnon has since confirmed that *naro* is indeed the Yanomami word for one species of possum, the other being *daraima* (personal communication).

hungry; one of nonobservance of visitors' etiquette; and one of general disorderly conduct leading to expulsion from the village.

THE PRESENT-DAY CYCLE OF ANIMAL EXISTENCE

For the Sanumá, all normal present-day fauna pass through a series of possibly three phases of existence. These are:

- (1) *salo bi* [edible fauna],
- (2) *uku dubi* [animaloid spirits], and
- (3) *hekula dibi* [humanoid spirits].

SALO BI [EDIBLE FAUNA]. The living fauna are hunted, fished for, or collected to be eaten as food. Once an animal is killed and carried home to village or camp it will, if large enough to warrant eventual distribution and consumption beyond the hunter's immediate household, be butchered in a set manner by someone other than the hunter himself, typically by an older brother. Once butchered, the portions of the animal are distributed around the village according to set procedures. Overlying this system of distributing meat as food is the food prohibition system which requires the avoidance of this food by the members of specified subsets of society.

UKU DUBI [ANIMALOID SPIRITS]. All animals, birds, snakes, fish, etc., and also all human beings have inside them, while alive, an *uku dubi* spirit. This is a miniature of, and has exactly the appearance of, the living being. At death this is released from the body and is free to move and act as a fully sentient and autonomous being. It is thus rather similar to our Western concept of "ghost." Unlike all other spirits of the Sanumá belief system, the *uku dubi* of animals can be destroyed. It should be noted that all other corporeal beings have humanoid spirits, even the corporeally animaloid Sky People (celestial buzzard, etc.), and that these spirits are in all cases indestructible. The destruction of an *uku dubi* spirit will, however, only occur as the end result of the chain of events which begins with the breaking of a food prohibition by a human being.

As I have described in detail elsewhere (Taylor 1971a, 1972) all locally edible animals are prohibited to the members of one or more of the ten "population segments" of Sanumá society. Young children, for example, should not eat kinkajou meat or they will become lazy; pubescents should avoid jaguar meat for fear of getting a sore back; the parents of a nursing infant should not eat capybara meat or the child may be drowned; middle-aged people will get pains in the rectum if they eat the meat of toads. In each case, the undesirable result or "penalty" is produced by an attack by the *uku dubi* spirit of the animal in question.

When such a situation develops, i.e. when someone does break a food prohibition and, as a result, the animal's *uku dubi* does attack and harm the offender (or his or her child), one's recourse is to shamanism. A shaman will be asked to arrange for some of his *hekula* to dispose of the *uku dubi* in question and also to remove the signs and symptoms of the patient's condition. The *uku dubi* being animaloid and the *hekula* humanoid, those *hekula* which can dispose of the particular *uku dubi* involved in any given case are always those equipped with weapons and/or skills appropriate for the purpose of hunting and killing, on the model of the hunting procedures of living human beings. For example, when the prohibition on anteater meat is broken and the *uku dubi* of the dead anteater inflicts the "stroke" penalty on the offender, the *uku dubi* has to be (1) tracked, (2) chased into ambush, and then (3) killed. The *hekula* of a *honama* (a grouselike bird which feeds on the ground and can run very quickly) searches for the tracks, hunts, and then chases the anteater *uku dubi*. The *hekula* of a *kulemi* bird (long-legged and a fast runner), of an *amu una* [fast-flying species of bee], and of an *uemigigi* [fast-moving snake] all chase the anteater *uku dubi* into an ambush where the *hekula* of the *maitaliwi* [arrow-head bamboo] and *managaitili* [mythical ancestors of a specified distant group of Yanoama] are waiting to kill it with bow and arrow. If necessary, a *paso* [spider monkey] *hekula* can then deliver the coup-de-grâce with its quarter-staff.

When someone is bitten by a poisonous snake and the snake has been killed, shamanism is used to cure the snakebite. The snake *uku dubi* is first (1) found, then (2) killed. Following this, (3) the venom is removed from the patient, and (4) the patient is relieved of pain. The *hekula* of certain small songbirds locate the snake *uku dubi*, which is then killed, with their staffs, by *paso* [spider monkey] *hekula*. Otter, capybara, egret, and cormorant *hekula* then wash away the snake's venom with the river water they carry in their mouths, and a *kobali* [large hawklike bird] *hekula* gets rid of the pain by massaging the patient with its smooth downlike feather arm-bands, held in its hands for the purpose.

When killed in this way, the *uku dubi* are considered to fall to the level-below-earth (*hidi kuoma*) of the universe, where they are eaten by the *oinan dibi* dwarfs. Thus twice-over hunted, killed, and eaten, they are totally destroyed.

HEKULA DIBI [HUMANOID SPIRITS]. If all prohibitions are correctly observed, the *uku dubi* will then (without in any way molesting human beings and thus avoiding the risk of its own total destruction) leave the forest and "go home" to the house of the humanoid *hekula dibi* spirits of its species for that particular hunting territory.

These *hekula* houses are typically in mountains, waterfalls, rivers, but not simply "in the forest." On arrival, the *uku dubi* will metamorphose

into a *hekula*, a spirit with the appearance of a miniature human being. It is then available to be taken as one of his assistant spirits by some Yanoama shaman, necessarily someone living a considerable distance away in a totally different part of Yanoama territory. On its metamorphosis to humanoid form, the animal spirit acquires a miniature weapon or weapons (*lasiwî gigi*), similar to those used by human beings. These are the metamorphoses of distinctive body parts of the living animal. Using these spirit-weapons, faunal *hekula* can attack and kill or chase off the supernatural beings which cause illness and death.

The worst that can happen to a *hekula*¹⁹ is that, if it is sent to attack a human being, other *hekula* may defend its human victim by attacking and chasing it away. The extreme form of such an attack involves actual dismemberment of the *hekula*'s body. But this is only a way of establishing dominance and does not destroy the dismembered *hekula*, which will put itself back together again and withdraw.

On undergoing metamorphosis from its *uku dubî* to its *hekula* phase, the being in question has regained a state of indestructibility.

THE REGAINING OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL CONDITION

The sequence of phases of mythological and postmythological faunal existence, and the corresponding changes in the incidence of the three basic mythological characteristics, can be shown as in Table 1.

Table 1. Phases of faunal existence

	Mythological ancestor	Animal	<i>uku dubî</i>	<i>hekula</i>	Incorporated <i>hekula</i>
Humanity	+	-	-	+	+
Corporeality	+	+	-	-	(+)
Indestructibility	+	-	-	+	+

When the mythological ancestors were transformed into animals, they lost both humanity and indestructibility, retaining only one of their three characteristics, that of corporeality. When an animal dies or is killed (as when hunted by humans), even this corporeality is lost and its *uku dubî* (animaloid) spirit does not have any of the mythological characteristics. When it then metamorphoses into a *hekula*, the being in question regains

¹⁹ On the model of human birth and the relation between ghosts (*nî pole bi dubî*) and the living, it may be the case that these *hekula* are also available for reincarnation in newly-born animals. I do not have information on this point, but will be able to check it out in the field in the near future. The particular relevance of this possibility is that it would mean that the *hekula* in question would thus revert to *uku dubî* status and be reexposed to the risk of annihilation.

indestructibility and humanoid appearance. But it is still only an immaterial spirit, living apart from human beings and with no direct relationship with them, as yet.

When a faunal *hekula* becomes one of the assistant spirits of a shaman — going to live in his chest, to be incorporated into his body — it then also achieves a substitute for the corporeality of its long-lost mythological condition. It is also reintegrated into the life and interactions of human beings. Its corporeality is, by all means, only a pseudocorporeality, since the body in question belongs to the human shaman and not really to the *hekula*, but at this stage in the game it is the best available possibility. At this point the faunal being has regained, in the most complete way that postmythological circumstances permit, all three of the characteristics of its mythological ancestor. It is at a possible end point in the series of transformations, metamorphoses, etc., of its existence. Closing the circle in this way, it has, in a sense, returned to its starting point. With luck, it will be able to remain in this state indefinitely, but this depends on its future as a chest-dwelling assistant spirit.

To begin with, there is the possible lifetime of the shaman in question. In addition there is always the possibility of being passed on to another shaman as an act of friendship on the part of the first shaman involved. Beyond this, there is the possibility of being transferred to a young novice as one of the set of first *hekula* which he has to receive from the stock of *hekula* of an experienced, older shaman. In this way the pseudocorporeality of a given animal *hekula* may continue for a long time.

The desirability of this pseudocorporeality is explicit in the fact that there are always some of a given shaman's *hekula* which he neither received as a novice nor called to himself once established as a shaman. These other *hekula* simply appear and offer themselves to the shaman, saying that they much admire the "hekula-house" inside his chest and would like to come and live there. Not only does the shaman at times have need of the particular skills of these *hekula*, but these are among the category of chest-dwelling *hekula* which will help him handle an emergency, even when there is no hallucinogenic snuff available. The *hekula*, on the other hand, are entirely dependent on the shaman for their pseudocorporeality in what is, in this way, indeed a symbiotic relationship.

The harmony of mythological times, when all beings were human, was lost when the ancestors were transformed into animals, etc. The subsequent phase is one of hostility between animals, and their animaloid spirits, and human beings. This is resolved, and harmony is restored, when the humanoid *hekula* are incorporated into the body of a shaman, becoming assistant spirits, i.e. collaborators in his shamanism, for the benefit of his kinsmen, neighbors, and allies.

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