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Different “seeing” – similar “hearing”. Ritual and sound among the Pemón (Gran Sabana/Venezuela)

Abstract: This paper discusses the theory of “perspectivism” (Viveiros de Castro) and its application to interpretation of the myths of the Pemón-speaking groups of the Gran Sabana (Arekuna, Kamarakoto, Taurepán); the paper aims to compare ontological conceptions of “seeing” and “hearing”.

Performances of the shamanic healing ritual, the hunting ritual (*parishara*), and recent *orekotón* rituals (*areruya, cho'chiman*) serve as examples for understanding “hearing” and related practices of sound production (speech, singing, imitation of animal sounds, etc.).

Whereas the particular representations of *yaukariü* (spirit/ Arekuna) or *yekatón* (spirit/ Taurepán, Kamarakoto), such as *enek* (animal), *pemón* (human being), and *mawarí* (spirit of the *tepuy*), illustrate different concepts of “seeing”, the use of the same communicative devices consisting of intelligible (speech, singing) and/or unintelligible sound structures demonstrates the possibilities of communicative interaction between these representations.

Along with my own material, contemporary indigenous discourses concerning Koch-Grünberg’s recordings from 1911 will be presented in an attempt to (re-)construct, or rather (re-)interpret, the healing ritual and the *parishara* and *orekotón* performances.

Keywords: Perspectivism, ritual, sound, Pemón, Venezuela; 20th to 21st centuries.

Resumen: En este artículo se hace referencia a la teoría del “perspectivismo” (Viveiros de Castro) y su aplicación en la interpretación de los mitos de los hablantes de pemón de la Gran Sabana (arekuna, kamarakoto, taurepán) con el propósito de comparar las concepciones ontológicas de “ver” y “escuchar”.

Las representaciones del rito de curación chamánica, el rito de la caza (*parishara*)

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y los recientes ritos *orekotón* (*areruya, cho'chiman*) sirven como ejemplos para la comprensión de la “audición” y las prácticas relacionadas con la producción del sonido (el habla, el canto, la imitación de sonidos animales, etc.).

Mientras que las representaciones particulares de *yaukariü* (espíritu / arekuna) o *yekatón* (espíritu / taurepán, kamarakoto), como *enek* (animal), *pemón* (ser humano) y *mawarí* (espíritu de los tepuyes), ilustran varios conceptos de “ver”, el uso de los mismos recursos comunicativos consistentes en estructuras sonoras inteligibles (el habla, el canto) y/o ininteligibles demuestra las posibilidades de interacciones comunicativas entre estas representaciones.

Junto con material propio, se presentarán discursos de indígenas contemporáneos sobre las grabaciones de Koch-Grünberg de 1911 como un intento de (re-) construir, o más bien (re-) interpretar, el rito de curación y el *parishara* así como las representaciones *orekotón*.

Palabras clave: Perspectivismo; ritual; sonido; pemón; Venezuela; siglos xx-xxi.

1. Introduction

Within the debate concerning animism, perspectivism and the construction of ontologies, I want to focus on the interaction between “seeing” and “hearing” and the associated action of sound production in Pemón ritual practice. Pemón¹ is the denomination of three different Amerindian groups (Arekuna, Kamarakato, and Taurepán) living around Mount Roraima in neighbouring regions of the Gran Sabana in Venezuela, Brazil, and Guyana. Their language belongs to the Carib language family.

Ernst Halbmayer pointed out that the minimal assumption in conceptualizing animic ontologies is the existence of beings other than human persons and that humans maintain relationships and have interactions, including communication and understanding, with these non-human beings (see Halbmayer, this volume). Perspectivism is also to be found in Pemón cosmology, as Viveiros de Castro (1997) has ascertained for cosmologies of Amazonia in general. Pemón tales reflect this point of view as Halbmayer notes when discussing the *Piai'ma*² perspective of the world.

1 Pemón means “human being”. The Kamarakotos are settled around Auyan Tepuy. Their main village is Kamarata. The Arekuna territory is located near the border of Venezuela and Guyana. Taurepán communities are located in the south near the Brazilian/Venezuelan border. They live close to Makuxi groups, who are Carib speakers as well. Butt Colson (1994: 5) chose the term “circum Roraima people” to refer to the indigenous groups of this region.

2 Armellada, Gutiérrez Salazar & Guerrero Contreras (2007: 155) categorized *Piai'ma* as a non-human being that lives in the forest. He is a giant, recognizable by his pierced earlobes and his human feet. All human beings are more intelligent than him. His perspective differs from humans: Rats and mice are deer for him. Mushrooms are his casabe bread (Armellada 1964: 193, 250; Halbmayer 2010: 168).

In what follows I will refer to Koch-Grünberg’s collection (1916: 81ff) and to my own field research, conducted between 2005 and 2010, to reveal the differentiation between “seeing” and “hearing” as well as the interaction between “changing the body” and “changing perspective”.

In 1911 Theodor Koch-Grünberg visited a Taurepán and Makuxi village named Koimelemóng. He recorded several songs on wax cylinders, the majority of which have been published by the Berlin Phonogramm Archiv (Ziegler 2006). During his tour on the rivers Uraricuera, Ventuari, Caura, and Orinoco in the years between 1911 and 1913, Koch-Grünberg was accompanied mostly by an Arekuna and a Taurepán shaman. His ethnographic field data are published in “Vom Roraima zum Orinoko” (Koch-Grünberg 1916, 1917, 1923a, 1923b, 1928).

The myth called “Visit in Heaven” was told by a Taurepán Amerindian in the years between 1911 and 1913. The story starts with the description of a war between two tribes in which one tribe is eliminated. The only survivor is Maitxaúle. He hid under a pile of bodies, afraid that the enemy would return. Some vultures passed by with the intention of eating the flesh of the dead human beings. Just at the moment when one of the vultures tried to pick into the body of Maitxaúle, he started to talk in his own language to the vulture, realizing that the bird was the daughter of the king of the vultures. He begged her first not to eat him and second to be his wife, because he was alone and needed a partner. The bird understood and decided to stay with him. Maitxaúle commanded her to carry out all the duties and responsibilities of a woman, such as cleaning and cooking. When he went out to go hunting she would transform her body, moving out of the animal cover (or bird body) and doing all of the work as a human being. Shortly before he returned she would put on her bird cover again. After three days of this game she finally decided to stay with him in her “normal” shape as a female human being. They celebrated this by sharing their first meal together. As a man, Maitxaúle was responsible for preparing the meat for the barbecue. While he was putting the first pieces on the grill he said to her: “You can eat it as you like – raw or cooked” (Koch-Grünberg 1916: 83, translation by the author).

This ironic phrase symbolically represents different perspectives. If the woman decides to stay with Maitxaúle, she needs to wait until the meat is roasted. If she wants to eat it right away, she has to reassume her bird body. The myth demonstrates the use of covers and the changing of the “perspective” of the covered being. Communication is maintained through speaking, hearing, and understanding the same language.

In our perception of Amerindian narratives, forms of communication are mostly defined through the “speaking” and “hearing” of words as they are written down in

text. This allows us to localize the different locations, real or virtual, occupied by humans and non-humans in the Pemón multiverse (see Figure 1). As Halbmayer (2010: 196) has argued, most relationships between beings are localized in the visible and invisible dimensions of our middle earth, in the visible mountains and in the sky. As an example of trans-specific communication practices, an extracted version of some parts of the Pemón multiverse in relation to sound production is presented in Figure 1.

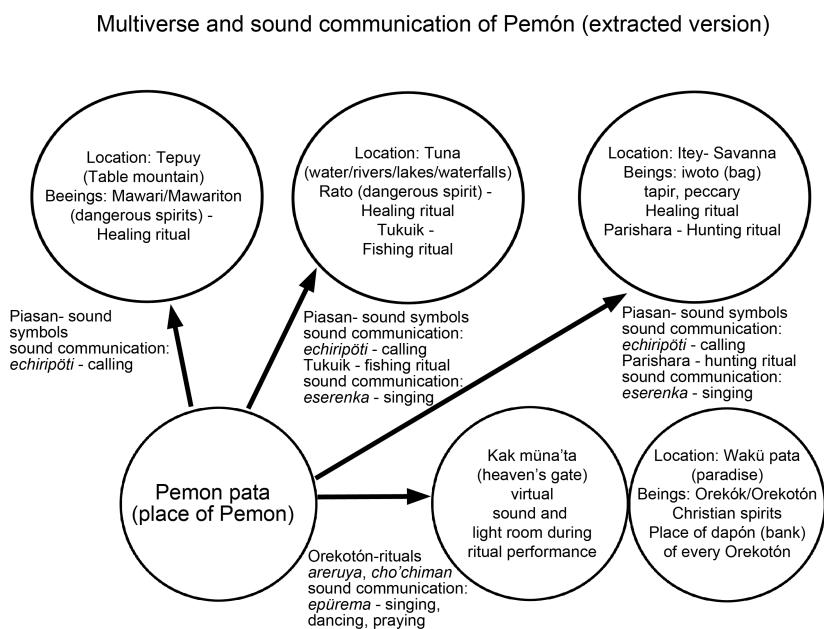


Figure 1. Multiverse and sound communication of Pemón (extracted version).

However, in his description of practice, Koch-Grünberg (1923a) suggests the importance of intonation and sound symbols – either intelligible or unintelligible. The role of audio material is receiving more and more attention in our field, which takes us back to the second minimal assumption formulated by Halbmayer – communication and understanding between different beings. Beside the tales, Pemón rituals are the instruments by which a connection between the different parts of the Pemón multiverse is established.

Here I want to adapt the question once used by Anthony Seeger (1987) as the inspiration for a book title: “Why Suyá sing?” Seeger also asks a second question, with implications for performance, in the introduction: “How do Suyá sing?”. In the case of the Pemón I want to ask the same questions from a more “perspectivistic” starting point – “How do spirits or non-human beings hear?” or to formulate it more reflexively: “How do Pemón think non-humans hear?”.

2. *Areruya* and the healing ritual

I want to start with an example that may seem paradoxical but that serves as one approach to an answer. It is cylinder number 41,³ recorded by Koch-Grünberg in 1911 in the Makuxí/Taurepán village of Koimélemong. The title of the cylinder is “*Areruya*” and Koch-Grünberg describes it in his recorded commentary as “songs from mission time”. For him, *areruya* is just a “caricature” of the original *parishara* dance (Koch-Grünberg 1917: 107), indebted both for the name of the genre (*areruya*) and for the singing, which his colleague later tried to define as “something that sounds like Scottish or Irish songs” (Hornbostel 1923: 417, free translation by the author). For an understanding of why Pemón people sang that way, it is necessary to recall the origins of the *areruya*-ritual. Butt (1960) concluded that the first prophets⁴ of that ritual were shamans who had met Christian missionaries.

To understand the “caricature”, we need to know which practice shamans used to communicate with non-humans. They were specialists in mediation between all beings of the multiverse. Hierarchically they had the highest position of all entities – the most important of these being the spirits of mountains (*mawariton*), animals (*enek*), and more recently the “Christian spirits” (*orekotón*). Every interaction with one of these representations is linked to a specific performance.

The healing ritual of the shamans is no longer practiced, so it is necessary to reconstruct it. The basic information can be found in Koch-Grünberg’s publication (1923a: 192ff.), enhanced by some information from the field research I conducted between 2005 and 2010.

³ Koch-Grünberg collection, Berliner Phonogramm Archiv Nr: VII_W_2797_K_GR_BRA-SILIEN_41 (Ziegler 2006).

⁴ It is necessary to note here that there is a difference between the terms *ipukenak* and “prophets”. The first prophets were called *ipukenak* (Butt 1960, Thomas 1976). In my opinion the meaning of *ipukenak* has changed over the last few years. Older and wise people are normally referred to by this term because they know a lot about mediation between human and non-human beings. The *orekotón* ritual is still led by *ipukenak*. Prophets (Pemón people call them *profeta*) dream and always have a special relationship with a supernatural agent from the *wakü pata* (paradise, see Figure 3). An *ipukenak* does not need to have these special relationships; on the other hand, most prophets are *ipukenak* as well.

When a client felt sick, he visited a shaman or invited him to his house. The cause of the disease was in most cases the hijacking of the *yekaton* (soul/spirit of a human being) by dangerous spirits such as *mawariton* (spirits of mountains) or *rato* (the spirit of the water), who were contracted by a bad shaman. The task of the shaman was to deal with the dangerous spirits, with the goal of returning the *yekaton* to the body to which it belonged.

After a preparation phase I (see Figure 2), the shaman established a connection with the virtual⁵ world in phase II. He mixed a drink using the leaves of a liana vine called *kapayenkumá(x)pe* (Koch-Grünberg 1916: 66). After that, he started with *echiripöti* (calling or shouting), in which he recited the word *utö*⁶ (come down).

The spirits who were called upon descended and took seats on the *murei* (bench). The place of performance had to be dark. A human being without supernatural capacities would drop dead the very moment he/she made eye contact with a spirit. Little children were instructed to close their eyes. Nonetheless, people were able to communicate with the spirits of mountains or rivers by “speaking”. Koch-Grünberg (1917: 156f.) writes about joking with the spirits during a session when the audience was lying in hammocks outside of the room.

The shaman used another sound symbol that referred to the arrival of *imawari* or *rato - tux ye edai* (“here am I”). At this point the shaman conversed with the dangerous spirits to obtain information about his enemy and the location of the missing *yekaton*, the spirit of his client.

In phase III, the fight between the “good” shaman and the “bad”⁷ one began. The sound symbol used for beating is “bóu-bóu”, and the reference to the death of the “bad” shaman is a long intonation that resembles “a---”. The winner is the one with the strongest voice (Koch-Grünberg 1923a: 212). This is the reason why informants sang a note for about 18 seconds, which was a matter of interest for Hornbostel (1923: 420).

5 I use the term “virtual” not in the sense of cyber-realities, but analogous to Bruce Kapferer’s term “virtuality”(2006: 674). Rituals generate a “virtual reality”, which is characterized through “determination” and “reproducibility” (Köpping & Rao 2008: 195; Kapferer 1997: 179).

In *orekotón* rituals the “virtual space” is part of that “virtual reality”. The ritual in its entirety contains “spaces” where human beings or “non-spirits” like shamans and clients act. There are “spiritual spaces” to be considered as well. I prefer the term “virtual spaces” to describe both worlds, the “human spaces” as well as those “non-human” or “spiritual spaces”.

6 Analysis of cylinder number 25 (Berliner Phonogramm Archiv Nr.: VII_W_2834_K_GR_BRA-SILIEN_25) proves that *utö* is the only intelligible word on the track. During my field research I presented the recordings to various specialists. They all confirmed that they heard *utö*. All other sound symbols are unintelligible or the transcriptions are different.

7 This differentiation between “good” and “bad” is taken from Koch-Grünberg (1923a: 212).

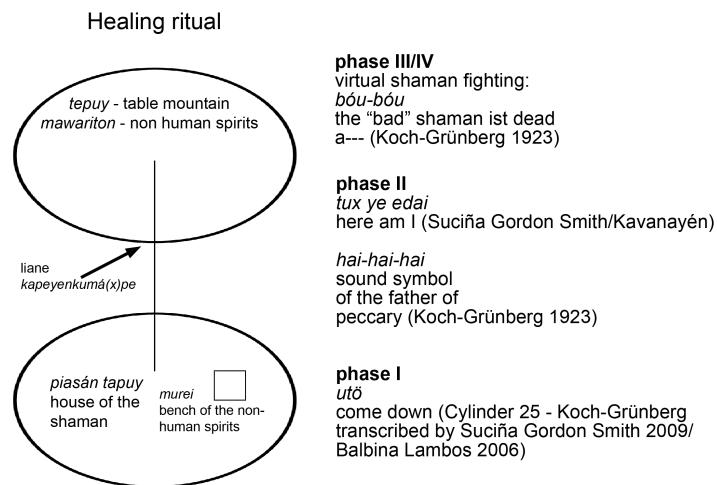


Figure 2. The healing ritual:
The levels of the multiverse are ritual locations corresponding to distinct ritual phases (Suciña Gordon Smith and Balbina Lambos are the names of Pemón specialists).

This short example from shamanic ritual practice shows that every action and every non-human is represented by a sound symbol. The first prophets of *areruya* were shamans,⁸ as Butt (1960) has noted. For a comparison of both ritual practices and to see what has happened in recent *orekotón*, I will describe the ritual practice of *orekotón*.

8 Shamans and prophets coexisted when *areruya* rituals began. This coexistence provoked competition between them. The shaman’s role was viewed with ambivalence. On the one hand the shaman was dreaded because of his dangerous powers, on the other hand he was needed because of his ability to cure people (Thomas 1982: 147). Halbmayer (2010: 165) and Armellada & Colsen (1990: 17) argue that prophets are not viewed with ambivalence. In my opinion the process of prophetization testifies to a certain level of ambivalence. Most prophets were “bad” people in their former lives, and this is also a feature of recent discourse surrounding Ramón, the founder of the “San Miguel movement” (Thomas 1976). I met the prophet Antonio in Kavanayén in 2006 and 2007. Discourse about his life before he became a ritual leader highlights his lack of ethical behaviour.

Different ability levels of prophets and *ipukenak* as well as a dichotomy can be observed in trans-specific communication. Everyone with spiritual knowledge of things such as *taren* (magical formulas) or *parishara* (hunting ritual, the hunters), can be counted among the field of specialists who might be viewed ambivalently. In most cases, those who know healing *taren* also know the negative magical formulas. Those who perform *parishara* as hunting rituals are always in possession of *taren* knowledge. In my opinion the shaman occupied the highest position in a ranking of qualities viewed ambivalently.

3. The *orekotón* rituals of *areruya* and *cho'chiman*

The practice of *areruya* and *cho'chiman* reflects present-day Amerindian ontology. I subsume both rituals under the category of *orekotón* ritual.⁹ They are performed on weekends in the early morning hours and divided into five phases.

In preparation phase I (see Figure 3), *ipukenak* washes the feet of every participant and two women offer *kashíri* while a group of musicians plays *aguinaldo pemón*¹⁰ (Lewy 2009: 438ff). These actions are more present in *areruya* than in *cho'chiman* ritual, but in both it is an obligation to remove one's shoes.

The *ipukenak* increasingly filled the vacuum of the outgoing shaman practices. Indeed, the prophets had their sublimations through their visions, but there is a gap between "common" *orekotón*, Pemón and/or non-*orekotón* and the family of the *ipukenak* in terms of how/whether they are perceived as prophets. The "bad" character in evidence in a prophet before his or her visions began is always a feature of recent discourse about prophets and their families, as in the case of Antonio. And because of prophets' special knowledge of how to attract "Christian spirits", it is assumed that they must have the same ability to contact the traditional *mawari*. An *orekotón-ipukenak*-prophet is also considered to be a *taren* specialist. That means *ipukenak* are not viewed as ambivalently as shamans were, but they have a very high degree of interaction with the non-human world which gives rise to the perception that they are "dangerous".

9 Butt (1960), Thomas (1976), Butt Colson (1985) and Kersten (1988) use terms like *areruya*-religion, *chochimuh* or *chimitin* as well as "San Miguel religion" or "movement". In my opinion all these rituals have more or less the same cosmological basis described in Figure 3. Thomas (1976) observed that every new prophet was responsible for a new "religion" and a new ritual form. Kersten (1988) and I (Lewy 2011) have not found a San Miguel movement or ritual. I think that Thomas was right within his time, but ritual practice was transformed within *orekotón* ritual practice. Participants have told me that all humans and non-humans involved in *areruya* and/or *cho'chiman* ritual are *orekotón*. I lived in Kavanayén with Antonio between 2006 and 2007. He is a well-known prophet because of his close relationship, through dreams and visions, with San Francisco de Asís. As *ipukenak* he practiced *cho'chiman*. He learnt all the songs from Raimundo Pérez (an *ipukenak* for *cho'chiman* but not a prophet) and he receives new songs from his supernatural agent. The decision as to whether *areruya* or *cho'chiman* is to be performed depends on the ritual knowledge of the ritual leader. So it is a question of which *ipukenak* is in the village.

For most participants it is not important whether *areruya* or *cho'chiman* is practised. Very often participants told me to go to *areruya* but I then realized that *cho'chiman* was being performed. Participants are concerned mainly with receiving their *dapón* (see footnote 12). Only ritual leaders and older, very experienced *orekotón* members are aware of the differences. These differences lie in the choreography of the beginning phases, in the lyrics, and in the sound organisation, as I described in great detail in my doctoral thesis (Lewy 2011).

10 *Aguinaldo* is a Venezuelan music genre played during Christmas time, from 16th of December till 31st of December, during Christian services and special events. The instruments played are the *tambora criolla* (drum), *cuatro* (4-string guitar), *furruco* (friction drum), and *maracas* (rattles). *Aguinaldos pemón* are appropriated (Lewy 2009:438ff) from Venezuelan *aguinaldos* or received directly from supernatural agents by prophets. They are played all year round in the beginning or final phases of *orekotón* rituals, in Christian churches and/or missions, at all kinds of events (Día de la Resistencia Indígena), or in private households early in the morning (Lewy 2011).

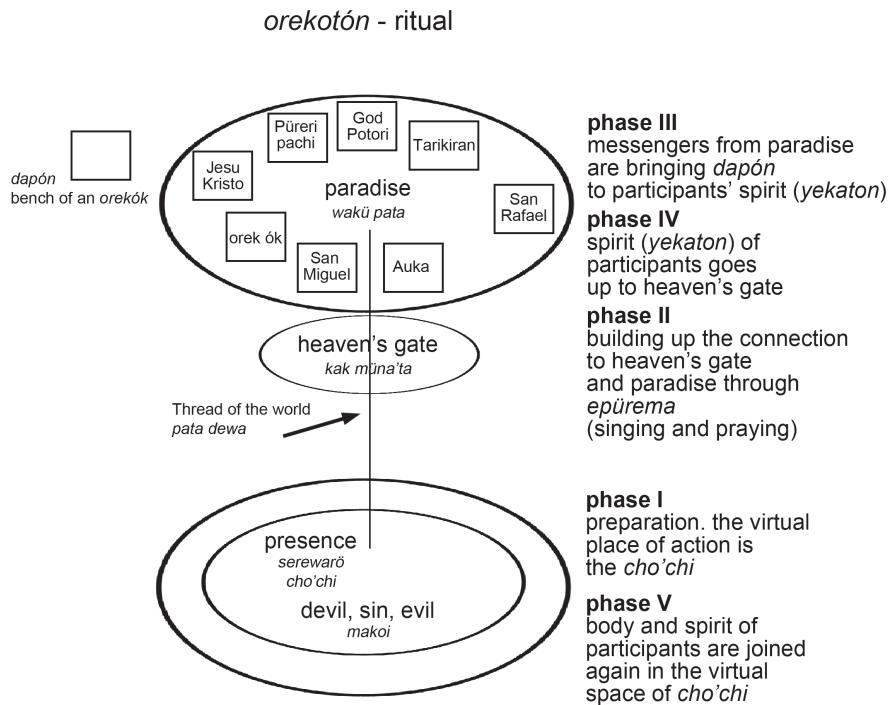


Figure 3. Inner framing¹¹ of *orekotón* rituals (*areruya, cho'chiman*).
The levels of the multiverse are ritual locations corresponding to distinct ritual phases.

In phase II, the *ipukenak* starts singing and dancing. He is building up a connection between the *cho'chi* (Amerindian church) and the *wakü pata* (paradise) through *dewa* (the thread of the world).

The messengers in the virtual location of paradise hear the singing of the *ipukenak* and his community and descend to *cho'chi* with the *dapón*¹² (bench) of every

11 Inner framing is the sequencing of the ritual which forms a closed virtuality (Kapferer 2006).

12 *Dapón* is the bench of every *orekotón*, human or non-human being. The term in general is used as the base of something or someone. For instance, the earth is the *dapón* (base) for the yucca plant; the yucca plant is the *dapón* (base) for the spirit *Püreri pachi*, etc. The *dapón* of every participant in *orekotón* ritual is located in heaven. It can be seen as a virtual location which is the base for the *yekaton* (soul, spirit) of a person after dying in heaven. Messengers bring the *dapón* down from *wakü pata* (paradise) during ritual performances. Trance can be observed at the moment when participants receive their *dapón*. The *murei* of the shaman is, in contrast, a real bench. It was used to locate spirits during healing sessions.

participant. These messengers are entities appropriated from Christian mythology, such as San Miguel, San Rafael, San Francisco de Asís as well as the *yekaton* (spirit/soul) of dead *ipukenak*, such as Auka, Tarikiran, Püreri pachi etc.

At the moment of their arrival every participant receives his or her *dapón*. Phase III is recognizable because the choreography changes. The *orekotón*¹³ in the *cho'chi* start to jump and, just in time for the incorporation of the *dapón*, they fall into a trance. The body stays in the location of the *cho'chi* while the spirit ascends to the *kak müna'ta* (heaven's gate, Figure 3), a virtual location in front of the entry to paradise.

In the concluding phase V the *dapón* and the messengers leave the *cho'chi* and return to paradise. Participants calm down and wake up. All phases are reflected in the ritual text and Amerindian discourse. The intention of the ritual is to build up the “strength of the heart”, the seat of the *yekaton* – the spirit of every person. The “strength of the heart” is an important part of caring for the spirit of a person, so that dangerous spirits like *makoi* (the devil, the evil, see Figure 3) and even the spirits of the mountain do not have any chance of kidnapping *yekaton*.

In comparing the healing ritual with the *orekotón* ritual, analogies of inner framing can be proposed. One of the founders of the ritual-performance was Pichiwön. Butt (1960: 74) notes that Pichiwön received his knowledge through contact with Christian missionaries. As a shaman he misunderstood the Christian missionaries who told him the “way to God”, because in Christian doctrine the “way to God” is a normative interpretation of Christian mythology and its ethics of life. In shaman ontology “the way to God” means establishing a direct connection with the help of a liana vine. To get in touch with the supernatural agency of the Christian missionaries, sound communication needed to be used in order to create a virtual path or connection to the spirit “God”.

Sound symbols demonstrate the formalized style of attracting supernatural agency. The first prophets needed to use their own strategies of attraction. The sounds they used were dictated by the Christian missionaries, because the missionaries knew how their spirits heard. This is the reason why the first prophets initially used Christian songs. The first prophets were shamans. They used the songs of their

13 *Orekotón* are all human and non-human participants. I subsume *areruya* and *cho'chiman* under the heading of *orekotón* rituals because the term is the autodenomination of all the participants. The word *orekok* derives from the English words “holy ghost”. It includes all entities and human beings as well as the potential for an energy surge inside the *cho'chi* during the performance. “God” is not a normal messenger as I had previously speculated during my lecture in Marburg in 2010 (thanks to Laura Rival for her advice). “God” has his special place in paradise, where human-*orekotón* are not allowed to enter during ritual performance.

spirits so the spirits could hear them. Finally, the first Pemón *areruya* ritual specialist used imitations of missionary songs to attract Christian spirits.

I listened to Koch-Grünberg’s cylinder 41 with contemporary Pemón specialists. Balbina (Kamarakoto) and Suciña (Arekuna) very quickly identified the song. The piece is an appropriation of Webster’s church song “The sweet by and by”. It was written in 1862 in the United States, not in Ireland or Scotland, and is mainly performed by Protestant Christians.

Transcription: cylinder 41 (VII_W_2797_K_GR_BRASILIEN_41_)
Areruya recorded by Theodor Koch-Grünberg 1911

Transcription: There’s a land that is fairer than day,
J.P. Webster 1862

Figure 4. Transcriptions of cylinder 41 (left) and J.P. Webster’s original “The sweet by and by” (right).

Cylinder 41 is a sound witness of *areruya* ritual transmission from Kapon to Pemón, which means from Guyana to the western savanna of Venezuela and down to Brazil. This is the reason why even today *orekotón* ritual specialists are convinced that *areruya* has nothing to do with Christian missionaries. The Interamerindian transmission was faster than the Christian conquest by human beings. In other words, Pemón specialists are sure that God himself sent agents such as San Miguel or San Rafael to warn the Pemón people. Butt Colson (1960: 71; 1971: 48f.; 1985: 113) dates the ritual to 1880, a time before Christian Missionaries had entered Gran Savanna.

A comparison of both songs – cylinder 41 and the “original” version by Webster – reflects the process of appropriation. The organisation of sound demonstrates a similarity¹⁴ with the typical Pemón song style of contemporary *areruya* and *cho'chiman* performance practice as well as the practice of *parishara* singing and dancing.

4. The *parishara*

The *parishara* was performed before hunting. Animals and humans shared the same drinks, the same food, and the same songs and dances. In a recording session with the Kamarakoto specialist Raimundo Pérez in Kavanayén in 2005, Pérez commented on one *parishara* recording:

They hear their songs and they come to join the party [...] like people. And they invited their brothers, and other animals [...] no jaguars [...] the wayura (tapir) brought his partner [...] to share the kashíri [...] they were a lot of animals [...] when they arrived [...] our grandfathers started to hunt [...] (Raimundo Pérez 23.11.2005, free translation by the author).

Like the first prophets and participants in the *areruya* ritual who imitated the sound of the missionaries to attract the “Christian spirits”, the Pemón hunters used the sound of the animals to attract them. Sound in this context includes the lyrics and their intonation as an important index. The human beings appropriated the songs from the animals. The hunting of peccary necessitates a strategy of attracting the peccary, which is reflected in the instruments, the sound-producing dance skirt, the lyrics of the songs, and the type of sound organisation of the lyrics – the intonation.

The bamboo stick or tube depicted in Figure 5 is called a *warunká*. It was beaten on the ground at every second step during the dancing. This signal could be heard from a long distance. The *warunká* was always played with a fixed rattle consisting

14 For sound analysis and comparison see Lewy 2009: 438ff.

of pieces of a dried food named *kewei*, the daily diet of the tapir. The conclusion of a song is indicated by blowing the tube trumpet *kamadén*. The sound imitates the grunting of peccary animals.

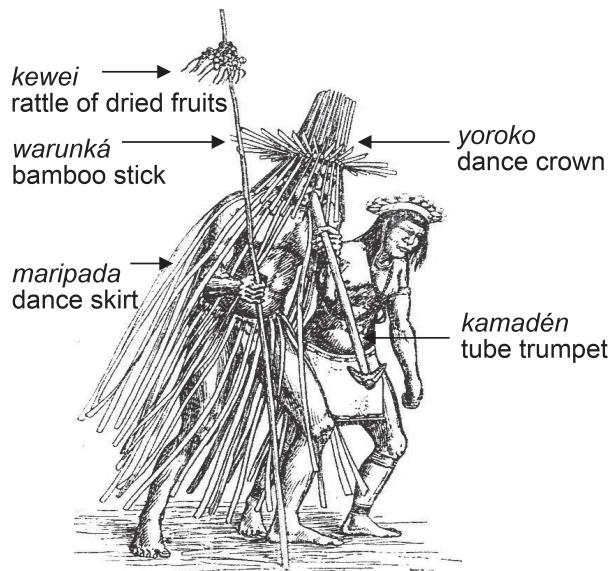


Figure 5. Parishara instruments and dance skirts
(illustration from Koch-Grünberg 1923a: 156).

The dance skirt *maripada* represents the rustling sound that the hunted animal produces when moving through the savanna. The leaves parted into belts were taken from the *maripa* palm tree (*Maximiliana maripa*), whose material was preferred to that of the *inaja* palm tree (*Mauritia flexuosa*). The consistency of the *maripa* palm leaves produces a louder sound than the ones of the *inaja* palm tree.

The lyrics represent the action and the sequence of a whole *parishara* cycle. In Figures 6 and 7, the first song of a cycle of around twenty songs includes lyrics describing the production of the instrument. The second song describes the manufacturing of the dance skirt and the third song the attraction of the tapir. The imitation of the sound that the animal makes in the savanna is followed by identification with the tapir. The animals are like people coming together for a party: “I came to the place of my brother – I came like the tapir” (Figure 7). Like the interpretation of the quoted myth, the song text reflects the perspective of the tapir, whose habits are the same as human habits. The tapir hikes over the savanna and joins his relatives’ party, eating, drinking, dancing, and singing.

Kewei - Parishara

Maripada-Parishara

1. Kewei (u) dapon pe dei sakötükö.
Yo he cortado el palo para el dapon de *kewei*.
I cut the stick, the dapon (base) of *kewei*.

1. Maripada püremapök rö. Yoroko püremapök rö.
Tejiendo la falda. Tejiendo la corona.
Braiding the dance skirt. Braiding the dance crown.

2. Pata nüpokowamüy. Pata nüpokowamüy.
La tierra atardeció. La tierra atardeció.
The earth is going down. The earth is going down.

3. Pata nüpokowamüy.
La tierra atardeció.
The earth is going down..

Figure 6. Parishara songs *kewei* and *maripada*.

Wayura - Parishara

Wakü pe kin uyenpakuaya? - 22. Areruya San Luis

1. Yakono pata pona.
Al lugar de mi hermano,
To the place of my brother,

2. iwoto pe uyepü,
yo vine como la cacería,
I came like the bag,

3. wayura pe uyepü.
yo vine como el danto.
I came like the tapir.

1. Wakü pe kin uyenpakuaya?
¿Será que tu me despiertas bien?
Can it be that you woke me up good?

2. Ipukenak pe uyenpakuaya.
Me despiertas como ipukenak.
You woke me up as ipukenak.

Figure 7. Wayura from the parishara song cycle, and Wakü pe kin uyenpakuaya? from the areruya song cycle, San Luis (2006).

5. Conclusion

Pemón ritual sound structure as described above, displays the interaction between humans and non-humans. For example, *parichara* and *areruya* dance cycles are divided into around 20 independent but similar songs which take between two to four hours to perform. Only the performance of all the songs secures the framing of the performed ritual. Most of these songs consist of three (ABC) or four (ABCD) musical phrases, as seen in Figures 6 and 7. These phrases are the intonation of two or three lines, which are repeated until the final sound symbols, like *hai* (see Figure 6-*kewei*) in *parishara*. This is the sound index of the father of all peccary in the healing ritual as well (Koch Grünberg 1923a: 198).

The same organisation of syntactical and musical parallelism is found in *parishara* and in all *orekotón* ritual song (Lewy 2011). The highest tone of the scale is mostly sung in the first phrase (A), which indicates the repetition. The second phrase (B or C) shows a descending of the tonal center and can be described as a phrase of

variation. The last phrase always ends on the deepest tone of the scale and is held for a longer time. This is a tone whose function is similar to a tonic, but in Pemón style I prefer to describe this as a tone of reference.

Finally, this generalized sound structure can be found in most of the songs in *areruya*, *cho'chiman* and *parishara* singing practice.

The forms by which the animals were attracted has been transformed in the last one hundred years into an attraction of the “Christian spirits”. Using appropriated western church songs at the beginning of the ritual practice, the lyrics of *areruya* have been changed from the imitation of English words as unintelligible sound symbols to an intelligible ritual language.¹⁵ The musical organisation of the western practice was completely abandoned and sound organisation or structure was taken over from *parishara* to *areruya* and *cho'chiman* performances as was the choreography of circle dance and accentuation with the right foot. In the present day, only these formalized sound structures are able to attract non-humans in the appropriated virtual world of *wakü pata* and to help with the ascension of personal *yekaton* to *kak miuna ta*.

In healing rituals the shamans imitate the spirit sitting on his bench. The shaman performance was a “radio play”, because “seeing” the bad spirit is a prediction of the forthcoming death of a normal Pemón person. The point of view of the tapir arriving at the fake party – the *parishara* hunting ritual – demonstrates analogous perspectives. In the moment of “seeing”, the performers start to hunt the tapir – a symbol of the prediction of forthcoming death for a normal Pemón person, as in the shamanic ritual.

Speech is needed to interact between these beings. But singing and sound symbols in rituals have more specialized functions. They are used to contact and at times to attract supernatural agencies in a virtual world, or “covered humans” like the animals in the savanna.

In other words, the sensory perception of “seeing”, which in Pemón etymology is closely related to “thinking” and “reflecting”,¹⁶ is responsible for categorization. Crossing the border between these cosmological categorizations is dangerous (see Figure 1). “Hearing” and sound interaction is used to interact with these categories. In a formalized way, every virtual or real location has a special term for sound interaction which in western terms can only be described as singing.

15 The *orekotón* ritual language is a mix of Akawaio, Arekuna, Kamarakoto, Spanish, and English. Most of the participants are proficient in these languages.

16 The term for “thinking” or “reflecting” is *esenu'menga*. It consists of *esenu* (eye) or *ene* (seeing).

In each of the three rituals, different terms are employed for vocal practice (see Figure 1). In the healing ritual, the preparation of the piasán is called *ekurarama*¹⁷ and the shouting practice is called *echiripöti*. The term for singing in the hunting ritual *parishara* is *eserenka*.¹⁸ Communication with the “Christian spirits” is named *epürema*.¹⁹ The term seems to be appropriated from “pray”, evidence of the influence of the Anglican missionaries in Guyana, who introduced their religious ideas to the Akawaio and Makuxí people.

The sound symbols and structures of the healing rituals are not found in recent *orekotón* rituals, but the ritual sequencing of *orekotón* rituals is similar to the healing ritual. Both rituals deal with a supernatural agency in different virtual locations in the Pemón multiverse.

The appropriation of Christian spirits and their amalgamation with and transformation into well-known performance strategies for attracting non-human beings, regardless of whether they are *mawariton*, peccaries, Christian messengers (such as Jesus, San Miguel, and San Rafel), or spirits of dead prophets or *ipukenak* (Auka, Tarikiran, Püreri pachi), demonstrates the emergence of a new ritual form, namely *orekotón* rituals. These rituals are sonic evidence for the dynamics of the Pemón multiverse system.

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17 In the healing ritual different forms of sound-producing practice are used. Armellada (2007: 49) writes that *ekurarama* means the typical gurgling practice of the shaman during his preparation. *Echiripöti* means “shouting” (Armellada 2007: 46) and, according to my informant Suciña Gordon Smith, is a typical sound symbol for calling the spirits .

18 Armellada (1975: 642f.) reflects the etymology of *eserenka* which means “singing” in the context of the traditional ritual dances like *parishara* and *tukuik*. In *orekotón* ritual lyrics, the term is *eserenka*.

19 *Epürema* (“to pray” Armellada 2007: 59) is used in *orekotón* rituals as a performance practice. “Let’s go and do *cho’chiman*” can be translated as *püremambai cho’chiman pök*. *Epürema* involves singing, dancing and praying.

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