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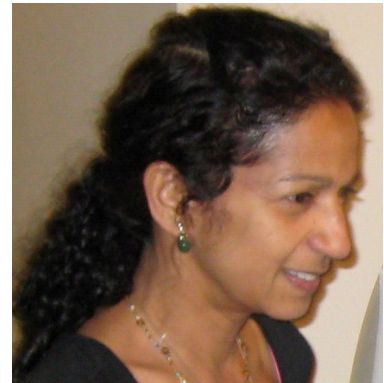
## *Unbodies of Water: The Health Effects of Extinction and Genocide — Arawak Perspectives*<sup>1</sup>

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### *Overview*

Arawaks, one of the first Peoples of the Circum-Caribbean, southern North America, Central America and northern South America, are falsely said to be extinct (Provost, 2001), and this leads to the challenge of non-existence. How can we articulate Arawak perspectives on health if we must conduct our lives in a foreign grammar and language where we must speak of ourselves in the third person? What are the health effects of being extinct? Is extinction the same as genocide?<sup>2</sup>



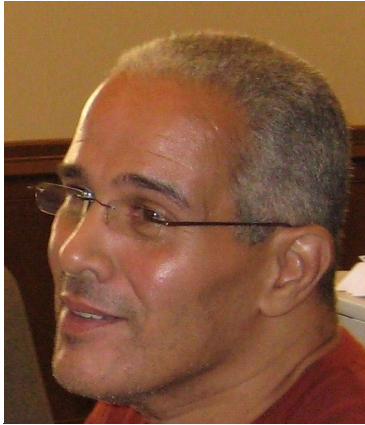
*M. C. L. Provost*

The noun *genocide* refers to mass killings of people on account of their racial origin. The adjective *extinct* describes beings who were killed off, leaving no living representatives. The verb forms are *to extinct* and *to be extincted*. The Arawak language we use is based primarily on J. P. Bennett's (1984; 1994) language work. In that language, extinction might be translated as *yakosa* – to extinguish (the fire/life - literally, "resemble/allow eye" – a type of 'heart'). From this comes *yakosahe* – the state of being extinguished (homicide); and, *yakosoa* – to extinguish oneself (suicide). *Yakosa* is related to *yahoda* - to die, and *aiyada* - to weep. Wholeness of 'eye-heart' is key to Arawak well-being. The language provides a kind of *sonographic ecology* through myth and song, so that being "out-of-[eye-]heart" has an adverse health effect (Taylor, 1951), as in *Guahayona's* story below.

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<sup>1/</sup> Portions of this paper were previously presented at side events of the 6th session (2007) of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples I and the 9th Session (2010) of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

<sup>2/</sup> United Nations Convention on Genocide, Article 2 (1948), includes 5 areas that apply to cultural genocide.



*M. Quintana*

The challenges to achieving this ecology of healthfulness began with the invasions of foreign Empires (i.e., Spain, France, Portugal, Netherlands, & Britain) at First Contact (1492). Each invasion was like the collision of two tectonic plates of Earth's surface breaking or shifting then colliding (Provost & Quintana, 2007). Earth is alive and earthquakes and aftershocks are evidence of her search for balance and equilibrium. But the cumulative damage of earthquakes increases in logarithmic increments, not by simple multiplication. Arawak identity is closely linked with all bodies of water and a waterquake would be a hurricane (*Húrankan* — a Divine name and attribute).

### *The Problem of Non-Existence: Zombification*

Genocide psychology is well known from stories of the Holocaust, but Extinction creates extreme difficulty in telling one's story, particularly in one's occupied homelands. The closest analogy is *zombification*. A *zombie* is a 'living-dead' – an unbody – created in one of two ways: (a) the zombies of *Vodun* by use of Tetrodotoxin from the Puffer Fish;<sup>3</sup> or (b) the zombies by isolation from one's home-family culture and socialization to an alien one.

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Similar violations and traumas occur in both forms, rupturing the self and its relationships. *Zombies* must live in this world without being of this world, as they do not really exist and are 'not-human' beings and this causes a sense of disembodiment.

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<sup>3/</sup> Vodum, though commonly known as a Afro-Caribbean religion, is actually a syncretism of Arawak with African and Christian iconography, known across the region also by other names. Tetrodotoxin reduces bodily functions to an imperceptible state so that the individual, appearing dead, could be buried alive but may be exhumed and enslaved. Tetrodotoxin use was publicized by W. Davis (1994) in *Passage of Darkness*, based on his work for an American pharmaceutical firm — but from indigenous perspectives, his report was a form of theft.

## *The Colonial Disease*

*The Colonial Disease* — our term for the spectrum of ill-being due to the Euro-colonial social experiment — negatively impacts all the social determinants of health due to a several factors: identity-loss; substance abuse; changes in diet, lifestyle and environment; pollution, and gender construction which may be imposed or self-initiated as life-strategies of last resort. The "cure" for *the Colonial Disease* always involves some form of ceremonial self-recovery through self-study of the languages, storying-arts, and environmental knowledge. We describe the Arawak sense of *Participation as Imekohe andábo*

*kake* — "Willingly joining together for life, we awaken" -with an agitated awareness and an impetus to learn. *Imekohe andábo kake korokodawa* involves becoming whole in heart, as well as a moment when we ceremonially enact the myths across the generations. Then, positive emotions evoked by ceremonial tribal family arts rekindle the fires of the Ancestors and the Divine in our own shared embodied <sup>4</sup>myth-dreams. This Arawak deeper-identity is heard throughout the myths (Provost & Quintana, 2009).

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We have seen that Arawak grandparents and great-grandparents, who live generally healthy and well-adjusted lives in the Hinterlands of Guyana, do still possess a certain level of immunity and resistance to *the Colonial Disease*. Their environment and ways of life make this possible, even though they honor their adopted religions alongside their Indigenous beliefs. The grandparents see *the Colonial Disease* as a threat to the younger generations while the young may not yet perceive it as such. The young tend to begin losing their Arawak identity (i.e., attachment) as they come under the illusions of affluence (i.e., individuation) through education and schooling in European /non indigenous languages, entertainment or work.

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<sup>4/</sup> The body tends to respond to learning the arts with health-producing chemical reactions rather than toxic ones, with a resulting sense of loving oneself, others, and of being loved. Arts therapies and arts interventions have therefore become a growing trend amongst non-natives.

## *The Example of Guahayona's Story*

The Family Principle of Giving is expressed in different ways but as *Imekohe andábo kake korokodawa*, it is violated in Guahayona's story as reported by Ramón Pané:

*Guahayona (literally "we cried [for] them"), the brother of an Arawak chief, sent one of the men to gather digo (an herb used for healing skin conditions and curative baths by Surinam Arawaks) ... Later Guahayona said to the women in Cauta (a place where Cauta trees grow, which have inedible fruit and resemble another tree with edible fruit), "Leave your husbands ... leave your little ones (here by the stream) ... I will come back for them, and we will take with us only the güeyo" (coco plant — once a staple food — but now cocaine is made from it). Guahayona took the women to Matinino (literally "Without Fathers") island and abandoned them there. He did not go back for the children. The little children abandoned by their mothers were hungry and began crying out for food. And so they became frogs, who cry until this day "Toa, toa, toa" (a term for self, the eye-heart, food for a journey, the song of frogs and thunder). A while later, Guahayona becomes ill and Guabonito (Deep Waters Woman), a celibate, teaches him how to heal by bathing in the sea. He goes to live with his father Hiauno (the name for an aggressive predator parrot) and takes a new name: Albeborael Guahayona (translated by some — as "henceforward Guahayona" — but the authors transliterate the name as "Steals + We Cry [for] Them") and then he brings all knowledge to future generations.*

What is wrong with this picture? Knowing our story-patterns and the nature of myth, we can distinguish various editorial impositions by Ramón Pané, a Catalan friar, and subsequent writers. Let us review: Traditionally, the woman's and man's voice would be present for balance and to avoid invalidity, but the woman's perspective is missing throughout Pané's account. *Guahayona* also breaks all the traditional principles. He deposed his own brother, misused his knowledge of Arawak Healing Medicines by over-harvesting *güeyo* and *digo*, and taking much of the 'medicine' of *guanin* (a precious metal) from the island of the same name. He misused his charisma to manipulate the women into deceiving themselves, by drawing upon their love for child and family, so that they abandoned their husbands and children. But he departed from the teachings of family and so his immune system attacked him and ego-greed manifested itself in his illness. The children, abandoned, regress to a pre-verbal animal state. The abandoned women have no way to recover their families or to begin new ones. The abandoned husbands lose their sense of being spouses and fathers. *Guahayona*, a self-appointed messiah-type, overcomes his infirmities and returns to live in his father's home. Enter the idea of celibacy in a place of solitude and a means for healing the disrupted self. But this is not a teaching for Arawak health; it is a Catholic religious intervention — and these types of transformations create individual and cultural invalidity.

Pané and later writers, in demonizing Arawak sexuality and family life, wrongly assume *Guahayona's* disease is syphilis; this is evident from a closer reading. *Guabonito's* prescription that the ill *Guahayona* bathe in the sea subsumes Arawak ritual bathing in Catholic baptism, yet he becomes mysteriously healed of his sores. After his spiritual rebirth, *Guabonito* presents him with gifts of *guanin* and *ciba* (precious stones) and he is cast as a hero to his People. But the missing children — embodiments of the fire of eye-heart — are never found. The women, exiled in a place without spouses or children become a type of the celibate woman *Guabonito*. This is the ideal of *La Virgen* (Spanish – the Virgin) for whom self-annihilation involves giving up her child and husband. But in pursuing their personal good as being for the good of all, the women and *Guahayona* have forsaken the reality that: "Willingly joining together for life, we awaken". The result is ill-health and ill-being for all except *Guahayona* who eventually becomes a self-made man.

Breaking the principle of family health perpetuates Extinction. Arawak self-identity embodies deep and multi-faceted relations with ancestors, family members, the environment and cosmos, with whom we are one being. *Andábo*

**Breaking the principle of family health perpetuates Extinction. Arawak self-identity embodies deep and multi-faceted relations with ancestors, family members, the environment and cosmos, with whom we are one being. Andábo (joining) creates individual self-identities as well as family self-identities, simultaneously. But separating the family (individuating) creates self-annihilation.**

(joining) creates individual self-identities as well as family self-identities, simultaneously. But separating the family (individuating) creates self-annihilation. *The Colonial Disease* does result in non-existence, death and dismemberment, orphaning, alienation and wounding. And because many of us are now a people of mixed-blood-and-culture, we must balance fragmented and divided identities. Thus an Arawak faces many deaths in Eurocentric society as her/his 'joining' self becomes socialized to 'separating'. An Arawak also has several other 'hearts' as we discuss elsewhere. Losing any one of these 'hearts' is like experiencing brain-death, cardiac-death or spiritual-death. Arawaks can hope to achieve health where Earth is also 'heart', for wholeness requires that we willingly join together for life and awaken — *wa'imekohe andá kake korokoda*.

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