

Alto Coen

I want to welcome you into our house that we built. It is our great traditional house. This is the house where our community gathers and holds ceremonies. It gives me great pleasure to share with you that our rivers each have great stories to tell.



SACRED MEETING HOUSE, BRIBRI TERRITORY

In our indigenous culture, these rivers of ours, all have life. Every river has a shape, and each shape a unique dialectic of every inhabitant residing along the banks. Every person learns from the river. This is the language and lens of how each live their lives. The river shapes the residents who live here, and across the basin, and it is not the other way around. We don't change the shape of it, we listen to it, and it constantly changes us. In listening, we learn to adapt to these changes.

For us, the rivers symbolize very large snakes, and this is why these rivers are rounded. They each serpentine down our mountains and hills. They say that the race and origin of all of where these snakes were born is

called the big house of Kamuk, which is positioned high up at the top of the basin, where these four most important rivers to our culture are born. In our language, these rivers are called: Coen Uren, Aradi, Telire. These rivers are the four rivers that Sibü, our God, left to us. For each river, the people are called the same who are born in the river's place. Hence, the people of Uren, are called Uren'awaH — the people of the Uren River. Those born of my home river in mountain plains area of Aradi, are called Aradi'awaH. Those born in the part of the COEN, are called COEN'awaH. And it is the same for the TELIRE'awaH.

In our culture, Sibü created the rivers as male and female. When we look across our lands, this basin, the Telire, the Coen, and Uren rivers, are women. The male river is the Rio LARI. Lari is the sharpest, and is the cockiest. What I mean by this, is that by no fault of Lari own, the umbilical cord was cut off from our culture and spiritually. This is evidently observed in the people LARI'awah are the people who most preserved culture because they were the purpose of our great Sibü, people of Alta Uren, the Rio Uren preserve the culture, the people of Bajo Coen because they lost their language, lost their customs, why? That they began to think evil. And they did not keep the spirituality of its rivers.



TRIBUTARIES OF THE COEN RIVER, BRIBRI TERRITORY

That river was our greatest, but became salted when the United Fruit Company arrived in the basin. When they came, they seized our terrain in the middle and lower basin, and with it, the spirit of our great spirituality. These are the days that the great Shamans called the spirit of water. It was then when the floods began to arrive more fiercely, in order to sink all of those who could eliminate our way of life, the way we have always lived — in rhythm with the rivers, the land, and nature.

Man, who does not follow in these ways, does not listen to the messages that nature sends him. He has forgotten or has never learned. This is unfortunate and can cause harm and lasting damages that may be unrecoverable. Contrasting, I receive an abundance from nature, which brings me messages in the rain, in the starry night, through the connections and in the footsteps of the stars – and I read this language. It's the language of the spirit, and it is the spirit that tells me what messages I need to make

mention of to my communities, whether that it is a message of life or a message of death or a message of preparation for either a good thing or a bad thing. I carry these messages to my brothers and sisters.

I'm a spiritual doctor of my culture. I have three scopes of responsibility within my culture. I carry out task of maintaining our culture's strong roots, communicating the basis of such studies of culture and values with our communities, and providing reminders to all of what each can offer the world of humanity within our culture: love your fellow man, love the earth, love our older brothers that are the animals, the rain, the sun, the water, and mother Earth.

The humanity across the world, I feel in my heart, has lost the spiritual values held within the elements. They are not present. Especially in the element of water, the fabric of life. We can see examples everywhere in cities and in more developed areas that do not value water. Simply, practices of throwing away trash in the streets, that eventually makes it way into the streams, people carry out these actions without thinking how this trash will affect the waters they drink. It's unfortunate how not having a connection and an understanding of the value of their water affects the lives of fish and animals that have always lives in their streams. Imagine that if the animals are affected, and this where the water that they drink daily, comes from? We don't let this happen here.

In our area, the fish are alive and thriving. And even the sun today is still shining overhead. This nature has not ceased to be no more, due to our ancestors living in marriage with all the elements, and all spirits. And they lived well.

Today, we hear stories of companies and businesses all over the world that want commoditize water. Or put their name on, patent it. But water is God. Water is for humanity. And we should not place our generations that are needing to take care of our waters in competition over something that God gave to all of us to share. We do this well in our rivers here, we share.

Water, time, the changing environment, the sun, the rain, the air, we recognize here that the spirit of the waters flows underground. These wells, they all are our brothers. We are part of them, and they are part of us. This was and is our cultural currents; it is a conscious era. And we still live this way.

It's difficult when noticing of others that instead of holding these kinds of cultural values for their waters and for the elements, they elect to live within a materialistic age. It is an age where their God is money, and they do not think about the spirits that are apart of them. I can say that this might be the most important message that I can share: I believe that revaluing our culture's connection to the value of water is something that many communities outside of our basin could revisit and consider for all of our futures.

This text is an excerpt from *"Navigating Cultural Currents: The Sixaola River Basin Story, that can be found here:*

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