

Origin Narratives, Transformation Routes

Heritage, Knowledge And (a)Symmetries On The Uaupés River

Geraldo Andrello

Abstract

This article begins with a series of discussions on the identification of sacred sites in the locality of Iauaretê, situated on the shores of the middle Uaupés River, between 2004 and 2011, involving the participation of local indigenous leaders and representatives of the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN). The work of identifying these sites began with the institute's visit to the region in 2004 and the partnership established with the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN) and the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), a non-government organization that has provided advice and support to indigenous peoples of the region for two decades. Following an evaluation of the effects of the listing of the Iauaretê Falls as intangible heritage by IPHAN in 2005, as well as the preservation actions implemented subsequently, the article explores some aspects of the new collaborative dynamics between anthropologists and indigenous researchers/intellectuals which the experience brings to the fore, as well as the specific way in which this phenomenon is manifested in the context of the upper Rio Negro.

Keywords: intangible heritage, knowledge, mythic narratives, symmetrical anthropology

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta, inicialmente, uma série de discussões sobre a identificação de sítios sagrados existentes na localidade de Iauaretê, situada às margens do médio rio Uaupés, entre 2004 e 2011, da qual participaram lideranças indígenas locais e representantes do Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (Iphan). As atividades de identificação desses sítios iniciaram-se com a aproximação do órgão à região em 2004 e à parceria

que estabeleceu com a Federação das Organizações Indígena do Rio Negro (FOIRN) e o Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), organização não-governamental que presta assessoria aos povos indígenas da região há duas décadas. A partir de uma avaliação sobre os efeitos do registro da Cachoeira de Iauaretê como patrimônio imaterial em 2005 pelo Iphan, bem como das ações de salvaguarda que se seguiram, busca-se explorar alguns aspectos das novas dinâmicas colaborativas entre antropólogos e pesquisadores/intelectuais indígenas que a experiência põe em destaque, bem como o modo específico como esse fenômeno se atualiza do contexto do alto rio Negro.

Palavras-chave: patrimônio imaterial, conhecimento, narrativas míticas, antropologia simétrica

Origin Narratives, Transformation Routes

Heritage, Knowledge And (A)Symmetries On The Uaupés River¹

Geraldo Andrello

This article describes a set of activities and discussions surrounding the identification of sacred sites in the locality of Iauaretê, situated in the Alto Rio Negro Indigenous Land on the shores of the middle Uaupés River, between 2004 and 2011. The activities of identifying these sites began with the visit by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) to the region in 2004 and the partnership established by the institute with the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN) and the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA). The aim of this action was to develop a pilot experience involving indigenous groups in the new policy of intangible cultural heritage with which IPHAN had been working since 2000. The experience produced various outcomes, including the recognition of the Iauaretê Falls as intangible heritage. At local level this event was absorbed into another set of ongoing actions and discussions, including key themes such as mythic narratives, participative mapping and the production and circulation of knowledge. The article looks to construct the general scenario formed by these connections, as well as explore some aspects of the new collaborative dynamics between anthropologists and indigenous researchers/intellectuals which the experience brought to the fore. Various people from Iauaretê participated in the process, among whom I should like to mention Adriano de Jesus, Pedro de Jesus, Miguel de Jesus and Luis Aguiar (Tariano) and Guilherme Maia Laureano Maia, Moisés Maia and Arlindo Maia (Tukano). Much of what follows has been authored by them too.

¹ This article partly reproduces arguments developed in an earlier work of collective authorship (see Andrello et al. 2012) with additional comments in its final section. My thanks to Ana Gita de Oliveira, Renata Alves and André Martini (in memoriam) for sharing their ideas.

The Iauaretê Falls as Intangible Heritage

The discussions concerning the drafting of Decree 3551 – promulgated in 2000, instituting the Intangible Cultural Heritage Register and creating the National Intangible Heritage Program – were based around the extensive accumulation of experiences of the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) relating to its preservation and protection of Brazil's cultural heritage. Amplifying the field of heritage work to contexts very different from those already consolidated posed a challenge, considering merely the questions covered by Law Decree n. 25/1937, which instituted the registration of material assets in Brazil.²

From 2004 onwards, the upper Rio Negro region effectively became one of these contexts. For IPHAN the upper Rio Negro posed a challenging and almost paradigmatic case. Firstly it involved putting into practice the guidelines established by the Department of Intangible Heritage for surveying the cultural references of indigenous peoples and expanding its institutional activities to regions historically situated on the margins of (or even outside) its range of preservation work. Secondly it involved confronting underlying problems like the very transposition of the notion of cultural heritage, as understood by the institution, to diverse cultural contexts. From IPHAN's viewpoint, other questions relating to the construction of the object to be preserved also loomed large. These included: how to approach the complex system of ritual exchanges already documented extensively in countless ethnographic texts? What domains of social life are immediately identifiable for preservation purposes? What approach would be best: work with one of the twenty-two ethnic groups found in the region or approach the set of shared 'cultural assets' also richly documented in the ethnographic literature? What parameters should be used to identify and delimit a 'historical site' (a concept central to heritage work) when implementing the actions to safeguard it? What are the most important references of the cultural context in question? And finally, but crucially, how to resolve the logistical problems involved in visiting the region's basins and rivers?³ Whatever the answers,

2 These experiences took place at the National Centre of Cultural References (CNRC) and the National Pro-Memory Foundation in the period between the end of the 1970s and the mid-1980s. Both institutions were directed by Aloísio Magalhães.

3 This diagnosis of IPHAN's institutional vision of its own work in the upper Rio Negro region is based on my conversations with the anthropologist Ana Gita de Oliveira, a technical officer at the institute's

the upper Rio Negro was chosen for a variety of motives, including the existence of FOIRN, perhaps the most prominent indigenous organization in Amazonia, whose partnership with ISA (Instituto Socioambiental) was initiated over fifteen years ago.

In fact the partnership established by IPHAN, FOIRN, ISA and local indigenous associations was essential for the proposal to become minimally viable in terms of the anticipated issues and initial challenges. Hence between May 2004 when the project began and August 2006 when the Iauaretê Falls were declared part of Brazil's cultural heritage by the Cultural Heritage Consultative Committee, various actions supporting 'cultural revitalization' processes were implemented.⁴ But the start of the process was marked by the meeting solicited by IPHAN and organized by FOIRN in May 2004 in the maloca located at its headquarters in the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira (AM). As the meeting was about 'culture,' the organizers invited those groups who had been working on the implantation of differentiated indigenous schools in the region, such as the Tukano and the Tuyuka of the Tiquié River and the Baniwa of the upper Içana River. Additionally, though, the meeting was also attended by the Tariano of Iauaretê, who, though not participating in a formal indigenous education project, had shown a lively interest in registering their origin histories, building a maloca and resuming past ritual practices.

The meeting basically involved presenting the policy for listing 'intangible cultural assets' – classified for this purpose as 'bodies of knowledge,' 'celebrations,' 'forms of expression' and 'places.' Although the subject included some legal aspects alien to the indigenous audience, the groups present demonstrated a keen interest in the topic. Overall the positive response to

Department of Intangible Heritage, responsible for coordinating its activities in the area. She enjoyed a privileged view of these issues, since as well as being a permanent employee of IPHAN, she had carried out research in Iauaretê and São Gabriel da Cachoeira in the 1980s as the basis for her master's dissertation and doctoral thesis in Anthropology at the University of Brasília.

4 Among these actions we can list the support given to the rebuilding of malocas; the identification of sacred adornments held at the Indian Museum in Manaus; the elaboration of a Repatriation Agreement for these adornments drafted by IPHAN with the collaboration of lawyers from ISA and the participation of indigenous leaders from FOIRN; and the audio-visual documentation of the work process by Vincent Carelli from Vídeo nas Aldeias. It is also worth mentioning the implementation of a Culture Point at FOIRN in 2008, which formed the basis for a diverse range of local actions focused on cultural heritage, leading more recently to plans for a specific program for the Rio Negro under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture. This program, still under development, will involve indigenous communities situated on the Colombian side of the region.

IPHAN's proposal reflected a wider concern on the part of the indigenous groups of the Uaupés and Içana Rivers to document the 'culture of the ancestors' for the new generations, who seemed to them increasingly drawn to things of the city and the whites. Indeed some of the experiences supported by FOIRN seek to counter this trend, especially the publication of the Collection *Indigenous Narrators of the Rio Negro* (which to date amounts to eight published volumes of Desana, Tariano, Baniwa and Tukano mythology). This material adds to the numerous primers and textbooks that have also been published. These experiences can be seen to provide the key to interpreting the response to the presentation made by IPHAN's officers to the indigenous audience assembled in the FOIRN maloca. As the Tariano put it, "now the government too wants to support the work we have already been doing," demonstrating considerable interest in IPHAN's proposal and interpreting it as an official initiative designed to support and strengthen their own initiatives. However the form in which IPHAN explained its work methodology suggested new ideas to them, since soon after the meeting they began to ponder the idea of registering their 'sacred places' as cultural heritage to be recognized by the government. But what were their precise reasons?

The Tariano, though part of the system of linguistic exogamy connecting the different peoples of the Uaupés River, occupy a peculiar position within it. Unlike the other groups, they originate from the Içana basin to the north, having moved to settle on the Uaupés in the pre-colonial period. They ended up occupying an extensive area within the territory of the Tukano groups from whom they not only obtained wives in exchange for sisters but also gradually adopted their language. The Tariano area on the Uaupés centres on the Iauaretê Falls, a location that forms part of the origin histories of various groups living there today. In these extended narratives, the emergence and growth of the different groups of the Uaupés are conceptualized in the form of successive spatial-temporal migrations of their ancestors, a process that also defines their respective territories.

According to the Tariano, Iauaretê is the place where their ancestors settled after leaving the upper Aiari, an affluent of the Içana River where they originated along with other Arawak-speaking groups. In Iauaretê the Tariano population today number around 850 people. The rest of the settlement's population, around two thousand people, is composed of representatives of Tukano-speaking peoples from the Uaupés: the Tukano, Desana, Pira-Tapuia,

Wanano, Tuyuka and others. For these groups the Iauaretê Falls comprise one of various stopover points of the anaconda-canoe, who brought their ancestors to the Uaupés in its wake.

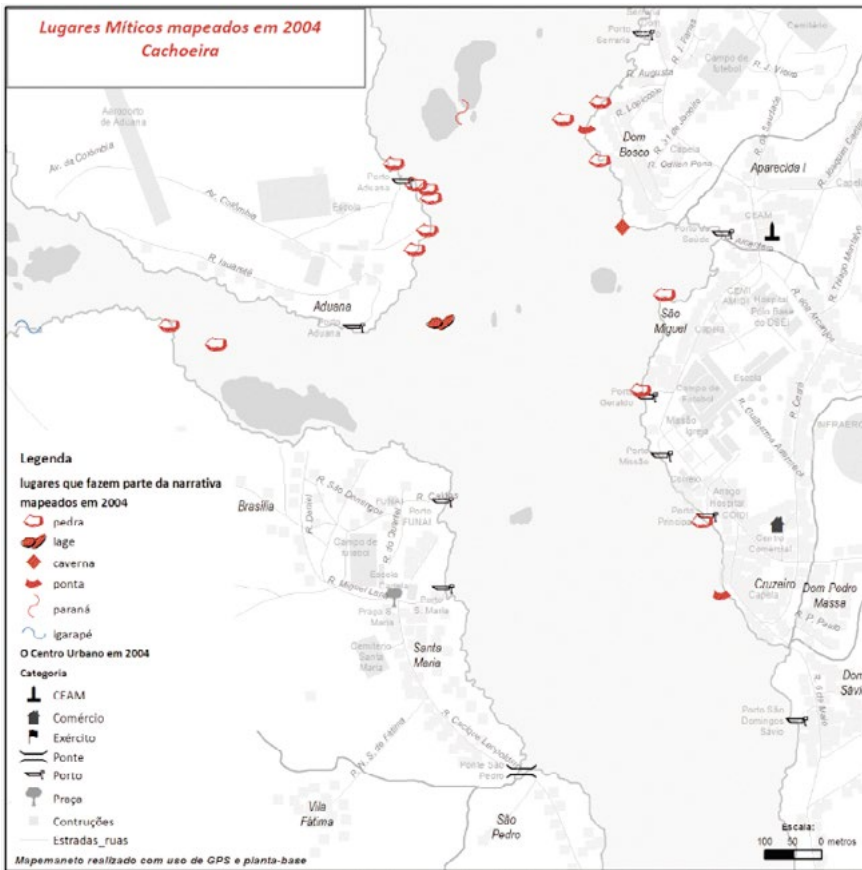
Iauaretê is today virtually a town with high schools, a hospital, electricity, a post office, television, an airstrip, an Army platoon and an active indigenous commerce. Until the mid-1980s, there were four Tariano communities living around the Salesian mission, founded there in 1930. Today there are ten 'districts' or 'villages.' It is generally considered that the closure of the boarding school run by the Salesians there for decades was the main cause behind this demographic concentration. Without the usual means of ensuring that their children frequented school classes, many families started to live in Iauaretê on a permanent basis. At first this led to the expansion of the old Tariano communities, forced to allow residential space, as well as areas for swidden planting, to their brothers-in-law from the Tukano, Pira-Tapuia, Wanano and so on. Next the priests began to allow the areas previously occupied by their pastures and plantations to be used to form new communities. In this context, the management of community issues became increasingly immersed in new difficulties. Families from the same original community tend to be dispersed among different districts, a fact reflecting the specific circumstances involved in each family's arrival in the settlement. Children and young adults spend much of their time at school and have a far less intense interaction with parents and grandparents. Much of their day is spent in front of the TV. Consequently the most frequently heard comment in terms of the difficulties faced in Iauaretê concerns the 'unruly youths,' which manifests as numerous quarrels over festivals and teenage pregnancies.

However another line of tension is perceptible in the day-to-day life of Iauaretê, one related, precisely, to an often implicit debate on the prerogatives claimed by the Tariano and other Tukano-speaking groups over who constitutes the 'legitimate residents' of the locality. This debate relates directly to the urbanization process and the kind of compulsory coexistence that the new situation imposes on these groups. The indisputable fact is that Iauaretê located at a point on the Uaupés River where the trajectories of two of the main indigenous groups of the region, the Tariano and Tukano, intersect. As well as its strategic geographic position, the prerogatives for establishing new communities in Iauaretê are disputed by the Tukano and the Tariano, who have distinct and opposing interpretations of their respective

mytho-historic narratives. Though difficult to evaluate, we can venture that the demographic concentration and hence the ongoing process of urbanization also result from this particular characteristic: in addition to the easier access to education, healthcare and income, many people seem to judge that they are fully entitled to live and raise their children there. For all these reasons, Iauaretê comprises a unique locality within the regional context.

This was another circumstance that enabled the Tariano present at the meeting at the FOIRN maloca to learn about the intangible heritage policy proposed by IPHAN. According to the legal framework instituted by Decree 3551, places can also be listed as cultural heritage. For the Tariano, Tukano and other groups from the upper Rio Negro this is certainly no novelty. Only that the decree spoke of markets, fairs, sanctuaries and squares. Meanwhile the Tariano were thinking of their own home. Since, as they tried to demonstrate in the following months: *“our history is written in the rocks of the Iauaretê Falls.”* These were the sacred places that they intended to register. IPHAN, in principle, accepted their proposal. We can recall that during the demarcation of the Indigenous Lands in the region between 1997 and 1998, various leaders had already said that *“our area is already marked, the demarcation is one more confirmation.”* They thereby referred to a vast range of mythic meanings attributed to the rocks forming the innumerable rapids along the area’s rivers, many of them presenting petroglyphs (on this topic, see Ricardo 2001).

A detailed map of the settlement in hand, we visited Iauaretê very quickly in November 2004. On this occasion, we agreed with them a set of more than twenty points to be visited in February or March the following year when the Uaupés River would be at its lowest level (see the map below). They insisted that we should come equipped with instruments allowing us to register what we would come to see: in parallel with the narrative to be recounted in situ, it would be essential to photograph and, where possible, film the rocks along with the Tariano themselves describing what each one signified. This would amount to a visible testimony of the prerogatives that they claimed over the site. Then in February 2005 we were in Iauaretê once again (Geraldo Andreello for ISA, Ana Gita de Oliveira for IPHAN and Vincent Carelli, video documentary maker from Vídeo nas Aldeias). Over a ten-day period, the Tariano of the Koivathe clan placed themselves entirely at the disposition of the project. During this time, they made considerable effort to debate the issues among themselves and formally and solemnly recounted a history that took place



Map 1 – Map of the urban centre of Iauaretê and the surrounding area

in Iauaretê a long time before the emergence of contemporary humankind (formed by the Tariano, Tukano, other indigenous groups and the whites). Using GPS, we located on a prepared base map the places relating to the ancient history of their mythic ancestor, whose successive transformations were responsible for the origin of some of the rocks of the Iauaretê Falls. The narrative concerned the primordial time of pre-humanity, a world peopled by creator divinities who sought to provoke the emergence of rivers, animals, plants and true human beings.

This Tariano history takes places in a world still in formation and explains how the Iauaretê Falls came into being. The word Iauaretê, ‘waterfall of the jaguar,’ is a toponym that alludes to a ‘jaguar-people’ who inhabited the place in the remote past. It is on this mythic narrative that the Tariano base their claims to be the legitimate residents of Iauaretê, since it recounts the

origin of various outcrops, rapids, islands and channels of these falls from successive transformations of a demiurge called Ohkomi. According to the narrative, the jaguar-people already knew that Ohkomi would create a populous group who would come to dominate the Uaupés River: the Tariano. For this reason, he was captured in his own house (located in what is today an upland area where Cruzeiro district is situated), sacrificed, killed and devoured by the jaguars. With the jaguars in pursuit, Ohkomi tried to throw them off his trail by transforming himself into animals and plants. All the forms that he assumed prior to being killed turned into rocks along the falls that are today used to set fishing traps. These are the 'sacred places' that the Tariano took us to visit and wished to register with IPHAN's support. The three small bones left from Ohkomi's right hand would form the origin of the Tariano ancestors, responsible for wiping out the jaguar-people and turning the Uaupés River into an appropriate place for the settlement and growth of true humankind. Hence from the Tariano viewpoint, the Iauaretê area itself comprises a record of their history, knowledge of which includes a detailed map of the ideal points for setting fishing traps and thus for obtaining essential food resources in the human era.

According to the Tariano, it was thanks to the extermination of the jaguar-people by their ancestors that the anaconda-canoe of the Tukano ancestors was able to journey up the Uaupés River and populate it. In fact the Tukano and other groups did not tarry in becoming involved in the process of registering the Iauaretê Falls, arguing, however, that their histories are equally marked on other rocks there. Their argument centres on a recess found on a large flat outcrop located just below the most rugged section of the falls. According to them, this element was the unequivocal sign that the giant anaconda-canoe of their ancestors had beached at this spot, from where it would subsequently open a channel between the waterfall's rocks before submerging forever upriver on the Uaupés. In other words, while from the Tariano viewpoint there was a large cluster of rocks dispersed across the area that testified to the history of the sacrifice of their 'grandfather' Ohkomi, for the Tukano there was at least one rock that provides the evidence and grounds for their claims, as well as the existence of the channel which still today allows canoes and other river craft to navigate along the Uaupés, upriver and downriver of Iauaretê. In addition many people question the monopoly claimed by the Tariano over the history of the jaguar-people. For them, the

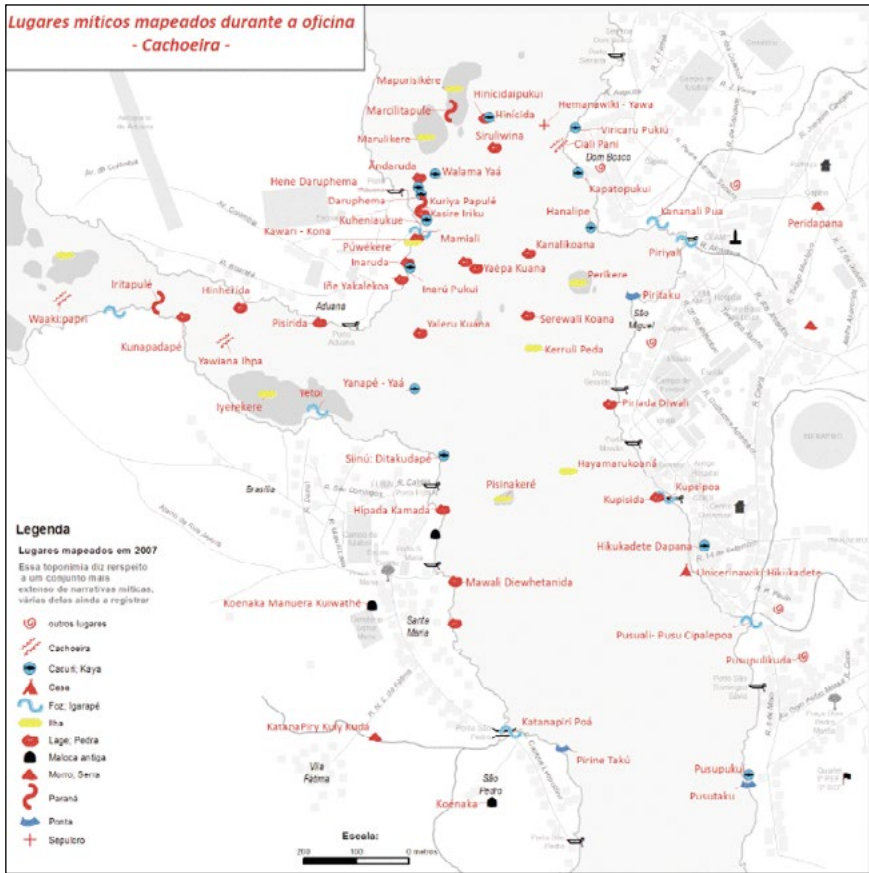
episodes that led to their extermination fit into various other versions of the narratives that describe the pre-human phase of the universe (for details of these other versions, see Andrello 2012).

The eventual outcome was that the request to register the falls in the book of places signed by Tariano and Tukano leaders had to be sent in the name of all the ethnic groups living in Iauaretê today. IPHAN's Consultative Council approved the request on August 4th 2006. The democratization of the request to register the falls and its implementation had a direct effect on the format of the 'preservation actions' implemented by IPHAN after the listing, specifically in terms of expanding the mapping work referring to the mythic places in the middle Uaupés and Papuri region around Iauaretê. The subsequent process involved the organization of cartography workshops with the participation of the Tariano of the Koivathe clan and various other groups.

Cartography of Sacred Places

The use of map images and base maps (with a hydrography and toponymy of the contemporary and past community and sites) in the first surveys of the Iauaretê Falls and in subsequent workshops represented both the introduction of new techniques and the simultaneous expansion of the social network involved in developing the activities, which included the localization of other sacred sites on the Uaupés and Papuri Rivers. Coordinated by technical staff from ISA's Geoprocessing Laboratory, the two workshops held in 2007 and 2008 showed the potential in terms of narrative content that each of these named places evokes, based on the informed observation of elements of the landscape.

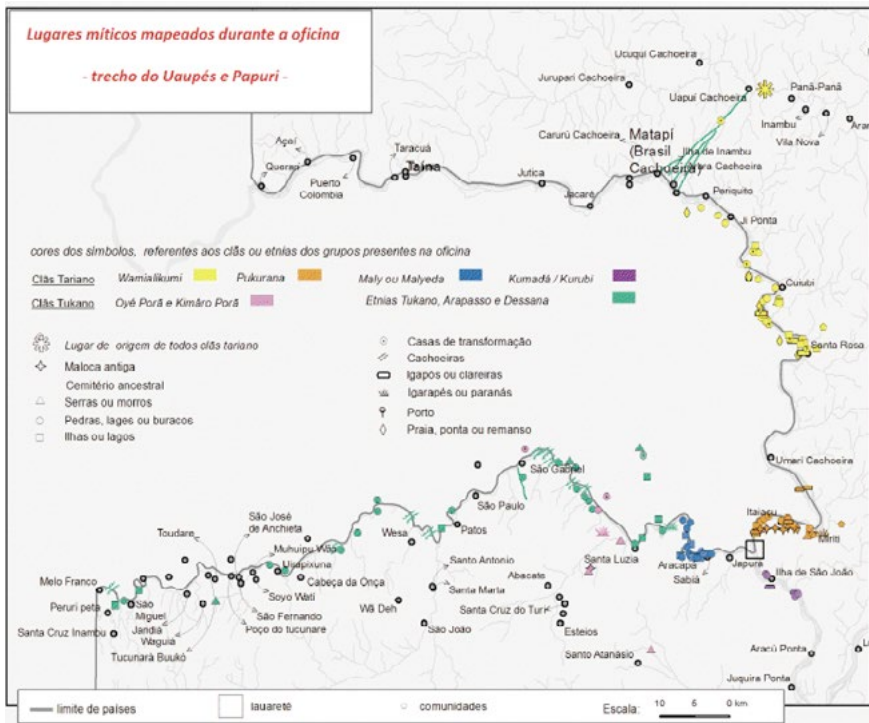
The first workshop on mapping the sacred sites was held over a five-day period in May 2007 in Iauaretê. Approximately one hundred people took part, ranging from students to elders and belonging to five Tariano clans (Koivathe, Pukurana, Wamialikune, Malyeda and Kumada Kurubi), two Tukano clans (Oyé and Kimâro Porã), as well as members of the Desana and Arapasso groups. The Koivathe's project of registering the toponymy referring to the Iauaretê Falls on maps was already well-known, stimulating the participation of these other groups. During the workshop each group concentrated on their region of origin, looking to identify the sacred places existing in each of these areas. The support material for the workshop was



Map 2 – Map produced by the Iauaretê group, centre.

produced beforehand at ISA's Geoprocessing Laboratory in São Paulo, and basically involved the preparation of base maps (with detailed information on the river courses and the localization of the communities on their shores) and map images (from the Landsat satellite) of the Iauaretê settlement and the region of the upper Uaupés and Papuri Rivers as a whole. All this material was printed in 100 x 70cm format, thereby allowing the identified sites to be plotted directly by the groups. The plotting work was preceded by an internal discussion within each group on which points to be marked on the maps, i.e. those they really wished to make public.

Most of the groups decided, in parallel with the plotting work, to register in writing fragments of the narratives related to each point. In some cases they used numerical captions correlating points on the maps with these texts since, with the exception of the Iauaretê maps, the scale used prevented any precise



Map 3 – Map produced by the groups of the Uaupés and Papuri Rivers.

plotting. In fact the scale of the maps available proved to be a limiting factor for much of the work produced. This is demonstrated by comparing what could be registered for Iauaretê, a locality for which a high definition Ikonos satellite image was available, enabling a 1:3000 scale map, and what was obtained with the other maps, all at the 1:100,000 scale. The first mapping of the Iauaretê Falls with the group from the Koiwathe clan in 2005 identified 20 points mentioned in the mythic narratives, while in 2008, as a result of two workshops, there were 75 points. In this second stage, twenty people from two Tariano clans took part. This more extensive toponymy relates to a more diverse set of mythic narratives, various of which have yet to be recorded. Meanwhile the other five groups (three Tariano clans, one Tukano and one Desana) who worked with maps of various parts of the Uaupés and Papuri identified a total of two hundred and thirty places, mentioned in a variety of mythic narratives.

Maps 2 and 3 represent the current phase of a process in which the Tariano and the Tukano are recalling their places and histories, attempting to coalesce these memories into a map form with the help of technical advisors.

The set of points identified on the maps refers to various types of geographic features, such as islands, marsh areas, creek mouths, shallows, outcrops, rocks and ridges, as well as the sites of old malocas and the 'transformation houses,' stopover points on the journey of the giant anaconda who brought the ancestors of the current groups to the Uaupés. All of them were identified on the basis of narratives referring to episodes from mythic time, involving diverse figures, and the origin of a series of precautions related to the present-day management of natural resources and people's health. The data from the eight maps produced during the first workshop were fed into a Geographic Information System, which allowed the elaboration of new work-maps for ongoing revisions. In 2008 another, smaller five-day workshop was held with approximately thirty people to revise the places mapped in the first workshop, including several discussions on the use of the Tukano language by the Tariano and their effort to discover the name of various places in their own language. On this occasion visits were made to some elders, as well as some of the places unidentifiable on the scale of the available maps, where GPS points and photographs were taken. The overall map of the Uaupés and Papuri region shown above is the provisional result of the initial work undertaken during these workshops.

The lesson acquired from these two workshops is that the maps slowly acquire new elements in response to the narrative details that emerge on each occasion. The resulting impression is that the process of elaborating these maps is virtually infinite, especially if the scale can be amplified at each stage, and if this exercise is combined with more time for visits to the mapped locations. In fact there is a striking variation in terms of details seen between the map of the Iauaretê urban settlement (1:3000 scale) and the more general map of the region (1:100000). Additionally the possibility of visiting the points cited in the narratives referring to the Iauaretê Falls and their vicinity allows a highly detailed mapping of this subregion unthinkable for other parts of the area. The map below is perhaps the best example currently available of what can be recorded through the adopted procedures. In other words, as part of the area surrounding the location where the workshops were held – which a number of the Tariano participants journey through in their day-to-day activities – it was possible to interpret or elucidate in situ some of the references to the local landscape found in the narratives being recounted.

Put otherwise, the Iauaretê Falls are clearly an important place for the Tariano and for the Tukano, Desana, Arapasso and others, albeit to different degrees, since the mythic transformations registered there are, for the Tariano, equivalent to what the Tukano narrative distributes along almost the entire trajectory of their ancestral anaconda. In fact this generated a methodological problem that became evident in the mapping workshops in Iauaretê: how to go about making the local maps if the narratives from which they derive mostly refer to a succession of movements and stopovers? How could these elements be registered in cartograms without re-enacting these very same movements? It was the Tariano-Koivathe themselves, in fact, who assumed the task of requesting the resources needed to travel the route taken by their ancestors from the Içana river to the Uaupés. This would be another of the actions involved in the listing of the Iauaretê Falls as a heritage site, since although they could demonstrate their ancestral connection to the landscape, they still needed to map the path taken to arrive there.

The interesting question that the overall experience raises is, therefore, that of the connection between landscape and narrative. It does not seem fortuitous that before engaging in the plotting work, the groups present in the workshops devoted themselves to writing sections of narratives. These provided the source details of what was seen and experienced on past voyages: their enunciation is itself a repeated form of mapping, just as the constant journeys up and down river today are also journeys of reflection on events of the more or less distant past. The fixation of features of the landscape onto the geographic maps produced for the workshops could not, therefore, do without this work of memory. The (im)possibility of retracing some routes led to differences in the level of detail in the maps. Indeed the density of the partial map shown above, which centres on the Iauaretê Falls and registers the extensive toponymy of the adjacent zones, suggests that this exercise itself should ideally be undertaken while moving. If not we risk producing what anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000: 234) calls a 'cartographic illusion': the presumption that the structure of the world represented on maps is fixed independently of the movements of their inhabitants. A map filled by an indigenous toponymy is likewise merely a pale and codified image of the landscape intensely projected by the migration narratives.

The origin narratives told by the Tukano peoples of the Uaupés are unanimous in affirming that the very course of the Negro River and its affluents,

and in general the course of all the Amazonian basin's rivers, acquired existence thanks to the upriver movement of the ancestral anaconda from the from the portal of the waters, situated at the mouth of the Amazon. It was not a random movement, however, since the arborescent structure of these rivers is due precisely to the felling of the great tree encountered there by the ancestors. After the great flood that followed, the travellers headed westwards, tracing a route that corresponding to the trunk of this tree and its branches, i.e. moving up the Amazon and entering its affluents and sub-affluents until finding the centre of the universe. An important point to emphasize is that this journey-gestation of humanity was conducted by the ancestors of all the current groups. People usually point out that the same history is involved, though told from different points of view. Consequently the same stopover point or episode may be situated in different localities, depending on the current position of the narrator's group within the regional context, making the situation even more problematic for the cartographer.

In attempting to produce cartograms based on conventional cartography, therefore, other problems will inevitably emerge. Each narrative is a particular exercise in mapping, which means that the continuous endeavour to condense multiple narratives into the same mapmaking process⁵ may lead to insurmountable dilemmas. This problem raises the question of what type of map could in fact do justice to this dynamic. Such dilemmas echo the kinds of questions explored in striking form in the beautiful book by Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Place* (1996), itself the outcome of an extensive project of mapping cultural geography among the Western Apache within a twenty mile radius of the community of Cibecue in Arizona, USA. Although the Apache themselves had conceived the project, the idea of publishing an atlas with the names of places identified in their own language to replace the countless maps of the region produced by the whites seemed to them somewhat absurd. As one person said: "White men need paper maps, we have maps in our minds" (Basso 1996:43).

Just as in Iauaretê, in the Apache community in question the interest in mapping seemed to reflect first and foremost a certain dissatisfaction with the limitations of conventional cartography, which, in Basso's words,

5 On this point the distinction between 'mapping' and 'mapmaking' would be equivalent to the distinction between the oral and the written (again see Ingold 2000, Chapter 13).

basically constitutes a ‘charted territory.’ In this particular case, the solution encountered by the ethnographer was to draw from writings that shed some light on this impasse, such as, surprisingly, the account of the visit by the physicist Niels Bohr to Kronborg Castle in Denmark: just the idea of Hamlet having lived there, perhaps, was enough for the castle to become for the physicist something very different to the image projected by its architectural features as a whole, though specific details, such as a dark corner or wooden carving, might evoke the character’s famous phrase – to be or not to be – in a new guise. For the informed visitor, the experience induced what Basso called a ‘retrospective world-building,’ more specifically in the form of ‘place-making,’ an act in which memory and imagination are implicated. Transposing this experience to the Apache universe, the author came to observe that the set of place names – as well as their structure, inextricably associated with elements of the landscape – codify narratives about the past; more specifically, about the events that occurred in specifically named places. In this sense the histories suggested by the local toponymy are equally specific: episodic, local, personal, subjective and above all highly variable in terms of the actors potentially involved in their production.

In sum, a history ‘without authorities,’ without any pretension to generate definitive narratives. More than general theories or models, a history that can “fashion possible worlds, give them expressive shape, and present them for contemplation as images of the past that can deepen and enlarge awareness of the present” (Basso 1996: 32). Still influenced by Bohr’s words, the ethnographer observes that this does not involve “a small or uninteresting truth,” but “a common response to common curiosities,” such as “what happened here? who was involved? [...] why should it matter?” (Basso 1996: 5). Responses, then, that presume cultivated sensibilities and knowledge. Nothing very different therefore from the situation that we have been observing during the activities undertaken in Iauaretê by IPHAN and its partners.

These suggestions in mind, the following section explores a number of points relating to the dynamic of knowledge generation and circulation on the upper Rio Negro, a dynamic that the experience of registering the Iauaretê Falls as a heritage site allowed to some extent to be glimpsed.

Registering Heritage, Registering Knowledge

The above-mentioned experience in fact points to a theme of enormous relevance in the life of the region's indigenous peoples: the inscription of their origin histories in the natural landscape. More precisely, the entire process indicates a fundamental association between history, as conceived locally, and geography, a social memory stored along the river courses, at the waterfalls, shallows, beaches, long stretches, areas of still water, channels and so on, which we saw as we navigated these routes. In this sense the journeys today re-enact the primordial movements and evoke the differentiations internal to humanity that came to populate the course of the Rio Negro and its tributaries, all of them recorded in the features of the landscapes and in their toponymy. In sum, while we can readily identify the motives for people travelling through the area – visiting kin, planning fishing expeditions, going downriver to the towns to obtain money and goods, seeking out schools and healthcare, etc., – it is less evident that during these same journeys, as well as what happens over its course, people also travel through time, and thus both acquire and produce knowledge. We could say, therefore, that on the upper Rio Negro, the sacred sites – these potential intangible heritage sites – themselves form a substrate of recorded knowledge. The narratives that they evoke thus refer to what we could call 'transformation routes.' These are the paths that, by circumscribing the movements and cycles of today's world – generally recorded in the so-called ecological-cultural calendars (see below) – comprise evidence of the process that led in the mythic past to the appearance of a true humanity, usually conceived as a slow transformation, or passage, from the subaquatic world of 'fish people' to the properly human world (I shall also return to this point below).

But, as I stated at the start, from the indigenous viewpoint the institutional experience of registering the Iauaretê Falls as intangible heritage formed part of a wider set of activities being developed through the partnership between FOIRN and ISA, and of the diverse projects involving indigenous leaders linked to the former and technical officers linked to the latter. Since the 1990s, a diverse set of local projects has been put into practice.⁶ Here special

6 Teams of advisors-researchers from ISA began to work with community leaders and local associations in 1993 on a project to produce an extensive map of the region's communities, as well as advise FOIRN on assembling a network of effective communication between the more than 500 communities represented by the entity, belonging to more than 20 indigenous peoples, distributed across the enormous system

emphasis can be given to the implantation of schools with differentiated education on the Tiquié, Içana and Uaupés Rivers, among the Tuyuka, Baniwa, Tukano and Wanano. These nuclei implemented systematic experiences designed to reverse a historical tendency linked to the introduction of school education on the Rio Negro: the concentration of school-age students in the large Salesian boarding schools in São Gabriel, Taracúá, Iauaretê and Parí-Cachoeira since the start of the 20th century, whose closure was only concluded in the 1980s. The experience of the boarding schools can be said to have supplied a negative reference point for the implantation of these new schools. While indigenous languages had been prohibited in the Salesian schools, in these recent experiences everything took place ‘in the native languages,’ from literacy classes to the elaboration of research and monographs; while in the boarding schools the priests taught the language, maths and trades of the whites, it was now a question of assembling curricular and didactic material based on local cultural meanings. The base methodology involves the development of research on the indigenous culture itself, for which western techniques and knowledge can and should be employed. The overall premise is that this will allow the absorption of new knowledge and value traditional knowledge simultaneously. Despite the extensive range of work needed to make such a program viable (constant pedagogical supervision, training of indigenous teachers, workshops with different types of indigenous and non-indigenous specialists, the production and publication of didactic material in different languages), the differentiated education model of school was incorporated by the São Gabriel da Cachoeira Local Council in 2007, at least in discourse.

These schools made use of and to a certain extent guided the start of other parallel projects, in particular a project for managing fishing and agroforestry resources. Along with the schools, plans were made for the implantation of fish farms, which were used to develop methods adapted to local ecological and logistical conditions. Breeding of native fish species was introduced in the region with technical assistance. Domestic fishponds,

of rivers forming the basin of the upper Rio Negro. This first phase of work was crowned by the homologation of five Indigenous Lands in the region, covering a total area of more than 10 million hectares, in 1998. FOIRN’s political and institutional consolidation, as well as the database accumulated thus far, played a fundamental role, enabling the successful implementation of a participatory process of physical demarcation of these areas.

combined with an agroforestry system located nearby to supply feed for the fish, began to appear in some communities closer to the schools. The fish farm activities fed back into the educational activities, so that most of the research developed in the schools began to concentrate on knowledge related to plants, animals and their reproductive cycles, the so-called ecological-cultural calendars. Fishing monitoring programs were also begun at the same time, focusing on both fishing production and the use of different technologies, both traditional and recently adopted, which involved an assessment of the impacts of the recent introduction of fishing nets.⁷ At the same time, the schools also invested in a survey of the ancient origin narratives, documentation of the chants associated with them, and attempts to revive ritual practices that had fallen into disuse. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the mapping workshops described above have been incorporated as activities in an indigenous school recently implanted in Iauaretê. In addition, many of the resources available to these new school experiences were directed towards the reconstruction of large malocas. Likewise over the course of the documentation process for the Iauaretê Falls, IPHAN provided funds for the Tariano-Koivathe to be able to rebuild the former maloca of Leopoldino, the famous *tuxáua* or leader of the Uaupés who welcomed the Salesian missionaries in Iauaretê in 1929. In sum, practically all the actions suggested to IPHAN as part of the Preservation Plan for the Iauaretê Falls coincided with experiences being developed within the differentiated education schools implanted in the region over the last decade.

In addition to evaluating the successes and failures of this set of activities – which may be present or absent depending on the criteria and scales adopted – the important fact to emphasize is that these nuclei of education-research became the centre of the community or set of communities in which they were located, just as the listing of the Iauaretê Falls as a heritage site animated many of the local conversations between the Tariano and their neighbours between 2005 and 2010. These initiatives formed the base on which new associations were built, creating new spaces for discussion and debate, and establishing new connections with the outside, including cooperation agencies, government and non-government programs for supporting

⁷ A description of a number of these experiences can be found in a volume recently edited by Cabalzar (2010).

community projects, research institutes and even artists. In addition they reconnected, so to speak, with their relatives from Colombia, as attested by the exchange visits between the Tuyuka and the Barasana, Yeba-Masa, Tatuyo and other groups from the Pira-Paraná River, where much of the ritual life already abandoned on the Brazilian side is still alive. Through these relations they were able to glimpse new possibilities for life in the communities, allowing them to acquire new routines and encouraging young people, always highly sensitive to the signals coming from the city and the white world, to continue living there. Obviously this process involves the appropriation of new technologies and equipment through which information can be accessed and made readily available – needless to say, the internet is a powerful tool in this context. Overall, then, the schools and their experiences created a space from which a new collective spirit emanates, stimulating a continuous reflection on the options and impasses now facing local people, including the new possibilities afforded by the official (and unofficial) tools for preserving heritage and the research that these stimulate. One of these issues, highly symptomatic of this new state of affairs, is expressed by Higino Tuyuka: are we just researchers or do we really live this culture we are rediscovering? Or as André Baniwa, the founder of the Pamaali School on the Içana, put it: we need to think clearly about the type of education that the new Baniwa person needs.

A particularly complex point in these processes – to a certain extent present in the case of the Iauaretê Falls and in the mapping workshops that took place after its listing – concerns the need to achieve a balance between the knowledge and techniques of the whites and indigenous knowledge. In the experiences developed thus far in the differentiated education schools, indigenous knowledge can be said to have converted into an object of study, that is, one type of knowledge turned into the object of another type. Though difficult to be sure, based on what took place in the mapping workshops described above, it may be that certain indigenous conceptual schemas have been objectified in the schools too, as if it were possible to separate their content from the form that they take, or the form in which they are produced. The question in reality is not new, since much of the discussion concerning the protection of traditional knowledge is unanimous in pointing out that its preservation involves above all the preservation of the conditions through which this knowledge is continually produced (see, among others, Carneiro

da Cunha 2009 and Viveiros de Castro 2008).

But here perhaps resides an important specificity of the Rio Negro. Speculating somewhat, the conditions for the production and transmission of knowledge have undoubtedly varied significantly over the course of recent history. Moreover, the systematic efforts of the Salesian missionaries to destroy the malocas and expropriate the traditional wealth of the region's groups (flutes and ceremonial adornments indispensable to the rituals performed in the traditional malocas) constituted, according to an assessment frequently made in the region, an almost insurmountable blow to the integrity of a canonical corpus of knowledge originating from the mythic past, insofar as songs and chants that form the basis of the ritual cycles were steadily abandoned. People say that many of the specialists of this type of esoteric knowledge (the baiaroa and the kumua, masters of the song and the chant respectively) died of sadness, and the elders known to today's generation are the children of these ritual experts: although they were born in the malocas, they grew up in an environment in which the abandonment or loss of the wisdom of the elders was a *fait accompli*. The initiation rituals gave way to the period in which children went to the boarding schools, and the prestige of the old kumua was further eroded by the emergence of new ritual leaders, such as the students who later returned to the communities to occupy the position of catechists and officiate at the Sunday services in the small chapels built under the direction of the priests.

The environment in which the elders of today grew up is, to a certain extent, known to their children and grandchildren. Their evocations of the sadness of the elders, the melancholic chanted songs that they also got to hear and, above all, certain essential magic spells that could never be abandoned (protecting children from potential diseases, giving them ancestral names, neutralizing the malevolent quality of some foods, protecting women and children from the dangers surrounding menstruation and childbirth, organizing a *dabucuri* for brothers-in-law to exchange sisters, among others) are very palpable indications that the knowledge inherent to certain existent practices is connected, undoubtedly in a complex fashion, to a wider intellectual system whose full expression was found in the ritual life observed in the traditional malocas and in the more austere way of life pursued then. What is the consequence of this fact? Many say that the elders were stronger and healthier, less lazy and smarter than young people today. But what was lost

exactly in this process? This is a question it seems impossible to answer with any precision. Even so it is common to hear that while much was lost, much was also gained, and that to an extent the Indian today already appear like whites in many aspects. The whites, though, do not possess ‘ethnic groups’ or ‘culture’ and in a sense do not run the same risks that Indians run since their body and food are different. I return to this point later.

In other words, although the conditions for the production, reproduction or transmission of knowledge have come under heavy pressures over the course of history, we can observe many life situations today in which ancient knowledge is mobilized, integrated and potentially transformed. During the conversations on the topic between anthropologists and indigenous intellectuals or researchers, for example, whether inside or outside the new schools, the impression is frequently given that we are all glimpsing just the tip of the iceberg. In other words, although the “knowledge possessed by our grandparents”⁸ generally seems to be beyond our reach, we can perceive flickers dispersed along distant rivers and localities even today. These shared perceptions mean that at least in some contemporary cases and processes, these research partners – Indians and anthropologists – recognize each other as effective collaborators. Although their interests may not always converge, a base of shared motivations seems to have engendered a situation in which all research conducted in the area today is research ‘with’ rather than ‘about’ the local groups. A situation as stimulating as it is sensitive, given that sometimes what appears as a very clear example of mutual understanding can hide serious equivocations. This is not a problem as such⁹, but it does have a number of implications, some of which I shall examine in the following section.

Reversibility and Symmetry

Clearly the problem at which we arrived in the previous section lies at the heart of an important contemporary debate on what anthropology can be at the start of the 21st century, when the old distinction between empirical data

8 In Tukano, *Isa wikisimia masinshé*, an expression chosen by a member of an important Tukano clan as the title of the book in which they narrate their version of the origin history of the universe and humanity (see Maia & Maia 2002).

9 On “controlled equivocation” as a virtual positive component of ethnographic analysis, see Viveiros de Castro, 2004.

gathering and theoretical speculation is beginning to be placed in doubt – i.e. when the separation between method and theory no longer appears to convince anyone. In fact it reflects a new situation in which the natives have ceased to be informants and have become real collaborators in the findings of anthropological research: “people we work *with*” (Ingold 2011: 243). Indeed Tim Ingold recently proposed that anthropology, rather than a comparative analysis supported by ethnographic observation, is itself “a practice of observation grounded in participatory dialogue.” The author suggests something like an inversion in the usual order of our analytic procedures, situating ethnography as a moment posterior to observation when the ‘field’ is constituted as a retrospectively imagined world, which permits a description separate, so to speak, from the moment of observation. The latter, for its part, corresponds to an inquisitive mode of inhabiting the world, of ‘being with,’ marked by a comparative attitude in relation to the varied conditions and possibilities of human life in a shared world. This, in the author’s view, would constitute the most recent definition of anthropology, and which, in an unparalleled way in my view, seems to characterize in fairly precise terms a series of collaborative studies that have been put into practice over the last decade in the region of the upper Rio Negro. Perhaps with one difference: according to Ingold, the anthropologist writes for him or herself, for others and for the world; on the Rio Negro we can observe numerous recent experiments that could be described as ‘writing with,’ as attested by the experiment in producing maps described above, as well as the production of a significant local literature over the last few years, typically generated with the support of anthropologist-advisors. Hence the field to be imagined in retrospect by these anthropologists includes a series of indigenous writings, as well as the effects that these have begun to generate in their contexts of circulation.

However it needs to be remembered that these recent experiments are not entirely unique in the region. The first book by one of the precursors of upper Rio Negro ethnography testifies to this fact. I refer to *Amazonian Cosmos* by Reichel-Dolmatoff, published in 1971, the first chapter of which consists of an account of the origin myth of the peoples of the Uaupés provided by Antonio Guzmán of the Desana people. Having lived only to the age of twelve in his community of origin, Guzmán displayed particular interest in working

with an anthropologist who would help him produce this record.¹⁰ Though it would be an exaggeration to take this work as a distant and pioneering example of what we today call auto-anthropology – especially because the other chapters of the book offer very *sui generis* exegeses proposed by Reichel-Dolmatoff, in general based on a notion of sexual energy that has been subject to heavy contestation by some of the region’s ethnographers – the book nonetheless suggests that since the primordial era of anthropological research in the Amazonian Northwest, the Indians themselves have, at least in part, been placing their most recurrent themes on the anthropological agenda.¹¹ More specifically, though, the growing involvement of anthropologists in the promotion of indigenous writings seems to me to evoke some form of symmetrical anthropology, “the idea that there is no anthropology that is not an anthropology of the other, in the double sense of the preposition” (cf. Viveiros de Castro, Goldman & Almeida 2006). Symmetrical, though, not exactly in relation to the anthropologists, who in these cases work as transcribers, revisers, presenters, note takers and so on. The creative part of the initiative is once again falls to the indigenous authors. Symmetry, then, in the sense that in speaking of themselves, the indigenous writings also describe ourselves.

To a large extent indigenous writings feed off one another. Written versions of the origin narratives that have begun to circulate over the last two decades have stimulated each other: in other words, each new published book provokes amendments, evaluations, corrections, one or several responses (Andrello 2010, Hugh-Jones 2010), a process that I think has been equally well exemplified by the debates on the registration of the Iauaretê Falls described above. Not by chance, the books published in the collection

10 Earlier examples could also be cited here, such as the famous text on Jurupari published by Stradelli at the end of the nineteenth century and the articles by Marcos Fulop in the 1950s on Tukano cosmogony. On the production of books of mythology by indigenous authors, as well as other kinds of writing produced in collaboration with anthropologists, see Andrello (2010 and ed. 2012) and Hugh-Jones (2010 and 2011).

11 Defining the extent to which the indigenous conceptual schemes themselves determined the form assumed by later ethnographic descriptions would demand a re-reading guided by this problematic generated by the extensive set of works available today, but I suspect that their influence is far from negligible. It is worth recalling what Irving Goldman observed in his second book (Goldman 2004), namely that an indigenous anthropology would correspond to the origin narratives themselves. In this book, indeed, the author famously devotes himself to what we would today call ‘cultural revitalization’ work, having stimulated the revival of a mourning ritual among the Cubeo Hehenewa.

*Narradores Indígenas do Rio Negro*¹² have been compared to the verbal confrontations marking the exchange rituals in the exchange, when two groups exchange goods and reciprocal perspectives. As occurs in the ritual discourses, indigenous writings do not guarantee the persistence of a specific version: like a *dabucuri* (a ritual offering food and artefacts), they virtually suppose various others. But there is an important difference. While the *dabucuris* are exchanged between the Indians, the books can and should circulate between the whites too – *dabucuris* directed towards the whites are not uncommon, but usually take the form of ‘thanks’ for certain ‘benefits’ or ‘projects’ facilitated by the latter; in other words, it is never a case of one *dabucuri* functioning as retribution for another earlier *dabucuri*. At the same time as the books involve the enunciation of the relational position of their authors vis-à-vis brothers-in-law and brothers (younger and older), they equally do so vis-à-vis whites. In these narratives, the white man appears as a younger brother of the indigenous ancestors whose intrepidity and courage – derived from his childlike foolishness – managed to acquire amazing powers: industrial goods and an unquestionable capacity for multiplication. For this reason whites, despite being the younger brother, are treated like older brothers.

There is no space here to enter into the details of this episode, but the point worth emphasizing is that the difference between Indians is placed in continuity with the difference between Indians and whites: i.e. if the original relation between the indigenous ancestors is conceived as a difference between senior and junior siblings (some of whom became brothers-in-law at the end of the mythic era), the difference between them and the whites is understood in the same way. Symmetry, then, at least in the vision of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2012):

This is how I understand the Latourian idea of a ‘symmetrical anthropology.’ I do not take it to be an attempt to discover equalities, similarities or identities between anthropologists and natives, scientific theories and indigenous cosmologies, or so on. Symmetricalization is simply a descriptive operation that involves *making the differences between all analytic terms continuous*: the

12 A collection made up of eight volumes published by the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN), with versions of the origin narratives elaborated by Desana, Tukano, Baniwa and Tariano authors. Other volumes are currently in production phase, though whether these will see the light of day is unknown. Like those already published, they result from the encounter between anthropologists and people from the region interested in producing manuscripts.

difference between the ‘culture’ (or ‘theory’) of the anthropologist and the ‘culture’ (or ‘life’) of the native especially is not deemed to possess any ontological or epistemological advantage over the differences ‘internal’ to each of these ‘cultures’; it is no more nor less conditioning than the differences of both sides of the discursive boundary.

I am not entirely sure if it is legitimate to apply this suggestion from the other side of the discursive boundary. But the procedure suggested by the author appears to describe with some precision what the Indians of the Rio Negro do with their narratives: there is no separate ‘origin myth’ for the whites, since their distinctive qualities are conceived as variants of those that distinguish the Indians from each other (see Hugh-Jones 1988, Goldman 2004). In this case, specifying the ‘life’ of the whites is part of the ‘theory’ of the native as much as their own, indicating a reverse anthropology that is equally symmetric – which perhaps is not the case in the famous analogy suggested by Wagner (1981) between ‘culture’ (of the whites vis-à-vis the Melanesians) and ‘cargo’ (of the Melanesians vis-à-vis the whites). The message, therefore, that the recent indigenous writings address to the whites concerns our common origin, as well as a creative mode of thinking about our differences. And if it really is the case of ‘thinking with’ them – rather than ‘like’ them, as Viveiros de Castro argues¹³ – taking the difference between their thought and ours seriously, we need to ask what the implications of this statement are. What kind of lesson can be drawn?

Without the space and competence to develop this point satisfactorily, I return to two points described above where I alluded to fundamental aspects of the local cosmology elaborated in diverse narratives. The first relates to the transformation of humankind, its emergence from the subaquatic world of the fish-people; the second to the fact that the whites do not possess ‘ethnic groups’ or ‘culture’: while the Indians are Tukano (earth-people), Desana (universe-people), Wanano (water-people) etc., the whites are generically considered ‘shotgun-people.’ The two points complement each other, albeit not explicitly, the second amounting to a deduction of the first. The slow process that led proto-humanity to differentiate itself from the fish resulted in a fundamental antagonism: since the fish-people envy humans, they became their

13 Although in the present case we could perhaps take the exercise of symmetrization contained in the indigenous narratives as an inspiration for our own experiments.

enemies for not having effected that passage, and later became their principal food. Because they envy the human condition, fish are held responsible for most diseases and deaths, conceived as abductions of human souls. For this reason great care is needed both on fishing trips and when bathing in the river, especially on the part of menstruated women and their new-born children.

The whites, however, are completely oblivious to this fact, as the Indians have already long observed, since no white person is known to have died from a spiritual attack from the fish-people. It is deduced from this that they do not run the same risks as the Indians, since they do not fish and indeed eat other kinds of food. But from the indigenous point of view the main reason why they are invulnerable to attacks from the fish-people is their lack of ethnic groups. Not possessing ethnic groups means not possessing souls –in other words, a specific immaterial part of the person, coupled to the body via nomination and brought back by shamans from the same subaquatic houses located at the stopover places of the anaconda who led the ancestors to the Uaupés River. Without these soul-names the indigenous collectives could not reproduce themselves and grow, since by differentiating themselves as the Tukano, Desana and so on, they establish a relation of affinity between them as exchangers of women, which enables them to procreate. Sexual desire is one of the indices of the gradual acquisition of humanity by the indigenous ancestors, but the differentiation between their descendants, the condition for the satisfaction of this desire, is only possible through a reconnection, so to speak, with their previous pre-human condition. Not by chance, some of these names designate fish species, such as the aracu, the wolf fish or the peacock bass. A crucial consequences stems from this: these soul-names, suggestively conceived as ‘fish bones,’ are what make the Indians fully visible as true human beings, especially from the viewpoint of fish but also from other potentially aggressive beings.¹⁴ If whites are oblivious to this type

14 These conceptions clearly invert certain aspects of the theory of Amerindian perspectivism as formulated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Here the prey of humans – the fish – do not see them as jaguars or cannibal monsters, but as humans, a condition that they could not attain. Consequently the prey par excellence is also the predator par excellence, epitomized by the anaconda, the mother of all fish. Perhaps the difference corresponds to one between groups that privilege hunting and those that privilege fishing. I hope to be able to discuss this point more fully on another occasion; not, of course, to claim that perspectivism does not apply in the Rio Negro region, but to verify how far its basic components involve an important transformation that can provide us with a more complete generalization of the model. After all, here humanity does not correspond to a condition removed by humans and lost by animals, but a condition corresponding to a transformation in the animal condition itself and, to a certain extent,

of aggression, it is very probably because they are invisible to the fish who therefore do not harm them. Hence dealing with the viewpoint of the other and with the serious risks this involves is fundamental for the Indians but apparently irrelevant for the whites. This is the first lesson of this history.

This succinct account certainly fails to do justice to the complexity and nuances of the topic, which I hope to be able to explore on another occasion. However it is enough to highlight a fundamental aspect of this Rio Negro ethno-anthropology: while to us it seems fundamental to understand how the Indians think to try to think with them, to the Indians it is important to understand our habits and manners, in other words, how we behave and what we do with our own body – enter the river without any type of precaution, for example. This careless behaviour leads to the second deduction, namely our invisibility from the viewpoint of the fish, which means that nobody in this universe envies us, and that the mythic bath that lightened our skin and made us the masters of production is the same bath that took from us the soul that the Indians were able to retain – “you whites have no soul,” in the inspired phrase and title of a book of tales by the anthropologist Jorge Pozzobon. The soul that makes the Indians visible as true human beings in the eyes of others – the fish, first and foremost. What is the lesson then? The somewhat discouraging lesson is that, from the indigenous viewpoint, our own humanity is doubtful, perhaps since it resulted from an immediate and abrupt transformation, in contrast to the mediated and slow transformation experienced by the indigenous ancestors. But here we must tread carefully, since rather than constituting a form of ethnocentrism, this attitude seems to result from the long and very often painful ethnography that they themselves have been conducting on us. In sum they know us and our ways better than we know them and their thought. A knowledge undoubtedly produced through the logic of the sensible. But times have changed. Our desire to comprehend indigenous thought has not passed the Indians by unnoticed: on the contrary, many people on the Uaupés River are enthusiastic about this shift. Many are aware too, though, of the distance that separates their ways from our own, and frequently ask us: “Do you think you’ll succeed?”

dependent on it. An unequal condition dynamically shared by the so-called ‘transformation people,’ true humankind. I suspect that perspectivism can also help us to comprehend the nature of the hierarchical relations on the Rio Negro and thus conflicts like the one we have seen emerge in the case of the Iauaretê Falls, involving the Tukano and Tariano.

But returning to our point, it is necessary, therefore, to take this type of knowledge seriously. In my view, the best way of so doing perhaps is to avoid taking ourselves so seriously. This question could be examined in some depth, possibly more than can be explored here. Since we need to return to the initial point of the article, suffice to note that the virtues we so extol in various fields may simply not be those that impress – and mobilize – others. In the case in question – official cultural policies and the possibilities for effective involvement of indigenous peoples within their scope – what most stands out are the unpredictable effects elicited by the set of actions planned on the basis of what seem in principle coherent criteria. Fortunately there has been some space and dialogue for constant adjustments to be made. It would be difficult to expect otherwise given that on the Rio Negro, under the apparently shared language of heritage, there are diverse modes of knowing and correlate forms of sociality that we are only beginning to learn through local narratives. Here it is worth mentioning that IPHAN and the Ministry of Culture more recently began to support a large bi-national Brazilian-Colombian project intended to retrace the trajectory of the ancestral anaconda, mapping all the relevant places along the Rio Negro between Manaus and São Gabriel da Cachoeira, and from there to the Ipanoré Falls on the middle Uaupés from where humanity emerged. This project is now underway with a first part of the journey having been undertaken in February 2013, with the participation of Tukano, Desana, Piratapuaia, Tuyuka, Bará and Makuna indigenous specialists. Images and narratives are being captured with the objective of editing in the future a video documentary on the theme of the appearance and differentiation of humanity. We shift, therefore, from the journeys on paper maps to another type of experiment, where the intention is precisely to experiment what may have happened on that primordial journey.

In conclusion: the transformation routes described in these narratives refer to a primordial movement along the course of the region's rivers through which humankind transformed into its present form, leaving behind the subaquatic world in which it slowly acquired strength and shape. Perhaps this formulation is the most that can be achieved at the moment in terms of some kind of synthesis, but it at the very least prompts us to ask about its source of inspiration. Anyone familiar with the region and who has already travelled up and down the rivers for many days or weeks with the Indians to

reach distant communities situated on the headwater rivers, and, in the opposite direction, visit kin who already live in the cities, will have some idea of how much this experience of prolonged travel – involving a ‘picture by picture’ contemplation of the landscape as it gradually reveals itself – stimulates thought and reflection. Hours and hours of silence spent in constant observation of the elements of the landscape, interspersed with the appearance here and there of communities and, above all, dangerous rapids, spectacularly shaped rocks, sandbanks and islands, variation in the patterns of shoreline vegetation, and the attentive search for the correct channel to follow, constitute a permanent scrutiny of what has already been seen and interpreted on previous voyages. In the end, each voyage can be considered a verification of what happened, or did not happen, on the first ever journey, that of the ancestral anaconda itself. The latter, for its part, is annually remembered through the upriver movement of shoals of various fish species and by the festivals held along different sections – i.e. their spawnings.

To travel in space and observe other movements is also, therefore, to travel in time and read the events and movements of past moments and eras within the landscape. What other events could have caused the qualities of the world and its inhabitants? This is why these earlier events were precipitated in the ancient and esoteric ritual discourses and songs, specialized knowledge par excellence. This leads us to conjecture on the extent to which the knowledge of the grandparents described earlier, sometimes deemed to be lost, or partially lost, is not found there still, so to speak: if not entirely stored in thought, then potentially distributed along these transformation routes.¹⁵ Between what is stored in thought and what is acquired through observation during successive voyages – of humans and non-humans – is situated perhaps the specific way in which knowledge is generated and, as we saw in the case of the Iauaretê Falls, disputed on the Rio Negro.

Moreover, obtaining day-to-day food in the region demands knowing the appropriate locations to place the sophisticated fishing traps – *cacuris*, *caiaás* and *matapis* – over the course of the seasons. As we have seen, these locations contain the rocks that crystallized the transformations of the Tariano demiurge and thus intentionally prepared them to ensure fish could be captured

15 In support of this hypothesis, see the recent works on the Northwest Amazonian region by Hugh-Jones (2011), Xavier (2008), Lolli (2012) and Cayón (2008), and others collected in Andrello ed. (2012).

by future generations. Eating fish, and avoiding the risks associated with this consumption, therefore implies knowing this history; but such knowledge is tested, precisely, when one fishes. Knowing the myth and fishing appropriately are indissociable operations here. In my view, it is this apparently recursive relation between thought and practice that needs to be kept uppermost in mind when planning future actions to safeguard the cultural and/or intellectual rights of the indigenous peoples of the Rio Negro, and very probably elsewhere.

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