



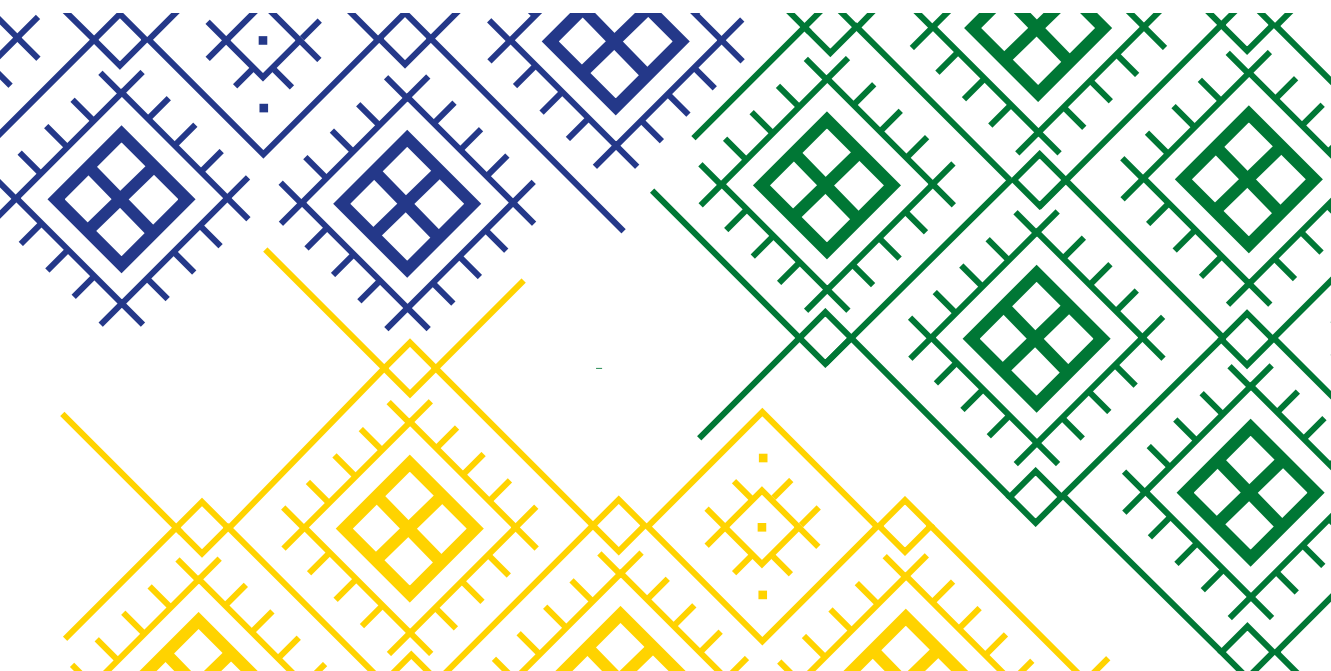
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Indigenous knowledge and languages in interaction –
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The forests standing, life for the world

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Abstract

This article focuses on specialists from the Upper Rio Negro, northwestern Amazon/ Brazil. Kumuá (shamans) sitting on the bench thinking, the forests with their feet, life for the world, with the rainwater that comes from indigenous lands. The original people of this Amazon, with its lush and primary forests, create a kinship system with other humans in human life. Currently, indigenous scientists themselves adopt the Kumuánic (shamanic) language, cosmopolitical management with other humans and using indigenous sciences to think and rethink the sustainable Amazon. Indigenous sciences are not the only paths to solutions, but they can contribute, based on a collective understanding of indigenous ecologies, sciences and public policies.

Keywords:

Knowledge-holders, Kumuánic (shamanic) language, other humans, indigenous sciences, sustainable Amazon

Introduction

This article offers an Indigenous anthropological reflection, starting from a *Kumuánic* language, so that the forests may remain standing. *Kumuánic* is an expression derived from the term *kumû*, who is our guardian of ancestral knowledge. By *Kumuánic* I refer to the shamanic actions of a *kumû*. The word *kumû*, in turn, comes from the word *kumûro*, which refers to a stool. The *kumû pa'taro* in Tukanoan culture is a stool made of wood from the sorb tree, sculpted into a parallelepiped form. Thus, the *kumû* is associated with the “stool of life”. He is one of the specialists that treat diseases. As part of his training, the *kumû* sits on this stool so as to make himself the guardian of ancestral knowledge. The root of the word *kumû* is linked to the stool as the place of “planetary curing and care”.

This article focuses on the importance of *Kumuánic* language, so that forests remain standing, and, along with the forests, so that life in the word persists. In the language of human ecology, the *kumû* (shaman)¹, although human, he uses another vegetal language with the owners of the forest. He is a cosmopolitical manager of other humans in his territory. *Kumuánic* language comes from the *Ye'pâ-masa* (Tukano) language, and it is used in the performance of various metaphysical activities with more-than-humans, and in interactions with other humans in human life.

First, I will draw on a very painful affective memory, about the extinction of the Miriti Tapuia Indigenous language, which was spoken on the lower Tiquié, in the region known as Cabeça de Cachorro (Dog's Head), in the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, in the Brazilian state of Amazonas. I will also reveal other academic spaces, reflections on other languages of the Eastern Tukanoan language family. In the Upper Rio Negro region, we are 23 peoples speaking our mother tongues. I start with a sample. My father's death afforded me the chance to learn other languages so at operate in the *a'mêri akâ si'ose* system through kinship considerations. On the other hand, the death of a language. In the historical context of the lower Tiquié River, the territory of the Miriti Tapuia, the *regãtoes* (river merchants) and rubber tappers who travelled through the region said that Miriti Tapuia was a “very ugly language”. The Miriti Tapuia people, hearing this insult, stopped speaking their maternal language in their territory, in the lower Tiquié, a tributary of the Vaupés River, in the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas state, Brazil. For this reason, none of the Miriti Tapuia Indigenous people speak their maternal language at the moment. Yet there are no ugly languages; they merely differ in their linguistic structure.

Second, I will show the importance of the shamanic language used by the category of the specialist/shaman. It is precisely this category of person that makes most use of the *Kumuánic* language for cosmopolitical

¹ It is our *kumû* (shaman) who mostly uses the language of human ecology in his daily affairs. It is a language of diplomacy, of negotiation, of offering and retributions to and from other humans so as to live well; a language which other humans, or more-than-humans, understand and can communicate with, within the environment in which they co-exist. *Kumuá* (plural for shaman) are fluent in this language of communication with other more-than-humans, involving interactions and interdisciplinarity, or, more precisely, *kumuánic* (*kumuánica*) language establishes connections with other humans in human life in their territory as well as in the natural, social and cultural environment. The *Kumuánic* language has the same meaning as the language of human ecology, since it concerns human being, other humans, and the environment of relationality to live well, to be healthy. It is another language of human ecology that speaks about life in these layers. To this end, there is the language of human ecology to live well.

management along with other humans in human life. I will therefore show that there is a proper place to access the conceptual maps of specialists: the conversation circles of the elderly. It is here that much contemporary reflexivity flows. More specifically, the proper place of listening is created when the kumû (shaman) sits on the stool of thought. This is not any isolated place, disconnected from the Anthropocene. To sit in this place, there are rules which must be observed to ensure the equilibrium of the shaman, particularly concerning his way of being with his kinspeople. At present, the children of Tukanoans, who are researchers and scientists in universities, use the Kumuánic language as an exercise in anthropological reflexivity, when they return to their people's linguistic territories. The Kumuánic language is, precisely, anthropological reflexivity. Kumuánic language is used by the shaman to live well in a secure place. Women, too, use their own wise language, but in tune with the discourse of her husband. It is these Kumuánic languages that create cosmopolitical relational networks.

Third, I want to speak of the rain that falls in Indigenous territories and how it may save planetary life. Rain falls on Indigenous territories because the shaman constantly negotiates with the *yukî masa*/tree peoples, so that there may be rain in their territories and that trees remain standing. I will provide a technical note, not in order to make evident non-Indigenous science, but to make evident the Indigenous science of basees (shamanic actions) in the form of Kumuánic language. It is one of the very restricted languages of communication that keep forests standing in Indigenous Amazonia. The Upper Rio Negro specialist is chosen, from the maternal womb, to be the guardian of ancestral sciences, to be respected and to provide care and to walk these lands/forests in silence. The forest is a house of other humans. Thus, the specialists, sitting down, represent the forests standing, and life for the world.

Without asking for permission, negotiating and offering, the territories of other humans will ultimately be reduced. When these other humans of the forest go away, they will take everything with them to other places. The lands/forests destroyed by humans, in the form of degradation and deforestation, also destroys the house of other humans of the forests, thus preventing the feast of the forests from taking place.

Finally, the forests standing, life for the world, depends on the existence of a guardian of ancestral sciences so that these forests remain standing. The kumû has a vitally important role in the use of Kumuánic language, so that Indigenous territories continue to be the main sources of water, by way of rain, soaking all of Amazonia.

Multilingual Eastern Tukanoan Branch

Tuyuka Context

I was born in the context of the aboriginal peoples of the Upper Tiquié River. In a wider context, it is a place where people speak the Tuyuka language, one of the languages of the Eastern Tukanoan family in Colombian Amazonia. Even though I was the one of *Wa'î pino maha* (Sons of the Fish-Snake), I was fluent in Tuyuka, the language of my mother. The Bará people are a minority in this region. After my father passed away, our family became disoriented. My grandfather, who is also Tuyuka, visited us with his Tukano wife, in the Trindade Community, and my family then moved to the Mercês Community, on the Cabari stream, a tributary of the Tiquié River, in Brazil.

To this day, the Trindade Community in Colombia and Pari-Cachoeira Community in Brazil practice marriage exogamy, the ancient form of marriage, in which the Tuyuka men of the Trindade Community go ask the Tukano women in marriage, and, reciprocally, Tukano men ask Tuyuka

women in marriage. It is one of the territories of *basúkarã* (cross-cousins) and *pê'yarã* (brothers-in-law). Despite the distances, and the waterfalls which make navigation difficult, they go get women to marry. The territory of the cross-cousins and the brothers-in-law, like the Pari-Cachoeira Community and the Trindade Community, maintain, to this day, the practice of marriage between cross-cousins and siblings-in-law among the *basúkarã*.

My family spoke the Tuyuka language because it was the predominant language in these regions. I was born and grew up amongst people who spoke the Tuyuka language. It was the first language I learned because it was the language spoken by my mother. The mother's tongue is always learned first. In my case, I learned the language of my Tuyuka mother. The Bará family environment became as if we were children of a Tuyuka. From one angle, it makes sense, because our maternal grandfather was of the *ĥāpinopona* people. It would have been correct for us to speak the language of our father, *Wa'î pino maha*, because of the patrilineage. Unfortunately, my family was not able to learn this language from our father. His death led to other opportunities in life. However, I am, at present, learning the language of my father, *wa'î pino pona maha*.

Tukanoan Context

From an early age I learned to speak the language of my mother. We should have also learned the language of our father, by inheritance and the linguistic legacy of the *Wa'î pino pona*, the Sons of the Fish-Snake. This has to do with a long history of our father. He grew up an orphan. During my teenage years, I had to learn another language to widen my vocabulary. My family lived in a place where two languages were spoken: Tukano and Tuyuka. In this process of constructing language knowledge, I was able to learn the Tukano language. The Tuyuka language was not a problem, but there were more speakers of

Ye'pâ-masa (Tukano) in the context. Furthermore, we are the grandchildren of Tukano maternal grandmothers. In a way, then, we learned the language of our grandmother.

For a time, my family and I remained in the Mercês Community, in the Cabari stream. We then had to move to the Pari-Cachoeira Community. This community belongs to the Tukano people. It is predominantly *Ye'pâ masa*. In this wider context, I was able to learn the *Ye'pâ masa* language. I mostly learned by playing with my peers, bathing in the river, and shooting arrows at lizards. I sometimes spoke the Tuyuka language; we do this while we are learning another language. It was this social context that enabled me to learn the language of my Tukano grandmother.

The *Ye'pâ masa* language, Tukano, is one of the co-official languages of the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, in the Brazilian state of Amazonas. The Bará people are a part of the Eastern Tukanoan group. It is by no means exceptional to speak another language. I am the grandson of a Tuyuka grandfather, but I am also grandson of a Tukano grandmother. Sadly, I know nothing of my paternal grandparents, but it is believed that they spoke the Tukano language. Bará, Tuyuka and Tukano share word roots. Their linguistic etymology is similar, and meaning is similar when the languages are spoken. Tukano is a *lingua franca*. It is a tonal language, spoken by the Eastern Tukanoan group, particularly by inhabitants of the Tukanoan Triangle, in the Dog's Head region of Northwestern Amazonia.

Miriti Tapuia Contexts

After a few years living with Tukano families in Pari Cachoeira, where we even lived in the houses of some Tukano families (first with the Costa family, then with the Brandão family, and finally with the Gentil family). Our mother remarried, this time to Mr. Benedito Meireles Dias (in memoriam), a Miriti Tapuia man, in the Vila Nova

Community in the lower Tiquié River. The community was composed of three peoples: Miriti Tapuia, Tukano, and Tuyuka, and, with us, the Bará. In this community we were speakers of the Tukano language; although we were another people, from other territories, we spoke Ye'pâ masa.

The Miriti Tapuia context is sad with the extinction of their language. During my research with my later stepfather, Mr. Bené, I would ask him about the Miriti Tapuia language. He became deeply emotional and remembered the value of the Miriti Tapuia language for his people. The Miriti Tapuia are one of the people who live in the lower Tiquié River. According to Bené, his parents and grandparents were left by their ancestor the Oropendola Snake as guardians of the rivers. The territory of the sons of the Oropendola Snake extend from the Taiçu to Iraití, on the Tiquié River. As a researcher, I was able to reach this conclusion through names received by the *baserã*. Sons of the Oropendola Snake, and not *Buya* Tapuia, was their correct name. Miriti Tapuia is a nickname, conferred by other people in the region, and there is no evidence as to its origin. Buya Tapuia is Nheengatu, but it is unknown what type of snake it refers to.

According to Bené, the Sons of the Oropendola Snake were *surára* (soldiers) in the lower Tiquié River. Guardians in the lower Tiquié River. These people are specialists in this river. They know when the waters rise by the level of the water. The Sons of the Oropendola Snake, since the start of the Canoe of human transformation, already had this role, staying on the bow of the canoe, acting as guides along the journey. Thus, the ancestor of these Sons of the Oropendola Snake left them as guardians of the rivers. In almost all of the lower Tiquié, they were owners of their Miriti Tapuia territory. From the beginning, they were left to protect the territory from foreigners along this river. There are other versions of the origin of the Sons of the Oropendola Snake which diverge, but also converge, with this origin.

Historically, the Sons of the Oropendola Snake were great warriors! These people had direct contact with the river traders, rubber tappers, and missionaries. They had very direct contact, which is why they had to deny their own language and were forced to only speak Portuguese. I remember well Mr. Bené's words and how he said that Miriti Tapuia language was considered as ugly by other people, because people did not understand it.

I thus came to understand that, because the language is "ugly", it ended up being caused to go extinct by others. People were forced to deny their own language. At present, they also speak the Tukano language. It is regrettable to have to remember this, but history brings us back to our linguistic territories.

In this way, in this subitem, I specifically wanted to show how the historical process had a severe effect on Indigenous languages. The linguistic context, the language of a people, endures, resists, or goes extinct. Language is not only a vehicle for communication! Language is the identity of a people in a specific territory. Linguistic identity within a specific territory provides self-esteem for a people to live well with their *basukarã* (cross-cousins) and their *peyãra* (brothers-in-law).

Types of constructed languages, Upper Rio Negro, Amazonas State

In this section I will write about the linguistic turn, or, better still, about the reclamation of the wise languages. In 2017 I entered the Graduate Programme in Social Anthropology of the Federal University of Amazonas (PPGAS-UFAM). In the university, I have tried to create a new territory of learning. I believe this happens to all Indigenous academics. It was no different with me. This memory of an academic career will help us better understand what I will focus on in this reflexivity space. Language circulates in

our being. That is why we are always attentive to changes that occur in our being. Because of the context into which we are inserted, we learn in integral time. What I am trying to say is that I knew who I was, but I did not know anything of another language; the language of the wise elders, the Kumuánic language, used by Justino Sarmento, a Tuyuka: “The kumua are specialists for activating powers of protection, calming, pacifying, tranquilizing, hiding, ridding... the cosmic beings (...) so that people can live well, so that they will not be stricken by the powers that harm the health of beings” (Resende 2024, 110).

Anthropology made me go back to my linguistic territory. I was aware that my father spoke his language, as claimed by Dagoberto Lima (in memoriam), the *yemeka*/language (Azevedo 2022). However, although the son of *kumû*, I was not a keeper of this language of the kumua, a Kumuánic language. Today I say this: One day I had a father, *wa’î pino mahê, kumû, bayá*. One day I had a stepfather, *Umú pîrô masê*, a *basegê* (similar to a *kumû*), and I still have a father-in-law, a Tukano, *basegê* and *bayá* (also similar to a *kumû*).

During the first two years of my MPhil research, nothing flowed in me. The academic language is learned while doing the anthropological exercise. As we learn in the university, I transported this learning to shamanic language. When I sat next to my parents, they told me: “These are difficult things. Dangerous things! They demand certain prescriptions and restrictions so as to have the qualities of science. These knowledges have their life, and they are not playthings.”

Amazonian anthropology is an overflowing trough of Indigenous sciences. My first attitude was to maintain the security and firmness of what I heard from my parents. For my parents, narratives are indeed science, and they are well-articulated systems of knowledge that can speak to

western science. Indigenous science has its own methodology; it has a proper setting in which it must be learnt, in which its knowledge is to be transformed and produced in company of its language so that new thoughts may flow.

Finally, these Amazonian sciences are theories and practices in the lives of men and women, and they should never be contested, because their importance lies in their potentiality. These knowledges are always being updated and are transmitted from generation to generation for contemporary life.

Bikirá úkũ duhîri be'to - the specialist's circle of conversation

In the specialists' circle of conversation, held at night, the elders gather together to eat *ipadú* (coca), smoke tobacco and to sit on the conversation stools. Since they are sitting in the stool, it is the stool of thought. I myself have never described ethics in the stool of thoughts. Perhaps 'ethics' is not exactly the right term. But, for the Indigenous people, there is a word, *wiô pesaro*, which means “place of danger” or “place that demands respect”, let us say a type of 'ethics', a principal element that man or woman must follow in the place of listening on the stool of contemporary thought or reflexivity (Barreto 2023), as I have presented in my academic work. If one does not respect, one is not deemed to be a *masá ayugi* (a good person). I can also contribute to what 'respect' means for the Indigenous person. It seems that every society possesses a guiding principle of listening to the sciences, and respect must be shown to the (male or female) guardians. Respect can be associated with ethics for aboriginal peoples, because this “respect” involves other human dimensions in collective life, such as social organization within one's territory.

A listening ethics requires that the listener “listen well to correctly apply what he hears to people, in what concerns the human dimension, territories, forests, rivers or

lakes, etc.” Thus, our parents demand that we take care, that we follow the prescriptions and restrictions, that is, that we have the qualities to flow in the sciences. In this sense, specialists take on the prescriptions and restrictions that must be observed. This is necessary for their health. It is an effort towards an integral respect, since it involves human people, other humans, places that have names, houses that have names (the environment), etc. Respect among peers is the main element of the collective life of the Eastern Tukanoan Group.

So, I started to sit next to my parents in the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, and later in our ranch at Taiacu, in the Tiquié River. My parents never told me: “OK, you will study everything! You are our son and so all of our sciences will be transmitted to you.” They did not say that. The first thing that Mr. Bené told me was: “You want this! The sciences of our parents require a certain care. The sciences have life, because they are knowledges of the guardians, and, in this sense, they demand people’s respect”. To respect means to be careful. Respect operates in the kinship system. It also involves care with one’s health, one must never doubt it, lest one fall ill. Mr Bené (in memoriam) told me: “These knowledges are difficult, dangerous things, and you must be very careful with your health.”

I would like to highlight here the essential elements that need to be considered by those who speak and those who listen in the elders’ circle of conversation:

- a) *Tĩ’ó nũ yã’a*/To listen first
- b) *Úkũ masotika yã’a*/ There can be no interventions
- c) *Masimigĩ tĩ’ó ya*/Even if you possess expertise, listen
- d) *Ayuró tĩ’ó ya*/Listen correctly
- e) *Ayuró tĩ’ó yẽ’e yã’a*/To grasp precisely the constructed concepts
- f) *Ayuró weegisami*/Do activities correctly

These six elements (there may be more or fewer elements) are part of the life of a specialist.

The Indigenous child starts to listen first, from within his or her mother’s womb. We are prepared to listen to the guiding principles of sciences. This is why we are offered the stool in our mother’s placenta. It is the first stool offered by the specialist so that we may sit in the stool of thoughts. From the mother’s womb, a child first starts to listen by means of *bahsesé*. In the Tukano language there is an expression: “*Kĩre ou koore kumũro ěhotu dipó ya!* (Offer him or her to sit on the stool!”.

I am claiming that the Indigenous child sits on the stool to listen, or, more accurately, on the metaphysical stool offered by the kumũ. The man or woman who was not offered the stool is a restless person, one who seems to have no place to sit. In the specialist language, “*duhĩri u’tũ moogĩ ou moogó* (the man or woman who has no place to sit)”. This refers to people who were not offered the stool of equilibrium to sit on. Specialists must have their place, the place of listening, the place of equilibrium, of sensibility and relationality. The first place of listening is the body itself. The body is itself a stool, for it is the very being of a man or a woman.

There can be no interventions at the moment of transmission by those who listen in the circle of conversation. Our specialist parents, grandparents, uncles or brothers do not like it when there are interventions at the moment of transmission, such as conversations occurring in tandem, people who are not paying attention or who are disconnected to the formulas contained in the narratives. The elders do not repeat versions. When the specialist sees that a person is not interested in his speech, he just stops. The secret is being highly attentive because, in that unique moment, the sciences are flowing through *omerõ*, as stated by João Paulo Lima: *Omerõ* (strength or potency) is a constitution of the circulation of *Yepamahsã* (Tukano)

knowledges. [...] a potency that inhabits and circulates in his body, and which thus connects him to the movement of the universe and its creators (Barreto et al. 2018).

Even if you possess expertise, listen. This part gives rise to conflict. Some people do not have the patience to listen to another person's version. Only one's own version is deemed correct. Specialists always ask that we listen to versions by other peoples, other groups. During activity, this knowledge provides another option. Even a specialist will sometimes lack some part, which will remain incomplete or which he does not know with precision. When I started studying his knowledge, my stepfather Benedito (2017) told me:

"I know very little. The little I know is a part of the wealth of knowledge that I heard from colleagues during the time in which I tapped rubber, and which I also had to adjust and update with my Tuyuka brothers-in-law. Even if one is a specialist, one has to learn new things, new formulas, new versions, and a new technology. It is an opportunity for adjusting and updating my knowledges with my kinspeople in my region."

Listen correctly. In the circle of conversation, one must listen correctly in order to prevent mistakes when executing the activity. Listening is a construction of the logic of thought. The method of listening is technique that aids in the exercise and execution of a kumû's activity. In this specific case, the kumû uses elements of bahsesé through matter such as fruits, liquids or foodstuffs. Bahsesé é a chemo-mathematical conjunction. The efficacy of bahsesé is a combination of matter, formula, and chemistry. The mathematical formula of bahsesé is a potentiality. The formula must be evoked precisely to avoid errors or failures. It is therefore the exercise of the reflexivity of thought. It thus requires certain evidence.

To grasp precisely the constructed concepts: This item pertains to the above.

To listen correctly is not necessarily to listen to sounds, noise, clatter, melodies, etc., though this is a part of listening. The meaning of grasping constructed concepts is founded on a combination of factors which afford a new conceptual confluence. I am referring here to the set of bahsesé. It can be associated, perhaps, to grasping an ability, an assimilationality, an assiduity, or, better still, grasping a conceptual map. An appropriation of thought, in the right measure, behind which there exists a logical mathematics, a technological engineering. Our specialists are renowned scientists of the systems of knowledge that possess life. These sciences have their potentiality by the force of omerô. Omerô is a vital force that leaves the mouth of the kumû. This is not all, there are other activities.

Do activities correctly: This is the most crucial part for the man or woman. From the maternal womb, the Indigenous man or woman is offered, attributed, and also, from childhood, prepared for certain dimensions of human life. Throughout life, he or she is re-strengthened or updated with technologies constructed with his or her father or mother. The attributed human acts are well-elaborated activities.

Thus, the aboriginal peoples of the Eastern Tukanoan Group have adopted guiding methodological principles, which are: listening, identification, observation, accompaniment, experiment, approval, and production. These are elements to think through a sustainable Amazon. The elements used by the Eastern Tukanoan Group have a methodological tenor. The Indigenous cosmotechnical word is complemented by prescriptions and restrictions. Our parents ask us to do these correctly, during our activities, to live well in our territory.

Finally, Indigenous researchers do activities correctly because they listened well to their parents, to this knowledge which compose the Indigenous cosmotechnical sciences. The method of listening is synonymous

with potentiality, ability, quickness in well-executed daily activities, and also with narrating, speaking, and doing bahsesé correctly. These are millenary dimensions among specialists, in the Upper Rio Negro, Northwest Amazonia.

Bikirã úkũse - the language of the elders

Researchers of the Bará, Tuyuka, Tukano, Dessana, Piratapua, Kotiria, etc., aboriginal peoples of the Eastern Tukanoan Group are focused on the languages of the specialists. Literally translated, this would be the ‘language of the elders’. I strive to say that it is the language of wise elders, specialists or guardians. I am also inspired by the word Kumuánic, used by Justino Sarmiento, Tuyuka (Rezende 2024). The term Kumuánic is applicable to men, as well as to women who are keepers or guardians of the knowledge of their husband, father, or grandfather. Inter-crossed knowledge can be known as a vertical interface of interdisciplinarity.

Bikirã numiã úkũse is the language of wise women. The language of kumua is “the set of the arts of discourses of knowledge” (Barreto 2023). This is how I understand it; João Rivelino Barreto (2022), a Tukano author, published a book *Úkũsse: the form of knowledge in the Tukano dialogical arts*, about the well-being of all the universe. These languages express ancestral lines of thought. When I say ‘ancestral’, I am referring to my ancestor *Wa’î pino pona mahĩ* “First human of the Fish-Snake”, to provide an approximate or equivocal translation. I know that the translation betrays much of the original epistemological and etymological meaning, but it leads us to think and reflect about the terms we use to reach a conceptual premise.

This is why we call ourselves Sons of the Fish-Snake. During the journey in the aquatic world, our ancestor gradually came up in the form of the Fish-Snake until it was time for human transformation. As we know, every people of the Eastern Tukanoan Group has their ancestor. This

ancestor is our vital reference, we are speakers of his tongue, and he is also the one who occupied and peopled the territory of his aboriginal people. For Dagoberto Lima, a Tukano man, the importance of *yemeka* (language) (Azevedo 2022), of being a brother-in-law or cross-cousin, so as to occupy such a territory, where another language is spoken, belonging to another people, culturally, politically, and territorially, according to Dagoberto Tukano.

So, the kumua have their own and specific language to carry out the cosmopolitical management of peers and brothers-in-laws. In the construction of anthropological thought for reflexivity, the bahsesé formulas require an effort at conceptualizing the notions of Kumuánic language. The language of the *kumua* is expressed through formulas contained in the bahsesé, which are, at once, arts of the discourse of permission, negotiation, mitigation or soothing (psychological), harmonization between people, the people of the forest, peoples of the world, and the *wa’î masa* of the river (Barreto 2018, 98-100). The specialist provides a very healthy environment, he provides cosmopolitical management. This cosmopolitical question goes beyond that between humans with other humans. These other humans are cosmopolitical managers in human life. To this end, we require abyssal negotiation. For us, humans, it seems as if we are not quite aligned with these other humans. We are always anthropocentric and do not always listen to these other humans in our lives. The sciences and public policies are not reverberating in other territories, belonging to other humans.

For my late father, Paulo Emílio Barreto (in memoriam), *Wa’î pino pona mahĩ* to do bahsesé was to do *ayuró weero i’awĩ* (to do correctly without any aggression), according to my mother’s memory.

Bahsesé is for “*Speaking, negotiating, and offering to wa’î-masa/other humans, to yuké*

masá/forests tree people, yôkoâ masa/people of the constellations, to offer food to the elderly, by the term elderly I am referring to wise specialists, these specialists have their own food and their own language. Language is one of the fundamental tools of negotiating a good life” (Barreto 2019. 69-71).

My Bará father did this to live well in his territory. The more he gave offerings to other humans, the more could he be assured of symmetrical retribution. I started to listen to this dense language since I was doing my Master’s research; a language completely different from that used by people in their daily attributions.

Yet, few take pause in these difficult and dangerous languages. The language of the kumua is very restricted, inaccessible to most people. I want to say that this language of the kumua is the first language of the very highest level of knowledge of the specialists. Recently, their children, grandchildren, siblings, uncles and aunts, children-in-law, and grandchildren have become deeply interested in their specialists and in non-Indigenous scientists or researchers. This allows us to apprehend that there is a collective effort between the Indigenous sciences and the Western sciences so that forests may remain standing. One of the languages is concerned with naming, permission, negotiation, attribution, adding, soothing, and offering to other humans, and also between humans. What is needed is to sit next to the stool of thought to align, plan, and budget, so that the collective effort is geared toward uniting unilateral forces. It will only be possible to add between the sciences. There is no other means of saving our lives.

Kumuánic language can be considered one of the languages that has wild thought used by specialists in this earthly layer. Bahsesé is more than a formula, it is also the thought of another human, but with its logic inverted. A sample can clarify what I mean here. When I say wild thought, I am

referring to the thought of a *Ya’î* (jaguar shaman, jaguar-specialist). It is he who transforms into a jaguar. This transformed human-jaguar possesses the wild thought to devour another human to feed his *Ya’î* thought. The set of snake bahsesé of the *Ya’î*, the jaguar specialist. This occurs when the *ya’î* does not take care with his sciences. The violations are non-observations of the dietary rules during the new moon, the full moon, or the time of the edible lizards. This *ya’î* transforms into a jaguar. This transformed jaguar sees humans as its food, *ya’î i’ sê sââsehe* (to have a fatty body). We, Indigenous scientists, must be careful with the sciences of our body that are constructed within us, according to João Paulo Tukano (Barreto 2022), in *The World in Me: An Indigenous Theory of Bodily Care in the Upper Rio Negro*, where he elaborates on this point.

In the Upper Rio Negro there exists this thought amongst specialists. A thought-battle between the Jaguar-shamans or kumua. Since I know something of this story, I want to bring it to this space of reflexivity of human ecology, how this human thought becomes a wild thought, the wild thought of the kumua. By referring to wild thought, we are referring to other times that existed, this practice among the *ya’îwa*. As we know, to this day this type of wild thought exists in society. My reflexivity as a researcher in the current context, I see how many fattened people see other people as their thought-food (Barreto 2023, 22-23). Human thought becomes wild thought to devour humans – an anthropophagy. My colleague Justino Sarmiento, a Tuyuka, uses the term *matapi*. He establishes an association, as if it were a *matapi* for the university. The university as a great *matapi* which attracts and imprisons those who enter it.

“The university is like a matapi, placed so that we enter its mouth... We, Indigenous people, left our villages and brought our traditions, that is, we brought another anthropology, built by our ancestors.

Studying in university, we asked: How can we prevent the university from swallowing us like a matapi?” (Rezende 2023, 42-43)

The *matapi* is a fishing trap. In my view, Justino makes sense when he says that thought arrests or captures another thought, making it a hostage within its thought, which ends up dying in the *matapi* of thought. I thus associate the Ya’î to something that sees humans as if they were its prey. The other human by means of wild thought see humans as its food.

As I mentioned above, *bahsesé* is a dangerous thing. Indeed, for the peoples of the Eastern Tukanoan Group, *bahsesé* is a means to do good things in their territories, but it can also be applied, through inversion, to do bad things, and thus in all of society there are certain good practices and bad things because of a bad thought. For me, the very *bahsesé* becomes bad thought, to send very far away, to pierce the eyes of other humans, to smoke with roasted peppers in houses which bear their name, expelling owners from their habitats (Barreto 2019, 63, 70). The *kumû* uses *bahsesé* to cause harm (aggression) to other humans, and, consequently, to humans, as the environment suffers from a dearth of foodstuffs.

In truth, *ya’î* in the form of a jaguar wanders with wild thought in various houses, the places that have names. It can be a metaphor of wild thought to say that, among humans, one cannot see the other as if it were one’s prey.

***Bikîrâ numiâ úkûse* - the language of the wise women**

This is the art of female speech, aligned with matrilineal thought. *Bikîrâ numiâ úkûse* can be understood as if it were merely the tales of people’s daily life. This is an equivocal claim. I prefer to say that they are the arts of speaking of wise women or the keepers of knowledge. Wise women have their own female language. Only women understand this locution. The thought of the

grandmother is always that her granddaughter will come to occupy her place, as a keeper of the languages, since, from the maternal womb, the children of *wa’î pino maha* (Bará), *Itã pino pona* (Tuyuka), *imikohori masá* (Dessana), *toho nîikâ umú pîro pōra masá* (Miriti Tapuia), etc., were already attributed or prepared to be keepers of the arts of female or male speech. This female speech is exclusively used by women.

Masirã numiâ úkûse is the speech of wise women in tune with the speech of their husbands. This female language is expressed in their *ãha-deé*, *ãha deé*, a melody of female songs, and in the offering speech which is sung in ritual. Women in the Upper Rio Negro have their own language, specific and differentiated, of cosmopolitical management between peers and their sisters-in-law. The art of female speech is also the base of a construction of anthropological thought under the ritual House of the father, the father-in-law, the grandfather, or the husband. *Ãha-deé*, *ãha deé* is a melody sung by women which expresses their relationality.

However, the *ãha deé*, *ãha deé* melody is an expression of female thought. This *ãha deé* is an expression of knowledge that is constructed in musical form. Musicality comes from her being as a woman. From the beginning, woman was already attributed and prepared to animate the life of her companions. To sing means to create the network of social relations by means of the *ãha deé*, *ãha deé*. *Ãha deé*, *ãha deé* is also shared among men. When one listens to this *ãha deé*, *ãha deé*, what emotion! How many sciences come out of man and woman.

***A’té nîi bikîrâ úkûse* - the discourse of ancestry**

I will show here the forms of expression of knowledge in the Upper Rio Negro. *Bikîrâ úkûse* are the speeches of wise men that mention their ancestry. The ancestor is a reference point for the way of life of an aboriginal people in a specific territory.

Ancestrality is a link of the past with the present as a gift for contemporary life. The ancestral is a style of life for the new generation as in the past. Within speech the matter of ancestrality has meaning, because it is an ancestral reference, or, better still, an affective memory of relationality. My ancestral is *Wa'î pino* (Fish snake).

The speech of wise specialists are many, but I can list the types of speech proffered in some moments, such as the *po'orã úkũse* (speeches of offering and retribution); *a'mêri aká-siose* (speeches for consideration among kinspeople); *numiã sêrise* (proposing a woman in marriage); and *makârikaharã niirã úkũsetise*, which are speeches of the owners of the House of ritual or the house of ceremony which also includes hunting grounds, fishing spots, and places where fruits are gathered, as well as garden paths and other visible and invisible paths of circulation.

A'té úkũse pahîro waâ, these are types of male dense speech. To become a *bikirã úkũse*, one must be a specialist in speeches. The Indigenous sciences choose people to be specialists in the arts of discourse, to be an agent. The keeper of speech is a person who practices and observes prescriptions and restrictions for his sciences. The person is very able in the speech of good thoughts, the speech proffered flows at that moment, yet when nominal prescriptions and restrictions are not observed, the person falls ill. The arts of speech are not a joke. The arts of speech have life, which is why they come to "collect" the health of their keeper. Speech has a logic in the life of people, which is why the life of the person is "collected" for self-care towards health. The owner of the art of speech has to be more careful with his body, *ehêri pô'ra*, which can be glossed as the psychological state of the physical body, particularly its health. The more care he takes, more efficient his speeches become. The owner of speech must be a *nikê pesayugî* person, a person in equilibrium in his way of life with his kinspeople.

This language of ancestrality is interdisciplinary, because they are elements of the conceptual map constructed to approach the sciences. The speeches were used often by our grandparents, by our parents, our uncles and aunts, our mothers and grandmothers, since the time of human transformation. The speech of ancestrality is not disconnected, it seems to be from another time, but it is always actualized in time and space because the Kumuánic language of men and the language of wise women is the exercise of contemporary reflexivity. The elements of speeches are transported to the present. These languages are harder, because they are not daily languages used by most people. Only in the elders' circle of conversation is this language heard.

Justino Sarmento Rezende (2021), Tuykua, organized a book with 12 Indigenous authors hailing from different Amazonian peoples. Each one brought their research material to be published. These are the texts of many Indigenous anthropologies. The book was put together just as its title makes evident: *Sieve of Knowledges: Overflowing Indigenous Reflexivities*, a space for the proper fermentation of knowledges and reflexivities. I associate myself with this sieve that overflows with many reflexivities, with the sciences of my parents. My body is as if it were this sieve which overflows with many anthropological reflexivities.

For our kumua of the Upper Rio Negro this is his Kumuánic language, specific, for daily activities. The Kumuánic language is perfectly married to the anthropological exercise, because they are epistemological languages. The Tukanoan man or woman does not choose this language in order to become a specialist, on the contrary, it is this language that chooses the body and the

*ehêri pō'ra*² persons to be wise. At present, there are no longer *Kumuari Wi'î* (the house for training specialists). However, at present, people have strived to listen to the knowledges alongside others, from other peoples in the construction of their sciences for family life, for the life of the territory, for their paths and gardens, for the rivers, and so that their forests remain standing. This gradually creates a web of social relations between Indigenous peoples. The Kumuánic language is the material and immaterial heritage of men and women in the Northwest Amazon.

It can be concluded that this part of the language of specialists goes beyond the language of bahsesé to create a strengthened Amazonian perspective: specialists sitting on the stool of thoughts, the forests standing, life for the world.

Kumuánic language so that forests remain standing

These things described here are indispensable elements for forests to remain standing. There are three important elements. A wild language for forests to remain standing. The Indigenous person is aware that the forest is part of hir or her life. There is no distinction between nature and culture. The art of fragmentation weakens the link. For these forests to remain standing, specialists sit on the stool of thought, life for the world. Since childhood, the sons of *wa'î pino* were prepared for the *wamétise* (the places that have the names of having a relation of):

- Wió pesaro* “place of danger or which causes fear/Respect”
- Ayuró i'yâ nirise* “of having greater care/Protection”
- Di'ta mariró* “Making no noise /Silence”

These three elements are present in the life of the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Amazon. For these things, from an early age, we are instructed to observe the path of the forest, the path of garden, and the river and its paths (Barreto 2023, 111-113). When we go into the forest, we must respect, be careful, and tread on these places in silence. Amazonian philosophy counterposes the Anthropocene. The relationship of respect does not mean not-entering the forest. This is not the issue, nor *wamétise*, other places that have names. The way to understand the relation of with lands and forests was visualized Dagoberto Lima Azevedo (in memoriam) in the flowchart of *Di'ta nikiri*, Lands/ Forests.

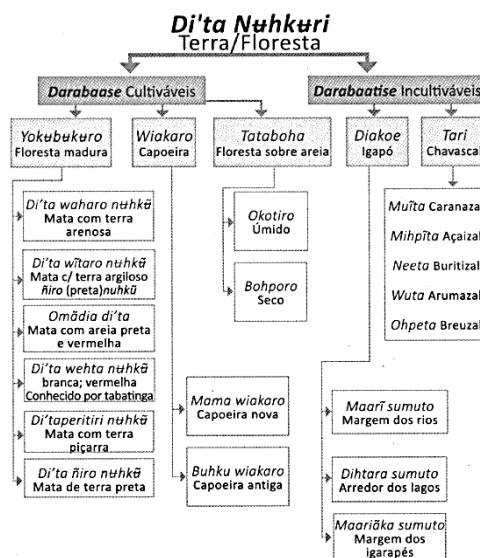


Fig. 1. *Di'ta nikiri*, Lands and Forests Azevedo 2018, 93.

This does not mean that the forest is untouchable. The lands/ forests are transited, conserved and preserved with their applications: bahsesé, the set of shamanic actions to live well with abundance and health in their ancestral territories by humans and other humans, who do not separate him or herself for this relationality. The specialist circulates in

² *Eheri pōra* can be understood as the heart, but it can also be understood as the being of man or woman.

these forests and these places by means of his metaphysical thought. There is no fragmented concept for Indigenous peoples in general. Amazonia is the large yard of the world.

Amazonia is a forest with its biodiversity. This story that it is the lungs of the world – it is no longer. There is not so much evidence. The Amazon forest has its vegetal philosophy which has some capacity to prescind itself from these human actions. Because this climate change has direct effects on our planet. In the dawn it is sunny; in the afternoon it is rainy. This is the instability of the present times. These human actions are wild thoughts incorporated into the activities of the Capitolocene, in the words of the ecologist Carolina Levis, with which she considers which are the societies that are generating these drastic alterations in nature and the world, and which make us rethink completely our style of life, particularly in cities (Moulin et al. 2022, 23), and, I might add, in our territories. Latour (1994) claims in his book on symmetrical anthropology, *We have never been modern*, or, better still, we have been the peoples of merchandise. We have never been modern. In truth, dwelling on that, I believe that we indeed think we are modern. Although we are Indigenous, we think we are modern, but as if these things did not affect us in our territories.

The Anthropocene is the enemy of life in the forest, the rivers, etc., and, for this reason, there is no point of return. Humanity is increasingly being smoked and roasted, regardless of place and space. These human actions directly affect the big cities and the territories of aboriginal peoples. There is a great risk that the ozone layer will be unable to maintain its capacity to absorb or filter.

The specialist of the Upper Rio Negro, man and woman, from the maternal womb, the Indigenous child is offered the *mišê batí* (vine basket) or the *wihê batí* (arumã basket) on his or her head to protect from sun and

rain. At present, our Indigenous specialists on climate change claim that smoke circulates in the air, sharply corroding these *batíri*. The Indigenous specialist refers to the *batí* placed over our heads by the *bahsesé*. However, these *batíri* over our heads are very much deteriorated. This is why we feel unbearable heat, and experience stuffy nights. All these hours we breathe hot air. The *batí* that is on our head is full of fat and burnt oil, the monocultures, ashes that spring from the hydroelectric dams burn the tree leaves and the Buriti groves, which thus dry up; the smoke becomes car ashes and ashes from the chimney of large factories, which are the main culprits. These ashes formed in these spaces fall on our forests. The clouds are saturated with fats and oils. This story of *batí* is not of my own making; for a long time, specialists have been concerned with the importance of the forests for their children.

We need the resilient leaves of our forests to stay standing so that they can filter this pollution. We need to renew our *batíri* with new vines or with new arumã, for our vine hats on our head.

The specialists sitting, the forests standing, life for the world

As I have mentioned, the forest demands respect, care and silence. Nature has its strength. The forest is sensitive, like humans. This earthly layer has been covered in forest for millennia. Yet the point of no return is fast approaching. This affects all of the planetary system for human life. The sons of the aboriginal Eastern Tukanoan people are being taught a relationality of the utmost respect, care and silence. If there is no dialogue with the Indigenous sciences, we will be approaching the edge of an abyss.

It is important to sit and listen to other sciences. Indigenous scientists from the Upper Rio Negro, along with one from the

lower Amazon, in collaboration with non-Indigenous scientists, published an article in the journal *Science*, called *Indigenizing conservation science for a sustainable Amazon. Dialogues between Western and Indigenous systems are critical* (Levis et al. 2024). Indigenous scientists showed that it is important to listen to and converse with Indigenous sciences, life for the world. This will only be possible if we ourselves sit on the same stool of thought, in defence of our lives, this is the collective path, substantial, constructed over thousands of years by the aboriginal people of the Amazon rainforest. Indigenous science is not the only solution, but it can contribute to other alarming situations. But we need to “sit on the stool of thoughts” (Barreto 2023), as I say in my thesis.

My mother, Dona Francisca, Tuyuka, told me in 2024:

“When you enter the forest to hunt, to gather, to collect manivaras, to seek out wood to build the House of Ritual, bringing down trees of virgin forest, or of any quality, to make your garden, to get clay to make ceramics, you need to ask permission from the owner of clay. To gather mushrooms of edible species, speak to the owners, and, likewise, to get vines, piassava, forest fruits, negotiate with and make offerings to the owners of patuá palms, bacaba groves, chonta groves, açai groves, breuzal, with the owners of vacu, the owner of cunuri, the owners of the caraná straw, the buçu straw, the leaves of the white straw. The owners of the streams or springs, you must speak to these owners.”

This is Tuyuka, Bará, Tukano, Dessana, Miriti Tapuia cosmopolitics between humans and nonhumans. Each constituted place has its owner, the agents of this places. These places are the houses of other humans. The largest house, covered with the leaves of tress, is the Amazon House.

The aboriginal peoples of the Eastern Tukanoan group have a custom that before

you go and do your daily activity, you must ask the owners’ permission. The forest has its managers of human life. However, the forest requires that there be humans who also ensure its symmetrical redistribution. My mother also says that, if we do not speak to these owners, they get mad at human presence, or sometimes hide things.

Another, more classic example, for a Tuykua woman, can be gleaned in my mother’s relations to her manioc stems. A woman has her *aturá* (carrying basket) on her back to clear or pick manioc in the garden. The woman thus creates a synergy between human and plant with her cultivars in her garden. The manioc stems are as if they were her children, and also as if they were their ribs, so said my mother, Dona Francisca:

“Today I will take care of you, my manioc stems. My manioc stems, you are like my children. I have to take care of you; I will clean the house that is my garden. You will give up much manioc, and I will thus feed my family. The garden is my being as a woman. The place where the network of social relations between kinship is constructed through food to feed and strengthen the social body.”

This type of language, expressed by the owner of the manioc stem, is meaningful for the owner of the garden. My mother shows that here she must be in an affective relationship with her cultivars. Everything that is planted in the garden listens and retributes, bearing, for the owner of the garden, many fruits. There is much abundance of food for the owners of these cultivars.

What I will now describe is the type of language used by the specialist. We might say that it is one of the specific and proper languages to ensure food. For aboriginal peoples there is no possibility other than the abundance of food during a certain period of the annual cycle. Every place in the forest has its owner. All raw materials can be found in the lands/ forests (Azevedo 2022),

they are material goods that belong to the owners, *Yukí³ masa*. Everything that is found in the forest are the cultigens of the forests, of *wa'î masa*, *yukí masa*, *o'mé masa* (people of the airborne space), and for this reason we need to:

Ask the owners for permission– Get permission from the owners regarding what you want to take, to gather for yourself, and in what quantities. I am referring to equilibrium in consumption. Anything one wants to take you must ask for permission to avoid a fatality. Ask for permission, always justifying your aim, explaining why you are taking or gathering from this place. You need to say from where you will get such and such raw material, the sorts of vines, fruits, *arumās*, the mainstays, the rafters, *caraná* straw, *buça* straw, white straw, clay for ceramics, etc.

Negotiation – This is where the specialist's *bahsesé* comes in. The matter of negotiation takes place between the specialist and the owners of certain places in the forest. The human specialist creates a network of social roles, foremost to strengthen this relationality and trust. The characteristic of negotiation creates a link with other humans in human life. In other times, more-than-humans were similar to humans. Yet these other humans did not transform into humans in this earthly layer. Other humans are invisible to humans of this earthly layer, but they can be seen in dreams, etc. In this sense they are important for onomastics in the kinship system. The other human is the grandfather, while his grandchild is human. One is raised by one's name in the kinship system. The specialist reveals that so-and-so is a grandson or granddaughter, and this is why they must be cared for and one must not find their presence strange. Negotiation is a means to create kinship systems between humans and nonhumans to live well.

Offering – The matter of negotiation is materialized in offerings to owners of certain places who have the names. When a negotiation takes place, the specialist is made to metaphysically sit in his stool by the owner. Tobacco is offered, lit and smoking, to be passed between those who are sitting and talking. The gourd of *ipadú* is also passed between people. Whosoever receives these elements must speak, bring forth a memory of his ancestrality. A speech of ancestrality for the present. The gourd of fermented drink is also offered to those who are sitting together. Finally, after this offering, other humans are invited to sit on the stool and to look toward another direction. The owners, other humans, sit and speak of the present.

Soothing (disarming) – Once these offerings have been received, the owners, who are other humans, sit firmly on the stool, smoking tobacco, chewing *ipadú* powder, drinking fermented manioc drink, they remain calm. They are occupied by these elements, consuming them. They do not think of acting against humans. The specialist disarms wild thought (anger), soothing it and metaphysically attributing good thoughts, offering milk and *buiuiu* foam. The milk and foam of *buiuiu* is a metaphor used by the *kumû*. In my academic work, I write that,

“Buiuiu is a low-hanging fruit from the fallows which is found on the garden path or in the gardens; these fruits contain sweet milk and foams, and they are gathered by children to eat, and they are bird food; these little fruits are associated with elements of the basese, the indispensable elements contained in the formulas; a metaphor, prototype of small fruits as activating principles and essences of human life” (Barreto 2019, 69).

Thus, foodstuffs were transformed into the body and the *ehêri pō'ra*, the good thoughts of other humans in human life. In the body,

³ Tree, or wood.

metaphysically constituted as its being in human dimensions in man or woman.

The fruits feast. The feast for offering *Yukí masa* (Tree people) with humans. The hosts that offer fruits are not humans, but rather Yukí masa. They are owners of the lands/forests. This is why there is constant negotiation for the health of the forest and for an abundance of foodstuffs for humans. These other humans offer their goods to humans and humans reciprocate offering fermented drinks in gourds. First, permission must be asked of the owners, this permission is manifest as an offering which is smoked, chewed, and drunk, so that good thoughts may flow. The Yukí masa are humans of the forest. Everything that composes the lands/forests are of the Yukí masa. It is they who offer them to humans. Other humans perform offering rituals to humans by means of the cycle of nature or constellations. As Justino Tuykua claims, this is the fruit feast (Rezende 2023). But also other foodstuffs; *wa'í masa* offers up fish at a certain time during the *piracema* to humans, but they themselves are drinking fermented drink, dancing *kapiwa* (dance of the elders) and playing *wêô pari* (pan flute), eating edible lizards, etc, for these other humans: *Wa'í masa*, for *Yukí masa*, the fruit feast, and it is a day of drinking for the fish, for an abundance of food in the region of the Upper Rio Negro.

Final considerations

These are practices of our specialists when doing *basese* according to the cycle of nature. We would need to put these practices alongside other sciences, public policies, so that we may have a greater participative governance. The aboriginal people of the Eastern Tukanoan group of the Upper Rio Negro have already shown their ways of relationality with the tree peoples. These shamanic actions are so that the forest will remain standing, with the rain that falls

upon ancestral land. It is regrettable that humans do not ask permission from the owners of the forests, with the tree kin, and so it is necessary to constantly negotiate through *basese* with tobacco or smoke from embers in our territories. These fruiting trees offer up foodstuffs for humans, for animals and birds, most of the trees free up oxygen. The Amazon forest is a communal ancestral house, life for the world. Trees, animals, birds, and fish already follow, in a very simple way, the cycles of nature. Only Indigenous peoples, river-dwellers, and peasants do their part to keep forests standing, and we will have many problems in our planet earth. The lands/ forests do not eat their fruits.

The lands/ forests that are in Indigenous Territories, with the rains that fall on the Amazon, strengthen primary vegetation, watering life for the world, as claimed in the Technical Note⁴ of the Serrapilheira Institute (Mattos et al. 2024). This note presents claims that the maintenance of Indigenous lands is fundamental for the hydrological and alimentary security of a large part of Brazil. The Indigenous Territories of Amazonia influence the rains that fall on 80% of the agro-grazing land of the country. It is from these lands/ forests with primary vegetation.

I would like to conclude by saying that the forests will remain standing, life for the world, when our lands/ forests are very safe places to live. Places where our specialist can sit down calmly on his stool of thoughts for his shamanic actions so that lands/ forest may remain steadfast and firm so that we may live according to our cultural practices. We, people of the forests, live in these lands/ forests with our millenary practices, with our Kumuánic languages and our technologies for planetary healing – before the last tree falls in the Indigenous Amazonian land/ forest. ♦



⁴ I am a co-author of this Technical Note.

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