SOUTHERN BRAZILIAN INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS AND THE FOREST: TOWARDS AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

INDIJANSKA DOMORODAČKA POPULACIJA JUŽNOG BRAZILA I PRAŠUME: PRILOG POVIJESTI OKOLIŠA

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Summary

The comparison between the ecological knowledge of the Kaingáng, Guarani, and Xokleng indigenous populations of Southern Brazil, the historical process of species dissemination, and the scientific knowledge may allow the incorporation of recommendations for the sustainability of forest handling, as well as bringing the indigenous knowledge to scientific practices in order to collaboratively handle natural resources. This paper displays a research of the Southern Brazil indigenous environmental history, regarding the use of Vegetable Genetic Resources, landscape, and soil.

Keywords: Environmental History; Ethnopedology; Southern Brazil Indigenous Populations.

Ključne riječi: povijest okoliša (ekohistorija), etnopedologija - domorodačka indijanska saznanja o tlu, indijanska domorodačka populacija južnog Brazila

Historians as Simon Schama claim that no society embraces nature, landscape, dominium or forest harmonically. (Schama, 1996) The optimistic perception defending harmony of traditional societies to the natural world derives, to this day, of the "good savage" perspective, supported especially by the illuminists. (Worster, 1998) In order to interpret relations between a human group and its surroundings, historians start from the moment in which humans absorb socially all that is non-human. Such relations occur as a complexity group, marked by human intervention to the environment, and also by environmental limitations to culture, as a two-way street. (Acselrad, 2004)

In other words, relations between human and non-human are historical relations of biological and socio-cultural tensions in which humans translate their surroundings with aesthetic or survival means, intervening upon it or disturbing it. The surroundings offer limited quantities or opportunities of resources and action. (Worster, 1998)

Agriculture in any level can be researched on its historical analysis, soil use techniques, and landscape handling. When it comes to local, traditional, or indigenous agriculture, the ethnical section of planting techniques and variety diffusion is a convergence point of Food Technology, Farming Sciences, Anthropology, and History studies. For such reasons, indigenous practices of soil use and landscape handling may bring forth more research strategies to bring Farming and Human Sciences closer. Together, Environmental History and Farming Sciences take on intersection matters between food production, environmental transformation, landscape intervention, and human/non-human relations. (Klanovicz, 2007)

When intersections as such come to surface, one of the main elements to consider in the historical analysis of ecologic relations between human and non-human is the byname "use-representation" of soil, landscape, and Vegetable Genetic Resources (VGRs) by the case study social group.

The use of VGRs, soil, and landscape plays a dynamic part in expressing the biological and cultural diversity through its central position in the genetic resources, agro-ecosystems, and social inheritance database. Farming varieties, plantation, identification, and nature naming techniques, as well as landscape handling, represent local cultural practices in unique environmental contexts. They play a decisive part in the cultural survival of ethnic groups through symbolic territory and ritual material maintenance and reinvention - handicraft, songs, origin myths, plantation and crop techniques and rituals, and many other uses from food to medicine. Such concerns are frequent research topics on relations between local populations and landscape, along a wider interdisciplinary scientific matter marked by the approximation of History and Farming Sciences. (Hoeschle-Zeledon & Jaenicke, 2007; Garí, 2005; Mwaura, 2004)

Kaingáng, Guarani, and Xokleng in the Santa Catarina state

Currently Brazil has an indigenous population of approximately 400,000 people distributed in about 200 tribes and 180 languages. Northern Brazil is the region with the highest number of indigenous groups, scattered in the states of Roraima, Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, and Rondônia. There are also countless groups which have had no contact with non-indigenous populations. (Figure 1)

Southern Brazil (Figure 2) has been originally populated by indigenous of two linguistic sources: The Jê and the Tupi-Guarani. The Kaingáng and the Xokleng are branches of the the Jê group, with similar languages and costumes. The Guarani are divided in Guarani M'bya and Guarani Nhandeva. The Xetá indigenous still inhabit the region, especially in the Paraná state.

The Kaingáng are located in Western Paraná, Western Santa Catarina, and Northwestern Rio Grande do Sul, with a population of about 15,000 people in the three Southern Brazilian states, distributed in over 20 Indigenous Territories (IT). In Santa Catarina the main IT is Xapecó, located in Ipuaçú city and near the cities of Xanxerê and São Domingos, in the west. IT Xapecó has a total population of 6,000 people. In present day, its area is of 11,000 acres.

Between western and coastal Santa Catarina. the indigenous population traditionally occupying the territory was the Xokleng. They are currently restricted to the IT Ibirama, located in José Boiteux city, on the Itajaí Valley. The Xokleng are historically known as bugres, botocudos, Aweikoma, Laklano, and Xoklen. (Santos, 1987) The geographical area historically occupied by the Xokleng was located in 26~29° 30' S Latitude and 50° 30'~29° 30' E Longitude, which included coastal areas, supported the Serra Geral and Serra do Mar mountain ranges, and the Brazilian Meridian Plateau. (Santos, 1987) Currently, there are 1,800 Xokleng alive.

In Southern Brazil, Kaingáng and Guarani have traditionally grown corn varieties (*Zea mays*) and Goiabeira-serrana or Mountain Guava (*Acca sellowiana*, formerly *Feijoa sellowiana*). These two ethnic groups, as well as the Xokleng, have always used products of the Araucaria pine (*Araucaria angustifolia*), the yerba-mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*), and the Guabirobeiras (*Campomenesia xanthocarpa* O. Berg).



Figure 1: Brazilian states and regions.



Figure 2: Southern Brazil and its indigenous areas.

The farming varieties used by the Kaingáng, Guarani, and Xokleng indigenous groups (registered by ethnographic and oral sources) in the Biome of Southern Brazil Atlantic Forest provide its farmers a survival repository which also serves to study adaptation to ecologic conditions of many plants, animals, and human groups. Such transformation can only be viewed in a historical point of view.

The research currently being developed in the Centro de Ciências Agroveterinárias of the Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (CAV-UDESC), in the city of Lages/SC is a representation of part of such concerns; it is from this research area, considering relations between technical Agronomy, Forest Engineering, and History academy solid kinds of knowledge, and their confrontation with the restricted and peculiar ethno-knowledge of the previously cited ethnic groups.

The "use of Vegetable Genetic Resources (VGRs), landscape, and soil by the Kaingáng, the Guarani, and the Xokleng in the Biome of Southern Brazil Atlantic Forest" is indeed an initial state research, intending to analyze the uses (planting and cropping, as well as its religious and mythical dimensions), from the point of view of intersections between Soil Sciences and Environmental History, of VGRs, landscape, and soil by the Guarani, Kaingáng, and Xokleng of the Southern states of Brazil: Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina. The focus is to analyze the socio-cultural constructions of such ethnic groups currently within indigenous areas protected by the Fundação Nacional do Índio (Funai).

The research is focusing on the human relation to soil, landscape, and plants such as the yerba-mate, the Araucária pine, corn varieties, and fruit trees such as the Guabirobeira, the Goiabeira-serrana, and the passion fruit (*Passiflora edulis*).

A primary objective emerges of the intersection of Farming Sciences and History, regarding the intensifying discussion of method and theory on the relation among those two knowledge areas regarding investigation instruments, methods, and themes which could bring them closer and create a basis for the elaboration of future interdisciplinary projects.

The Farming Sciences have been growing roots in the History field continuously, searching for local practices connected to the construction of ethnicity and the ecologic and economic relations of traditional populations and their surroundings. This is the result of a soft approach of both sciences, created in the 1960's and supported when agronomists began conceiving farming activities not only as productive and productivity, large-scale oriented, but also as a result of socio-cultural constructions of small and previously marginalized groups. (Maturana, 1997) In this sense, Human Science categories have become part of the analytical universe of Farming Sciences as a manner of empowering, as well as an inclusive concern broadening the scope of the "farming activity" concept. (Floriani, 2007) In other words, understanding farm regimes is a much wider, complex, and democratic process. (Bloch, 2005)

This Environmental History study case is a strictly applicable study with an interdisciplinarity within that very applicability. This has supplied the idea of providing a historical case study for Farming Sciences which handle the matter of VGRs, knowledge protection, ethnopedology (Barrera-Bassols and Zinck, 2004) and ethno-knowledge. (Calavia Saez, 2007)

The historical presence of the three ethnic groups is to be identified, regarding the geographic distribution of vegetable species of traditional use of such groups. In order to do so, there is a necessity of making diffusion and obtaining of VGRs by the indigenous historical, as well as the handling of landscape and soil, once this is part of the byname "Environment-Production", within which the Environmental History analysis has taken a more adequate position regarding landscape handling. (Klanovicz, 2007)

Preliminary Points

1) FIRST UMBRELLA - HISTORICAL RECORDS: Since the late 18th century, the Southern Brazil native population landscape handling has been described by travelers, naturalists, writers, and artists, in technical, literary, or ethnographic works, as well as in journals. Until recently, such readings and descriptions could be framed as exotic, with all its curiosity and prejudice - and maybe for that reason, making the historical constitution of precise and continuous public policies on such social and historical groups in the area much more difficult. There is still an indigenous population economic and cultural clash scenario.

However, such documents are sources of endless information for historians looking for use-representation perspectives on the Brazilian natural universe from the 18th to the 20th centuries, once the west constitutes to this day an object of mystery regarding the Brazilian environmental imagination. (Buell, 2003) The idea of nature has been transformed, leading to inherent scientific transformations, a qualitative and quantitatively better production came as an effort of knowledge retrieval on such territories, to this day little explored on historiography through time and space.

The advent of the *ecologic era*, as the world has become since the 1950's, has brought along the publicity of the environmentalist paradigm. (Worster, 1998) Such paradigm framed most of the society's events and phenomena regarding race, disease, superiority or inferiority explanations through food, and the quality of forests and agriculture or breeding practices of traditional populations, among others. (Arnold, 2002)

The historical analysis of such creative writers who have traveled through Southern Brazil since the 18th century, allied to the social perspective of native groups on their surroundings, and their farming and environmental practices allow, therefore, the comparison of uses, perceiving permanence or rupture of VGR exploit, soil, and landscape, close to oral sources, and current economic and cultural activities of the Guarani, the Kaingáng, and the Xokleng.

The sources are many, and the umbrella that emerges from them comes from the official documentation on the area (such as governmental and business reports, province and later state law, demographic census, land registry, colonizing company reports on indigenous and non-indigenous conflict areas, among others). More than reporting governmental or business accomplishments, such documents name and classify the indigenous groups and the area's biogeographic reality. These are also rich sources to the understanding of the governmental and business elite point of view on the "Brazilian setbacks" and on its poor, marginal, and silent populations.

Such documents report a universe of tensions between modernizing projects, colonies, and plantations, and the indigenous reaction, which has come in the form of various kinds of conflicts. However, this does not exclude the concerns of some indigenous group defense agents, such as in recent researches developed on the humanist/positivist influence on politics and public authorities who defend the Southern Brazil indigenous groups. (Manfroi, 2007)

The popular "quotidian documents" are another great source of records: memoirs, photographs, newspaper and magazine articles are free to report events and suggest solutions as the official reports do, but they also are free to express many opinions, even radical opinions, which are part of the cauldron of society and part of the environmental imagination.

The oral sources: verbal reports, evidences of life stories with social agent details make the context more evident, complementing, illustrating, and presenting its own dynamics over previously cited sources. (Samuel, 1996)

The proximity between History and Farming Sciences shows the environment as a strategic point of view to interpret social relations to the surroundings, by observing the influence factors which configure the relations between human culture and the natural world - bonds built throughout history.

Such point of view has been defended by environmental historians, postulating the environment as an instrument to classify experiences of social groups on nature, and the decisive process of intervention and handling on their surroundings.

2) SECOND UMBRELLA - ETHNOHISTORICAL AND ENVIRONMENTALLY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE KAINGÁNG, GUARANI, AND THE XOKLENG:

According to the Fundação Nacional do Índio (Funai), there are 29,474 Guarani, Guarani M'bya, Guarani Nhandeva, Kaingáng, Xokleng, and Xetá indigenous in Southern Brazil. The Xokleng only inhabit Santa Catarina; the Xetá group live only in Paraná and the Guarani (except for the Nhandeva) are currently in all three Southern states. (Funai, 2007)

The indigenous occupation of Southern Brazil has begun long ago. (Silva, 2006) In the case of the Kaingáng, mobility has always been a part of social life, whether because of subsistence (preferably pine seeds and hunting) or because groups have broken up into subgroups. (Silva, 2006)

The non-indigenous conquest attempts of the Kaingáng territory, since the 18th century, and the later effective occupation of fields and forests (emphasized by the 1850's Land Law) has favored the union of distinctive Kaingáng and Guarani villages, which has promoted the forced transfer of groups previously scattered through the Southern Atlantic Forest. (Silva, 2006) As a counterpart, the traditional territory of all groups has been reduced, especially the Xokleng, who previously covered a territory reaching all three Southern states, and were then confined to a small area in the Itajaí Valley, in Santa Catarina.

The Xokleng used to live in separate, small hunting groups of 30~50 individuals as stationary nomads, occupying lands from the plateau to the coast because of subsistence, season changes, or food shortage. (Vieira, 2004) The non-indigenous extraction and planting in the country has grown continuously in the 20th century, and the contact between indigenous and non-indigenous groups resulted in a grave reduction of territories traditionally occupied by the Kaingáng, Guarani, and Xokleng. Because of the territorial reduction process, costumes, life habits, feeding forms, traditional medicine, and religiosity have been threatened, which are the ethnosciences and socio-cultural constructions of these groups as a whole.

Although the pacification policies directed by the Serviço de Proteção ao Índio (SPI) in 1910 have contributed to weaken, or to even vanish many traditions and knowledge (i.e., through imposing Portuguese as the mother language and prohibiting the native tongue), the communities still preserve knowledge on plants, medication, animals, forest, and soil. (Salvaro, 2007) This is a paradox, for the SPI threatened the indigenous culture through the village policies, but they allowed scientists, ethnographists, and linguists to have contact with the reduced populations and to interpret their culture, history, quotidian, politics, power relations - their social universe as a whole and, as the focus of this research, relations between the indigenous groups and the natural world.

Kimyie Tommasino et al. have elaborated a research on the forest conception of the Kaingáng. (Tommasino et al, 2004) For the Kaingáng, the forest is a hunting and collecting site for any individual; the Araucaria pine seed extraction rights are, to this day, divided between the subgroups. The Araucaria pine skins had signals which divided the public territories. The VGRs, soil, and landscape use plays a dynamic part in the expression of biological and cultural diversities; the farming varieties have specific local cultural practices and environmental contexts, with a decisive part to cultural survival. The Kondá indigenous village area of the Kaingáng in Chapecó/SC is an important example of the fauna and flora usage issue.

The presence of *Ilex paraguariensis* is abundant; in the harvest, the men cut the herbs - this product belongs to the community. The yerba-mate is a trade product in the area companies, and the families receive the beneficiated yerba-mate for the morning and afternoon *chimarrão* (a hot yerba-mate tea) in which the members of a nuclear family talk on many subjects, past (*wãxi*) and present (*uri*). (id, ibid.)

The environment is, therefore, a strategic point of view for the understanding of humans and natural world relations, between the aspirations on space and palpable world effective practices. Issues on "what to eat", "when to eat", "how to eat", "where, when, how and why to plant", among others, help outlining historical constructions with different group perspectives.

The Environmental History perspective is concerned not only on how the environment was altered, or what are the effects of such changes to human societies, but it is also concerned on the ideas of the natural world, and how such ideas have developed and become part of the general farming knowledge.

Conclusions

Traditional handling practices have been contributing to maintain biodiversity. Thora Martina Hermann claims the Mapuche historical knowledge on Araucaria species in Chile and Argentina has contibuted to establish balanced handling practices of the current Farming Sciences. (Hermann, 2005)

To research the ecologic knowledge of such groups in constrast to non-indigenous populations, and confronting them with the historical process of species dissemination gives

support to the VRG area to incorporate sustainable forest handling recommendations, as well as to create conservation strategies *ex situ* and *in situ*, which would incorporate the indigenous knowledge to the scientific knowledge in order to promote the collaborative handling of natural resources.

This analysis on condition, integration, and incorporation of indigenous knowledge by Farming Science researches leads to the consideration of ethnoscience as another fundamental starting point. (Calávia Saez, 2007)

There is a crescent disposition in recognizing local knowledge, not only as a rich source of brute information, but also as a systematic, symbolic, and cognitive kind of knowledge. Traditional and natural knowledges, however, are not the same -- tradition is an idea based on the assumption that local knowledge is part of cultural conservation. Therefore, knowledge is transmitted through a space full of class, relation, gender, and ethnicity barriers. (id, ibid.) Through an analysis of regression and historical correlations, there is the intent to determine the degree of use of ecologic and morphologic characteristics, geographic differences of food supplies, and the social perception on species and their availability. This is necessary to define whether abundance or quantities are relevant to use, permanence, or sustainability.

The survival of traditional practices depends on the revision of farming and conservation policies. Therefore, the construction of instruments and a knowledge database on the conservation of resources is a priority, in order to guarantee the sustainability of such resources. The historical research allows an update of places, objects, and use traditions which have been of importance to analyze the current state of such species in an area; a wider knowledge on VGRs will also be built and established by understanding the sociocultural processes of a social group and their surroudings.

Sažetak

Usporedba između ekoloških saznanja domorodačke indijanske populacije plemena Kaingáng, Guarani i Xokleng južnog Brazila, povijesni procesi diseminacije vrsta te ekološka saznanja dopuštaju uvrštenje preporuka za održivi razvoj i očuvanje prašuma, kao i uvođenje domorodačkih saznanja u znanstvenu praksu kako bi se zajednički i u suradnji rješavalo pitanje prirodnih resursa. Ovaj rad prikazuje istraživanje povijesti okoliša (ekohistorije) indijanskih domorodačkih plemena južnog Brazila u smislu korištenja genetičkih biljnih resursa, okoliša i tla.

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