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Chapter

Munduruku Cosmopolitics and the Struggle for Life

Bárbara do Nascimento Dias

Abstract

The mythical narratives of the Munduruku people in the Tapajós region are permeated by metamorphic transformations from humans to nonhuman beings into vegetables, animals, or spirits. Today, while these beings live as other forms in the world they still have an agency in the lives of humans and can intervene directly in the social life of the villages. The Munduruku strategies used to negotiate with these beings undergo ritualized actions that are also part of everyday life. Most of these actions are intended to bring joy to the spirits, who in return provide them with an abundance of food from the fields, hunt, and fish. This cosmopolitical relationship with these beings, however, is today threatened in the face of logging and mining operations that are advancing on indigenous lands. The pursuit of the defense and demarcation of the territory, in this sense, is intrinsically linked to the sacred places and to nonhuman beings that help to direct the strategies of struggle and political resistance. Thus, the war that the Munduruku people face is to protect the multiple worlds or existing plans, the multiple histories and scenarios where they live.

Keywords: mundurku, cosmopolitics resistances, territory

1. Introduction

For the Munduruku people, as for many Amerindian peoples, the world—or the worlds—is inhabited by various human and nonhuman beings. To relate to the forest, to the rivers, and to the territory also implies relating to these beings, for they are subjects whose agency influences the world of the living. In this same sense, actions carried out in the world of “humans” also have the capacity to interfere in the lives of these other beings, because those are worlds that coexist and intertwine.

Thus, for the Munduruku to be able to relate without noise with the spirits of the ancients, with the mothers of the forest, of the game, and of the fish, they must negotiate conviviality by means of respectful exchanges, based on generosity, with all these beings of distinct forms of existence. It is important to emphasize that the conviviality to which I refer does not mean harmonious coexistence, without conflicts or the possibility of predation. So that the relationship and connection between these diverse worlds, with different materialities and temporalities, do not become chaotic and predatory, the Munduruku trigger ways of doing cosmopolitics through the ability to “articulate the multiple existing worlds” ([1], pp. 446–447).

The Munduruku inhabit the Tapajós river basin, which comprises part of the states of Mato Grosso and western Pará, Brazil, and is the largest tributary of the Amazon river. Known since the eighteenth century as Mundurukânia, the region of the middle and upper Tapajós course is inhabited by at least 14,000 Munduruku and a great diversity of traditional peoples and communities living along its banks and those of its main tributaries, the Jamanxim, Juruena, and Teles Pires rivers.

The Munduruku people live on the banks of the Tapajós and Amazon river basins, between the states of Pará, Mato Grosso, and Amazonas, and are historically known for their warrior character ([2], p. 81). They call themselves *Wuy juju*, whose meaning is “true people,” and are known and feared for their trophy-head hunting expeditions, which lasted until the nineteenth century ([3], p. 48). The name Munduruku was given to them by their former war enemies who lived in the same region, and means “red ant” ([4], p. 368). This paper will limit itself only to those Munduruku on the banks of the Tapajós River, with emphasis on those who inhabit the middle part of the river course between the municipal areas of Itaituba and Trairão, both in Pará.

2. Munduruku cosmopolitics and the struggle for life

Isabelle Stengers’ cosmopolitical proposition recognizes these other ways of existing in the world, and among the Munduruku the relations between humans and nonhumans are almost always ambivalent: sometimes of estrangement and avoidance, and other times of rapprochement. The strategies with which the Munduruku manage these worlds, however, are confronted by logging and mining invasions in their territories, which often affect places that are sacred to them. The respect for these places, as well as the protection of the dwellings of the mothers of the fish, hunting or mountains where the spirits of the ancients’ dwell, for example, are fundamental so that the connection between the multiverse [5] does not become dangerous. Not to protect these places is to provoke the anger of these other beings, who may respond with violence in the form of accidents or illnesses upon the Munduruku.

Beatriz Perone-Moisés is right when she says that we must take indigenous people seriously, which “means, in this case, to stop treating as metaphor or figure of speech that which appears so to us” ([6], p. 18). One must recognize the specificity in the construction of historical processes and narratives present in Munduruku historicity, for every historicity has a specific temporality ([7], p. 109) and this often differs from the linear and “progressive” temporality of Western society. Given that sacred places are inseparable from the Munduruku way of handling the world, we can see how mythic narratives also direct political and social decisions in the present, for these places fall within what Cayon [8] understands as “shamanic geography.”

geografía chamánica debe entenderse como un aspecto fundamental que estructura la realidad al vincular metonímicamente a las personas con el espacio en el que viven, reafirmando sus conexiones históricas y con sus ancestros, y relacionándolos con los otros seres que pueblan el mundo ([8], p. 149).

Thus, the landscapes of the Tapajós region are intrinsically linked to the people’s mythical narratives and their ways of managing the world, that is, the procedures that

ensure the order of their world and allow “the vital processes of the various beings and the succession of the seasons to take place without inconvenience” ([8], p. 17).

The chief of the Sawre Muybu village, Juarez Saw, always travels through the territory with the warriors to find out what has been happening inside the indigenous land. I have sometimes accompanied this type of action, in which the warriors and young people of the Munduruku audiovisual collective¹ would register the presence of mining rafts and tracks opened by loggers. In one of these situations, we passed one of the rafts that, according to the cacique, belonged to the largest illegal mining operation inside the indigenous land, the Chapéu de Sol, whose damage is easily seen by satellite images.

With an ever-watchful eye, cacique Juarez spots the red macaws flying above the forest from afar. It is from the feathers of these macaws that the Munduruku head-pieces are made, and it is these feathers that show their social organization, which is divided into two clans, the white (adorned with yellow and blue feathers) and the red (adorned with red feathers). On our way, we pass near a large raft that has been trying for many years to mine for diamonds out of that place. The cacique points to a mountain in the middle of the vegetation, where there is a large crevice, and says that that is the passage of the pigs, where “they narrowed the river to try to get the son of Karosakaybu,” and went on to tell us that many workers have already died trying to get the diamond out of there. He explains that “they will never succeed because this is a sacred place, there will always be consequences.”

Although there are specific places in the territory to which they refer as sacred sites, usually places where the “mothers” of the animals are, or where there is a concentration of spirits of Munduruku dead or of former Munduruku living on another plane, the territory as a whole and everything that was left out in the administrative demarcation process, although part of their territoriality, is permeated with stories about the people, about the ancestors.

Thus, as the Munduruku themselves point out, the whole territory needs to be protected because there is a multitude of sacred places in it, where their ancestors are. If any destruction happens in these places, the angry spirits may take revenge:

We hear the sound of reeds, the sound of flutes, these are people that we cannot see because they are on the other side of the world, on the other side of life, but they try to communicate to say that they are alive. These are what we call sacred places. We want to get in touch with them, and they with us, but they are in another world (Chief Jairo Saw, interview held in 2017).

The sacred places, so important for the Munduruku people, hold ancestral memories of the people, but they are also channels of communication “between worlds,” for “sacred places are inscribed within people, while they connect them with their ancestors and with other dimensions of the world” ([8], p. 218). In this sense, a place that was once occupied by Munduruku will always be a Munduruku’s place, in which one of the marks is the black land, *Katomp*, in the Munduruku language, it even is responsible for legitimizing reoccupations in the forms of new villages.

¹ The Munduruku audiovisual collective is formed by young women, who accompany the actions of resistance inside and outside the territory. See more at: <<https://www.facebook.com/audiovisualmunduruku/>> [Accessed: March 25, 2021].

3. The Munduruku people and the construction of the world scenario

In the history of the Munduruku people, the Tapajós River, or *Idixidi* in their language, was created by a very powerful warrior of ancient times from the juice of three tucumã seeds. During the paths taken by Karosakuybu, the great demiurge, several places important to the Munduruku cosmology and cosmography appeared, many of which are still considered sacred. With superhuman powers, the great warrior also brought the Munduruku themselves into the world, who in turn “helped to build the scenario of the world, had this participation because the Munduruku were transformed into trees, fish, animals, so for us, they are also beings like us” (cacique Jairo Saw, 2017).²

Thus, the landscapes of the Tapajós region are intrinsically linked to their mythical narratives and their ways of managing the world. For the Munduruku people exist specific places in the territory to which they refer as sacred sites, which are usually places where the “mothers” of the animals are, where there is a concentration of spirits of the dead Munduruku and of the “old ones” living in another world. But the territory as a whole, and also everything that was left out in the administrative demarcation process is permeated with stories about the people, about the ancestors, and contains some degree of “sacredness.”

According to Munduruku narratives, the spirits of the ancients are those who, during the time when the Munduruku had the power to metamorphose, became animals, vegetables, turned into streams, or simply chose to live in another world. The elders say that at that time their bodies were made of tapir lard, which is why they had such transformative powers. As for the spirits of the dead, they are all those who “lost their human life” and their spirits went to the forest, because, as the Munduruku teacher Hiléia Poxo told me: “when we die our spirits go to the animals, they go walking with the spirits of the ancestors” (Hiléia Poxo, Poxo Muybu Village, interview held in 2020).

Sacred places not only nurture a relationship of identification with the Munduruku, but also relationships of reciprocity, through the exchange of gifts with the various beings that exist in the territory. In line with Cayon and Chacon [9]: “los lugares no están sólo conectados con las narrativas míticas sino con otros elementos como las curaciones chamánicas, los cantos, la música y los objetos, donde todos sirven como vehículos o manifestaciones de conocimiento” (2014, p. 216).

In the myth about Karosakaybu, the great warrior metamorphoses some Munduruku into pigs as punishment for having denied his son food, even coming across the abundance of a great hunt. By turning those who did not share the food into pigs, Karosakaybu established a way of acting, a parameter for what is or is not a “social being.” Thus, not sharing the game is considered an act that breaks Munduruku rules of sociability and can even interfere with the availability and diversity of such game, which is released by the mother of these groups of animals. The spirits of these animals can come through dreams to rebuke those who are stingy and, in addition, the act of eating game can also be considered a ritual. The sharing of the game is still reflected today in the way the Munduruku deal with this type of food. Even though being composed of small animals, the game must be shared among all the inhabitants of the village.

The Munduruku who were turned into pigs were confined in a kind of enclosure inside the village. The armadillo Daydu, another mythical character, went to

² Chief of Sawre Aboy village, interview conducted in 2017.

Karosakuybu's son to urge him to leave the hammock his father had ordered him to stay in while he went hunting, and persuaded him to open the enclosure where the pigs were and feed them tucumã. When the pigs realized who had opened the enclosure, they wanted to take revenge on Karosakaybu and set out in pursuit of his son. To try to reach him, the pigs, who also had superhuman powers, narrowed the banks of the Tapajós, but according to some narratives, never managed to catch the descendant of the great warrior.³

They left marks on the mountain the trail they had passed through, as well as Karosakuybu's footprint on the stones by the river. For the Munduruku, this place, called *Daje Kapap Eipi* (sacred passage of the pigs), which today gives its name to the territory, cannot be disturbed, otherwise, they may suffer from various types of "accidents" and diseases that the angry spirits may cause, such as scorpion and snake bites. The constant invasions of miners in the area, however, negatively interfere with the dialog that maintains the coexistence between various worlds. The chief of Sawre Aboy village, Jairo Saw, told me this story:

karosakaybu said that he was going to turn some of his relatives into food because if they are being denied food, then they will serve as food for future generations. So he turned these Munduruku into pigs when the karosakaybu's son was deceived by the boy Daydo. The pigs recognized the karosakaybu's son and then said, "it was his father who turned us this way, so we will also punish his son! "Then he was chased, but they could never find him because he turned into everything: fruit, scorpion, snake, bee, all sorts, but the others could still identify him, smell him. They never caught him [...] In our Sawre Muybu territory there is the sacred place where the son of karosakaybu was persecuted. It also has the path of karosakaybu that is under the earth that is called the path of the worm, which is like a tunnel, a secret passage under the earth. So they had the mastery of space and could shorten the path to be there anywhere. We call it *noma*, (underground paths) (Jairo Saw, Itaituba, 2017).

Jairo tells another part of the myth: After losing his first son, who had never been seen again, Karosakaybu carved a wooden doll and, in one breath, gave him life. When his son grew up, the women began to have sex with him, until one day the men of the village found out about it. They then went to talk to Karosakaybu, who decided to transform his son into a tapir, which did not stop the women from continuing their relations with him. In retaliation, the husbands gathered to kill him, and, after it was done, cooked him for the whole village to eat. When the women found out what they had done, they decided to take revenge: "so, they told the men, 'tomorrow everyone goes hunting!' When they went, the women lined up, performed a ritual, and, singing, fell into the water to turn into fish" (Jairo Saw, personal communication).

Today, in order for them to score the big catch with timbó⁴ they have to do the Tinguejada ritual to ask permission from the mother of fish, "which is Xiquiridá, Karosakaybu's wife—I will talk about this ritual in more detail later. She is the one who pulled the woman to transform into fish, this ritual is to make her happy. If she is happy, we can make the big catch" (Jairo Saw, personal communication). Taking care

³ In another version of this story, Karosakaybu managed to trap the pigs between some mountains, but his son ended up staying with them and no longer seen by the demiurge.

⁴ The timbó is part of a group of plants in the leguminous and sapindaceous families, and is used by the Munduruku, as for several other indigenous peoples, to stun fish, making them float and facilitating fishing.

of the mother of the forest, the fish, and the game, as well as protecting the sacred places and objects, are all part of a cosmopolitical relationship, for they are agencies that operate and articulate themselves both in the earthly world of the living and in the worlds of other beings.

The Tinguejada ritual takes place between the two moieties of the social organization.⁵ During the ritual, the women and men from opposite moieties try to pass sorva on each other. This ritual aims to bring joy to Xiquiridá, the mother of the fish. When approaching the dono-maestria-maternity theme, Carlos Fausto [10] understands that this relationship is constitutive of sociality and “characterizes interaction between humans and nonhumans” ([10], p. 16). About Tinguejada, the mother tongue teacher, Hiléia Poxo, clarifies:

The fish were also transformed by human beings, that's why when we have a tinguejada it's like a party for them. That is why when we go to a tinguejada and start to play, and do the game very well, then those pretty fish die. When we do not do it right, the pretty fish do not die, only some, because the game wasn't done right, the prettier fish hide, that's why they do not die. When we do it right, respecting them, they die happy, because it is like a party for them. (Teacher Hiléia Poxo, Poxo Mubybu village, 2020).

On the day of the Tinguejada, women may not be menstruating and no one should have sexual intercourse the day before, otherwise, the fish that we cannot see in this dimension will climb trees and throw dry leaves in their place, thus preventing them from being caught. Trophy headhunts, performed by the Munduruku until the eighteenth century, also fulfilled functions similar to the ritual performed to make the mother of the fish happy. Comprising three parts, the ritual lasted from one and a half up to two years, and the warrior involved had to comply with a series of interdictions. The first part of the ritual was the *Inyenborotaptan*, (ear adornment), where the ears of such heads were adorned according to the clan of the warrior who conquered it (white or red clan). The second part of the ritual, the *yashagon*, as described by Murphy [11], consisted of shaving the head, and the third and last part was pulling the teeth out of the head and hanging them on belts or necklaces. Once a Munduruku told me that during the process in which the teeth were being pulled, it was necessary to put them inside the mouth of the one doing it, so that they would not be stolen by the spirits.

Headhunting was a way to please the mother of the peccaries, *daje ixé yu*, so that she could maintain the reproductive power and abundance of the peccaries. In addition, the heads also aided in the people's own physical reproduction, as well as the “renewal of the warrior movement, since it was assumed that the belt of teeth increased the bearer's chances of getting new victims” ([10], p. 459). In this sense, the heads of war enemies went through what Fausto (2014) calls familiarizing predation, since, from the beginning of the ritual, these heads were introduced “into a segment of that society” ([10], p. 458) by being adorned with the same colors as the clan of its hunter, transforming an enemy, whose spirit might come to take revenge, into something allied, or belonging to the hunter's group.

About Munduruku headhunts, the chief of Sawre Mubyu village, Juarez Saw, told me that there were two types of headhunts: those of other Munduruku, from other

⁵ The Munduruku organize themselves into two exogamous halves: white and red. On the social and kinship relationship, return to the introduction.

villages, whose heads had great power of attracting the hunted, and were also very desired by the spirits because they also wanted this hunting facility; and the other is the hunting of heads of other ethnicities, which gave the warrior value and status.

Maintaining the tranquility of multiple worlds, with sacred places protected, while the hunts continue to be released to feed the villages, is part of a set of agencies that are being negotiated all the time in order to maintain conviviality among the Munduruku multiverse, controlling alterities in a “constant *lucha contra el carácter disruptivo del caos*” ([12], p. 53) so that, in this way, it can also maintain social reproduction. This kind of negotiation that “articulates multiple worlds” is, in Stengers’ terms ([1], pp. 446–447):

The cosmos, here, must therefore be distinguished from every particular cosmos, or every particular world, as a particular tradition may think of it. And it does not designate a project that would aim to encompass them all, because it is always a bad idea to designate an encompassing for those who refuse to be encompassed by anything else. The cosmos, as it appears in this term, cosmopolitical, designates the unknown that constitutes these multiple, divergent worlds, articulations of which they could become capable, against the temptation of a peace that would claim to be final, ecumenical, in the sense that a transcendence would have the power to require of that which is divergent that it recognize itself as only a particular expression of that which constitutes the point of convergence of all.

Myths end up giving guidelines on ways of acting that guarantee people’s sociability. Santos-Graneiro [13] emphasizes the importance of thinking of myths as “sacred truths,” literal and conscious manifestations that are present in all spheres of life and “provide guidelines for social action” ([12], p. 18). Thus, the Munduruku participation in the construction of this landscape of the world described by the cacique Jairo Saw must be taken seriously, because not only are they producing the history of these landscapes, they are also “producing knowledge and reality, confronting the reality created by Western science” ([14], p. 599). They thus tension the production of the Western “single world” that has the extinguishing of multiple worlds as its *modus operandi*.

The pursuit for the defense and demarcation of the territory is intrinsically linked to sacred places and nonhuman beings that help directing strategies of struggle and political resistance, as contemporary works on the people have been demonstrating. In her work with the Munduruku resistance movement *Iperég Ayu*, for example, Rosamaria Loures [15] highlighted the presence and importance of shamans in Munduruku movements and occupations against hydroelectric dams and in other resistance actions. The shamans are subjects who possess “two visions” ([15], p. 206), that of the world of the living and that of the spirits, and it is through them that the guidelines and strategies of struggle are revealed, so their presence, in these moments, is indispensable. The shamans, however, are responsible for both the good things that happen in the village and the bad things that also might happen. There is an ambivalence that marks the life of these pajés, as well as the Tapirapé pajés:

They are essential for social reproduction and, at the same time, they are feared and dangerous, that is, they seem to have a threatening power for society. In the figure of the shaman there is a combination of the figure of the enemy and that of the whole person. The tapirapé imagine that every death is caused by the witchcraft of one of them. Thus, the shamans must live in strong family groups that are able to protect them ([14], p. 38).

Even with their ambivalent power, the shamans access the multiple worlds and mediate relations with them. They are important figures in the struggle for land the Munduruku people face. This struggle is for the existent different worlds or planes, for the multiple histories and scenarios they inhabit. When analyzing the paths and territories trodden and lived by the Mbyá indigenous people, Guimarães [14] analyzes how indigenous peoples understand that territories are made of human and nonhuman beings as subjects identified in narratives, situated in histories, and with whom they establish social relationships. He goes on to argue that territories are space-time of social interactions, where there are beings with whom they weave social relations of both peaceful and bellicose reciprocity. In these interactions, several plans are made and the Munduruku need to deal with them. They make themselves Munduruku and make their world through this careful interaction.

In all elaborations of resistance that I followed from the Munduruku, where chiefs, leaders, shamans, and warriors were present, the songs were always present, sung before or during the occupations and demonstrations held by them. These songs evoke the presence and wisdom of the ancients, telling their trajectories and strategies of fighting in the wars they took part in. According to Hiléia Poxo (2020): “whenever a person goes to the movement, the spirits of the old people who died are always close by, that is why they sing so that they can hear our songs and let them know that we have our living culture. The living culture, as described by the teacher, can be interpreted as what the Munduruku recurrently refer to, not without a certain pride, about the ‘warrior spirit,’ reaffirmed by the odysseys played by the ancients, the head cutters of the Brazilian Amazon.”

The Munduruku war against invaders and development projects that presuppose the destruction of these sacred places has the “purpose” to maintain the life of different beings that inhabit the multiverse, keeping them within a relationship of coexistence, not one of chaos. They think, feel, and live this multiverse differently from the State’s war, and its territorial occupation, which is against all forms of multiplicity. The relationship between the Munduruku and these beings can be read from the concept of gift in Marcel Mauss [16], as conviviality and predation are not always opposed. In the Munduruku case, they go together, and are not rarely mediated by gift exchanges. To understand how conviviality, predation, and gift are connected, we will see how the gift is defined by anthropology.

4. Giving, receiving, and giving back: the spirit of giving

Starting from the assumption that gift exchanges can exist universally, Marcel Mauss [16] makes a series of comparisons between the various regions and continents where the exchange of gifts are present. According to the author, they generate alliances and sociability and can occur through matrimonial, political, economic, legal, etc. Exchanges materialize in different ways, whether through parties, gifts, visits, or the circulation of goods and people. In many societies, gift exchanges are present throughout daily life, as well as in cosmopolitical relations, that is, between humans and nonhuman beings.

In said gift exchanges, unlike mercantile exchanges, whose relationship is between subject and object, the exchange of “objects” is constituted as a relationship between subjects [17]. When one exchanges something, one also exchanges part of oneself, for that which goes, is embedded with spirituality, soul. That which is given must be received and reciprocated, but this obligation is, at the same time, “performed”

as spontaneous. The gift differs from other types of exchange because its exchange, in most cases, is not immediate, and can even occur between generations, between peoples, and between beings of different forms of existence. Its specificity, however, is in what “transcends” what is exchanged, because it is not a relationship between subject and “object”—in the Western way of understanding the latter—it is a relationship between subjects. It is a long-term relationship, not one an immediate exchange such as defined by the edges of capitalism. To give, receive, and reciprocate is a continuum that is constituted and constitutes social life, and it is also the triad that makes up the gift.

The refusal to give or receive something can mean war or the path of enmity, as described by Davi Kopenawa about the ethics of exchange among the Yanomami. By bartering, on the other hand, collectives are linked, and alliances are consolidated:

When the road that leads to another house is not for us a path of goods, we say that it has the value of enmity. In that case, we can wage war against the people to whom it leads, [...] on the contrary, when we first come into contact with the inhabitants of an unknown house to make friends, we exchange with them everything we have. ([18], p. 414).

In the Munduruku myth of Karosakuybu turning his relatives into pigs for having denied food to his son, we can see that by denying something to someone one also denies what guarantees the sociability of the group. In the case of the myth, by denying hunting, a behavior that is considered unsocial, one loses the status of “humanity,” culminating in the transformation of people into game animals. In the Munduruku villages, games or fish must be shared, as mentioned before, even if they are only available in small quantities. If this food is not distributed among the families in the village, the mother of the fish and game may appear in dreams to “scold” the Munduruku or even limit and exhaust the possibilities of being able to access said food.

Also, according to Mauss, in the exchange of gifts “souls are mixed into things, things are mixed into souls. Lives are mixed, and thus the mixed persons leave each one of their own spheres and mix together: which is precisely the contract and the exchange” ([16], p. 213). If by exchanging something the receiver feels morally obliged to reciprocate, Mauss questions, it is because there is something more to this relationship than goods going, coming, or being passed on. For the author, “if things are given and reciprocated, it is because ‘respects’ are given and reciprocated—we can also say ‘courtesies.’ But it is also because people give themselves by giving, and, if people give themselves, it is because they ‘owe’ themselves—themselves and their goods—to others” ([16], p. 263).

To reflect on Munduruku sociability, like Yanomami sociability, would require thinking about the exchanges established in interethnic contact between indigenous and white people, but also about the exchanges within the group itself and with other nonhuman beings. Among the Munduruku, contact with non-Indians peoples occurred most intensively through the SPI (Serviço de Proteção ao Índio—Indian Protection Service) and later through the *regatões*⁶, for while the Munduruku worked in latex harvesting and made rubber for exchange, the *regatiros* took drugs from the *sertão*, “luring” them to the riverbanks. According to Dias-Scopel, “to some extent,

⁶ The *regatões* traveled the rivers of the Amazon in small boats to exchange products from the city for products from the forest.

the rubber enterprise eventually placed the Munduruku in a circuit of the local and global economy, in which they inserted themselves as part of an extensive network of production and circulation of commodities.” Chief Juarez Saw, who also worked in latex and sorghum milk collection as a young man, SPI agents also took goods to trade with rubber,

“They started to buy rubber first. It was the SPI people, there were two guys [SPI agents] who took the goods directly to the Munduruku post to exchange them for rubber. Then, after them, the regatons came in. Then a bunch of regatão went up by boat to take goods” (Juarez Saw, 2020).

Exchanges with nonindigenous peoples, however, had been taking place since the nineteenth century, when travelers, mainly foreigners, traded Western items for trophy heads that were no longer useful to the Munduruku. Soon after, the gatekeepers, as the buyers of animal skins are called, such as maracajá cats, bush cats, and jaguars, also began to trade with the indigenous people.

Although these are the most obvious forms of exchange, and which undoubtedly generated significant changes in Munduruku ways of life and sociability, this is not the only exchange relationship between them. Between the spirits of the ancients, with the mothers of the forest, the pigs, or the fish, gift exchanges mediate the good (or bad) communication between them. That can also occur between hunters and hunted, between shamans and spirits, and between humans and nonhuman beings.

An example of this is the relationship between hunter and hunted among the Munduruku and Yanomami. In Yanomami cosmology, the hunted give themselves to the hunter, attracted by objects given by the shamans to be used in the hunt. The hunted give themselves, and the hunters receive and take them back to the village. This hunter, however, cannot consume the game he has taken, he has to make it go further. It is the logic of the gift that is at work: giving, receiving, and giving back. Thus, other hunters will have to do the same and this hunter will feed on the game of another, creating a relationship of interdependence among the group. If this triad is broken and the hunter consumes his own game, the animals of the forest will respond by no longer giving themselves to him, and this hunter will become panema.⁷ Without being able to bring food to the village, social relations between him and the group may be damaged.

In the Munduruku case, the hunter and hunted relationship are also complex. In one of the many dialogs, I had with a great sage and leader of Sawre Muybu, the chief Juarez Saw, one of them seemed especially interesting. Instigated by the fact that many Munduruku had been transformed into animals, as the myths tell, I asked him about his relationship with the animals they hunted. The chief told me that when the Munduruku found a group of peccaries or other animals, it was because the mother of those animals—who for some peoples are called chiefs of the hunt, as occurs in the Runa ([19], p. 106)—set them free to be hunted by them. The animals, Juarez Saw told me, “walk all around here, they know where we are, they know who we are, if we can hunt them, it is because they gave us permission. They are the ones who find us.”

According to him, the game, in their worlds, think that Munduruku humans are shamans. “When, in their world, these animals get sick, they go to meet the ‘shamans’ to be cured” (Juarez Saw, 2020), and the number of sick ones in the animal world is

⁷ Panema is a term used for hunters who can no longer catch game or fish. Either because a spell has been cast on them, because he has transgressed some interdiction, or because he has disrespected the hunts.

exactly the same amount that goes in flocks to meet the Munduruku in their human form. This encounter is the hunt, which functions as the beginning of a healing ritual whose last act is the meal. According to the chief Juarez Saw:

We dream about these people when they give themselves up. And when they are in the bush, it's not just any game that they will offer to the village. Because, for example, it will be night, right, and then we will dream about them, but they have also joined together in the bush, for example the pig, and then he says: "How many sick people are there in our midst? "Who wants to consult with the Pajé?" And we are Pajé to them. This is how they give themselves to us. Then they will indicate themselves: "Me! "I am also going! Then it will be a woman, "I am also going", I am sick. If it's two, it's two, if it's four, it doesn't go beyond their indication. You only see the one who is going to die, you don't see the others. Then you shoot him, "pow", then he comes back here, when we finish eating his meat he goes back to the bush. (Juarez Saw, Sawre Muybu village, 2020).

After the game is eaten, the skulls of the hunted are placed under trees near the houses. Their spirits return to other animal bodies, now in good health. Murphy [11], during his work with the Munduruku of the upper Tapajós in the 1950s, had already described rituals for pacifying the mothers of the hunted using animal skulls.

Before the skulls were placed in order, they were washed with a fragrant solution made from the envira cherosa and then with miirt, a sweet manioc gruel. Miri is thought to be especially pleasing to the spirit mothers, and a bowl was kept near the skulls so that the spirits could eat after answering the summons. ([11], p. 60).

In the middle Tapajós, it is still possible today to perceive this ritual operating in the daily life of the village, where around the houses these skulls are, to unsuspecting eyes, "thrown" randomly. Although the ritual does not happen the way it was described by Murphy in "Mundurucu religion" (1958), one can see how it still occurs, with few modifications. Children are even told from a very young age not to play with those skulls, because the spirits may cause them harm. According to Professor Deusiano Saw

There are some rules that we have to tell our children, so that they do not play with that, because we might suffer something. When you separate a jabuti's shell you should not play with it, too, so it's everything... there are rules too, with the mother in the river too, it's the same way, when I catch animals, you should not play with their spines, I may have an accident and have serious consequences too, because they penalize us too, right, so we catch them and should not play with them (Deusiano Saw, interview conducted in Sawre Muybu village, 2020).

Viveiros de Castro, in *Os deuses canibais: a morte e o destino da alma entre os Araweté* (1982), brings a perspective on the understanding of sacrifice between humans and nonhumans that can corroborate the analysis of the Munduruku's relation to hunting. According to him, in the Awaweté cosmology, humans, when dying, will meet the *Mai*, who will go through a ritual of cannibalism that will transform these dead into gods. When eating the hunted, the Munduruku also perform a kind of ritual sacrifice. The body is eaten so that the spirit can be healed and return to the forest, thus obtaining new ways of existence.

Among the Munduruku, it is recurrent to hear that the older men, for example, have more experience with otherness, because they have already gotten lost in the forest during days of hunting, and have seen and gone through things that the younger ones are yet to go through. Getting lost in the forest is not something casual or an accident, because according to what they told me when this is not the result of some *cauxi* (spell) that was cast on the hunter, it is because the spirits of the forest did this to teach the hunter to respect the game animals, not to be playing around and making jokes during meals because those hunts have spirits, they are his relatives from the time of the ancients. The forest is a place to be taken seriously.

After the Munduruku goes through such situations several times, which can also be of sickness, they become “intimate” and “friends” with these spirits, after which they are allowed to play around during meals or afterward, when the skulls of the hunts are still around the houses ([11], pp. 59–60). Juarez Saw clarifies how this approach to the spirits happens:

She shows up to fight with us, because we say a lot of things. He is not a person to play with, we can, but we have to go through a lot of process. For example, if I play with a pig's head, then I can get injured. Then I spend a week sick, really sick, I'm no longer in this world here, I'm already in their world. Why do I go there? because it's for me to know what they do. they take me there, with my spirit, just for me to know. Just for them to say: look, we are no joke. Then I walk with them, and then they send my spirit back, then I get better. From there you already bring back a lot of stories from this trip that you went with them. Then again, about five times, then you can be their friend, then you can do whatever you want with your head, with your meat, with everything. Then we play with them and they smile too, but not yet. (Juarez Saw, Sawre Muybu village, 2020).

For the Munduruku, most illnesses are occasioned by *cauxi* or because the mothers of the hunts and spirits of the forest want to teach them something. On certain occasions, as cacique Juarez Saw reported to me, if the spirits of the animals take someone to teach them a lesson, their spirit will walk with their spirits in the forest, as their body in the world of the “living” gets sick, suggesting that consciousness and spirit are not umbilically linked. Sometimes the spirits of these animals are very pleased with this person and do not want to return his spirit anymore, and it is up to the shaman to do the negotiation to recover the subject's spirit.

When the person's spirit goes to the forest, then the people from the community ask the shaman to consult that person that has been sick for more than a month, then he goes there and says: no, this person already has no spirit, he is already going to the forest to stay with the spirit of the animals, of the pig, of all the animals... he goes... first he goes to an animal, then he gets sick because of how much he stayed with this animal, then some time goes by and he goes to another animal. Then he spends some time with them, then he gets sick, then he goes to another animal and keeps going. Then the one... said that he will leave when he leaves when he walks with all the spirits of all the game of all the animals of the forest, then he passes to the spirit of the monkey. Then it becomes more difficult to bring. And so they do. Then they call the community to make a porridge to call the spirits of all the animals of the forest, then they call three Pajé or four Pajé, but good ones. Then they make it for almost a week, and then they stay inside the village and start to sing near the patient, the Pajé. There, each one has his or her own chant, every animal. Then the pajés sing, not only the pajé, but the

singers themselves, who are specific just to call the spirit that knows the dance of all the animals, then they start with one, and if there is not one, they say: “it’s not with us, no”, but the pajé keeps an eye on it, and then moves on to another one, for almost a day singing only one animal’s song. And the mingauzão is going on. Every day that goes by, spirits are arriving there, and they go looking for them in every corner, until sometimes they find the spirits of the deer, of the pig. With this ceremony there comes both good and evil spirits, and the shaman is for this, so that the evil spirit does not touch them. When they manage to do so, they put the head of the dried tapir, like we find pigs’ heads, and they keep it, and when it is during these ceremonies they take it and put it inside the house, around the corners. Then when the spirits of the forest come, with the spirit of that person comes a lot, then it enters in the place of the tapir’s brain. Do not you have that hole that stays just inside? Then they go in all the way. He says that when they arrive there is a lot of noise, a lot of people come. Then the shamans stay outside the house too, to keep the evil people out. They are like their guardians, and there are others inside the house and some at the door. Back in the Sai cinza we participated a lot in this kind of ceremony, now it is difficult, it is very difficult for us to see. (Juares Saw, Sawre Muybu village, 2020).

Death in this sense is not the definitive rupture of life. It is related to the change of corporality, which, as said by Aparecida Vilaça about the Wari in *Eating like people* [20], is connected with the change of relatives, because when the doubles of these subjects are taken by the doubles of the animals, he continues to perceive himself as human in the forest, but inserted into other sociocosmic networks [10] in view of the fact that his former relatives will no longer see him as human but as a game. Death for the Munduruku as much as for the Wari is a relational rupture [21]. The moment when the spirit of the sick person will walk with the forest animals, and the shaman tries to return him to his human relatives, is a liminal space/time/condition [22] in which changes and transformations can happen or simply return to what was before. That is, either that sick person will change his corporality, relatives, and dimension, or he will return to his relatives and “human” corporality.

5. Concluding remarks

For the Munduruku, the territory is not only where their ancestors lived and where they continue their occupation process. The dead are not framed in a picture depicting the past, are not static in a time gone by, or are alive only in the memory of the people. These dead, their ancestors, are also in the present, they have agency, personality, and rationality in the same way as the spirits, the peccaries, the açai trees, and the mothers of the animals. The way reality and time are constituted for the Munduruku people confronts our own perceptions of time and of what we so pretentiously call reality.

Nevertheless, the indigenous people lead us to conclude that our conception of politics is not sufficient to understand the complex relationships in which these people are inserted. As well put by Cadena [23] and Stengers [1], we need to “pluralize” politics: not limit the concept to power disputes between opposing forces, but rather make it pluriversal, involving all human and nonhuman beings who seek conviviality.

The Munduruku are fighting for territory, but this territory cannot be read as a space without any kind of agency. The Western way of understanding the world often

establishes dualisms and dichotomies to explain the social, such as subject/object, nature/culture, male/female, and the idea that one must dominate the other. But these dualisms do not make sense to these people, being that too many Amerindian peoples here the idea of a continuum makes sense, which sometimes brings subjects together and sometimes distances them depending on the relational play.

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Author details

Bárbara do Nascimento Dias
Social Anthropology at the National Museum, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Brazil

*Address all correspondence to: barbaradiasuft@gmail.com

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