

THE MARCH OF THE MANIKINS

Agroforestry practices and spiritual dancing in Northwest Amazonia.

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Abstract

Among the Tukanoan indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon, certain practices represent and reflect outstanding examples of ecological knowledge and management. This paper focuses on one of these practices: "The March of the Manikins" also called "The Dance of the Spirits" (Arhem 1998).

The March of the Manikins is not offered to honour a particular god and it is not a totemic dance in strict sense of the term. Besides its environmental management importance, this Tukanoan ritual is an astonishing expression of the aesthetic and religious values of the Amazonian indigenous peoples. The author directs attention to the fact that by understanding these cultural practises, western society could deliver a new semantic, contributing to the re-definition of "sustainability" concept that would involve both, material and spiritual dimensions. This would be part of a dialectical process for the appropriation of a meta-language that could set up new patterns for environmental management practices and policy delivering.

Introduction

Are indigenous managerial systems sustainable? Conservationists, politicians, academics, preservationists and indigenous peoples keep debating on this issue. Environmental policies favoring or contradicting indigenous rights are justified upon arguments raised from this discussion.

Ethnoscience has found that human involvement with the natural environment have developed in accordance with ecosystems functioning. They have found that the distinction between nature and society seems to be an odd concept for many indigenous societies (Descola & Palsson 1996). The ways of living of Amerindians and other indigenous peoples all around the globe involve aesthetic and spiritual dimensions that contribute to the functioning of the environment and society as a whole. In the case of the Tukanoan from Northwest Amazonia the placement of human beings is within the environment (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1996). Tukanoan and Northwest Amazonian indigenous ways of living illustrate the ideas of Rappaport on the

relevance of religion and ritualisation for the management and adaptability to the environment (Rappaport 1999).

Other perspective is that of conservationists that advocate for a specialized management of the global environment. For this management to be effective, nature must be objectivised and the appropriate technology should be developed. By this way, conservationists perpetuate the ontological dualism nature/society. Conservationists are able to show as effective results from this approach that inventory and long-term monitoring have contributed to the understanding of global environmental problems and to the setup of verifiable indicators within environmental management.

Political ecological perspective questions the approximation of environmental management when seen as administration of places. For an environmental or ecological justice to be applicable, environment must not be seen as a material entity to administrate, but as shared space (Low and Gleeson 1998).

Sometimes deliberately and others unconsciously, indigenous peoples are said to be ignorant or incapable of managing the environment, not having the scientific and technological resources they require to do so. Behind this argument there is the assumption that indigenous social systems consciously or unconsciously are inherently incapable of managing their environment¹. Indigenous peoples could get deprived of their rights, denied of managing their own territories and finally be place in vulnerable situations that could drive them to cultural and physical destruction. (Colchester, 1997)

Conservationists defend a position in which protection of natural areas is possible when human intervention is controlled. Extreme preservationists want to isolate the environment from any form of human intervention. At the other extreme of the debate, there are those called "neo-indigenists" (Agrawal 1995), which advocate authentic, sometimes autarchic indigenous management of the environment. Both groups, conservationists and neo-indigenists, have arguments supporting managerial styles that though differing in methodology seek 'sustainability'.

Conciliating environmental management, local governance, and indigenous people's rights might be possible but the controversy between conservationists and indigenists continues inspiring contradictory policies. The need to implement effective policy for environmental management of

¹ The discussion is developed by Hornborg (1996): While Bateson (1972) and Rappaport(1979) argue that there are in social mechanisms of self-regulation; Friedman (1979) rejects this proposition.

Amazonia has urged participants to innovate. Efforts have been made everywhere to develop hybrid environmental management based on participatory approaches². Within the hybrid management policy is not derived exclusively from the results of hardcore scientific research, nor from indigenous knowledge and practices. Advocates of a hybrid management argue that in the XXI century, where the link between economic development and global environmental problems is recognized everywhere, it is inevitable to come to agreements for environmental management in which we all are involved.

The hybrid management operates when there is partnership between the scientific establishment and grassroots organizations. Ethnoscience has been promoting this kind of partnership for many years (Schultes 1991). There have been transfers of information used in the analysis of ecosystems, the development of industries, the provision of services and the development legislation. Indigenous peoples have found this useful as an instrument to assure territorial and cultural rights, and sometimes, to gain control over their lives and territories. From the perspective of political ecology, the encounter between global market dynamics and local environmental management should be analyzed in terms of power relations. This perspective does not promote development of new managerial recipes for development but the enquiry on the relationship between managerial institutions and local peoples in terms of preservation of territories and the evolution of meanings as adaptive responses.

The hybrid model is not easy to implement. There are several questions challenging scholars, managers and grassroots leaders alike: To what extent can *engaged*³ anthropology promote social change?, Are environmental and indigenous peoples' rights complementary? How do we deliver policy when both rights compete rather than complement with each other? How do we respond to religious and economic practices that could be *maladaptive*⁴, threatening 'partnership' in environmental management?.

These questions reflect confrontation of divergent perspectives and incompatibility of life-styles. This could be illustrated with an example. A few years ago, while working for COAMA⁵, we received a visit from a friend interested in indigenous opinion on property rights. Our friend was

² See Warren et. al for compilation of case studies

³ Engaged Anthropology (Rappaport 1993, 1994a, 1994b) is also known as Applied Anthropology.

⁴ Here we follow Rappaport (1993) concept in which *maladaptation* occurs when special-purpose subsystems take on general-purpose functions, promoting their own interests but at the expense of a more general welfare.

⁵ COAMA: Program for the Consolidation of Amazonia. A Network of NGOs working in the Colombian Amazon.

promoting the recognition of communal rights as an alternative to individual rights (patents), which were seen as a threat to indigenous peoples, who were unable to compete with multinationals in the acquisition of patents. The researcher went to Araracuara and interviewed indigenous peoples. She asked the elders of some of the ethnic groups, what did they think about establishing communal compensation or payment for the use of product and services derived from traditional environmental knowledge. The group immediately agreed that this action was immoral. They explained that knowledge for healing or curing people, (even when generated locally) should not be safeguarded or sold. They explained to her that they were not expecting money for a service that everyone should have for free. What they were expecting was that white people; doctors in particular, would behave within this morality, providing services and medicines to anyone who needed them.

The ascription of meanings to particular words endures our political actions⁶. The language we use reflects our perspectives of environmental management. Could we enhance such perspective including non-western meanings to our nominations? Such process would require re-defining concepts in such a way that would made it possible to apprehend indigenous epistemology. Therefore we would be facing a dialectic process in which meanings are re-constructed rather than replaced.

It is evident that hybridization is not a new phenomenon but the constant of human adaptation. The resistance to equate western science and indigenous knowledge will remain as there is political confrontation in which western scientific establishment pretends to impose its own myths over those of non-western traditions. The tendency within conservationists is to manipulate rather than to apprehend indigenous knowledge, which *"is refunctionalized to serve the interests of western style conservation"* (Escobar, 1998).

In this paper we will examine the way Tukanoan practices are effective as agroforestry management systems. Further on we go on discussing *sustainability*, as a principle of environmental management. We will discuss also whether or not sustainability is an indigenous practice. We attempt to begin the dialectic process we refer to in the above paragraphs.

Rituals and Myths: there and here

⁶ We follow Escobar "poststructural" framework, considering that language does not reflect but constitutes reality Escobar (1996)

The Tukanoan Indigenous peoples speak of the *Baile de los muñecos*.⁷ when referring to a ritual in which a series of characters dance over a three day period. I will describe how through this ritual dance and other practices, sacred and profane, Tukanoans manage their environment, develop socio-political institutions, teach their arts and enhance their spiritual life.

There is no evidence that the ultimate goal of the March of the Manikins is to manage freshwater ecosystems but there is evidence, as it will be shown, that freshwater ecosystems are a core element for the characterisation within ritual performance.

That many aspects of Tukanoan rituals have to do with the intersection between society and nature should not surprise us. In fact ethnoscience studies repeatedly show that among indigenous people there is a tendency to see such intersection as a continuum (Descola and Palsson 1996), leaving us the question of the value of such distinction. Rappaport dedicated much of his work to study of rituals demonstrating that one of the aims of rituals is to facilitate adaptation, assuring the continuance of society and nature as a whole. [Rappaport 1999]

The motivation for this paper is not pure enjoyment, although I have been enjoying the performances for years. I do not pretend to say the 'last word' about Tukanoan dances, their art and intentions. Even though the Tukanoan world has been studied with care since the beginning of the XX

⁷ We will refer here to the *March of the Manikins*. Kaj Arhem refers to it as the Dance of the Spirits. The first part of the dance is called by the Makuna *rûmûa sahara*, the entry of the spirits (Arhem 1998).

century⁸, any specialists would agree that there remains a great scope for further research, a whole universe to learn from. My luck is that the dance happens to illustrate a particular style of dealing with what we call 'rainforest' management problems and I happened to be invited by the Tukanoans to participate in the dance.

In the above paragraph I wrote "*what we call 'rainforest'*" Who is this "we" and why do I point out the noun. Is there any chance of reshaping semantics in this case? And if there is, what for?

In previous work I recorded some of the toponymy use by several indigenous groups in the Yaigojé resguardo reserve (Forero 1999). Twenty-four categories were distinguished to differentiate areas of cultural/environmental importance. A group of recognised *Payés*⁹ of Apaporis let me accompany them in a journey through the Apaporis river (see map 1) to identify the places ascribed to the defined categories. 321 places were geo-referenced using a GPS, although some of them had more than one name --there were 356 names- as they were include in two or more categories. All the places were of religious importance and have a level of sacredness identified by the *payés*. These names were attached to distinguished bio-geographical natural indicators such as saltlicks, waterfalls, rapids, pools, hills, swamp forest, beaches and straight linear river paths.

⁸ Although they have been mentioned by Wallace in 1848 (1852), studies of the Tukanoan of Colombian Amazon begun with Koch-Greenberg (1903). Numerous geographical, ethnographic and anthropological studies have been written since them. A list of reference is in Forero (1999). An on-line reference list is available in www.kumoro.com.

Tukanoans also classified their environment with respect to the agricultural, gathering and hunting practices. For this reason *Chagras* (gardens) have different names as *yucal* (specialised in manioc) or *frutal* (specialised in fruits such as pineapple, cashew-fruit, star-apple,) and *chontadural* (specialised in palms like *chotaduro* (*Bactris-gasipaes*) and *seje* (*Jessenia bataua*). Names also refer to stages of cultivation, differentiating among gardens that were recently opened, mature ones that have been harvested, or ones that have been partially abandoned. This complexity has to do with the fundamentals of their economic activities that, on one hand, humanise the flora and fauna of the gardens, and defined habitats (Arhem 1990). And, on the other hand, developed a technology that aims to mimic observed phenomena of the natural environment, such a forest secession (Forero, 1999; Rodriguez and Van-der-Hammen C. 1996a, 1996b; Van-der-Hammen, 1992)

Tukanoans do not have 'rainforest'. They do not refer to the "rain forest" as an entity or a subject. The whole collection of territories is nominated as "the world", and in fact *Kumuas*¹⁰ refer to the *management of the world*. But these terms are not equivalent to the western concept of 'rainforest' or 'rainforest management'. Representatives of western Science, use this name: 'tropical rain forest' [*selva humeda tropical*] to refer to these uncertain complexes of relations, that western science stills trying to understand.

This semantic incompatibility reflects a political confrontation. By naming 'tropical rainforest' we are suggesting a new entity that has to compete with local concepts. This would not be a problem if local societies had the same

⁹ Shamans

¹⁰ Certain group of shamans that do not heal or perform minor rituals and who are specialized in what is called *the healing of the world* and more generally "*the management of the world*".

scope, amount and extent of power as western society, or if a dialog had taken place. Indigenous systems of knowledge are regarded as cultural traditions while westerns produce science. Names do not simply describe, but qualify. This hierarchy of systems of knowledge leads to unequal basis for the process of policy making regarding environmental management.

In the XIX century, when Comte called for a positive Science that was to fight metaphysical explanations and the superstitions of religion, he was calling attention to the need to establish methodologies and procedures for the development of a renewed western knowledge system. However, through science we do not find the key to the "truth" but produce plausible explanations. Comte was fighting the obscurantism, which was the abuse of religious institutions of the Judaic-Christian myth. The power to search into the semantics of the myth was taken out of the public sphere by institutions that created a rigorous management of the secrecy in order to maintain their privilege as a dominant group. But the aim of positive science was not to replace a myth. Unfortunately this message did not get through and in many cases, positivism have helped supplanting myths or the production of hegemonic myth making.

When a myth is taken away of the public sphere and an organisation claims to be the exclusive interpreter of its meta-language, we could be facing some kind of dogmatism or obscurantism, or both. To spread the revelation of a unique truth, some institutional support is required. Revelation involves then a hierarchical system, and depending of the structure and the scope of institutional power, myth making could more or less have the tendency to exclude other myths from the debate as argued by Stott (1999).

Stott (1999) has shown how through naming "tropical rain forest", through misreading other peoples landscapes and, by replacing their history with our own construction, we have created one of those 'hegemonic myths'. Therefore, it could be argued that hegemonic mythmaking is in the core of *maladaptation*. Stott follows Rappaport in advocating the need to find a new meta-language to explain the complex relations observed in functioning ecosystems with their ever-dynamic character.

From the political perspective, through placing back myths and rites into the public sphere, we could provide an impulse to communication and discussion. We could suppress the statics of revelation allowing the creation of a new semantics at the service of adaptation.

The obvious strategy to allow new semantics of environmental management in Amazonia is participation of indigenous peoples in environmental policy delivery. We know that indigenous 'environmental management' has been effective. It has been documented in Colombia for the Tukanoan and other Northwest Amazonian inhabitants¹¹A contestant response to hegemonic myths making is through the empowerment of indigenous peoples. The responsibility of environmental managers, ethnoscientists and engaged anthropologists nowadays is that of facilitators of a dialectic process in which the fulfilment of rights established by national and international laws are ensured.

¹¹ See Arhem, 1998; Forero, 1999; Hugh-Jones C., 1979; Hugh-Jones S., 1979; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1967, 1975, 1996, 1997; Rodriguez and Van-der-Hammen, 1996a, 1996b; Van-der-Hammen, 1992; Von-Hildebrand 1983.

The hybrid model is not possible following the commons of positivism and instrumentalism within science. From the positivist perspective nature is an object of study, while instrumentalism sees environmental management as a matter of developing adequate technology. From those perspectives human participation is purely mechanistic. Here it is argued that indigenous ways of living, reflected in the March of the Manikins and other ritual performances, offer western society an alternative perspective. Through examining the propositions of the ritual semantic we might enhance our perspective of sustainable practices. This will require managers and politicians to incorporate the arts and humanities into environmental management.

The place and the people



Map 1. Northwest Amazonia - Colombia

Yaigojé Reserve

The Colombian Amazon borders with Venezuela, Brazil, Perú and Ecuador. In the Northeast of the Amazon Department¹² is the Taraira or Royeyaká River, which for 150 kilometres marks the national border with Brazil. The Royeyaká/Taraira is a tributary of the Apaporis River, which serves as the national frontier for 43 kilometres, until it reaches the Caquetá River at the Brazilian fort of Villa Betancourt. Caquetá is a tributary of the Great Amazon. One of the principal tributaries of the Apaporis is a black torrential river called Pirá-Paraná. The geography through which this river and the Apaporis flow encompasses most of the Tukanoan territory, which extends further north to the Vaupés River (Map.1)

There are three main linguistic families in Apaporis: Arawack, Eastern Tukano, and Makú-Puinave. The first classification of linguistic families was made by Koch-Grunberg¹³, who made a careful description of the Tukano speaking ethnic groups, some of which have already disappeared. The Makunas, Tanimukas, Yahunas, Letuama, Barasano and Itana, with whom the author lived and to whom the present paper refers will be called by the generic name Tukanoan, as they all share this linguistic family¹⁴.

Today, Tukanoans live in communities of forty to three hundred people who usually belong to one ethnic group. In these communities there is one or few *malocas*, the communal houses where an extended family lives. Tukanoan kinship is patrilineal and the residence has virilocal patterns. The *maloca* is inhabited by the *maloquero* with his wife (*maloquera*) and the families of their

¹² A Colombian political administrative division

¹³ German voyager who travel during 1903 and 1904. Koch-Grunberg did not only classified languages but also collected artefacts, wrote on indigenous music, took data on rain, temperature, rivers volume, took photographs of the rituals, spoke to shamans, called the attention on the political problems, wrote about inequalities among mestizos and indians, and open the Northwest Amazon for the ethnographic studies.

sons. Also, there are always visitors. Nowadays the sons' nuclear families tend to live separately, in a small house, but the maloca remains the meeting point. In the maloca people organize their daily activity and men meet each night to make and take the mambe (coca powder), to heal, to transmit oral history and to plan communal and ritual activities. The maloca is constructed to resemble the Tukanoan universe and it is used as a calendar and a clock. Furthermore, it is the place where ritual dances take place. The space inside is divided in family quarters, female and cooking space, male ritual space (*mambeadero*), and communal dance and eating space¹⁵.

The Tukanoan territory is mythically conceived as a big round plateau with several upper and lower layers. This big plateau is said to resemble a *budare*, a round clay pot used to make the manioc bread called *casabe*. *This plateau is hold together by some laces. The knots of these cordons have visible points on the surface of the earth.* All which are waterfalls of Northwest Amazonian rivers (Forero, 1999). By mythology we also know that this territory was divided and each ethnic group had its own fraction.

The Tukanoan reconsider the management of their environment continually. They have to, if they want to continue their fishing, hunting, gathering and agricultural activities. Species diminish considerably and can even be driven to extinction without hunting and fishing regulations. Tukanoans have rules for hunting, gathering and fishing. Most of these activities were, and still are in some extent, regulated through shamanism (Arhem, 1976, 1998 Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1975, 1996; Von-Hildebrand, 1983).

¹⁴ Not to be confounded with the Tukano ethnic group, which is one of the Tukanoan family language speakers.

¹⁵ For detail information about the Maloca see Hugh Jones C., 1979; Hugh-Jones S., 1979 and 1995, Arhem 1981, 1998

We do not know the extent to which these regulations were effective when clans and ethnic groups were actually forced to share the territory. The Tukanoan practice linguistic exogamy and alliances were made through the exchange of women (Sorensen 1967, Jackson 1983). There were ethnic wars during the XIX century and at the beginning of the XX century and it is possible that the need for expanding territories was one of the causes of these conflicts (Van-der-Hammen, 1992:22). However, it has been argued that through complex political-religious practices the Tukanoans made a system to control population size, use resources and avoid ethnic conflicts (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1967: 107-118).

Political-religious practices involve shamanism and the performance of rituals. This paper focus on the March of the Manikins, one of the rituals carried out by Tukanoan people every year. On several occasions, during the 1990s the author would observe or participate in the ritual¹⁶. Additionally, interviews to Shamans about the importance and significance of the March of the Manikins were carried out during this period. All these activities happened within the Yaigojé Resguardo Reserve on the Apaporis River. (Map 2).

¹⁶ Fieldwork comprehended approximately 40 months between 1993 and 1998.



Map 2- Yaigojé Resguardo

3.3 The Origin

The ancestral journey of the Tukano heroes is part of the shared Tukanoan mythology. The rivers, with the rest of the territory, were not something presented or given to these peoples without purpose. In their everyday life as well as in their mythology nothing is received for nothing, there is nothing created from nothing. Within Tukanoan cosmology, the world is in a permanent state of change. Tukanoan did not received material gifts from their cultural mythological heroes; instead they received knowledge and instructions on how to respond to challenges.

The cultural heroes called *Imarimakana* (the four sons of time), acquired the essence of things, alive or inert, and placed them in the Tukanoan Territory

as concrete beings. Each plant, each animal, and each artifact has a spiritual owner who has the power to release the species, the thing or the knowledge he protects and manages, and does so when asked in the proper way. In this process *Imarimakana* have to struggle and resolve problems in order to obtain what they were looking for. By relating the story, the present day Tukanoan have the possibility of resolving problems that still challenge them in every day life, such as the use of resources and the management of conflict and disease.

The cultural heroes placed the rivers over the territory by cutting down trees, which fell in a direction contrary to the direction of the flow. The Apaporis was a tree situated at the point called Yuisi (Libertad Waterfall). When it fell down its roots got extended to the Caquetá (another tree previously cut down) and the trunk pointed Northwest, therefore the River and its tributaries, which correspond to the tree branches, run towards the Southeast:

“Then the gods cut down the tree using a guard stick (*macana*). They made it fall and the Apaporis river was running towards the Caquetá river. The tree headed towards the north where the sun sets down, its higher branches laid down at Jirijirimo. There, they felled another tree to give continuity to the Apaporis. When that tree fell down it carried a vine we call Weria, forming the river Weriyaká that white people call Cananarí...” (Fragment of a Myth related by Jaime Tanimuka, primary school teacher from Apaporis).

As the tree was being cut every splinter became a fish species. The smallest splinters were ‘*sardinas*’, ‘*sprats*’ (offspring of new species that would populate the river). The different trees, which were fell produced splinters that turned into the particular species of fish that now populates each river. Indigenous people know that some species are present only in certain rivers or just at particular places along the course of a river. Generally a waterfall marks the limit for certain fish species. The giant catfish, lechero (*Brachyplatystoma fylamentosum*) or dorado (*Pseudoplatystoma-flavicans*),

for example, can not reach Jirijirimo. It only gets as far as Iaňakoꝑea waterfall, which marks the limit of the Tukanoan Territory in Apaporis.

All freshwater species have been identified and their territory marked and encoded in mythology. Also recorded are the time at which they reproduce, where they migrate from and to, and the nursery places for fish and crustaceans. All of which is vital information for freshwater resource management.

3.4 The Lake of the Manikins

In the Lower Apaporis River there are three main lakes. The first is near the mouth of the Royeyaká/Taraira River, and is called *Mujutuꝑia* (Tanimuka) or *Mosiro Itajura* (Makuna). The second is located at 7.5km south of the mouth of the Ugá river and is called *wísõbo boraitara*. The third is Lake Kariaka, 8.7km south of *ꝑoꝑeyaka* river. All three lakes have cultural importance and people refer to them as sacred places. The first is said to have a cricket as its spiritual owner. It also has a rock formation, which indicates the point of origin of *masãjiwiri* people, the place where the ancestral anaconda *aňapaki* started looking for the course of the Apaporis River, and finally, there is also the place where *kuruyai* (*caiman --Paleosuchus spp.*) originated in Apaporis. Fishing in this lake is restricted and can only be done after shamans have asked the spiritual owner.

The second lake is also of great importance and similar restrictions are placed over the use of resources at this site. There, not only fish and game, but also the giant grass and surrounding plants have to be protected by Tukanoans. There are several sacred places within the lake; the beach is

called *bijo-masã* meaning ‘the people that own the thunder’. The lake is said to be the shelter for the fish people *wai-masã~*. *Meorosa*, which is the name of a river that feeds the lake, is recited by shamans to alleviate the pain of people that have been bitten by a snake.

The *wîsôbo boraitara* lake is also called *Lago de Muñeco* (Lake of the Manikin) because it was there that the mythical heroes invited the *wai-masã~* (fish people) to dance for the first time. To understand the significance of this, it is important to note that the dance represents an act of revelation. Each character sang their stanzas and in doing so established the ritual order. Therefore, Tukanoans have to sing the same sounds in the same order at the same times during every enactment of the dance.



Figure 1. The Sabaleta (*Brycon sp.*)
Indigenous drawing. Apaporis Paper Making Project

3.5 Who are these characters and what do they sing about?

Through these sounds characters praise the act of occupation that took place in Apaporis when the Tukanoans first arrived. Some characters like the hawk, the deer, the wood-eating ant, the frogs, and other animals and deities, are (within Tukanoan mythology) descendants or relatives of fish-

people. Other characters represent different groups and families of fish-people (See Figure 1).

The narration talks about the adventures they have while going up the river: where they reproduce, where they migrate from and to, and the place where they spawn. It also relates their rank or importance within their group. It should be remembered at this point that from the Tukanoan perspective, fish people are much like Tukanoan people, with the same social structure. Fish people as well as the Tukanoan have to obtain territories, they have allies and enemies; they select their wives from an allied group and maintain reciprocity among these groups. Fish-people, like animal-people¹⁷ and humans, will return in essence to their point of origin, or “the maloca of the breeding”. And all of them have to establish alliances and regulate their inter-species trade, which involves life itself.

The fish people can become ill or perish if they do not enjoy the protection of their spiritual owners. Shamans are responsible for the protection of their own people and, through trance and meditation, they communicate with their spiritual owners. Therefore, through the ritual, Tukanoans meet with the spiritual owners of the fish-people, establish and reinforce their alliances and maintain the energy flow necessary for both of them to survive.

¹⁷ In order to control the use of the resources and therefore the amount of energy to be used by each species there are several negotiations with spiritual owners of the animals, subjects of hunt. Like in the case of fish-people there are myths and cultural practices that Tukanoan culture had elaborated on order to maintain reciprocity with each species, which are conceptualized as tapir –people, deer-people and sometimes like animal-people in general (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1996).

3.6 The performance



Fig 1. The March of the manikins. Indigenous Drawing.
(Apaporis Paper Making Project)

The March of the Manikins takes place in February when the seeds of the peach palms (*Chontaduro: Bactris gasipaes*). are harvested The seeds are collected, cleaned, cooked, mashed and placed in containers sunk into the ground to a depth of 50 cm and rise above the surface up to two meters. The palm seeds ferment and with them a drink called *chicha* is produce, which is used by the maloquero to pay the dancers, the mythical characters who enter the maloca for the three days and nights of the dance.

Before the dance there is intense preparation by both the maloca group and the dancing group. The former, besides preparing the *chicha*, has to send invitations to the singers and dancers. These invitations are made in person, the maloquero either goes himself or sends a secretary with mambe and tobacco as presents. The men of the receiving maloca have to hunt and fish. All these activities are ritualized as Tukanoan consider that they are

“picking” the prey rather than hunting. Before the expedition, the “prey picker” and the shaman of the group have already asked their spiritual protector and agreed with him on the pay (made in coca and tobacco) and the quantities to be picked. In order to prepare for hunting, men usually have to accomplish diets and practice sexual abstinence¹⁸. The *maloquera* has to organize women to collect manioc and make the cassava in sufficient quantities to feed the hundred or so people who will be attending the dance. Women also have to clean and smoke the fish and game obtained by the men. The *maloquero* and his secretaries and sons have to pick coca leaves and tobacco and prepare *mambe*, snuff and cigars. Everything has to be ready before the dancers arrive.

For the dancing party there is much work to do too. Their shaman asks the spiritual owner of the *marimá* tree for the fibre used in the construction of masks and shirts. They also have to ask and obtain other fibres for the skirts (*sayas*) they use. To paint the masks they have to look for clay of different colours: red, yellow and white. The masks are made of balsa wood and then covered with *brea*, a sticky black glue or pitch obtained by burning other woods. The making of the dance dresses and masks is demanding and usually takes two or three weeks. Besides that, the principal singers, usually two, select their companions and prepare for the dance.

On the day of the dance the *maloquero* receives the *payé* that will be “healing” the dance. This *payé* is responsible for communicating with the spirits that come into this world to meet Tukanóan people during the ritual. We shall return to this later when referring to the importance of the dance, but for now we should stress that the ritual, even though space is given for

¹⁸ Although with the presence of western education, some of these practices are becoming unpopular among the

improvisation while the performance is being carried out, does have a structured order. This liturgical order and the relevance it has when celebrating was described by one of the shamans interview:

“The origin of the manikin spirits is where the sun rises. There was Riabitisanirō whence Manakarú was born. This happened by the Caquetá river. After that, came Boraitára, up from Yuisi (Libertad) waterfall. Then Manitara, near Bella Vista where the eagle lives was begun. Then came (Itoñani) Ideña, the owner of that place. He is an Anaconda. His son is Meneyawiri and his companions are Idera and Sotó.

Next there was Imanakariki, the first peach palm (*Bactris gasipaes*) under whose fruits, there is a kind of white colored plant, Idejatañō otebojoñō, yabinog obojina. Then Iamojotañō, another plant, was originated. From those two plants singing originated. Plants are the owners of the sounds of the manikin spirits. They figured out the sounds, so they could dance.

The first Payé – because in the dances there is always one Payé who heals the dance – conducted his work with caution. The first singer was Minayabiri. The sound of the marimá spirit was born; this is the sound of food related manikins. Then came the Letuama people. The maicero (*Cebus apella*) manikin started first. Then came the bees singing. Other sounds came and then little Nōkōrō.

Another stanza went and big Nōkōrō appeared. This opened the way to the fish people. After that came copay for the protection of the maloca. Ūmāwārêrûmû, the lighting one, was born. With the light, sickness is kept away so no harm will come... There are hundreds of manikin spirits and each one has its story. Depending on the sickness, each Payé takes from them, so he is able to heal.

There are many important stanzas when puño [*Serrasalmus sp.*] and the other fish come, one by one, all of them. Each fish describes its journey up the Apaporis, the path he took.. Everyone sings, the tiger, the white ant, each one sings his story. Then they sing about the way back to their place of origin, and how they are born again in riajirimi, from whence they go to manacarú, in the Caquetá river. Then they go to the lakes Borairara y Manitara. Then they travel to waiyajido, near Bocas del Pirá.

From the mouth of the Pirá-Paraná River, they travel to Jirijirimo, that is the place where they finish. This is everything that was heard, our grandfathers received this knowledge, each ancestor of each tribe. From there the dance ceremony began. They danced with every stanza and then they went out¹⁹ to finish the dance. That was when Mereyabiri danced, he is the Kayari. That was the last night of the ritual. That was what happened during the first march of the manikins, and the maloca was purified, without harm, nothing bad could happen. Snuff was shared, coca was shared, and everything was given.

The march of the manikins is performed only in one season, during peach palm season, that is the time when they come. That is the reason, we, the Payés, heal the maloca. Once we start dancing the manikins, we have to finish. The dance starts from the malocas down the river and continues to the next one up the river, without stopping, until the right time to finish dances comes. This dance is not a game, it is not a party, it should not be play with. It was originated so indigenous peoples could defend themselves. The Manikins were not born recently but at the beginning of time. If Payés do not cure and heal during this season, much sickness would come out. That is why we must heal, we have to cure for each person. The companion of the dance is the short *carrizo*²⁰. I am telling you part of it, but not everything can be said. These things I am telling have to be

younger generations.

¹⁹ Getting out means out of the maloca. When dance is finish, the payé and the singers, followed by dancers and everybody that was inside the maloca, go out dancing spreading incense in the way out and around the maloca, healing the place and saying good by to the manikin spirits.

²⁰ Musical instrument: panpipe.

developed with care, not everybody should be told. That is the reason we are going to dance tomorrow. As our grandparents hear and learned, so shall we dance. With this dance we can perform everything we need --for good hunting, to make good deals, for each activity we'll do. They are the Dolls that make everything. These words I am saying to you are serious, and they do not come easy into my mouth, they have great value". (Isaac Makuna, 1994).

The liturgical order of the ritual suggests that the dance contains important and precise messages for the Tukano, and payé Isaac's narration was reinforcing a message about the sacramental character of the dance²¹. In support of this he said that after the dance is performed, the dancers and all of those who attended the maloca, become pure, free from sickness, free from envy and aggressive behavior. They are full of joy and covered with the protection they will need until the next dance season.

There some particularly interesting points to note from Issac's narration. We know that there were spiritual characters preparing the sacrament at the time of creation, and that they were present from the moment the Apaporis River was formed. We also know that the ritual and narrative are based on the myth of a structured web or chain of life; the palms and their fruits provide food for other species. Many mammals, besides humans consume peach palm, but more importantly, it is the palm trees that are elevated here, in a way that makes their presence indispensable for the origin, diversity and continued presence of fish. Isaac expresses it poetically: "they made the sound up, so they could dance". The spiritual owner of palms release its power to allow fish people to come and reproduce into this world, just as it is the peach palm fruiting season that maintains fish people today.

The sacramental character of the Dance, which implies that the present world and its people are overtaken by another people from another order of reality (or in Tukano mythology, another layer of the multi-layered plateau)

and that, for a moment the origin and the present time come together, is explicitly marked by Payés:

“These characters are ‘the sacred’. One is coming in, but what really happens is that they came into you. Their spirit comes into oneself. This is a serious matter. You can see the singers coming in and out; they sing one stanza after the other and never make mistakes. They go out straight away and when they come in again they bring other characters with them. If you are inside the maloca you could say: "this one already came in. I gave to him²¹ so I won't give to him anymore". But that is a mistake, you have to give to him too, because he is someone different from the one that came in before. It is a different spirit coming into the same person. – That is the reason they [the singers] must not make mistake. If one of them gets it wrong sickness comes to the children, women, boys and girls. This dance, the elder said, is sacred, and we treat it as sacred. Is the word of the Payés.” (Octavio Makuna, 1994)

After all the fish people have visited, the alliances are affirmed through the sacrament and then the light comes. The Copay metaphor used by Isaac is remarkable as this tree, whose bark is very easy to peel off, like many species of birch (*Betula spp.*), ignites even when green. It does not need to be dried and is therefore used for lighting the maloca. It provides the users of the mambeadero with comfort. The bark is also used to start fires quickly and is therefore an essential source of protection.

The light from the copay has an additional symbolic meaning. For Tukanoans all energy comes from the sun and it is distributed among all things living and inert. The management of this energy in terms of lightness, color, brightness and heat is the business of shamanism (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1996: 32-37). It is through the adequate use of light and heat that human and other living things can keep fit and alive. We could imply that it is failures in the use of energy that causes disease. When someone is ill, physically, mentally or spiritually perturbed, the shaman tries to restore the equilibrium of energy flow that was somehow disturbed. The payé listens to

²¹ The interview was carried out in the mambeadero, the ritual male place of the maloca, while taking mambe and snuff.

²² Come in, means inside the maloca. The payment to the manikins is in food, especially peach palm *chicha* (beer), but also smoked meat, fish, cassava bread, coca and snuff.

the patient and their family, then establishes the moment when the energy flow was broken, which could have occurred through eating a prohibited fish species during dance times, by hunting without permission or due to improper behavior with relatives or allies. The shaman then treats the patient and also their family, placing them on diets and prescribing sexual abstinence. After this, he talks with the spiritual owner and tries to reestablish the alliance. This is done by assuring the spiritual owner that his group will follow certain patterns of abstinence and by promising to send someone to the original maloca the souls of those who will die²³. The alliance is reestablished through reciprocity as inter-ethnic relations are established and reinforced.

Discussion

The importance of the dance from the Tukanoans own perspective is emphasized by the shamans, who point out that this celebration is not a game but a sacrament. Its importance lies not only in its character as a joyful celebration but its value as a tool that allows them to reestablish alliances with the spiritual owner of trees, fish, animals and all beings that share they the territory. From an etic approach we could say that the dance represents the Tukano belief that ecosystem processes are susceptible to management. In this respect Tukano gathering, hunting, fishing and religious ceremonies, aim to control the amount of energy that is used by humans and thereby allow for the survival and reproduction of the other species, with which they share the world. We could also point out that there are socio-political and religious processes that are managed at the same time

²³ The maloca of breeding: It is believed that all species, including humans, came from the same original place and will return there to live again in different form. The exception to this had happened, it is said, to extraordinary powerful and helpful shamans, called Kumua, that have escaped this circuit and cease to come to this life again. It is also believed that some shamans have gone to this maloca of the origin without dying.

and with the same tools, which aim to preserve health, and to avoid conflict within the group.

In terms of environmental management the March of the Manikins, among other Tukanoan practices, covers several aspects: ecological, economic, socio-political, religious and esthetic. Indeed, it is difficult to find such a sophisticated or efficacious mechanism of environmental management in the Western world and it seems inappropriate to label such practices 'sustainable', because even if the term could embrace socio-political equality and ecosystem management, it certainly does not encompass the sacred and aesthetic dimensions managed by the Tukano.

It could be argued that something is been sustained: the ritual practise. And 'sustainability' comes into question again. The noun 'sustainability' has been translated to Spanish in two ways: *sostenible* (sustainable) y *sustentable* (suitable). The first refers to condition of something that endures for a defined period of time. To illustrate this, economists talk of *economia sostenida* (sustainable economy), the maintainance of economic conditions, or of *redimiento sostenido*, maintainance of profits. *Sustentable*, the second noun, refers to a condition of self-sufficient system. In this case, accomplishing sustainability is a matter homeostasis and the maintainance of energy efficiency. "Sustainability" is usually associated with "balance", "harmony" and "stability" (Stott 1999). Therefore, Stott argues, the concept of sustainability is preferred by conservationists and conservatives. Is it possible to contest the static of the concept? Could we attempt a counter-hegemonic response to conservatism/conservationism?.

If someone from the group of the healing Payé has broken the norms of exogamy or reciprocity s/he should be

The notion of discursive formation (Foucault 1972) served to unveil sources of power. Political ecology has been involved with the deconstruction of hegemonic concepts, like 'development', (Escobar 1995) 'rainforest' and 'sustainability' (Stott 1999). But what about attempting the re-appropriation of concepts so to place utopia²⁴ in the core of 'environmental management practices. Is it possible?

If we were to make a mechanic operation replacing nouns, like "sustainable development" for "management of the world" we would only put indigenous knowledge at the service of conservatism by evading the dialectical process. Instead we could follow an "eco-logic" in which we no longer attempt the resolution of opposites but the involvement of all members of society towards environmental actions (Guattari 2000: 52). In resume, if environmental management could have a place it would be by helping the reinvention of social practices and not by supporting modern scientific myth making.

We could not replace the western concept of 'sustainable development' for the indigenous concept of "management of the world". We could not do so because "management of the world" comes from a non-western epistemology while "sustainable development" is in one core concept of modern scientific mythology.

The epistemology from which "management of the world" comes from has been partially unveiled by the analysis of the Tukanoan March of the Manikins. If we want to engage into hybrid management we must construct

the one killed in a shamanic way. By this way the payé can restore the of energy balance flow.

²⁴ "Utopia is what connects philosophy to its epoch...it is with utopia that philosophy becomes political, carrying to its extreme the critique of the epoch" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993: 101; cited by Escobar 1995: 246)

a new semantic, which must include the aesthetic distension into 'sustainable' practices. This is the process of appropriation of a new meta-language that avoids since the starts the dichotomies of nature-society, sciences-arts, divine-human and other alike.

Conclusions

"Are indigenous managerial systems sustainable?", a general question upon which the debate between preservationists and neo-indigenists have been developing is out of space. A debate based in such grounds is irrelevant because as we have discussed in this paper, the examination of different epistemologies is necessary to make an 'eco-logical' response.

The Tukanoan "management of the world" endures itself into the XXI century. Tukanoan knowledge and ritualisation remain active in the Yaigojé Resguardo today. This fact could not be immediately translated to "Tukanoans have accomplished sustainable environmental management" or "Tukanoans live in harmony with nature" or "Tukanoans possess the system of renewing energy with fewer entropy cost". May be all of these things have been accomplished and could be demonstrated, but such translation is possible after the dialectical process has been developed.

We have partially examined the Tukanoan way of constructing their environment in an attempt to apprehend Tukanoan epistemology. As we have seen for Tukanoan (paraphrasing Reichel-Dolmatoff) the forest is within; while the image of rainforest --a construction of instrumental science--, places a distinction.

Environmental managers could replace nouns, affirming that a process of participation of stakeholders had been implemented. This, of course is the rhetoric of participation and in the case of the Northwest Amazonian indigenous political confrontations it could be easily identified, because indigenous knowledge would be reported as something present in the minds of shamans with respect to external objects.

From the examination of Tukanoan practises experience we can realise that something is escaping from us when we rely on western environmental management. We are ignoring the spiritual dimension that would embrace in the same being oneself and GAIA.

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