
MYTHOLOGY AS A CONSTRUCTIVE ELEMENT OF SUSTAINABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This is a study about how the mythology of the kaiowá-guarani indigenous people of southern Mato Grosso do Sul influences the construction of the idea of sustainability. The mythology of the kaiowá-guarani nourishes their way of being and leads to something that can be described as a sustainability of life. Their deep knowledge of the land leads to care and respect in a relationship of interdependence between all beings. A bibliographical review and discussion of the literature on nature and society relations for indigenous peoples, as well as, specifically, for Kaiowá-Guarani cosmology was made. In this study, the mythological figure of the jara was highlighted as being the owners or beings of nature. The category of owners or guardians of nature is found in various native american cultures. Fieldwork was carried out in 2014 on three lands: Te'ykue, Sucurui'y and Jatayvary through the case study methodology where techniques of direct observation, conversations, recorded and transcribed testimonies, field diaries and hiking were adopted.

Keywords: mythology; sustainability; kaiowá-guarani.

*A MITOLOGIA COMO ELEMENTO CONSTRUTOR DE
SUSTENTABILIDADES*

RESUMO

Trata-se de um estudo sobre como a mitologia do povo indígena kaiowá-guarani do sul do Mato Grosso do Sul influencia na construção da ideia de sustentabilidade. A mitologia dos kaiowá-guarani alimenta o seu modo de ser e conduz a algo que, pode ser descrito como uma sustentabilidade da vida. O profundo conhecimento que possuem da terra leva ao cuidado e ao respeito, numa relação de interdependência entre todos os seres. Foi feita uma revisão bibliográfica e discussão da literatura sobre as relações natureza e sociedade para povos indígenas, bem como, especificamente, para a cosmologia kaiowá-guarani. Neste estudo, foi destacada a figura mitológica dos jara, como sendo os donos ou seres da natureza. A categoria de donos ou guardiões da natureza é encontrada em diversas culturas indígenas americanas. Foi realizado trabalho de campo, em 2014, em três terras: Te'ykue, Sucurui'y e Jatayvary, através da metodologia de estudo de caso onde foram adotadas técnicas de observação direta, conversas, depoimentos gravados e transcritos, diários de campo e caminhadas.

Palavras-chave: *mitologia; sustentabilidade; kaiowá-guarani.*

INTRODUCTION

This work consists of the analysis of elements from the mythology of the Kaiowá-Guarani of southern Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, as constructive instruments for their sustainability. For this, the nature/culture interfaces of this ethnic group were studied in a perspective of sustainability of life on earth, based on their mythology that is a source of biological and cultural diversity.

A literature review and discussion of the literature on nature and society relations for indigenous peoples was made, as well as, specifically, for the Kaiowá-Guarani cosmology. The theoretical analyzes are intersected by the speeches of the interlocutors with whom the field work was done.

The study is located in a qualitative approach through a case study of three indigenous lands: Te'ýkue, Sucurui'ye Jatayvary, with a majority of the Kaiowá-Guarani population. The study population is characterized by representative groups of: seniors, prayers, teachers and leaders. The main sources of data are oral based on conversations carried out in field work. The definitive field work, carried out in August 2014, consisted of gathering oral sources from groups of people described above, through conversations held in each indigenous land for a period of one week in each of the three lands studied.

The kaiowá, ka'aguygua or ka'guagua, literally, those of the forest or people of the forest are traditionally farmers, possessing a strong territorial identity. Cosmology and knowledge Guarani Kaiowá have a sacred dimension on earth and the beings that inhabit it. The myths are experienced in reality according to their way of being. The Earth is understood as a living being and in its cosmology the figure of the jara is seen as the owners of beings on earth.

1 INDIGENOUS INTERFACES: NATURE AND SOCIETY

There are some points of contact between the environmental ethical calls developed theoretically by American and European authors to think about the relationships between humans and nonhumans and the indigenous cosmologies in America. They are the non-anthropocentric currents that are closest to these cosmologies. A relationship of complementarity and a holistic view prevail that we are part of the whole. However, there are peculiarities that have been well worked out by Descola and Viveiro de Castro to discuss the relationships between humans, nature and

supernaturalness in indigenous peoples in America.

The so-called nature/society interactions/relationships invoke a number of theoretical positions. Western hegemonic thinking has historically been based on the dualism between nature and culture. Structuralist or symbolic anthropology used this dualism as an analytical category, which according to Descola and Pálsson (2001, p. 13) aimed to the:

objeto de dar sentido a mitos, rituales, sistemas de clasificación, simbolismos del cuerpo y de la comida y muchos otros aspectos de la vida social que implican una discriminación conceptual entre cualidades sensibles, propiedades tangibles y atributos definitorios.

The most common criticisms of this dichotomy lie in the following arguments: the difficulty of an understanding that is truly ecological, therefore, does not see the local forms of ecological knowledge; the predominance of the power relation of Western knowledge; an epistemology that extends to other oppositions, such as: mind-body, subject-object, individual-society, etc. (DESCOLA, PALESSON, 2001, pp. 12-5).

In order to overcome dualism, it is necessary to create theoretical and methodological alternatives. In addition to the biological and anthropological traditions, Descola and Pálsson (2001, p. 30) propose an irreducible system between person and environment, in which the person is part of the environment and the environment is part of the person. In this conception, the focus is processes and relationships.

Monistic visions that are localized and specific to a given culture in terms of power are subjugated. In monism some relationships can be found, such as: animals and plants have human behaviors; animals and plants are regulated by social rules; humans can become animals; relations between humans and non-humans are part of a dynamic of transformations and reciprocity.

The relationships of humans with nonhumans are identified through naturalism, totemism and animism, which can interact, creating new modes among themselves. Naturalism originated in Western cosmologies since Plato and Aristotle and structured our epistemology. It results in the idea that nature exists and that entities owe their existence and development to a principle unconnected to chance, as well as to the effects of human will (DESCOLA, 2000, p. 161) Its ontology is based on justification through causes, whether realistic or transcendental.

In totemism, plants and animals have anthropomorphic attributes, such as intentionality, subjectivity, affections and social characteristics, but it is not relational. In animism, humans and nonhumans have the same nature. For Descola (2011, p. 91), plants and animals are conceived “as persons endowed with a soul that enables them to communicate with humans, and it is because of this common internal essence that nonhumans are called to carry a social existence identical to that of men.” In comparison, totemism and animism:

In totemic systems, plants and animals function as privileged operators of taxonomic thought; in the soul systems, plants and animals appear properly as persons, they are irreducible singularities, not classes. In totemic systems, in short, nonhumans are treated as signs; in the soul systems, are treated as the term of a relation (DESCOLA, 2000, p. 160-1).

Thinking about this interaction Descola and Pálsson (2001, p. 29) formulated a transformational model from three dimensions of social life¹: modes of identification; modes of interaction and modes of classification. For this, it is necessary to go beyond the mere description of local systems of human-environment relations. In this context, the richness of the ethnographic experience can point the way to a more creative and imaginative comparative project. Descola calls indigenous peoples “societies of nature,” in which:

las plantas, los animales y otras entidades pertenecen a una comunidad sociocósmica, sujeta a las mismas reglas que los humanos; cualquier descripción de su vida social debe, por fuerza, incluir los componentes del medio ambiente que son vistos como parte del dominio social” (DESCOLA, PÁLSSON, 2001, p. 25).

Viveiro de Castro (2011), on the other hand, proposes the relational idea of perspectivism to think the nature/culture binarism. In its conception, based on ethnographies of indigenous peoples of the Amazon, perspectivism

¹ “Modos de identificación, o el proceso por el cual las fronteras ontológicas se crean y se objetifican en sistemas cosmológicos como el animismo, el totemismo o el naturalismo; modos de interacción que organizan las relaciones entre las esferas de humanos y no humanos, así como dentro de cada una de ellas, de acuerdo con principios como los de reciprocidad, rapacidad o protección, y modos de clasificación (básicamente el esquema metafórico y el esquema metonímico), por médio del cual los componentes elementales del mundo son representados como categorías socialmente reconocidas” (DESCOLA, PÁLSSON, 2001, p. 29).

does not apply to all animals² and “personitude” and “perspectivity”, that is, the capacity to occupy a given point of view is a matter of degree and status of the nonhuman. Another important point in this relationship is that some beings can present themselves more fully than others and even than the human being themselves (VIVEIRO DE CASTRO, 2011, p. 353). The notion of spirits or “owners of animals” is present in various indigenous cosmologies. In his analysis:

These master-spirits, invariably endowed with human-like intentionality, function as hypostases of the animal species to which they are associated, creating a human-animal intersubjective field even where empirical animals are not spiritualized. It should be added that the distinction between animals seen under their soul-aspect and the master-spirits of species is not always clear or pertinent; it is always possible that what we encountered with him in the woods seemed to be just a creature, reveals itself as the disguise of a spirit of a completely different nature (VIVEIRO DE CASTRO, 2011, p. 354)

There are a number of possibilities for studies of contemporary anthropology on nature. Ulloa (2011, p. 30) summarizes some of these themes and what could be an agenda for future research:

El replanteamiento de las categorías de naturaleza/cultura, la pérdida tanto de conocimientos como de la biodiversidad misma, las propuestas concretas para confrontar el deterioro ambiental, la necesidad de etnografías densas sobre prácticas y conocimientos en lugares específicos, el seguimiento de las genealogías de los discursos ambientales, las políticas globales y su incidencia en lo local, hasta el activismo político frente a los derechos de los humanos y de los no humanos.

Tim Ingold proposes an anthropology of people that is contained in a biology of organisms, in a context of post-Darwinism, whose focus is centered on processes rather than events. It is a dialogue between anthropology and biology that is different from sociobiology. In his view, the person’s relational field occurs between his biological base and social life, because: “una adecuada integración de la antropología en el campo más amplio de la biología requiere que el estudio de las personas se incluya

² “Ele parece incidir mais frequentemente sobre espécies como os grandes predadores e carniceiros, tais o jaguar, a sucuri, os urubus ou a harpia, bem como sobre as presas típicas dos humanos, tais o pecari, os macacos, os peixes, o veado ou a anta. Pois, uma das dimensões básicas, talvez mesmo a dimensão constitutiva, das inversões perspectivas diz respeito aos estatutos relativos e relacionais de predador e presa” (VIVEIRO DE CASTRO, 2011, p. 353).

bajo el estudio de los organismos” (INGOLD, 2011b, 126). His proposal resides in an integration of a theory of people with a more general theory of organisms, yet “sin comprometer el rol de la agencia humana o negar la creatividad esencial de la vida social (INGOLD, 2011, p. 127).

2 KAIOWÁ-GUARANI COSMOLOGY

As for the Kaiowá-Guarani and their ethic of life on earth, “the *teko porã* or the rules of good living kaiowá is constituted of a normative conceptual building and represents the ideal situation of life, in which would reach the optimal coefficient of stability in relations social in general” (PEREIRA, 2004, p. 293).

In its conception, the cosmos has two axes: 1) vertical, composed of three planes: a) *yvy* - the earth; b) *pa’irei* - the underworld; c) *yvaga* - the sky or paradise; 2) horizontal, formed by the east, associated with the sun and, in the west, bound to imperfect beings. In the underground world live horrifying beings that cause terror. To heaven are reserved the attributes of perfection and the divine, in which the human should be inspired. Land is the place of humanity. Earth is a dynamic being, with cycles of life and death. The synthesis of this thought is expressed in Pereira (2004, p. 251) in which:

the earth “is born, lives and dies,” and the transformations through which it passes can derive from an order of internal causality, depending on the stage of its development or the relations between the diversity of its inhabitants: humans, spirits, mythical beings and species of *jara*. Men do not possess and dominate the earth, it is not entirely subject to their designs, they simply inhabit it along with other beings, with whom they negotiate at all times the conditions for the development of their social formation. Nevertheless, the deterioration of the relations between men, when the social order is broken down, can be one of the causes of destruction of the earth, and in this case, men would have a decisive participation in its destruction.

Yvy is the habitat of mankind and also of vegetables and animals and their *jara*, that is, of their owners. The *yvy marane’y* is the soil or the untouched land. Meliá, when analyzing the older meaning of the term, that is, that of a virgin soil, concludes that its search may have caused displacements and migrations by the Guarani. For him:

En la búsqueda de un suelo donde poder vivir su modo de ser auténtico, los Guaraní pueden haber hecho cristalizar tanto sus antiguas aspiraciones religiosas como la consciencia de los nuevos conflictos históricos. Yvy marane'y se convertía en "tierra sin mal", tierra física, como en su acepción antigua, y a la vez tierra mística, después de tanta migración frustrada (Meliá, 1988, p. 108).

Both yvy and the Ava (Guaraní man) are part of the cosmos and were created by Ñanderú Guasu (our great father) through the first seeds he planted on the earth. This action reinforces the strong sense of belonging of the Ava to the land. Therefore, actions through their way of being should be geared towards the maintenance and care of the earth and the cosmic balance. The metaphors of Kaiowá-Guarani cosmology are linked to the human body and its functions, such as food and rest, are considered important for the physiology of the earth. Examples are the practice of coivara and the planting of corn.

This is why the Kaiowa and the Nandéva understand that the practice of coivara allows the land to "feed" at rest for long periods, with which it recovers robustness that is manifested in the spontaneous reforestation (*omboka'aguyjevy*) arising from the period in which is at rest; in the place of cultivation, interrupted temporarily, will be born of the earth, with which man to feed. The plants, especially corn, considered sacred, are treated as a child, once again emphasizing the anthropomorphic view of the elements of nature (THOMAZ DE ALMEIDA, 2005, 32).

The strengthening of the relations of the ava with the cosmos is made by prayers and rituals through shamanic action to conserve the earth, it is also considered a living being. The way of being of the Kaiowá-Guarani (*ñande reko*) is associated with the quality of the land. Their failure to comply entails the risk of catastrophes and destruction of the land, which according to Thomaz de Almeida (2005, 32), "can be exposed in the form of an equation: *reduced land = weakened teko*, way of living".

The creation myth of the Guarani has as its centrality the cycle of the twins. There are many versions depending on the narrator and the author³ who transcribed and interpreted it. Many of them were written based on reports of informants and form methodological structures with common elements, but also with episodic variations. Besides this, there are several other mythical themes from which the origin of plants and

³ See the narrations in Unkel (1987), Bartolomé (1991) and Chamorro (2008).

animals is revealed, revealing the sacredness of nature and its relations with humanity.

According to Bartholomew (1991, p. 80), the Ava-Katu-Ete religious pantheon is formed by Ñanderú Guasu and Ñandesý as the founding gods, then by the cultural heroes Kuarahy and Jasy respectively, sun and moon brothers (myth of the twins). Followed by a Uranian deity, Tupã. By the messenger birds: Paraka'õ, Tape, Maino, Kusuva. Below are the Añag/jaguars, which are evil figures and by the saviors Jarýipire/divine shamans. Mediation is done by the shaman. There is also the presence of spirits of plants and animals (jara). Chamorro (2008, p. 123) in narrating mythical accounts of Guarani groups mbýa and kaiová/paĩ-tavyterã makes reference to Jasuka, a kind of “active principle of the universe”.

The myth is something alive, dynamic, based on oral traditions in which one generation transmits its knowledge to another through narrations and actions. The myth is lived by the reality of those who experience it. As Overing points out (1995, p 110):

[...] myth is the genre through which the indigenous cosmology is revealed. It is through myth that the postulates concerning the universe are expressed and explained. Mythical cycles address basic metaphysical questions about the history and development of the kinds of things or beings in the world, as well as their modes of being and relationships.

In the field work, stories on myths were heard in all lands surveyed, mainly by prayers and leaders. In Jatayvary, the leadership narrated several aspects of the creation myth, drawing on the memory of the ancestors of what they have learned throughout their lives. In his interpretation appear several elements and personages of the myth of creation.

In the oral tradition of the Guarani cosmology each one recreates, reinvents, re-signifies the myth of creation. And it continues to make bridges and connections with the present world, with its life, constructing meanings of the relation of human beings with the other beings of nature. Each one lives the myth. This is consistent with Eliade's (1994, p. 21) analysis:

In most cases, it is not enough to know the origin myth, it is necessary to recite it; in a sense, it's a proclamation and a demonstration of knowledge itself. And not only: reciting or celebrating the myth of origin, the individual is allowed to impregnate by the sacred atmosphere in which these miraculous events unfolded. The mythical time

of the origins is a “strong” time, because it was transfigured by the active and creative presence of the supernatural Entities. In reciting the myths, the king becomes part of that fabulous time and the person becomes consequently “contemporary” in a way, of the events evoked, shares the presence of the Gods or the Heroes. In a summary formula, we could say that by “living” the myths, one proceeds from profane, chronological time, entering into a qualitatively different time, a “sacred” time, at the same time primordial and indefinitely recoverable.

The myth constitutes the truth itself and guides the way of being the kaiowá-Guarani peoples and their practices of culture that are lived individually and collectively. The myth must be lived, practiced, felt and perceived. As Eliade (1994, p. 11) states: “Myth is an extremely complex cultural reality that can be approached and interpreted through multiple and complementary perspectives”.

There are several explanations about the creation of the world and ways of thinking its relation to the world. Although there is a unit of explanation with common elements, the experience lived by each indigenous person reveals peculiarities. Jatayvary’s prayer said that “the story is not in the books, it’s in people’s minds. What we know is not written on paper. “ Myth teaches “primordial” stories which constituted it existentially, and everything that relates to its existence and to its own mode of existence in the cosmos directly affects it” (Eliade, 1994, p. 16).

The myth also makes predictions. The Guarani myth is apocalyptic about the end of the world. The world is not over yet because prayer keeps sustaining the world by making the connection between earth, water and sky. Hence the importance of prayers and rituals.

There is an important passage narrated by Nimuendaju Unkel (1987, p. 71) in dealing with the prophecy of the catastrophe of the flood. Before the account: “Today the land is old, our race no longer wants to multiply; we will review all the dead, darkness will finally fall, etc.” He analyzes:

It is not only the Guarani tribe that is old and tired of living, but it is all nature. When the shamans in their dreams go to *Ñanderuvuçuí*, they often hear the earth begging: “I devoured too many corpses, I am tired and tired, put an end to this, my father!” And so he cries out water to the breeder, so that he may let her rest; and so do the trees, which supply the firewood and the building material; and so the rest of nature. Daily *Ñanderuvuçuí* is expected to attend to the pleas of his creation (Idem).

The Guarani myths break epistemologically with dualistic rationalistic thoughts. Indeed, as Overing (1995, p. 112) states: “From the scientist’s point of view, the indigenous postulates about mythology are ghostly. “Many of the scientific propositions about nature are incompatible with indigenous mythology, which puts us once again in the face of dualisms in relation to the relation of human beings and others (nature and supernatural entities)”.

In conversations with the teachers of the Sucurui’y school, one of them refers to the work with the children as follows: “they were very distant from indigenous knowledge. After we started working on culture, myth, legend and they are already starting to differentiate. Now I’m talking to them about indigenous legends, that myth is reality. But we forget. “ According to his perception, the non-Indigenous puts the myth as if it were a fantasy or untruthful⁴. But his students now stand up: “When we talk like this to them, they say the opposite. It’s not a myth, my teacher, it’s true. They put the truth to it anyway. Most come from home, we just reinforced it. They already know. “ And to reinforce the knowledge of the myth, the prayers collaborate with the school.

The metaphors of nature revealed by myths carry treasures to be and be in the world. In Kaiowá-Guarani mythology, the relationship with the Jara points to better ways of living together.

3 THE JARA AS OWNERS OF THE BEINGS ON EARTH

The jara are spirits or owners of diverse beings that inhabit the earth. According to Chamorro (2008, p. 166): “the term *jára*,” owner “, indicates that the beings denominated under the epithet *Tekojára* are those that impart animistic characteristics to the guarani religion”. Communication between the Kaiowá and the other nonhuman beings with the jara occurs through religious language.

For Pereira (2004, pp. 232-3) there are several categories of jara⁵, according to the relationship established between the Kaiowá and non-human beings in a given space (domains):

4 “A myth is considered a sacred narrative and, therefore, a ‘true account’ because it Always refers to *realities*.” (ELIADE, 1994, p. 12). But there are negative aspects that are associated with the myth as: legend, falsity,

5 For an analysis on other jara, such as: jakaira (owner of agricultural plants); so’ara jara (owner of animals) and kaja’á (owner of water beings), see Pereira (2004).

Thus, we have the *jara* for: stone hills, marshes, forests, agricultural plants and the various types of wild animals (*mymbá*) and domestic (*rymbá*). This classification starts from the postulate of the existence of social life and anthropocentric dispositions of variable intensity in each of these modalities. Each modality of interaction follows the style of life impressed by its *jara*, with which the residents there develop a relation of deference, respect and dependence.

Te'ykue's prayer, speaking about the environmental conditions of part of the devastated land, dealt with the relationship with the *jara* and the return of the animals:

We can call. You're praying to make the animals come back. It has the name of the god that sends the animals. We have to call back to form the bush again. Each of them has a *jára*. It has the prayer of the *jara*. Two or three prayers can make it come back. We know the prayer, but the farmers will not let us. We're on a dead spot. The whole earth belongs to us.

The spaces socialized by Kaiowá are the houses and the gardens. The forest (ka'aguy) according to Pereira (2004, p. 171-2) can be thought of in two ways: 1) as a vegetated space where nonhumans, animals and spirits live; 2) as space where hunting and gathering activities take place. For the Kaiowá, besides the knowledge about the management of the forest, the great difference is the establishment of good relations with the *jara* that live there (Idem, p. 173).

The ka'aguy *jara*, owner of the forest, is responsible for the growth of plants in the forest. The Kaiowá had the perception that the forests were endless in their territory of traditional occupation. "The existence of the forest was not a cause for concern, it has always remained practically unchanged, regenerating itself from the impacts resulting from the occasional human action for the realization of plantations, houses, roads, etc." (PEREIRA, 2004, p. 248).

The processes of colonization imposed a reality of destruction of ecosystems and scarcity of elements of nature. As a result of these human actions, the ka'aguy *jara* throws diseases on the earth. "As a rule, the origin of the disease is in violation of a rule of coexistence with some shamanic being, be it some kind of *jara*, or a human shaman. Thus, in most cases, the disease is the product of revenge" (PEREIRA, 2004, pp. 248-9).

The kaiowá forest entrance should be made with a license

application for the *ka'aguy jara*, otherwise you will suffer some harm. Likewise, if you need to remove something from the woods, such as wood, medicinal plant or hunting. It is illustrative the quote from Pereira (2004, 249) about tree cutting:

This entity is very jealous of the beings under its care: the wood when cut feels pain, groans and cries. Its owner soon comes to his assistance, and can be deadly to the unaware. According to the Kaiowá, the shaman used to come in the place chosen for the overthrow of the future crop, prayed by summoning the *ka'aguy jara* to explain that they were poor humans, had no place to take their sustenance, so they needed to knock down a small piece of the forest to plant their food. The request was always taken care of and could be planted quietly, because they would not be affected by any disease.

The praying ritual for entering the forest and for the removal of the bark from some trees were observed in the field work. In one of the visits to the forest of Sucurui'y, with the company of the prayer; the teacher and the leadership was witnessed: the Ñemboxe (prays) to the Jara before entering the woods; reverence and respect for beings; knowledge and sense of location in the woods; care and knowledge in extracting tree barks for the use of medicines; the identification of plants and their properties for health and the joy of sharing a time and a space where they feel free and happy.

The front of the group was the praying man opening the way while praying and playing the *mimby*. According to the teacher: "To enter the forest, touch the *mimby*, there the animals know that the owner who called him, everything goes away. Then you can go hunting and nothing will happen. The evil animal will run. When it rains, it plays *mimby* too when the wind is strong".

The prayer man knows much about the forest. With the visit, I wanted to extract the bark from a tree to make medicine. He saw a tree in which someone had extracted the bark from the wrong place. And then, he said, "you have to take out where the sun rises. "The professor added: "medicine... one has to know how to take it. After two or three months he will heal. " There was a strong retreat as if it had been with an ax. The reciter said: "If everything is taken away it becomes rotten. One cannot extract much. Just a little bit. To preserve". He took some out of one tree

and said he would take another because he had already taken enough of it: “to shave from the right side, to form again, all the bark. So, medicine cannot let everything go. “

There are several trees, called chiru, in the woods. Younger trees have thinner bark and clear green leaves. The oldest ones have a thick bark, for these, if you know the prayer, you can extract a little through the surface rasp of its stem, according to the position of the light of the sun. In this case, it is recommended that in the end a payment or offer for the chiru be left. As the reciter says: “You have to talk to him to take his shell. Take off your clothes, let them pay you. “ When the reciter needs the chiru rasp to make some medicine, he removes the bark from the oldest chiru that is stronger. Because chiru is sacred, there is specific prayer, so it is not anyone who can pick it up.

In this observation it was noticed that the reciter has a deep knowledge about the forest and knows where are the tree and plants, its uses and the ritual to extract from them what he needs to make a medicine. His procedure passed: by the identification of the tree; choice of which would be the most adequate according to its size, location and degree of extraction; authorization through prayer to extract the necessary amount to make the remedy, scraping its bark on the side and the right way. Extractions were made from two trees, one of which was the chiru, in this case beyond the steps described above, he “paid” the chiru, offering him a piece of cloth from his shirt, which was placed in the place where he removed the scratch.

The leadership showed chiru trees and spoke with reverence: “We respect a lot, which is sacred. If you go peeling anyway, something can happen in your path. You can break your arm. Fall on a stick and get hurt. Because she’s there and not disturbing anyone. “ It is as if it were a categorization of the chirus trees, in which the older and intact trees are more respected. For the teacher: “every chiru has a power”. He showed one and said, “This one is more respected because no one took off the bark. “

At every step, he indicated feet of trees and plants by their name⁶, most in Guarani, and the innumerable properties thereof. The experience was followed by stories and their confirmation that populate

⁶ “Traditional populations not only coexist with biodiversity, but they name and classify living species according to their own categories and names. “... this diversity of life is not seen as a” natural resource, “but rather as a set of living things that have a use value and a symbolic value, integrated into a complex cosmology. In this sense, Diegues (2000, 31) proposes the term ethnobiodiversity, that is, “the wealth of nature in which humans participate, naming it, classifying it, domesticating it, but by no means naming it wild and untouched. “

their imaginations. There was a great enchantment of them in the woods when visualizing trees: ingá, lemon tree, canafistula, peroba, jatobá... they walked, talking and showing. With the sounds of the woods, the smells and the sights, they have awakened several senses. They showed what is good for arrow making and headdress; the leaf that the Nãnderu mixes with the smoke and places it in the pipe; the armadillo hole; quati; trace of ounce; bugio... The professor showed a jaguar trail near the stream. To him, as the mimby was touched, the jaguar was gone.

The leadership narrated a situation in which he actually went on to believe the word of his great-grandfather, in an experience where he felt the reality of myth:

My great-grandfather would say that to me. I would go out in the woods with the ax and get off with it in the trees. He said do not do this not that or your skin will get all scarred. And I did not believe it. And it's not that for a while I broke my arm, playing ball, and I had a big scar. I learned not to take a tree bark for nothing. Then I teach the young ones. Because the wood has an owner. When I was fifteen, I began to find out that it was true. If a guy does not believe it, after he sees some things, he'll believe it.

And he was very talkative, telling his experiences in the woods: "I've been in this woods from end to end. I've seen a howler, an ounce in the woods. I saw a jaguar, I got close, and I came right back on the badge. The dog did not want to let me pass. " He is accustomed to going into the woods alone because he does not make a noise: "In the place I go, I do not make a noise, you see, you see something in front of you, a snake, a bigger creature. "And also to better understand the animals: "you walk and to. Then the animals get in the way to go there in person. But the animals got it harder to catch an Indian because the Indian and the animal are almost the same, right. Because he walks in the woods, right? The Indian knows the place that has an animal. And the Indian knows the place that has a snake. And the guy cannot cross there, right? "But in spite of being very much in the woods, he once got lost. Therefore, it is necessary to observe the markings of the forest and how to locate it: where the sun rises, where is the bathed and the sting... His strategy was to pray when one is lost to find oneself and not to panic.

Returning to the analysis of the category of owners or guardians of nature, these can be found in various Native American cultures. On the Amazonian cosmologies, Descola (2000, p. 154) realizes that there are no

absolute ontological differences between humans and most of the animals and plants. Their differences would be of degree, not of nature. For the Achuares of the equatorial Amazon:

[...] most plants and animals possess a soul (*wakan*) similar to that of humans, a faculty that puts them among the “people” (*aents*), since it guarantees them reflective consciousness and intentionality, makes them capable of experiencing emotions and allows them to exchange messages with their peers and with other members of other species, including men” (DESCOLA, 2000, p. 151).

Already for the macunas, Descola (2000, p. 153) states that:

The ontological categorizations are, however, still much more plastic than among the Achuares, because of the faculty of metamorphosis attributed to all: humans can become animals, animals can become humans and the animal of a species can become an animal of another species.

Perceptions on earth can be expressed through myths and how they are experienced by a particular people. The myths of nature carry with them an environmental ethics or normativity. The *jara* symbolically serve to regulate access to natural resources. For the *nahuas* of the south of Veracruz, Mx, they are the *chaneques* and owners of the animals.

The similarities described by Lazos and Paré (2005, p. 199) on the relation of *the* mythical *corpus* of *Nahuas*, through the *chaneques*⁷ and owners of animales and *jara* or owners of beings for the *Kaiowá-Guarani*, as well as their rules of access to natural resources:

Las prohibiciones que se ponen en boca de los *chaneques* constituían medidas para vivir de la tierra con un respeto hacia ella, para mantener los recursos que en ella proliferan. Éstas no sólo representaban una normatividad de tipo restrictivo, sino que entrañaban beneficios toda vez que los seres sobrenaturales ofrecían protección si se cumplía con los códigos de conducta. Fundamental en estas reglas es la idea de reciprocidad (LAZOS, PARÉ, 2005, p. 199).

⁷ Los *chaneques*, personajes pequeños o grandes, femeninos o masculinos, blancos o negros controlaban, a través del imaginario colectivo de los *nahuas*, el acceso a los recursos naturales. Estos *duendecillos* que se aparecen bajo distintas formas podían enojarse y provocar enfermedades, sustos y encantos cuando alguien transgredía las limitaciones impuestas en la apropiación de la naturaleza. Los *chaneques* son el fruto de la imaginación, la concretización de los miedos y angustias y expresan la voluntad de un respeto. Moradores de las florestas, son dueños de los recursos que en ellas proliferan. Por tanto, tienen derechos y obligaciones: exigen respecto a las regulaciones pero también otorgan protección” (LAZOS, PARÉ, 2005, p. 56).

The chaneques function as a regulatory institution between the economy and ecology for the Nahuas, in which the rules of their behavior towards other living beings are based on the idea of reciprocity. According to Lazos and Paré (2005, p. 66):

Hasta donde entendimos su pensamiento, los humanos comparten el mundo con estos seres y no deben servirse de ellos más allá de lo necesario para sobrevivir. Se podría decir que la satisfacción de las necesidades individuales y de las familias de la comunidad marca el límite de un uso correcto, o como se diría hoy, sustentable. Esto no excluye la posibilidad del intercambio por trueque o comercial pero dentro de los límites de las necesidades comunitarias. Cazar, pescar o recolectar para lucrar significa una extracción desmedida que tiende a una acumulación mediante la cual uno se vuelve “más rico” que los demás y ocasiona desequilibrios tanto sociales como ecológicos.

Also in the Sierra de Santa Marta, the Nahuas adopted a system of agriculture based on “roza-tumba y quema”, which was disrupted by the advance of the agricultural frontier. Another point in common between the Kaiowá and the Nahuas on the perception of the elders⁸ about land reclamation in the face of environmental degradation is that:

Los ciclos naturales se encargarán de restaurar lo dañado. Entre estas personas mayores, las explicaciones míticas son recurrentes para explicar lo que está pasando. Los chaneques castigan las faltas cometidas por los hombres en su relación con los seres del monte, pero también tienen la capacidad de perdonar y cesar los castigos. Entonces, cuando los hombres sean perdonados, volverá la abundancia y la riqueza de flora y fauna (LAZOS; PARÉ, 2005, p. 201).

The cosmological idea that the owners or masters of animals removed or kept the beings from the forests as a consequence of the transgressions to established norms permeates many Latin American indigenous cultures. For Lazos and Paré (2005, pp. 68-9) analyzing the symbolic of the Nahuas, there are two paths: a) Humans can not intervene

⁸ “Para muchos ancianos y ancianas, la deforestación y la pérdida de biodiversidad animal – tanto de la fauna acuática como de la fauna selvática – se atribuyen a que el Señor del monte escondió adentro de los cerros y montes – en el *bayo* – a toda la fauna y a la vegetación con el fin de protegerlas del humano. Es reiterativa la referencia a que los animales se fueron a otro lado en lugar de pensar que quizá ya se hayan exterminado”. Esta assertiva también existe para varias partes do mundo rural do México, como em Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz e Tabasco (LAZOS, PARÉ, 2005, p. 67).

in the restoration of nature because they do not have this acting power. The authors refer to a talk from a Nahua elder about the failure of a reforestation project: “he says that the reforestation project failed because the owner of the forest had not been asked for permission “; b) there is a possibility of the restoration of the natural order when the norms established with the owners of beings are recovered. This conception is important for all environmental education restoration work.

For Viola (1997, p. 20), the interdisciplinarity required by the scientific studies of nature has led to an interest in cosmological meanings and together with it a unitary view of nature. This “return to cosmology” is a sign of the entrance of science into postmodernity. This is because:

Durante la modernidad la cosmología y la filosofía de la naturaleza habían sido eliminadas, por considerarlas un residuo molesto de las viejas cosmologías míticas, que explicaban narrativamente el orden del mundo como un proceso contingente, que dependía de las vicisitudes de los dioses o de los héroes (VIOLA, 1997, p. 20).

The processes of colonization subjugated the knowledge of the native populations, placing the myth in a smaller and distant place, as something liar and false. It is interesting to think of Overing (1995, p. 11), when he states that “the” problem “of myth is not a question of deficiency, but of excess.

CONCLUSION

For the Kaiowá-Guarani, the sustainability of the earth is deeply linked to their cosmology, which directs their way of being. Their knowledge of the land leads to care and respect in a relationship of interdependence between all beings.

The cosmology of the Kaiowá-Guarani nourishes their way of being and leads to something that can be described as a sustainability of life. Starting from an ontology of diversity, where nature and culture coexist in the construction of its territoriality.

The mythology of creation and destruction of the earth is part of their cosmology. While the occupation of their traditional lands reveals several ways of disturbing their way of being. The stories of destruction are very present in the life of indigenous lands. The explanations for this phenomenon, mainly by the prayers and older people, go through

the cosmological interpretations, the lack of prayer and the non-practice of the traditions of the way of being. The solutions and reversals of this framework, besides going through cosmology, increasingly result in the understanding that the technical-scientific knowledge of non-indigenous people helps in this process of recovery of the weeds and the return of the animals.

Biodiversity loss is also a loss to sociodiversity, with consequences for culture and spirituality, the effects of which can be felt in food, rituals, hunting and fishing, agriculture and the breaking up or breaking down of knowledge between a generation and another. The profound environmental transformations in the landscapes and in the use of the natural resources occurring in the territories of traditional occupation of the Kaiowá-Guarani have generated new interpretations and resignifications in the society-nature relation.

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