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The third shore of history: structure and narrative of the indigenous societies

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ABSTRACT

From the point of view of my own research among the Yaminawa of the Acre River, this paper examines the latest historiography on the indigenous peoples in Brazil - a rather new discipline, since these peoples were viewed as "out of history" not long ago. It brings some questions on the role that the historicity of indigenes plays in the broader theoretical frame of anthropology. Does it tell us anything new about "natives" or about this anthropology that has been leaned, more or less explicitly, in the distinction between humanity "with" and "without" history? Have we either faced the dissolution of another false dichotomy or perhaps such dichotomy used to be too much productive not to have disappeared without leaving behind a profound modification of its terms?

Keywords: Anthropological theory; History; Ethnohistory, Cold societies; Yaminawa.

In the 1980's, the indigenous history in Brazil has passed into the forefront of anthropologists' interest. [1] The theme itself was not new, but it used to appear in monographs as a specific chapter, that of the contact with the society of the whites, which, indeed, would have brought history to a place from where it had been formerly absent. History would be a series of externalities: expansion fronts, interethnic frictions, indigenous and indigenist policies, actions of national society and native reactions. In monographs, it could grow and dominate the description, reducing to a foreword the accounts of the "pre-contact" life – an adequate distribution when concerning the "acculturated" or "integrated" groups -, or assume the form of an epilogue or an obituary, when, on the contrary, the protagonists had a distinctive and still vigorous culture, whose twilight would be just beginning before the ethnographer's melancholic eyes.

If the chapter on the *contact*, greater or lesser, foreword or epilogue, has not lost its importance, the bloom of indigenous history certainly exceeded its limits, converting history into a constant and internal dimension of those societies. This redistribution attended to a necessity of the indigenist movement, vigorously blossoming at the time (Carneiro da Cunha, 1992). Peoples aspiring to a future should also have a past, and assume as their own, and no more as the outcome of an intrusion, the capacity for change. The indigenous history movement – and I say "movement" because in many ways it transcended the limits of the academy, being inserted into the undertakings of the Indian Movement itself – has taken several alternative or combined paths. On one hand, it promoted a recovery and a more optimistic assessment of the documental materials produced throughout the centuries by the agents of colonial or national society, which were in greater quantity and quality, and much less irrecoverable than usually thought. With this revision, the movement simultaneously asserted that the indigenous role in the construction of the national society was much more constant and profound than allowed discerning the great accounts on the "formation of Brazil".

On the other hand, rejoining a world trend in studies on illiterate societies or on popular sectors of literate societies, the movement adopted a renewed attitude towards oral tradition, accepting its documental validity, or even stressing its importance as an alternative view relatively to the official history. This new legitimacy of the orality was in conformity with the quest for the indigenous perception about history and, therefore, with the openness to what one could call "other historicities", not necessarily in accordance with the heuristic and chronological patterns of academic historiography.

In third place, and confronting a central duality in anthropology, such movement kept concentrated on the relationships between structure and history, overcoming the static versions of the first and the entropic or voluntaristic versions of the second.

Each of these versants of indigenous people's historiography had its inspirers and emblematic authors not necessarily tuned with each other, who have been tributary and/or innovators of all theoretical paradigms in anthropology. What they had in common was perhaps an ethical valuation of history or historicity. Claiming that Indians have – and always had – history, was equivalent to an actualization of previous recognitions; as, for instance, the acknowledgement that they have soul, or rationality.

The assertion of indigenous historicity also assumed the form of a revision of anthropological assumptions, denouncing such a fiction of peoples without history, whose authorship was attributed to evolutionism, functionalism, culturalism, or structuralism, depending on the critic's filiations and disaffections. This fiction evidently has been presented in very different manners, from the characterization of the primitive as a sort of humanity's degree zero (or of a history not yet occurred) to the description of their societies as stable formations, as a matter of fact or by their own will, besides the alleged impossibility of inferring a history (understood in a strictly positivistic way) out of the available data, or even of the non recognition of the continuity between rigorously distinctive forms and the hybrid forms appeared from the interaction with the exterior. The primitive could be ahistorical by nature, or out of vocation, or by definition, or because of an invincible ignorance about their past. On account of being more recent, or more suggestive, or more explicit, the Lévi-Straussian formula opposing cold and hot societies – unfolded into other ones: clocks and steam machines, for example (cf. Charbonier, 1989, p. 30; Lévi-Strauss, 1987) – has been taken in many cases as a preferred antagonist to the heralds of indigenous historicity, what was an excessive choice to the extent that this antinomy was taken for a summary of the whole set of negations.

Letting aside, for the time being, the injustice of this interpretation of the Lévi-Straussian binomial, it should be stressed that, in the decision over this new *status* of indigenous history with respect to universal history, there was also much of this dichotomy hunting, which, with its formulation, rivals for the honor of being the preferred entertainment of anthropologists. In other words, there has been an emphasis on continuities to the detriment of contrasts. Even when indigenous historicity was postulated as "another historicity", the emphasis was on the term "historicity" and not on "another", which is not surprising in a tendency that reacted against exoticism.

Yet, the studies on indigenous history already acquired a reasonable maturity, and they can be expected to liberate themselves from some reflexive movements dependent on their context of origin. Neither the statement of an ecumenical historicity, nor the articulation between structure and history, are positions in need to be further defended, although there is an important gap between their generic assertion and their application to concrete accounts. The documentation on indigenous history became subject to intense research. The Indian Movement is coming to assume as its own – for instance, on the texts used for a differentiated indigenous education – a historiography not always attached to the guidelines provided by

that “other historicity” discovered by ethno historians. Once a consensus on generalities has been created, this is maybe the moment of turning back towards indigenous history, focusing this time not its continuities with an occidental manner of treading along the time, but precisely those contrasts which, in former periods, allowed thinking of the existence of peoples without history. [2]

The Yaminawa have been the theme of my Ph.D. thesis (Calavia Sáez, 1995), which tried to venture through the three mentioned versants of the indigenous historiography – the recovering of documentation, the definition of another historicity, and the articulation of structural and historical descriptions. On the whole, the Yaminawa constitute an excellent starting point for an assessment. On the one hand, they are very far from representing that crystal clear model of peoples “without history”, frozen and secured in reproducing their structures. At first sight, their social instability, the constant changes in their settlements and their parental arrangements, and also their miscegenation are evident. At first sight as well, it is easy to become disenchanted out of a pessimistic evaluation of their relationship with the world around them. At the same time, these desperately historical Indians seem to face history with some coldness: weak genealogical record, scarce traces – proper names of personages or places of the past, temporal marks – serving as framework for collective memory; little endeavor in transmitting knowledge [*saberes*]. In the following pages, I intend detailing such characteristics and give an account of my experience in writing the Yaminawa history, which, in some measure, may be extended to other peoples of the Lowlands.

Documental Efficacy

As to the first of these versants of indigenous historiography – the reassessment of the documental sources –, it is the case of saying that the pessimism applied to the whole set of indigenous peoples should be maintained for a considerable sector of those peoples. An insistent search on the Yaminawa couldn’t raise but sparse journalistic notes, citations in long lists of ethnic groups, third or forth hand references, accounts of an ephemeral encounter, or stereotypes due to neighbouring ethnic groups. Whatever benefits can be drawn from this information gathering, such data do not place us in the inside of a Yaminawan society, but inside an ethnic field in which the term Yaminawa makes sense. Rigorously, they say much more about the history of a name than of the history of any people attached to it.

What is especially lacking is that kind of dense documentation which may be produced by ethnographers, missionaries or indigenists. Even though, this lack – which persists until our days – may signify something, since missionaries, ethnologists or indigenists have been producing a considerable literature on almost all those peoples surrounding the Yaminawa, as the Shipibo-Conibo, the Piro, and the Kaxinawá. What kind of hazard could have determined that the Yaminawa have not been subjected to such attention? In fact, we know – although the Yaminawa don’t remember - that in the 1950’s catholic missionaries have visited them with a certain frequency. More recently, about twenty years later and remembered by them, missionaries of the *MNTB – Missão Novas Tribos do Brasil* (Brazilian New Tribes Mission) established themselves in the Indian settlement of Mamoadate, but they dedicated too little attention to the Yaminawa, preferring to concentrate their efforts on the Manchineri. The *Funai* (National Foundation for the Indian peoples), which settled in the State of Acre only in 1975, and in general with scanty human resources, established a post in the settlement of Mamoadate, but never in the Indian land of the Acre river’s headwaters, where I have developed my research. Even for the last twenty years, the documentation on the group is scarce. This persistent disinterest, probably due to the admission that the Yaminawa are a “difficult” group, suggests that religious or secular missions, outstanding producers of qualified nonprofessional ethnological documentation, consciously or unconsciously make choices when defining the subject matters of their accounts. The vast and extensive documentation on the riverine Panoan groups elaborated by Franciscan missionaries and their

visitors (naturalists, military, geographers, adventurers, and artists) deals, evidently, with those groups who settled in the missions, and only indirectly with those who permanently or periodically avoided them; and such disregard is the counterpart of the *ethnogenetic* work dedicated to their neighbors. Missions, in a broad sense, have an important role in the building up of ethnical groups, and *a fortiori* in the constitution of their historical memory. This is especially important for the riverine Panoan peoples who, freely paraphrasing Frank's suggestion (1991), might very well be understood as hybrids of a local society and exotic elite. On a minor key, the same can be said about the role of the Summer Institute of Linguistics – SIL - with respect to the Kaxinawá. [3] At least, it could be said that the ethnic groups "selected" by the missions have, in this dialogue with their different apostles, a good opportunity for inventing their culture, in the sense given by Roy Wagner (1975), which could very well be extended to the invention of history. [4] At most, one may suppose that the accumulation of an external written tradition consolidates, or occasionally creates, a distinction between "reference" peoples – who conform to the minimal requirements of what is considered an ethnic group and a history – and marginal peoples in relation to such center. The contrast between rich and poor documentations – the rich being those in which the members of an ethnic group play an active role in formulating their memories - is not a mere quantitative gradient, but the outcome of a process which introduces qualitative divergences and distributes differentiated roles in the ethnical field. Production or co-production of documents are useful in elucidating history, but not without being useful in the first place to make it, often generating, paradoxically, such type of crystal clear models of the past that we use to understand as an antithesis of history.

The historical subject

This question is directly linked to another, apparently distant, related to the specificity of the Yaminawan perception of history. Which would be the subject of this history? The Yaminawan "we" – *yura*, *yurawo*, i.e., the "body", the group of relatives/co-residents exchanging food and corporal substances – is a sociological but not a historical subject. And it could not be so, since a cognatic society as the Yaminawa necessarily sees the *Yura* as being split or at least diluting itself from generation to generation towards the past; entire segments of a "mingled" society, which are constitutive parts of its here and now, conform the exterior in recent past.

In fact, there is nothing in this of specifically Yaminawan, or Amerindian. Any history aware of the constructed character of identities faces the same problem, be it the history of the Yaminawa, of France, of the Jews or the gypsies. But, in the case of the Yaminawa, this contrast between a history written either in the plural's first or third person – this tension between the contemporary "us" and the "they" of other times – manifests itself on a threshold that is very near to the accounts' enunciation. To count on this stable historical subject, the Yaminawa should, for instance, adopt a rule of unifiliation – and tell their history in name of a lineage – or undertake the creation of a retroactive identity. The second solution, the pattern of national histories, is that followed by other Panoan peoples, as the Shipibo-Conibo and the Kaxinawá, sometimes identifying themselves with certain cultural patterns (those of the "ucayaline civilization"), sometimes defining a criterion of identity (the Huni Kuin, true people, have their origin described in a myth, recognize themselves by a certain organization of their settlements, etc.). The Yaminawa ignore both possibilities: they recognize themselves through an ethnonym which has been attributed by the first Funai [Brazilian Indian Foundation] agents having dealt with them, yet they add that in the past they were Xixinawa and Yawanawa, or rather Mastanawa and Marinawa, or Dëianawa, etc., all these names designing "other" peoples, different one another, distant from the narrator. As historian, my task has been to jointly trace down these references and reports spread throughout varied documental sources, making an account not so much of a "people", but of a determined position within the ethnic field.

Besides the history I have constructed, the Yaminawa have another (another kind of) history which I have merely recollected and commented: the ancients' histories, called *Shedipawó*. The Yaminawa, who do not assign a denomination for themselves – the others are those who denominate them -, do not tell their history, but a history of others, - the ancient. It should be stressed that, in spite of suggesting a kinship link, the term *shedipawó* – which may be glossed as "the great grandfathers" – does not imply identification. The *yura* share grandsons (a single kinship term comprehends all the individuals of such generation), but not necessarily "grandfathers": the ancient aren't imaginable as a joint bloc of ancestors, but as an incontrollable diversity of fortuitous enemies. The best example is that of the Rwandawa, who form, according to the interpretations of one of my best informers, one of the "halves" of the contemporary Yaminawa people, and constantly appear in their myths in the role of semi-monstrous enemies. Besides, the "great grandfathers" aren't a pristine power, wisdom or moral manifestation, but the protagonists of an insane, unviable way of life; they are ignorant, poor, violent (as well as some contemporaries, by the way). Rather than "ancestors", they are "outcasts" [*marginais*]. This lack of a transcendental subject or, more explicitly, of a subject being simultaneously history's narrator and agent, would perhaps be a distinctive feature of a "cold" history, but one that has no problems in coexisting with a conscience of change. [5] Let's examine this more closely.

The *shedipawó* differ considerably from a very common pattern in oral history, that of establishing a continuum of temporal proximity/distance. In consonance with the usual taxonomy of narratives, all of them are unequivocally "myths" or, to use Lévi-Strauss' economical definition, histories from the time when animals spoke. There is no separation between such time of universal communication and an exclusively human time. Chronologically, the *shedipawó* are plane: the single distinction between before and after is part of a reduced group of myths "of origin". Previously to the episode being told, men made love to the women's back part of the knee, women didn't know how to bring forth, the seeds were monopolized by a niggard personage, etc. But these myths of origin, susceptible of tracing a demarcation line between the past and the present condition, are useless to transform such line into a temporal mark of general validity; the before and the after exhaust themselves within the limits of each narrative. There is not a differentiated picture of what would be a primeval humanity in contrast with the present one. In particular, although the myths describe the beginning of some important capabilities, they do not describe anywhere the end of this regime of transformations and communication among species which serves as an axis to the whole set of narratives. In other words, the end of the mythical times is not part of such descriptions. This is understandable to the extent that the extraordinary facts narrated, and known by Yaminawa as quite distant from the daily experience, are rather identified with a synchronic than with a diachronic distance; the time when animals speak is another present time, that of shamanism.

This weakness of the myths of origin as a whole neutralizes the *shedipawó*'s chronological dimension, reinforcing as well a characteristic which conventionally marks the historical accounts in contrast with the mythical ones. In fewer words, the *shedipawó* aren't but residually paradigmatic accounts. They are presented as individual episodes which occurred once with an individual and concrete protagonist: *shedipawó*s' titles or summaries always tell, for example, about a man who has been transformed into a peccary, or about a group which has been transformed into a herd of peccaries, but they don't tell anything about the peccary's origin or about the hunting from which it resulted. There is a reduction of those personages which show an exemplary value in other mythologies. On numerous occasions, for instance, the myths have two brothers with more or less similar characteristics as protagonists, nevertheless there is not a cycle of narrations about twins, nor do these twins assume a demiurgical role for which they are distinguished in other Amerindian mythologies. The *shedipawós* are presented as facts occurred once – not as facts occurred, so to speak, once and forever. The considerable freedom characterizing their exposition – with no

requirements or restrictions when it comes to narrators, the audience, the narration's circumstances, etc – combines well with the scarce social return they provide. There are no efforts to transform the *shedipawó* into exemplary histories, to consecrate habits or rules through them. Although the collection of *shedipawós* is an inexhaustible source of references for shamanic or loving chants, of for humoristic comments on the personality of a neighbor (so famished as Yurapibe, for instance, who devoured two wives), there isn't a socially demarcated activity of exegesis which can make them ascend to the category of sacred history. [6] In their more existential than essential texture, the *shedipawós* come paradoxically close to one of the main attributes with which the historic is identified by the philosophy of the Occident.

The mythification of historical facts represents, I suppose, the case which best nourishes the oral history defenders' avidity. To purify the myth from its fantasies, discerning in it the references leashing it to a faithful narration of facts, in short, to extract history from the mythical waste material would be one of the historian's main tasks, and one of the most productive. The Yaminawan case, however, shows that this task may be impaired by a naïve presupposition: that such rationalization would have been waiting for a formal study, that generations and generations of natives have restricted themselves to an honest accumulation of mythical waste. Nothing impedes that the mythification of history and the historicization of myth have regularly succeeded one another along the centuries, and it is most likely that, in the same way that one says that history is constantly being reinvented, one may say that it is constantly brought back to earth by the transformation of paradigmatic accounts into occasional ones.

The White Man

Yet, we are diverting ourselves precisely from the kind of account which has usually aroused reflections on the indigenous history, i.e., that respecting the white man. In fact, in the course of my research, the encounter with the white man has been frequently reported. It seemed always clear to me, however, that these accounts weren't *shedipawós*. In the absence of a differentiation among narrative styles – to which the Yaminawa offer neither much subsidies nor much interest –, [7] this kind of account seems to constitute a style in its own. In fact, it is a single account which, with minimal variation in details, is repeated by all narrators: in the beginning, the Yaminawa didn't have salt, sugar, and iron ax; they wandered about nude, disperse in the forest, always in motion. The whites arrived and the Yaminawa feared those dangerous beings who would perhaps be cannibals; Indians killed whites, whites killed Indians; then everything has changed (in the more detailed version, it has been a boy abducted by the whites who, having became familiar with both languages, established a mediation), and since then there is no more fear, now the Yaminawa go to town, their youngsters study with the whites; now there is salt, sugar and iron, there are clothes.

In its apparent simplicity, and in the monotony with which this sober narration is repeated from one narrator to another, numerous links with strategic aspects for the understanding of the cultural diversity of the Yaminawa may pass unnoticed, as for instance the sugar, the cannibalism and the iron ax. In addition, the account conveys an implicit paradox. Finally, this account which in a certain way, due to its absolute verisimilitude, offers the foreign listener a plausible historical narrative, presents as counterpart a definitely paradigmatic character (and therefore, in a certain sense, ahistorical), since – repeated from a narrator to another without significant variation and regardless their origin – it describes not an encounter with the whites, but The Encounter, in a generic sense. Nothing individualizes the "discovery" of the Yaminawa among hundreds of similar episodes, involving indigenous groups of any language or localization, rubber tapers, missionaries, or indigenist agents. One could perhaps claim that in fact all encounters have happened according to this same script: the monotonous narration of a monotonous history. Yet, wouldn't this be one of the reasons

why Euclides da Cunha was led to label Amazon as the land "in the margin of history"? Wouldn't the reiteration of the same episodes, the same strategies, the same oppositions, century after century, precisely be the indicator of the lack of history in the regions distant from the great centers of power in the world – from the stages of history properly?

The historicity of this account gains significance if we consider that, in fact, it is not only a narrative about the whites, but mainly *for* the whites. [8]

I became perplexed when the "account of the contact" has been first presented to me - by Clementino, who was consensually considered the best expert in *shedipawós*. The history of war and peace with the whites, from the initial penury to the later profusion of goods, figured as the second part of an account describing the acquisition of reproductive capacity: men, until then having access solely to the posterior fold of their partners' knees, have learned with the nail-monkey [*macaco prego*] the usefulness of the vagina; since then, the Yaminawa multiplied themselves.

With this hybrid account, Clementino probably attempted, on the one hand, to define the relationship between the "accounts of contact" and the world of *shedipawós*; on the other, the place of the White man in the Yaminawan cosmology. The arrangement in parallel of two narratives, which, jointly, would be up to account for the present situation of the Yaminawa, is something that strikes the eye. Rather than introducing the "White" as a personage into other narratives – this never happens -, in lieu of creating manifestly hybrid histories which could be read as a mythification of history or a historification of myth, and instead of dedicating an account to explain the origin of the Whites, the adopted solution has been that of proposing a parallel between two episodes describing the acquisition of basic wisdoms from the animals and from this other important personage. Thus, the way in which Clementino presented his account would serve a double function: as all the other accounts on contact, it plays with the recognition of the Yaminawan past by the whites, with their relationships' codification in terms of the differential in goods; in this way, the Yaminawa, or their immediate ancestors, insert themselves within the history of the white listener. Yet, with the second segment, Clementino's account inserts as well, metaphorically, the white within the Yaminawan tradition of founding the innermost of their lives in the absorption of alien wisdoms and techniques. The discovery of reproductive sex - who would doubt? - does not yield in radicality to all changes introduced by the white man. The Yaminawan life has experienced much newness in the last thirty years; only the newness in itself is what was absolutely not new for them.

The account of the contact, centered on the acquisition of alien wisdoms, would be better understood if associated with another narrative essentially directed to the white interlocutor, which we could call "account of the end". After occasionally referring to the persecution, servitude and expropriation of the Yaminawa by the whites, and above all of the "surrendering" of these Indians to the invaders, such account focuses the abandonment of their traditional culture and its foreseeable consequences. Assertions about the cultural decadence of the Yaminawa went along with my research since the beginning, and were supplemented by quite pessimistic forecasts about the future, which may be symbolized in the following phrase: "in thirty years there will not be Yaminawa anymore". As in the "account of the contact", it is easy to acknowledge a plausible assessment in this type of statement, in this case referred to the group's future; again, such plausibility depends on the mobilization of concepts and diagnostics well known by the listener – another listener, this time, no more the agent of official indigenism, or the employer, or the white latex extractor, but the militant of a NGO or the anthropologist sympathetic to alien traditions. Once more, the account opens a niche for the Yaminawa in the interlocutor's history, assures a dialogue and an occasional collaboration. This factual content, however, deserves some consideration in face of the vagueness of this abandoned "tradition", as well as of more deleterious behaviors to the group's good government (internal quarrels, constant displacement, scissions) which,

reported in other moments as a characteristic of the "ancient", seems to show with clear evidence the essential continuity of this "lost" tradition.

In short, we can say that the white man's role in the *shedipawós* accounts evokes in a certain sense the game established elsewhere by the Panoan graphic arts between figure and background [*fundo e forma*] which allows reading different plots in the foreground. At first sight, these narratives make no allusion to the white man; on the contrary, they describe a world free of his goods and gods. On the other hand, they constantly deal with him, that is, the *nawa* appear at every moment, sometimes as fellow creatures, sometimes as monstrous ones – "*nawa*" is the term used to designate the white men, and, nowadays, to designate the others par excellence. At first sight, no more than a homonymy, although tenaciously maintained: in reproducing the *shedipawós* accounts in Portuguese, the Yaminawa use to translate "*nawa*" into "white", even when this results in the appearance of "whites" throwing arrows or sharing the ancients' language, usages, or their penile cords. But, is it plausible to presume a simple homonymy when it comes to such a strategic aspect? As I already have analyzed in another study (Calavia Sáez, 2002), the whole set of uses of the term "*nawa*" leads us to a contra-intuitive conclusion. Obsessed with the white's presence, fatally attracted by their cities and goods, the Yaminawa didn't take the trouble to create a new category for this being, having rather opted for granting him the use and enjoyment of a central category in their cosmology. On the one hand, this caused the white to attract to himself the Yaminawa's vision – as it happens with all the assessments involving the group's deculturation – or, otherwise, to become invisible – as it occurs when the Yaminawan world is read through the *shedipawó* accounts. In either case, there is not a mark permitting to speak about a before and an after the white man; the *nawa* already existed before the arrival of the white man. Evidently, this does not turn the Yaminawan universe into a monad amazingly blind to the whites' ubiquity – it would be of no interest asserting this enormity, which is against any common sense. On the contrary, what is worth noticing is that the whole of the categories used to describe the possible relations in the cosmos – which already reckoned the alterity in its interior - remains perfectly cold in face of such presence.

Inventing history

I shall recognize that the historification of the *shedipawó* accounts may result from the narrative context, that is, may have been motivated by the question about the Yaminawan past. Asking for history – and not, for instance, for exegeses of such or such practice – is how I have obtained the collection of narratives. [9] In other words, my research offered an opportunity for the invention of the Yaminawan history – for the first time in a written form. I have already alluded to their two main versions – the *shedipawó* and the account of the contact. Yet there has been one more version, with very different characteristics, which has been formulated by someone with greater fluency in the white's language and his discursive manners. The account made by Chief Correia, the group leader in the occasion, was essentially a list of places and neighbors: in a certain place, the Yaminawa live together with the Shipibo, the Piro and the Catiana, in another place, with the Sharanawa, the Mastanawa and the Marinawa; here, they get acquainted with the Peruvian, there, they come to know about savage Indians living hidden in the forest. Between one and another of these localizations, as a continuous motor of this history, conflicts have arisen that determined the exit of the ancestors towards new homes; in conflict with other Indians, they also saw the internal divisions multiply – the Yaminawa aren't but a collection of peoples that only the white man decided to epitomize under this name.

The account has certainly an hybrid character in view of the absence of mythical elements and on account of the relevance of the information and concepts acquired in the dialogue with indigenists or anthropologists (for example, the notions about a Panoan family of languages, or about the names given to the ancient Peruvian neighbors). Would it be, therefore, a

spurious account? The enunciator himself is, biographical and functionally, a mestizo who went through the Indian settlement, the city and the *seringal*, having assumed as well the role of indigenous chief and chief of the Funai post. But should we bring to the indigenous historiography an abject adaptation of that ethnical purity already dismissed from other fields? Should indigenous history be restricted to memory resources, rejecting the use of information directly or indirectly obtained from a written tradition? The problem here is not whether this account can or cannot be considered the authentic Yaminawan history. This has been assured at least to the extent and in the moment when the historian-chief socialized it among his followers. But is it sufficiently "other" to offer an original contribution? Or is it no more than a reflection, a re-elaboration of what has been written by others, of the wisdom accumulated in the libraries? As in so many other occasions, the elucidation of the indigenous history recoups as a problem a process rarely discussed, but frequent in any historic conscience, that is, the transformation of information obtained from others into one's own memory. [10] In he indigenous case, the boundary between one's own and another's, supposedly clearer, suggests the usual paradox of determining the factual by means of a fictitious memory.

It is worth noticing, however, that in Correia's account, besides the bibliography's original data re-compiled in his followers' memories, there are valuable ingredients of this "other" history we long for – the chief is not just a narrator, but a researcher as well. I am pointing out to the arrangement of those data. We cannot say that it owes much to any of the great narratives of our historiography; and it owes even less to those which our mediators make available for the Yaminawan historian. I am especially referring to the definition of the protagonist, which does not proceed from an origin, but is determined in contrast with his "others", who shift from chapter to chapter: Shipibo, Catiana, Mastanawa, etc. The narration of the Yaminawa chief shows a high degree of systematization: history is not an illation from events, but a succession of structures – of interethnic relations – which are united or, more precisely, separated by punctual events. Ultimately, a significantly cold history, and one that leads the structures to generate new variants of itself. [11]

Neither kings nor battles

No text whatsoever has been so referred in the bibliography on indigenous history of the 1980's as the articles of Marshall Sahlins on the Hawaiian history, especially about the dramatic identification between Captain Cook and the god Lono. Besides a general argument about the necessary articulation between structure and history, Sahlins provocatively stresses the capacity of kings and battles (symbols of the disparaged *histoire évenementielle*) for personifying and changing durable structures. Under this rubric too, the Yaminawas' memory – differently from that of many other indigenous groups - refuses to offer the researcher immediate satisfaction. There are neither proper names, nor historic personages, nor monuments in the accounts about the past; in short, there aren't points of information accumulation needing to be reduced to the structure. Yet, this discrete profile does not change in anything that articulation referred by Sahlins; on the contrary, it takes it to more necessary grounds. [12]

In the case of the Yaminawa, one can research at least two classical domains of what we use to consider *structures*, that is, mythology and kinship.

As to kinship, there is no difficulty in identifying the sign of history, but perhaps there is in recognizing in it some constructive aspect. It is easy to notice the diversity of criteria when it comes to classify relatives, assign names, formulate matrimonial rules or define filiations or groupings. The precariousness of the genealogical data prevents hierarchizing such criteria or measuring their effectiveness. Thus, kinship would be – and there is no lack of exegeses in

this sense within the group itself – an argument in favor of the cultural and ethnical disorganization of the Yaminawa, a structure not articulated in history, but disaggregated by it. The mode of historic articulation of structures, however, would not precisely be in this contrast between the always discrete order of the past (or of a presumed future) and the disordered plurality of the present? When an authentic order is enunciated, the group's moral authority – be it the chief's, the elders', or "of those who know" – resort, in the first place, to this contrast between temporalities, basing the sociological on the historical discourse. The structures' presumed "immobility" derives from identifying as "structure" this legitimate (i.e., traditional) model, and not the set of variables within which it acquires sense. Oscillating between the Dravidian, Australian or Dakotan models, the Yaminawan kinship system is not, therefore, an illustration of confusion between orders, but the global aspect of a structure [13] in the absence of an authority able to maximize one of these aspects over the others. This, in itself, turns the Yaminawa into a peculiar variant within the entire Panoan cluster, which presents crystal clear examples of "traditional" orders. [14] The structure's historical possibilities would not rest in its capacity of reaction to external events, or of unfolding within them, but precisely in its internal variability, which allows, or obliges, several consecutive readings. Historical events – Sahlins' kings and battles – would thus fundamentally be discrete re-reading points of a structure susceptible of many versions.

As to mythology, its character of open work is evident. It seems clear that certain narratives have been improvised for the researcher, and were based on some known formulas which allowed doing so without great effort. The comparison between the Yaminawan myths and their closer Panoan neighbors' correlates, beyond a surprisingly continuity in themes and arguments, shows the easiness with which these myths have been subject to transformations, following alterations in other domains, as those of kinship and political authority. In various articles (Calavia Sáez, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003), I have been trying to show how Yaminawan myths are able to synthesize the contrasts opposing this group to others who share the same narrative legacy, as much in the assemblage of episodes and the characterization of personages, as in the style and the context of enunciation. In other words, their narratives concern a mythology unequivocally Yaminawa, whose coherence surprises: collected from a significant number of informers proceeding from different groups – what could transform the Yaminawan orality in a sort of federation of particular traditions -, these myths form, on the contrary, a rather consolidated heritage. In spite of differences in style among narrators, the perceptible variations among the different versions are minimal, which assures homogeneous accounts in contrast with the narratives proceeding from other peoples very closer to them. This ordered divergence in relation to other neighboring mythologies suggests that Yaminawan myths are far from representing a conservative material. Well on the contrary, they are especially sensitive to the course of history, allowing the researcher to detect trends which would be difficult to acknowledge in other domains of the Yaminawan social life. Malleable for the narrator, yet subjected to a communication process which discards or normalizes novelties, i.e., which structures them. Since Lévi-Strauss, it is not surprising that a mobile version of structure, not opposed to change, but requiring it as a permanent condition, has been based precisely on myths. What could finally be better for this course of history than a changing way of telling it? Yaminawan myths are history not because they comprehend original and irreducible information about the past, but because they constantly reformulate it. They do it now, and nothing suggests that they haven't done the same before.

The third shore

Subjected to the conditions of the Yaminawan case, history has the possibility of recouping some original traits. And not because it allows great approximations between our historical account and an account of another type; but rather because it returns to us, reformulated, the distance between peoples with or without history. What is lacking in what we are told by the Yaminawa are these marks which have usually served as a Rosetta stone to the interpretation

of indigenous memories as history: great events, divisions separating long periods. Besides, the very precariousness of the documents referred to the Yaminawa and the indetermination of a trans-temporal identity prevent thinking the Yaminawan discourse over the past as a "taking of conscience" of an already existent history. Directed to the white man, and elaborated with a generous use of his terms, the Yaminawan narratives frequently show history as invention. This absence of a "given" history – from which the constructed historical discourse would be a more or less faithful reflex – stresses, as a counterpart, two important aspects which usually do not appear in the historiography of the peoples "with history". The first concerns the relevant role acquired in such accounts by *other* wisdoms, that is, by history understood as narration of others or about others. The second concerns the essential role assumed by historical discourse in history itself: not as its reflex, but as a first rank factor in its practice. The formulation of History dissimulates its efficiency when committed to a body of experts distant from the political stage and, thus, paradoxically, at the margins of history, but shows itself in plain light when, as a function of political leadership, it turns to be understood as a central event. [15] In this strategic point, the historic discourse occupies, for the indigenous peoples, the same place in which stands the absorption of the alterity through matrimonial alliance and the entrance of goods or doctrines, besides being probably subject to the same cosmological filters which regulate those other incorporations. Indigenous peoples absorb alien history not because they lack it, but because they submit it to the same regime of subjetification applied to sociological, ideological or technical material.

But the absence in Yaminawan history of great events, kings, battles, and temporal sequences – in short, of narrative motives – serves to localize history where it is *given*, before its narrative elaboration, i.e., in the structures' mandatory variability, which can only be perceived in its contrast and in its alteration. Alteration is, therefore, the normal state; on the contrary of a primitive stability (among the Yaminawa, it is always expected that the authority of a chief could be able to implement such stability, either in reality or in memory), stability is a selected fruit of history, a fruit which not always becomes ripe.

Resuming the beginning of this article, let us remember that the claim of an indigenous history occurred in two fronts: that of the objective historicity of indigenous peoples (which are not frozen images of a primitive state) and that of its subjectification, that is, of the presence of an historical wisdom and, therefore, of a peculiar historical conscience. It seems clear that these dimensions should be articulated, i.e., it should be recognized that the way by which the peoples perceive and narrate their history is an essential part of such history. This is the point where we can perceive how erroneous has been the reading of the binomial "cold societies/hot societies" as a negation of history, when it should have been considered precisely the key for elucidating the contrast between different historicities. Only the propagandistic narratives of Progress, Enlightenment or Revolution – whose importance cannot be minimized, for they accomplish a very significant role in the trajectory of the peoples "with history" – make of the distinction between *hot* and *cold* a question of data. In practice, data appear ordered only in accounts, which define their value. This is how revolutions are travestied as restorations, and restorations as revolutions; this is how everything changes in order to remain the same and how great changes act as old moles excavating an apparent immutable soil. Only Lévi-Strauss' conception, however, tended to make of this game not an astuteness of history, but a human action susceptible to alternative versions. In order to understand the manipulations of the historical temperature, it is necessary to be aware that, in the Lévi-Straussian version, [16] the structures are not able to account for both deeds attributed to them: to remain safe and sound (constituted by contradictions between terms – their stability would be a contradiction in terms) and to abolish themselves in order to give place to absolutely new structures (their terms are too much basic to permit imagining a new configuration done without them). The comparison of the contrasts present in historical accounts is what allows perceiving that history, being it of

revolutions or of permanencies, is above all an effect of sense, of far reaching efficacy over reality.

The third shore of history is inhabited by this organic historian who selects data, rhythms and directions, in determining the account's coldness or hotness. In the study of indigenous history, more than finding history where someone supposed it didn't exist, it is important to find again – in the invention of the subject, in the mythical variation, in the mimesis of other accounts – the original living traces of the historical practice, so many times wiped out by the historiography's routine.

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[1] I am especially thinking about activities such as the Working Groups (*Grupos de Trabalho – GTs*) on indigenous history in *ABA* (the Brazilian Anthropological Association) and *Anpocs* (the National Association for Graduate Studies and Research in Social Sciences) meetings, the elaboration of the *Guia de Fontes sobre a História Indígena no Brasil* (Sources Guide for Indigenous History in Brazil), and specialized groups as the *Núcleo de História Indígena e do Indigenismo* (Center for Indigenous History and Indigenism), created by Maria Manuela Carneiro da Cunha at the University of São Paulo – USP. Many other individual or collective initiatives, however, have trodden upon this field in the period, stimulated by a general interest in themes as, for instance, memory and oral history, the latter considered both as a method and a political-cultural movement.

[2] It is not in the scope of this article to make a general assessment – otherwise much necessary – of the extensive bibliography on indigenous history produced in the last decennia. For more details on the revision here outlined, see Viveiros de Castro *et al*., 2003.

[3] It is only after a continued presence of SIL's missionaries/researchers that a Kaxinawá model, non recognizable in former documents, emerged with remarkable clearness. See Calavia Sáez (2000, pp. 25-27).

[4] A good opportunity is not necessarily the only one. Any long term reconstruction of Panoan past (see Lathrap *et al*,, 1985) undoubtedly notices the existence of no less dramatic contacts much prior to the that with the whites.

[5] This impossible subject of the Yaminawan history adds a new dimension to the discussions on the possibility of a history, or of a historical agency, "without subject" (cf. Palti, 2004); the alternative subject/non-subject would be "in history", and not only in the theory of history.

[6] Significantly, shamanism, so intimately connected to these accounts, is an activity which is distant from the public sphere.

[7] Something similar occurred with the accounts having exclusively animals as protagonists; such accounts seemed to stay out of the field of *shedipawós stricto sensu*, but, at the same time, in the absence of a specific category for inserting them, they ended up being aligned within it.

[8] In dealing with indigenous history, the addressee, and the context he provides, is rarely taken into consideration. A noticeable exception is Gow's work (2001), which is also useful in appreciating the relevance of improvisation in this historical dialogue.

[9] However, it must be said that, in the course of the research, opportunities for the exegetical discourse have also been offered, but without appreciable results. The historicity of the accounts has not been due to a repression of an exegetic habitude. Besides, occasionally, the exegesis occurred by means of historification – a food restriction, for instance, should have been a custom of the ancient, since there was an account referring to that.

[10] As a counterpart, the eminent orality, naturally attributed to indigenous history, dissolves another problem that is better apprehended in written historiography, i.e., that of the oblivion. To know which data have been wiped out of memory may be as revealing as the preserved memory itself. This versant of indigenous historiography remains unprecedented, although there is no lack of data for exploring it.

[11] However, it is worth noticing that, in the referred account, these variations had a definite direction: that of the Yaminawa's progressive isolation and disaggregation.

[12] According to a recent critique by Peter Gow (2001, p. 18), Sahlins' analysis rather show the possibility of attributing anthropological value to historical events than a manner of making history from structures.

[13] On the possibility, or necessity, of these systems' coexistence, cf. Viveiros de Castro, 1995.

[14] What is equivalent to suggest (following Leach's classical reference on High Burma) that this cluster should be read as a system of political situations, and not only as an aggregate of ethnic groups.

[15] This situation is equivalent, in our case, to presidents and kings being constitutionally empowered to enunciate the official history. Something that, finally, is not so distant from our experience: it is enough to remember that the first General History of Spain carries the signature of King Alfonso X, that Thiers has been an important historian, and that the Emperor Pedro II has had an important role in the formulation of a history of Brazil. The lack of attention towards the connections between event and structure, however, can lead the scholar to imagine such undertakings as a sort of leisure activity.

[16] The Lévi-Straussian binomial arises from the sociological texture of society, not from the perception and the account of history. The approach to the latter occurs mainly in his polemics with Sartre (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

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