THE NOTION OF INTIMACY IN AMERINDIAN NARRATIVES[1]

JOSÉ LUÍS JOBIM
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL FLUMINENSE
FÁBIO ALMEIDA DE CARVALHO
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE RORAIMA

Abstract: This paper discusses some aspects of the notion of intimacy for Amerindian communities and authors. In Amerindian narratives, referred to in Latin America as *testimonio* (testimony), there is a challenge to the characterisation of types of first-person narrator-character discourses as only being "individual" or limited to the sphere of the intimacy of a singular authorial subject. Since these discourses claim to verbalise not only the personal, intimate past of their authors, but also the history of the indigenous people they belong to, it is necessary to extend the concept of *intimacy* in order to do justice to that claim. In indigenous texts, the notion of *cultural intimacy* presents nuances that, roughly speaking, correspond to: 1) the specificities of authorial positions, included in a context in which individual authorship comes into conflict with the processes of incorporating the demands of the community to which the author belongs; 2) the incorporation of collaborations to produce narratives, with the presence of authors that do not belong to the community but are essential for the creation and circulation of the text (due to their role as editors of the verbal artifact written on the basis of oral material; due to their proficiency in the language that is "foreign" to the Amerindians and in which the text is written; due to their real or supposed ability to understand the meanings of the oral narrative and turn it into a verbal artifact understandable for the "white" culture etc.). Another factor that defines the type of *cultural intimacy* expressed via the texts of indigenous verbal art relates to the way they reflect the different socio-cultural realities experienced by the indigenous populations in the social fabric of the communities they belong to.
Keywords: cultural intimacy, Indigenous verbal art

Resumo: Este artigo discute alguns aspectos da noção de intimidade para comunidades e autores ameríndios. Nas narrativas ameríndias, referidas na América Latina

[1] Translated by Lisa Shaw.

como *testimonio* (testemunho), há um desafio à caracterização dos tipos de discursos em primeira pessoa do narrador-personagem como sendo apenas "individuais" ou limitados à esfera da intimidade de um sujeito autoral singular. Como esses discursos pretendem verbalizar não apenas o passado pessoal e íntimo de seus autores, mas também a história dos povos indígenas aos quais pertencem, é necessário ampliar o conceito de intimidade para fazer justiça a essa pretensão. Nos textos indígenas, a noção de intimidade cultural apresenta nuances que, grosso modo, correspondem a: 1) as especificidades das posições autorais, inseridas em um contexto em que a autoria individual entra em conflito com os processos de incorporação das demandas da comunidade à qual o autor pertence; 2) a incorporação de colaborações para a produção de narrativas, com a presença de autores que não pertencem à comunidade, mas são essenciais para a criação e circulação do texto (devido ao seu papel como editores do artefato verbal escrito com base em material oral; devido à sua proficiência na língua que é "estrangeira" aos ameríndios e na qual o texto é escrito; devido à sua capacidade real ou suposta de compreender os significados da narrativa oral e transformá-la em um artefato verbal compreensível para a cultura "branca" etc.). Outro fator que define o tipo de intimidade cultural expressa nos textos da arte verbal indígena está relacionado à forma como eles refletem as diferentes realidades socioculturais vividas pelas populações indígenas no tecido social das comunidades às quais pertencem.
Palavras-chave: intimidade cultural, arte verbal indígena

In the Portuguese language, probably as a legacy of the meaning of the Latin adjective *intimus* as *very within, domestic, familiar*, *friendly* (Cretella Jr and Ulhoa 629), there is an association between intimacy and a series of literary genres (autobiography, autofiction, diaries, memoirs, letters etc.) that encompass narratives presented by a narrator who is also a character in the story that they are telling, generally in the first person.[2]

In texts classified as *autobiographies* or *memoirs*, it is often assumed that there is a kind of *pact with the reader,* as Philippe Lejeune termed it. This type of text frequently claims to know or reveal a personal past, accessible by putting it into words. The reader is deemed to

[2] José Veríssimo, in a text written in 1899 (Machado 218-219, our emphasis), commenting on Machado de Assis' "powerful faculties of observation and analysis" and very animated by what the author had done in the memorialist text "The old Senate", published in *Páginas recolhidas*, did not hesitate to make a request of him: "Both our political history and our literary history suffer from a lack of *intimate documents, memoirs, correspondence, confessions*, from which we could piece together the life and spirit of past times, things and men. […] Mr. Machado de Assis could bring us a precious deposition of literary, journalistic, artistic, social, and even political life from thirty or forty years ago. He experienced all of them or at least lived through them all, and his text "The old Senate" would be an excellent chapter of the book that I am here asking him to write."

consider it truthful because it has been created by an author who claims to be reproducing in the written word what actually happened to them. Therefore, somehow it is presumed that the narrator-character restricts themselves to what is intimate to them, to what is in the "interior", so to speak, of the limits of their subjectivity and can be narrated *from within*, as a product of this singular, non-transferrable intimacy that the subject has with themselves. The narrator-character is attributed with legitimacy to recount what they witnessed or experienced, the events that relate to them or in which they took part, and the feelings or emotions they had in the face of what happened to them. It is also presumed that what the narrator-character witnessed or experienced is all that can be narrated. In other words, this type of text is legitimized by claiming to be a reference to the author's past: they are deemed to be recounting what they actually saw or felt, in the circumstances in which it was possible for them to witness or experience facts from their own past.

However, in texts analogous in terms of form to *autobiographies* or *memoirs*, such as those referred to as *autofiction*, for example, the full extent of this *pact with the reader* is not presumed, since although the narrative makes use of structurally similar linguistic resources, it does not possess the necessary correspondence with extratextual references pre-dating the production of the narrative. In fact, it is often possible to differentiate *autofiction* from *autobiographies* or *memoirs* not from the text's "formal" aspects, in other words, by the linguistic techniques that structure it (use of the first person, presence of a narrator-character, use of past verb tenses, etc.), but from other aspects. Whereas in *autobiographies* or *memoirs* it would be imperative that the narrative corresponded to events and actions experienced by the narrator-character prior to and exterior to it, the same is not true of *autofiction*, where this correspondence is not necessary (although it could possibly occur).

In Amerindian narratives, referred to in Latin America as *testimonio* (testimony), there is, however, a challenge to the characterisation of these types of first-person narrator-character discourses as only being "individual" or limited to the sphere of the intimacy of a singular authorial subject. Since these discourses claim to verbalise not only the personal, intimate past of their authors, but also the history of the indigenous people they belong to, it is necessary to extend the concept of *intimacy* in order to do justice to that claim. One possibility is to use Michael Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy, which seeks to recognise aspects of a shared cultural identity that would ensure a particular common socialisation and familiarity.

However, Herzfeld is not interested in the peculiarities of discourses seen as individual, but rather in the presence in Nation-States of different spheres of *cultural intimacy*,

which would make the idea of national homogeneity unviable. In fact, he is particularly interested in the way in which the *cultural intimacy* constructed in infra-national groups goes against the homogenising nationalist discourse, based on general, biogenetic or cultural similarities: the very existence of these groups is, in his view, a challenge to the claims of universality predominant in the Nation-State. In this sense, collective representations of *cultural intimacy* may become a problem, chiefly if they diverge from what the 'powers that be' wish to impose as the sole representation within the confines of a given country. In any case, the various infra-national communities that resort to collective representations of *cultural intimacy* as a source of cohesion and social belonging cannot avoid relationships with the overarching culture, in a process that is always underway, although they seek to avoid homogenising nationalist totalisations, or at least to resist them.

Intimacy and interculturality

Regarding the emergence of texts of an autobiographical kind, but also with community elements, attributed to Amerindian authors, but that are mediated/elaborated/edited/structured by "white" agents, some common characteristics have been identified in the narratives attributed to Rigoberta Menchú and Davi Kopenawa:

> 1) they are aimed at a non-Amerindian audience, although the authors themselves are Amerindian; 2) they describe elements of Amerindian culture; 3) they present historical facts that refer to the encounter between Amerindian culture and the dominant culture, in their respective countries, taking an indigenous perspective; 4) they were originally published in languages different to those of their Amerindian authors – in other words, they were mediated via translation; 5) they were edited and structured by people linked to French culture, based on "western" disciplinary perspectives: Anthropology or Ethnology. (Jobim 33-34)[3]

The book *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchu y así me nació la consciência* [*I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*] calls into question the assumption that a narrator-character

[3] 1) são dirigidas a um público não ameríndio, embora estes autores sejam ameríndios; 2) descrevem elementos da cultura ameríndia; 3) apresentam fatos históricos referentes ao encontro da cultura ameríndia com a cultura abrangente, em seus respectivos países, partindo de uma perspectiva indígena; 4) foram originalmente publicadas em línguas diferentes daquelas de seus autores ameríndios – ou seja, foram mediadas por tradução; 5) foram organizadas e estruturadas por pessoas ligadas à cultura francesa, a partir de perspectivas disciplinares "ocidentais": Antropologia ou Etnologia.

restricts themselves to what is intimate to them, what is in the "interior", so to speak, of the limits of their subjectivity and can be narrated from *within*, as a product of this personal non-transferable intimacy that the subject has with themselves, for at least two reasons.

The first is that, as has already been pointed out (Jobim "Narrativas ameríndias"), the book, in its French and Spanish editions, presents Elizabeth Burgos as the "author" on the cover. In her prologue to the first edition, Burgos clearly explains her role in editing the material supplied by Menchú, beginning with transcribing the oral material into written form, attributing to herself the role of both proxy for the indigenous woman and vehicle for turning the oral material into a written text.[4] Burgos, therefore, processes the narrative recorded by Menchú to turn it into a book, something that would not have happened if it had remained solely in the hands of the indigenous woman.

The second is that events are included in the narrative that could not have been witnessed by Menchú, events deemed to have been beyond the limits of her testimony. However, these limits were questioned both by the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation (RMTF 104) and by researchers (Pratt 42-43), who pointed out, amongst other things, that it would be legitimate to include in a testimony everything that was passed on orally as having taken place in the community to which the narrator belonged. In other words, at the level of *cultural intimacy*, stories that were attributed to a particular configuration of the past would be shared and incorporated by the narrator-character into her testimony. It is following this line of thought that the Rigoberta Menchú Foundation defends the incorporation of events that were not witnessed firsthand:

> The testimony of Rigoberta Menchú has the value of representing not just the story of a witness, but rather the personal experience of a protagonist and the interpretation of *that which her own eyes saw and wept over, that which her own ears heard, and that which they were told*. No testimony can be viewed as journalistic reporting, nor as a neutral description of the reality of others. The testimony of Rigoberta Menchú has the bias and the courage of a victim who, in addition to what she personally suffered, had the right to assume as her own personal story the atrocities that her people lived through. (RMTF 104, our emphasis)

[4] "Situarme em el lugar que me correspondía: primero escuchando y dejando hablar a Rigoberta, y luego convirtiéndome en una especie de doble suyo, en el instrumento que operaria el paso de lo oral a lo escrito." (Situating myself in the appropriate place for me: first listening to Rigoberta and letting her speak, and then becoming a kind of proxy, the tool that would perform the transition from oral to written form.) (Burgos 18)

The book by Kopenawa and Albert is also an example of the mixing of individual memory and the incorporation of collectivised stories related to a kind of *cultural intimacy*, which could also include the anthropologist Bruce Albert, who co-existed with the Yanomami people for decades. Albert is aware that the book *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* is not an "indigenous" creation, so to speak, since he states in the introduction that it arose from a collaborative project located at the unpredictable, fragile intersection of two cultural universes.[5] Furthermore, in the case of both Menchú and Albert, their testimonies are directed primarily at the dominant society, which has become a threat to the survival of indigenous peoples. Kopenawa talks *to* and *through* Bruce Albert to the "merchandise people" (the term used by Kopenawa to refer to those who see the forest only as a source of raw materials to be exploited), because he wants people to understand what he is saying, in the name of the Yanomami people: "I also want their sons and daughters to understand our words and become our friends, so that they do not grow up in ignorance. Because if the Forest is completely devastated, there will never grow another one."[6] (Kopenawa and Albert 43)

Contours of cultural intimacy

The previous cases demonstrate that, in indigenous texts, the notion of *cultural intimacy* presents nuances that, roughly speaking, correspond to: 1) the specificities of authorial positions, included in a context in which individual authorship comes into conflict with the processes of incorporating the demands of the community to which the author belongs; 2) the incorporation of collaborations to produce narratives, with the presence of authors that do not belong to the community but are essential for the creation and circulation of the text (due to their role as editors of the verbal artifact written on the basis of oral material; due to their proficiency in the language that is "foreign" to the Amerindians and in which the text is written; due to their real or supposed ability to understand the meanings of the oral

[5] Ce livre n´en constitue par pour autant une ethnobiographie classique. Il ne s´agit nullement, en effet, d´un récit de vie sollicité et reconstruit par un rédacteur fantôme, à partir de son propre projet documentaire, à la mode des classiques nord-américains du genre au début du siècle dernier. Ce n´est pas non plus une autobiographie ethnografique relevant d´un genre narratif traditionnel, transcrite et traduite par un antropologue tenant lieu de simple secrétaire. Les registres du témoignage de Davi Kopenawa excèdent de beaucoup les canons autobiographiques (les nôtres ou ces des yanomani). Le récit des épisodes cruciaux de sa vie entremêlent indissociablement histoire personelle et destin collectif. Il s´exprime à travers une complexe imbrication de genres : mythes et récits de rêve, visions et prophéties chamaniques, discours raportés et exortations, autoethnographie et anthropologie comparative. Par ailleurs, ce livre est issu d´un projet de collaboration situé a l´intersection, imprévue et fragile, de deux univers culturels. (Kopenawa and Albert 29)

[6] Je voudrai aussi que leur fils et leur filles comprennent nos paroles et qu´ils fassent amitiés avec les nôtres afin de ne pas grandir dans l´ignorance. Car si la forêt est entièrement dévastée, il n´en naîtra jamais d´autre. (Kopenawa and Albert 43).

narrative and turn it into a verbal artifact understandable for the "white" culture etc.). Another factor that defines the type of *cultural intimacy* expressed via the texts of indigenous verbal art relates to the way they reflect the different socio-cultural realities experienced by the indigenous populations in the social fabric of the communities they belong to.

In this sense, although it is not as famous as the above-mentioned examples, an emblematic case is *Os cantos tradicionais Ye'kuana* [*Ye'kuana Traditional Songs*] by Fernando Gimenes Ye'kuana, winner of the Dirce Cortes Riedel prize for best Master's dissertation in 2021, awarded by the Brazilian Comparative Literature Association (ABRALIC). It was a genuine novelty in Brazilian literary studies to award such an eminently academic prize to a verbal artifact created by an indigenous man whose first language is not Portuguese, and who presents himself as the author of a text that can be classified as academic (because it took the form of a master's dissertation) and also imaginative.

The impulse to create Fernando Ye'kuana's text comes from a complex context that has to do, firstly, with a decision supported by a cultural policy internal to the *Fuduuwaaduinha* (Auaris) community, where he lives, in the forest area on the Brazil-Venezuela border—having realized that the wise elders, custodians of stories and traditional songs (designated "historians" and "singers"), are dying without leaving heirs to these roles, as well as that the young people now need schooling to have more contact with the traditional knowledge that was previously passed on via the activities of daily life, the inhabitants of *Fuduuwaaduinha* (Auaris) negotiated a kind of cultural policy within the community. This policy seeks to create strategies to confront the rapid and unavoidable demands of life in the dominant society, such as the academic training of Ye'kuana thinkers. The idea is to enable them to transit within and outside indigenous communities.

Equipped with the awareness of the dangers of the fading away of the regulatory principles that underpin community life, as well as the possibilities of drastic alteration of Ye'kuana cultural identity, in addition furthermore to the resulting fear that life could be quickly and irrevocably altered, due to the many appeals of dominant society, leaders and other members of the community chose the teacher Fernando Ye'kuana to confront the process of cultural change and forgetting. It was in his position as teacher, compelled by the need to preserve and give value to the principles of community life via the school, that Fernando Ye'kuana undertook to stand up, as an individual and a community, to the process of cultural loss within the community and beyond it.

This gave rise to the initial impulse and courage to collect material and to obtain a postgraduate qualification in literary studies – no mean feat for an indigenous person born

and raised in a community located in the "depths of the virgin forest", as Macunaíma, Mário de Andrade's famous character might say. Fernando Ye'kuana took it upon himself to turn the school, that strange institution identified by many as the spearhead of controlling hearts and minds in the Western world, into a place of resistance against contemporary transformations, and consequently, of strengthening traditions and community life. To achieve this, the chosen tool was based on developing activities to research and record the traditional songs of the Ye'kuana people – those veritable pearls of Amerindian verbal art.

The community, therefore, mobilized so that the elders helped the teacher to carry out this undertaking to become a new vector of cultural transmission in the community, while taking a bold step into the unknown by entering academic life at university as an undergraduate and a postgraduate. Committed to upholding the ethical and aesthetic values of Ye'kuana culture, in the *Introduction,* Fernando Ye'kuana states his objective of "presenting, translating and analysing four of the songs he considers the most important to understand the culture and habits of this people":

> [...with the] intention of recording this heritage of my people for the youngest people in the communities and for everyone who is interested in the Ye'kuana culture, I also have one more objective: to disseminate inside and outside of the Ye'kuana communities the forms and functions of these important elements that are essential to our culture, as they are what maintain the memory and existence of our people. [...]. I think this is important because, after school was introduced in the communities, and children began to have their days occupied with schoolwork, they lost the opportunity to learn songs, as happened in the past when the school did not exist for the Ye'kuana. To give you an idea, nowadays, parents scarcely are in the habit of planting fiya'kwa in their backyards, or teaching songs and languages to their children. (Yek'wana 14)[7]

[7] [...com a] intenção de deixar registrado esse patrimônio do meu povo para os mais jovens das comunidades e para todos os que se interessam pela cultura dos ye'kwana, tenho também mais um objetivo: o de divulgar para dentro e para fora das comunidades ye'kwanas as formas e as funções desses importantes elementos que são essenciais para a nossa cultura, pois são eles que mantêm a memória e a existência do nosso povo. [...].
Acho que isso é importante porque, depois que a escola foi introduzida nas comunidades, e que as crianças passaram a ter os seus dias ocupados com as tarefas escolares, elas foram perdendo a oportunidade de aprender os cantos, como acontecia antigamente quando a escola não existia para os ye'kwana.
Para se ter uma ideia, hoje em dia, os pais quase não têm mais o costume de plantar fiya'kwa nos quintais, para ensinar os cantos e as línguas para seus filhos.

It should be noted, firstly, that the movement seeks to reverse the harmful impact of the school, which has contributed so much to the fraying of the transmission lines of Ye'kuana culture. Now the Ye'kuana seek, in reverse, an attempt to actually make it a vector for the transmission of this same culture. Next – and this aspect has a poetic novelty about it – we must note that Fernando Ye'kuana seeks to compensate for the fact that the community is losing the habit of planting *fiya'kwa*, the vegetable that is used as a means of memorizing traditional stories and songs.[8]

This combination of factors motivated the teacher from the Gimenes Apolinário Indigenous State School to record the content of the verbal-material heritage of his people. The text was produced based on individual and community demands at the same time, giving rise to a conception of authorship in which the individual's understanding is linked to the understanding of the community as a whole. In this process, one cannot fail to draw attention to the role of the school as an institution with joint agency over the production of the text, which intends, among other aims, to be used as "teaching material" for the purpose of training youth in the principles of traditional Ye'kuana life.

In other words, given Fernando Ye'kuana's undertaking to present himself as responsible for maintaining the traditional collective memory of the Ye'kuana, as well as his commitment to finding ways to 'Ye'kuanize' the community's school, leaders and members of the community collectively decided to create the conditions for the collection, recording and dissemination of this important aspect of Ye'kuana life and culture. It is worth adding that the community expected that, in the longer term, the teacher-researcher could even take on the role of singer of traditional songs, which in fact has been the case, since Fernado Ye'kuana has established himself, in recent times, as a "singer" in *Fuduuwaaduinha*.

As an individual accredited and endorsed by the community, Fernando Ye'kuana also began to involve himself in academic work in the field of literary studies at the postgraduate level. This led to the production of a text of a very dissonant nature, in relation to both current academic traditions and the traditional forms of indigenous textualities. This has enabled him to produce texts that are potentially capable of provoking significant transgressions in relation to traditional notions of narrative logic and to the very forms of narration established in the field of literary studies. As a result, this has benefitted both the process of schooling and cultural preservation/valorization promoted by the Ye'kuana and the field of literary studies, with the latter now including texts that not only diverge from

[8] *Fiya'kwa* is a scrubland plant used to teach the young to memorize the songs, stories and all the languages that they need to learn, or others want them to learn. In the past everyone used to plant *fiya'kwa*, the memorizing plant, in their gardens. This habit has gradually been falling into disuse among the Ye'kuana.

traditional genres but are also dissonant as regards the contemporary Western notion of authorship and its forms of expressiveness and linguistic and cultural intimacy. To this end, it was also necessary for the indigenous author in question to go through a process of academic supervision/tutelage on the Postgraduate Program in Literature at the Federal University of Roraima. In previous work, we have stated that:

> Although the author's name on the cover of the published book is Fernando Gimenes Ye'kuana, the text results, as can be seen from what has been said, from a type of collective collaboration, in which *historians* play the role of primary sources of *shared intimacy*.[9] In another dimension, however, the text is the result of collaborative writing, in which the supervisor's participation is manifested not only in the structure and language of the text, but also in certain aspects of the topic chain and in the translation of the songs from the Ye'kuana language into Portuguese. (Carvalho 27, our emphasis)[10]

This feature creates another dimension of the text's collective construction in Portuguese, given the meticulously dialogued collaborative partnership responsible for the final draft, involving the shared definition of the sequence of narrative events, as well as the details of the translation. To this end, in addition to his academic supervisor, the Ye'kuana author received support in reading and writing text from a research assistant.[11]

Hence the awareness that, if, on the one hand, *Ye'kuana traditional songs* certainly constitute an original product in the field of the production of thought, narrative and Amerindian incantation poetry, on the other, we must recognize that it is not necessarily an "original" text, as it has been constructed through a process of collaboration located at the unpredictable and fragile intersection of two distinct cultural universes, but equally in a context of constant contact and mutual, supportive interest. As can be seen, the *cultural intimacy* on which *Ye'kuana traditional songs* are based and structured also reflects a complexity

[9] The elders, guardians of traditional stories, that were previously only passed on orally, are referred in the Ye'kuana languages as "historians", in other words, *guardians of the stories of the ancient ones*.

[10] Apesar de o nome de autor estampado na capa do livro publicado ser o de Fernando Gimenes Ye´kwana o texto resulta, como se pode depreender do que foi dito, de um tipo de colaboração coletiva, em que os *historiadores*, desempenham a função de fontes primárias da *intimidade partilhada*. Noutra dimensão, entretanto, o texto é resultado de uma escrita colaborativa, em que a participação do orientador se manifesta não apenas na estrutura e na linguagem do texto, mas também em certos aspectos do encadeamento da tópica e na tradução dos cantos da língua ye'kwana para o português.

[11] Namely Yves Souzedo de Carvalho, holder of a Scientific Initiation scholarship awarded through the CNPq (Brazilian National Research Council).

that prompts us to rethink and resize notions such as authorship, belonging, cultural intimacy, and sharing.

The previous discussions demonstrate how the notion of *cultural intimacy* conforms to certain aspects of the production context of these texts. We will now consider another equally interesting case, albeit for issues different from those mentioned above.

Back in 2003, at the invitation of the Organization of Indigenous Teachers of Roraima (OPIR), as a literature teacher and advisor, Fábio Almeida de Carvalho had the opportunity to participate in the Anikê Project. This project aimed to develop specific and innovative teaching material for indigenous schools in Roraima, in the areas of history and geography, with the aim of preserving indigenous stories and elders' memories. The main premise of the proposal was that this work should be carried out with the participation of indigenous teachers from different regions of the state, in order to guarantee the authenticity of the final products.

Added to this is the fact that, despite all the participants already working as teachers in schools in indigenous communities in Roraima, since the team was made up of people from cultural environments in which an eminently oral type of communication predominated, with very little circulation of written texts, all of them had a degree of difficulty with writing.

The recording process consisted first of bringing together and preparing the group of indigenous teachers (predominantly from the Macushi people) to collect the texts. Once this stage was completed, and the following one (collecting the material), we all got together again to read, discuss, and put the finishing touches to the material in the communities themselves – an activity that included the presence of some elders who had provided the stories for teachers. In a previous text, this activity was described as follows:

> A small number of the stories were collected and recorded in the Macushi language, while the majority were recorded in Portuguese. The texts underwent shared reading and were then copied onto the school's blackboard or in other places improvised for this activity – generally in *malocões*; the next step was to discuss in detail the sequence of narrative events, as well as the form, structure, and language of the texts, when everyone present had the opportunity to tell different versions of the narrative.[12]

[12] Large constructions that are generally located strategically in the centre of indigenous communities, where all kinds of collective activities take place. In *Ye'kuana* they are called *ättä*, and this is usually translated as "round house".

> The texts were discussed exhaustively until a final version was established, widely negotiated, and resulted from a precarious consensus. After a final form was decided on, the texts were sent to the "translation teams" (from Portuguese to Macushi or from Macushi to Portuguese, depending on how the text had been collected). Afterwards, the texts returned to the plenary, where they were read and re-read again so that they could be approved. After that, they were finally read to/with students from community schools, who produced drawings to illustrate the content of the narratives. In short, the activity constituted an act of textualization in which the exercises of transcribing, correcting, fixing, gluing, and repairing the texts in a collective and shared way proved to be of supreme importance. (Carvalho 106-107)[13]

It was interesting to note the need for comparing versions that contained modifications of the same narrative episode, which were generally expressed in detail. These variants had to do with the different regions, as well as the ethnic differences of the participants.

Therefore, the definition of a supposed "final version" required considerable negotiation skills, since representatives from different regions and different communities had divergent opinions about what constituted the "truest version". Thus, if on the one hand the work of shared translation helped to negotiate a final version derived from different versions found in different regions, on the other hand, it was conducive to the proliferation and confrontation of textual authorities.

Disputes over the "truest version" led to heated discussions regarding the form, structure, content, and language of the collected narratives. Furthermore, the authorities of the "elders" of each region and/or community fuelled disputes about which version was supposedly most faithful to tradition. The existence of different versions was a cause of

[13] Pequena parte das histórias era colhida e registrada em língua macuxi, ao passo que a maioria era registrada em português. Realizava-se, então, a leitura partilhada dos textos e, em seguida, copiava-se o texto no quadro negro da escola ou em outros espaços improvisados para a atividade – em geral nos malocões; o passo seguinte era dado no sentido de discutir pormenorizadamente a sequência de eventos narrativos, bem como a forma, a estrutura e a linguagem dos textos, quando todos os presentes tinham oportunidade de narrar variantes do entrecho.
Os textos eram discutidos à exaustão, até o ponto em que se definia uma versão final, amplamente negociada, e resultante de um precário consenso. Depois de decidida uma forma final, os textos eram encaminhados para as "equipes de tradução" (do português para o macuxi ou do macuxi para o português, dependendo de como o texto havia sido colhido). Na sequência, os textos voltavam para a plenária, onde eram novamente lidos e relidos, a fim de serem aprovados. Depois disso, finalmente seguiam para serem lidos para/com os estudantes das escolas de comunidade, que produziam desenhos para ilustrar o conteúdo das narrativas. Resumindo, a atividade se constituiu num ato de textualização em que as manobras de transcrever, corrigir, consertar, colar e reparar de forma coletiva e partilhada os textos se mostraram de primeira importância.

disputes over narrative details. And the goal of preparing a "final" written version was obviously a transcultural act itself, as in the Amerindian context, these narratives have always circulated orally in different versions.

Having provided this brief overview of the process, it is necessary to return to discussing the notion of *cultural intimacy* in the light of this particular case. Firstly, we must consider that the notion did not appear to present itself in the same way, nor in the same terms and forms, for all project team members. Even though these were people with close kinship ties (in fact, everyone considers themselves "relatives"), in personal, community, and ethnic terms, this case allows us to assume that the notion of *intimacy*, though shared in general terms, was also affected by components of the context, which derived from micro-regional and ethnic differences.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that the final products of these activities contained very clear intercultural markings. The final version of the texts, in addition to being itself derived from interethnic acts, was designed from the outset, as a product for use in schools in indigenous communities where the texts were collected and where negotiations over final versions took place – in other words, the texts' purpose, stated from the start, cannot be overlooked, namely to be part of teaching material in the areas of history and geography, circulating in the network of indigenous schools in Roraima.

And it is always good to remember that "school" is not an institution that belongs to the ancestral traditions of the region's indigenous peoples. Therefore, the very insertion of these texts into the school system already constitutes a form of transculturation. Nor can we ignore the white teacher (*karaiuâ*), who helped put the finishing touches to the written text in Portuguese. It should be added that it was only after a final version in Portuguese had been established that the text was translated or rewritten in the Macushi version, which means that what was decided in Portuguese had effects in the Macushi version.

Even if there was an intention to maintain the aura of the text as exclusively indigenous, we cannot fail to acknowledge the reality that the process of construction, negotiation, polishing, and finalization of the texts has a significant impact on their final configuration. And it was precisely in this dynamic process of "interpretive-translation" that the oral narratives gained a written version and were transformed into texts to be used in schools as teaching material. To disregard the interferences generated by the displacement of oral narratives from the sphere of everyday life to that of didactic-school use, as well as the cultural and linguistic intersections, is to fail to recognize the importance and complexity of an entire chain of linguistic and cultural appropriations and translations.

Putting the notion of cultural intimacy in perspective

At this point, it is interesting to reflect, albeit briefly, on the configuration of the notions of *intimacy* and *culture* and, consequently, *cultural intimacy*, from an indigenous perspective. As each case is different, let us start by dealing with that of the Macushi.

As lexicographer Celino Alexandre Raposo explains, the Macushi language expresses the notion of intimacy through the word *waakama* (to be intimate, to love, to have affection for).[14] *Î'rî waakama yeserupî' tato* can be translated, according to Raposo, as "being intimate with something or someone". Regarding the notion of *culture*, he states that it can be translated into Macushi by the word *yeseruwannî*, the use of which he exemplifies with *Ko'manpîra yeseruwannî pî' to' eseuruma'pî* (Yesterday they talked about culture). Completing his linguistic consultancy, he gave us the example orally: *Uyeeseruukon waakama e'pai awanî*, translating it as "We need to be intimate with our culture".

These examples demonstrate that the notion of cultural intimacy can be formulated within the culture of these people who inhabit the savannah of northeast Roraima (known locally as the *lavrado*), who have a centuries-old history of intense intercultural contact with the surrounding society, due to the fact that the Macushi language has the elements necessary to convey the idea – including the meanings formed within the scope of anthropological thought.

However, it must be added that, in a complex context such as the Circum-Roraima region, located around Mount Roraima, on the triple border between Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela, where people of different ethnicities (Macushi, Patamona, Arekuna, Taurepang, Ingarikó, Ye'kuana, Akawaio, Kamarakoto, among others) consider themselves "relatives" because they recognize themselves as common descendants of the ancestral heroes Makunaima and Insikiran, the notion of intimacy seems to vary according to the degree of proximity between different communities. Celino Raposo states that, "depending on the community, the Macushi language may, for example, even come close in terms of pronunciation and meaning to another language such as Taurepang, "which is less likely when communities are spatially distant from each other. "These factors bring the ways of speaking and the ways of telling stories closer together", says the indigenous professor.[15]

[14] Celino Alexandre Raposo belongs to the Macushi people and works as a professor in Communication and Arts on the Intercultural Degree course at the Insikiran Indigenous Higher Education Institute at the Federal University of Roraima. The authors of this article would like to thank him for kindly sharing his rich knowledge of the language and culture of his people.

[15] Celino Raposo and Fernando Ye'kuana kindly made oral contributions to the development of the arguments presented in this article, providing explanations of a lexicographical and cultural nature. Their participation has undoubtedly helped shape the arguments presented here.

In this sense, population dynamics lead to a decrease or increase in "living in intimacy". Erwin Frank and Carlos Cirino (Barbosa and Melo 14), scholars of ethnic relations in the Circum-Roraima region, contend that a certain type of non-state territoriality, because it is organized in terms of emotional relationships that members of such groups have with the space they occupy, usually has an influence on the degree of *intimacy* shared by community members. They argue that there is a very strong identification of individuals and community groups, radiating – with decreasing intensity – in all directions from the "centre" of each of their vital daily activities (or those of their "local group"), until it finally dissolves in distant areas.

The feeling of living in the *intimacy* of the same *culture* derives from the degree of sharing of elements such as language, cuisine, construction techniques, and *savoir-faire*, as well as the recognition of descent from common heroes that populate the narratives of ancestral traditions of the peoples from this region, among other aspects.

How does this issue present itself among the Ye'kuana people? When asked about how to express the abstract notions of *intimacy*, *culture* and *cultural intimacy* within the scope of Ye'kuana life, Fernando Ye'kuana immediately responded that "it was difficult, very difficult indeed"; however, after consulting his peers, he added that the notion of intimacy could be translated by the word *äweichakoono*, while the idea of culture could be conveyed by the term *weinnhä*. As we can see, the notion seems somewhat obscure, even for a Ye'kuana with an academic background.

In a stimulating essay entitled "Unity and difference: the Ye'kuana and their relations with the binational border", that discusses the forms of self-recognition among the Ye'kuana inhabitants of Venezuela and Brazil, Karenina Andrade asks herself where, in societies whose social structure goes beyond the forms of political centralization typical of national states, the source of maintaining social solidarity and group cohesion lies. In her opinion, after the processes of establishing independent national states in South America were completed, the subnational indigenous groups that had resisted prior colonization maintained their resistance to the non-indigenous national societies configured after independence.

The territories previously inhabited by the indigenous peoples were, in many cases, divided between different Nation-States, creating borders that separated, into different national groups, peoples who previously occupied territories considered by themselves as uninterrupted. For Andrade, this raises many questions:

> Can we continue talking about the same people, society, or group, in the singular, when their communities are located in different countries? Does the establishment of relations with different States, with their unique logics, constitutions, and public policies, impact the feeling of belonging to the same whole, in the case of people living on international borders? Does the group, in such a context, stop being a group? (Andrade 56)[16]

The author adds that she hopes to convince the reader that the problem lies precisely in the definition and use of certain concepts (society, group, people, ethnicity) that are in some way derived from a logic specific to the constitution of Nation-State-type formations. Employing such concepts, which are *a priori* endowed with an internal cohesion that pays tribute to their "Western" origin, can make it difficult to perceive what they cannot capture.

In the case of Nation-States, the forces that acted at different levels in favour of homogeneity also did internal work to undermine difference. In the case of indigenous populations, the feeling of belonging to common territories, ethnicities, languages and cultures was harmed, for several reasons: 1) the partition of former common territories, based on non-indigenous logic; 2) the submission of the "same" ethnicities to different laws (within different national states); 3) the various levels of differentiation that are established when these "same" ethnicities are forced to coexist with different languages and dominant cultures.

Karenina Andrade (55–56) argues that both in the context of the production of the similar (the Ye'kuana world) and in the context of the relationship with otherness (non-Ye'kuana) we are "faced with a gradient of proximity and distance much more complex and refined than that of self-contained poles, marked by a supposed internal homogeneity, which oppose each other".

The anthropologist develops her argument based on a narrative (*Watunna*) provided by Vicente Castro, who reports how *Kuyujani*, a primordial hero sent to Earth by the demiurge *Wanaadi*, demarcated the traditional Ye'kuana territory. According to history, *Kuyujani* set off from the *Ye'kuanajödö* mountain range in *Kamasonha* toward the different places that demarcate the limits of *Ye'kuana* territory. The hero's journey narrates *Kuyujani*'s encounter

[16] Poderíamos continuar falando em um mesmo povo, sociedade ou grupo, no singular, cujas comunidades estão situadas em diferentes países? O estabelecimento de relações com diferentes Estados, com suas lógicas, constituições e políticas públicas singulares, se faria sentir no que tange ao sentimento de pertença a um mesmo todo, no caso dos povos que vivem nas fronteiras internacionais? Deixaria o grupo, num tal contexto, de ser um grupo?

with neighboring peoples (in *Kiyakuninha*, *Odo'sha* created *Maku Weichö* = *Maku* people; in *Kudutunnha*, he created *Kadi'nha Weichö* = *Kariña* people, on the left bank of the *Medewadi* River, and, on the right bank, he created *Shaje Weichö* = *Xiriana*; in *Demini*, he created *Mawade Weichö* = *Yanomami*; in *Penamä*, in what is now the city of Belo Horizonte, *Odo'sha* created *Maxacali Weichö* = *Maxacali*). From then on, *Kuyujani* created the division: the headwaters region now belonged to the indigenous peoples, and to the south, to the whites. In this way, the *Ye'kuana* territory and its limits are configured, and the types of relationships with their neighbors are defined. All of these people were created by *Odo'sha*'s ruses with the purpose of killing the hero, but potential enemies were transformed into allies by *Kuyujani*, in order to take care of the Earth (Andrade 63).

In this cosmogonic narrative, as the hero moves through the territory and his enemy gradually creates different peoples to prevent him from creating "good people on earth", the different *weichö* – a term translated as "people" – are defined. At this point, the anthropologist adds:

> When I asked Vicente Castro what constitutes Ye'kuana weichö, he answered me: the wätunnä, origin narratives, the a'chudi, and the ädemi, Ye'kuana songs. Narratives and songs constitute the ultimate source of Ye'kuana knowledge, carrying knowledge about the emergence of the world, beings, the relationships between them, as well as the rules and values that should guide life - in short, the Ye'kuana relational matrix. As a corpus of knowledge, it is a whole open to experience and the incessant production and incorporation of new elements arising from worldly experience itself and the creativity and interpretation of wise people. Associated with the concept of weichö are the terms iyeichö, which we can translate as "rules", and weichoje, meaning "way of life". (63)[17]

[17] Ao perguntar a Vicente Castro o que constitui o Ye'kwana weichö, ele me respondeu: as wätunnä, narrativas de origem, os a'chudi e os ädemi, cantos ye'kwana. Narrativas e cantos constituem a fonte última do conhecimento ye'kwana, carregando o saber acerca do surgimento do mundo, dos seres, das relações entre eles, bem como as regras e valores que devem pautar a vida – em suma, a matriz relacional ye'kwana. Enquanto corpus de conhecimento, trata-se de um todo aberto à experiência e à incessante produção e incorporação de novos elementos oriundos da própria experiência mundana e da criatividade e interpretação dos sábios. Associados ao conceito de weichö, estão os termos iyeichö, que podemos traduzir como "regras", e weichoje, "modo de vida". Of course, the presence of narratives that can serve as a cultural matrix is not exclusive to the Ye'kwana either: "The ideals that Homer portrayed in Achiles, Homer and Ulysses played a large role in the formation of the Greek character. Likewise when the Anglo-Saxons huddled around their hearth fires, stories of heroes like Beowulf helped define them as a people, through articulating their values and defining their goals in relations to the cold, alien world around them." (ALCORN and BRACHER, 1985, p. 350)

Therefore, although the notion of *cultural intimacy* in the terms proposed by Michael Herzfeld is not particularly productive for the issues dealt with in this article, thinking about the ways of being in the world implicit in this notion can undoubtedly lead us into explorations of other meanings.

The arguments presented above have sought to demonstrate that the notion of *cultural intimacy*, as regards the first-nation peoples of the Circum-Roraima region (the triple border region of Amazonia between Brazil, Venezuela, and Guyana), is a complex one and is not homogenous either across the different peoples or within a given community. In the case of the production and circulation of narratives understood as originating from a community or one of its members, there are also significant differences, ranging from the most community-centred outputs (that can result from the community's intimate collaboration with the person entrusted to produce a version of the narrative recognised as the common one) to outputs seen as more individualised. In the examples explored above, however, it cannot be denied that the production and circulation of the Amerindian verbal artifacts are transcultural, since those artifacts not only bear the marks of their Amerindian origins but also others from the dominant culture, constituting objects that cannot be adequately understood without taking into consideration the multiple aspects of their formulation.

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