

Aspects of riverside ontology on Saracá Island, municipality of Limoeiro do Ajuru (PA)

Aspectos da ontologia ribeirinha na ilha Saracá, município de Limoeiro do Ajuru (PA)

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Abstract

The riverside fishermen of Saracá Island, located in the municipality of Limoeiro do Ajuru, in the state of Pará, interpret the world in which they live being inhabited by both humans and beings of different corporealities. These beings reveal themselves whenever they want and however they want. In this article we seek to understand the relationships established between these two groups of beings who inhabit the same island and lead intertwined lives. Our analyses are based on a vast amount of research material that reveals the existence of these beings. We relied on autoethnography and ethnography, following the methodological assumptions of anthropology. We conducted structured interviews, both direct and participant observations, and photographic records. The data suggest that Saracá Island is the home of visions, *mizuras*,¹ apparitions and creatures from local folklore. Some are undeniably good or evil, while others' true nature is as uncertain as the circumstances in which they appear and disappear. These narratives are important because they influence people's lives, shaping their decisions and affecting their daily routines.

Keywords: Ontological Systems; Riverine Communities; Amazon.

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¹ A type of vision which does not appear in physical form, but through sounds and smells instead.

Introduction

The riverside fishermen of Saracá Island, located in the municipality of Limoeiro do Ajuru, in the northern state of Pará, in Brazil, believe that non-human beings coexist in the world they live in. Narratives that illustrate encounters with the *boto*, Matinta Pereira, Curupira and many other beings that populate equally vast ontological systems are widespread among traditional and riverside communities in the Amazon.

Accounts identified and analyzed from various traditional communities in Brazil evidence instances where one or more individuals have encountered these beings face-to-face. For instance, one of the authors had a firsthand experience with a *mizura* and a figure that, although indescribable, sent chills down his spine making him overwhelmed with fear. In Saracá island, many people have witnessed or believe in accounts from witnesses to events such as the commotion of the *botos* coming out to play and sitting by the river bank, or sticks and branches breaking on their own, while being unable to see what or who caused the noise.

Narratives about non-human beings are widespread across Brazil and have been classified as part of folklore,² as well as documented in audiovisual media. Some of these characters, along with new ones, have recently gained international recognition through the TV series “Invisible City,”³ produced by Netflix. These narratives are significant for the way they unveil beings that shape people’s lives, influencing their decisions and daily activities; they offer alternative ways of understanding the world, going beyond the dichotomous Western perspective. These narratives hold symbolic and moral significance, hinting at experiences yet to be explored, they also highlight the intangible heritage of various traditional Amazonian communities.

Although rooted in the particularities of each culture, narratives about both visible and invisible non-human beings are universal, being found in many human societies and serving as a subject of reflection for numerous anthropologists, ranging from the classic studies of myths by Lévi-Strauss (1979)⁴ to Phillipe Descola’s (2015)⁵ relatively recent classification of ontology

² CASCUDO, Luís Câmara. Dicionário do folclore brasileiro. São Paulo: Global, 2001.

³ Available on: < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GodwQKNXIYk>>. Accessed on: 27/09/2024.

⁴ LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *Mito e significado*, Lisboa, Edições 70, 1979. See also the work “Mitológicas,” published in four volumes, which demonstrates how the narrative of myths is embedded in the context of the relationships between nature and culture, alterity, and social relations.

⁵ DESCOLA, Philippe. Além de natureza e cultura. *Tessituras*, Pelotas, v. 3, n. 1, p. 7-33, jan./jun. 2015.

types. In order to understand the diverse experiences identified and analyzed in various human societies, Descola (2015) proposed a comprehensive framework of four types of ontology: animism, totemism, naturalism and analogism. These ontologies are explanatory models that attempt to understand the diverse specificities contained in the different perspectives found in social contexts.

In ethnographic studies conducted in the Amazon, some authors, including classics, attempt to approach the universe to which these beings belong.⁶ Who are these beings? Why are they present in so many places? What do they represent? Why do they reveal themselves to us, human beings, at certain moments and only to specific people? Is there a purpose behind their appearances?

In more recent studies, anthropologists and historians⁷ have emphasized the fondness of traditional Amazonian communities for creating, telling, and listening to stories about a world full of beings that transcend our rationality⁸ and whose existence wavers between the perceptible and the imperceptible, the shadow and the loud or visible. Such stories express a worldview, construct and reinforce a collective memory rooted in the territory and in social relations among humans, between humans and non-humans, and between the latter and the environment. This subject has also been approached from other perspectives such as the classic studies on Amazonian communities which emphasized the so-called “religion of the Amazonian *caboco*”⁹ and the recent perspectives from authors who constructed significant anthropological reflections on the religious aspect of non-indigenous peoples, particularly fishermen from the northeast of Pará. Those reflections can be a means of approaching the ontological aspects of different societies in the Amazon. In this study, we register narratives obtained on Saracá Island which address:

⁶ Refer to GALVÃO, Eduardo. *Santos e visagens*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1955; MAUÉS, Raymundo Heraldo. *A ilha encantada: medicina e xamanismo numa comunidade de pescadores*. Belém: UFPA, 1990; WAGLEY, Charles. *Uma comunidade amazônica: estudo do homem nos trópicos*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1957.

⁷ FIGUEIREDO, Aldrin Moura de. *A cidade dos encantados: pajelanças, feitiçarias e religiões afro-brasileiras na Amazônia, 1870-1950*. Belém: Edufpa, 2009; VAZ FILHO, Florêncio Almeida; CARVALHO, Luciana Gonçalves de. *Isso tudo é encantado*. Santarém: UFPOPA, 2013; MEDAETS, Chantal. Bora da história?: un jeu de narrations entre enfants dans le bas Tapajós (Amazonie brésilienne). *Strenae*, v. 15, p. [online], 2019.

⁸ HOUDART, Sophie; THIERY, Olivier. *Humains, non-humains: Comment repeupler les sciences sociales*. Paris: La découverte, 2011.

⁹ We refer to: GALVÃO, Eduardo. *Santos e visagens*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1955; MAUÉS, Raymundo Heraldo. *A ilha encantada: medicina e xamanismo numa comunidade de pescadores*. Belém: UFPA, 1990;

a) characteristics of fish species; b) the manifestation of non-human beings, including the dead; c) visions; d) the devil or demon; and e) humanized animals; f) how these beings are present and manifest themselves in the daily lives of the riverside dwellers of Saracá Island.

Research methodology

In this study we used autoethnography and ethnography. Our initial research was grounded in the observations of one of the authors, what he learned, and experienced on Saracá Island. Most of the information was passed down to him by his grandparents, his mother, and other family members. Two approaches to understanding reality were used; while these methods are two sides of the same coin, they have distinct methodological features; autoethnography, for instance, is rooted in ethnographic research.

As stated by Silvio Matheus Alves Santos (2017), “what characterizes the specificity of the autoethnographic method is the recognition and inclusion of the researcher’s experience both in defining what will be studied and in the development of the research (...) as well as the relational factors that arise during the investigation.”¹⁰ By combining autoethnography¹¹ and ethnography, we aim to understand the worldview of the riverside people of Saracá Island, following the teachings of classic¹² and contemporary¹³ authors to access the ontological universe that belongs to them. We conducted interviews using a cellphone voice recorder. A semi-structured approach was employed for the interviews, using a guideline that evolved based on the participants’ responses.

¹⁰ SANTOS, Silvio Matheus Alves. O método da autoetnografia na pesquisa sociológica: atores, perspectivas e desafios. *Plural*, Revista do Programa de Pós-graduação em Sociologia da USP, São Paulo, v. 24.1, 2017, p. 214-241.

¹¹ In recent years, autoethnography has been used by various researchers in different regions across the globe. These studies generally start from the researchers’ own experiences, using the context in which they are embedded as the locus of investigation, that is, society, a group, family, etc. This is the case, for example, of Gonçalves (2018), who studied the territory and kinship relations in the Braba village, located in the municipality of Cametá (PA); Borges (2013), who conducted an autoethnography on the commercialization flows and circulation of açaí in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Belém (Pará); and Maria Pereira (2024), who studied the impacts caused by large projects on the way of life of riverside communities on the islands of Abaetetuba, Pará.

¹² See: MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw. *Argonautas do Pacífico Ocidental*. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1976. E GEERTZ, Clifford. *A interpretação das culturas*. Zahar. Rio de Janeiro, 1973, p. 13-41.

¹³ PEIRANO, Mariza. Etnografia não é método. *Horizontes Antropológicos*, Porto Alegre, ano 20, n. 42, p. 377-391, jul./dez. 2014. E OLIVEIRA, Roberto Cardoso de. *O trabalho do antropólogo*. UNESP: Paralelo 15. Brasília; São Paulo, 1998, p. 17-35.

Historically, anthropologists embarked on expeditions to distant and “exotic” islands, immersing themselves for extended periods to gain a deep understanding of their unique characteristics of local groups. Malinowski’s (1976)¹⁴ studies in the Trobriand Islands, as well as countless anthropologists have devoted their careers to comprehending different cultures. Despite not being remote, exotic, or geographically distant from the mainland, Saracá Island has distinct characteristics compared to its neighboring areas, as it is widely perceived as a picturesque and resource-rich location.

Research area

Saracá Island is situated within the municipal boundaries of Limoeiro do Ajuru,¹⁵ in the state of Pará, about 200 kilometers from the state capital, Belém. It is part of the Tocantins River watershed, located in the Cametá microregion of the Lower Tocantins¹⁶. The journey from Belém to the island takes eight hours by motorboat and about five hours by speedboat. The nearest towns to the island are Limoeiro do Ajuru, which is a 30-minute boat ride, and Cametá, about 1-hour speedboat ride. Saracá Island can only be reached by boat; there are daily speedboat rides following the Cametá-Limoeiro do Ajuru-Cametá route. The speedboats depart from Limoeiro do Ajuru early in the morning and pick up passengers along the way who have been waiting on boats in the middle of the river. The location of the houses on Saracá Island, as well as on the surrounding islands, follow the curves of the Tocantins River and its tributaries, situated in close proximity to the waterways. The riverside people have a deep-rooted reliance and connection to the river.

Locally, Saracá Island is usually divided in three main areas known as: Saracá de Cima, Saracá de Baixo, and Saracá da Costa. The map below (Figure 01) shows the three main divisions. The yellow area shows the location of

¹⁴ MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw. *Argonautas do Pacífico Ocidental*. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1976.

¹⁵ A significant part of the territory of the municipality of Limoeiro do Ajuru is composed of several insular areas, known as “the regions of the islands” or simply “islands.” According to Sena (2007), in addition to Saracá, other islands stand out: Amorosa, Araraim, Arara, Belizário, Comprida, Conceição, Defunto, Grande, Navio, Pacu, Paquetá e Paulista. These islands vary in size. Some are quite large in terms of territory, while others are smaller. Some are densely populated, while others have a smaller population. Many are located near Limoeiro do Ajuru, while others are farther away. There are islands with greater infrastructure compared to others. Some are sought after by tourists, while others are not. There are islands where the river is narrower, and others where the river is wider.

¹⁶ HOLANDA, Bianca da Silva; SIMÕES, Aquiles Vasconcelos. *Estudo do Acordo de Pesca da ilha Saracá/ Limoeiro do Ajuru*. 23f. Monografia. Especialização em Extensão Rural, Sistemas Agroalimentares e Ações de Desenvolvimento – Universidade Federal do Pará. Belém, 2017.

the Saracá da Costa community; the red area shows Saracá de Baixo; and the pink area shows Saracá de Cima.



Saracá Island. Source: Santos-Filho/Holanda, 2019.¹⁷

The geographical region known as Saracá da Costa includes the rivers Três Barracas, Igarapé Grande, Caverna, and Amândio; Saracá de Baixo consists of the rivers Paxiba, Cobra, and Mata Fome; while Saracá de Cima is formed by the Gregório River. The largest populations in the region are located along the rivers Paxiba and Gregório. The island is home to roughly two hundred and fifty-five families.¹⁸

¹⁷ HOLANDA, Bianca da Silva. "A água ficou presa lá" – transformações socioambientais a jusante da barragem de Tucuruí. 123f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Agriculturas Familiares e Desenvolvimento Sustentável) – Universidade Federal do Pará: Belém, 2019.

¹⁸ HOLANDA, Bianca da Silva; SIMÕES, Aquiles Vasconcelos. *Estudo do Acordo de Pesca da ilha Saracá/ Limoeiro do Ajuru*. 23f. Monografia. Especialização em Extensão Rural, Sistemas Agroalimentares e Ações de Desenvolvimento – Universidade Federal do Pará. Belém, 2017.

The traditional riverside community of Saracá Island consists of a group of fishermen and their families. Most of them were born either on the island itself or on nearby islands and in local municipalities and became residents after establishing marital or employment relationships. The inhabitants are generally very welcoming. Among them, there are housewives, parents of usually large families who routinely spend their time in the forests and rivers, searching for food, leisure, and other necessities.

Tidal fluctuations regularly flood the land, even inundating the lowest buildings, particularly during the Amazonian winter when high tides occur. This period of the year is dangerous since the high waters attract snakes, cockroaches¹⁹ and other animals closer to the dwellings. Most of the dwellings are stilt houses built along the banks of the main igarapés (a type of small waterway in the Amazon region). Many are interconnected by wooden passages and, to a lesser extent, by açaí palm stipes or miriti palm trunks. The settlement pattern on Saracá Island follows the same logic identified by Furtado and Nascimento²⁰ in their study of the reproductive strategies of artisanal fishermen in the village of Tamaruteua, in the municipality of Marapanim, on the coast of Pará.

“The Enchanted Island”: Aspects of the Riverside Ontology on Saracá Island

“The forest is a realm of people, sights, wisdom, hues, smells and stories.”²¹ The invisible world emerges through encounters, scents, sounds and dreams. These are the channels or portals that reveal the world of visions and “visionary creatures,” as described by anthropologist Eduardo Galvão. “Nature is both tangible and supernatural at all times.”²² It is important to note that all stories are told by someone who has experienced them; there is a testimony that must always be mentioned, creating a concrete link between fact and

¹⁹ A huge cockroach with an incredibly rigid shell. They are very common during high waters, a period known as “lançantes.”

²⁰ FURTADO, Lourdes Gonçalves; NASCIMENTO, Ivete Herculano. Traços de uma comunidade pesqueira do litoral amazônico; relato sobre organização em comunidade haliêutica. In: FURTADO, Lourdes Gonçalves; QUARESMA, Helena Barbosa (Orgs.). *Gente e ambiente no mundo da pesca artesanal*. Belém: Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, 2002, p. 23-56.

²¹ ALMEIDA, Rogério. Amazônia, Pará e o mundo das águas do Baixo Tocantins. *Estudos avançados*, 24 (68), 2010, p. 291.

²² VAZ FILHO, Flôrencio Almeida; CARVALHO, Luciana Gonçalves de. *Isso tudo é encantado*. Santarém: UFPOPA, 2013, p. 20.

narrator. It is this interconnection that grants it truth, further enriched by the description of the spaces and times in which they occur.

a) Explanations regarding species traits

Mrs. Ana, one of the oldest residents of the Igarapé Grande river, told us that in the past, the largescale four-eyes (*Anableps anableps*) lived in the deepest parts of the river instead of the smooth weakfish (*Cynoscion leiarchus*). One day, the largescale four-eyes lent its stone so that the smooth weakfish could experience what living in the riverbed felt like, but the latter borrowed it without ever returning it. Since then, the largescale four-eyes lives near the surface and the smooth weakfish in the bottom of the river. That is why the smooth weakfish has a pair of stones in its head.

Another narrative concerns the dusky flounder (*Syacium papillosum*). According to Mrs. Ana, the dusky flounder was cursed with a crooked mouth as a punishment for imitating its godmother. Mrs. Ana also advised that you cannot laugh at a dusky flounder being roasted, or else its meat gets sloppy, therefore spoiling its flavor.

Both explanations were also found among the riverside dwellers living on islands located in the municipality of Abaetetuba, Pará state,²³ in the Lower Tocantins region. Therefore, those are ways of interpreting the behavior of three species typical in Saracá Island. It can be observed that the largescale four-eyes, the smooth weakfish and the dusky flounder are viewed within Saracá Island's cultural framework as fish whose nature has been transformed. The dusky flounder, for example, was considered a regular fish, since it did not have a crooked mouth, but its misbehavior modified its appearance, and inflicted with lasting punishment. The largescale four-eyes put too much trust into the smooth weakfish and lost something important, the stone, which kept it sunk.

b) Non-humans

The riverside people of Saracá Island also believe that their island is not solely inhabited by humans, but by other beings who share the same ecosystem. Those beings can be anywhere. They cross the same paths and head to the same places in the daily life of the people. They bathe in the river, sail on boats, go to church, and attend festivities. They are beings who

²³ PEREIRA, Maria das Graças da Silva. *PIRÍ: Um estudo sobre povos tradicionais, ambiente e práticas políticas. Ilhas de Abaetetuba, Amazônia Oriental*. 186f. Tese (Doutorado em Agriculturas Familiares e Desenvolvimentos Sustentáveis). Universidade Federal do Pará. Belém, 2024.

appear whenever and whoever they want to because they have their own will just like us.

Hence, it is not a separate reality or dimension, but rather the same world²⁴. Despite spending most of their time in hiding or concealed, the non-human creatures of Saracá Island intermittently reveal themselves or inadvertently expose themselves to human gaze. They take on a multitude of forms, from human and animal to the incorporeal, like smells, sounds, and shadows.

In Saracá, these beings do not appear to all the island's river dwellers, but they tend to reveal themselves to those who break certain social rules, as well as to those who seemingly have caused no harm or done anything wrong. Some of these beings appear and disappear without expressing anything at all. While others interact, either by approaching or making eye contact, leaving any local with shivers down their spine. The window of opportunity for the riverside dwellers of Saracá Island to escape and return home safely comes during this phase of recognizing the ominous signs.

The non-human beings can be categorized into five groups: 1) humanized animals; 2) the dead; 3) visions or *mizuras*; 4) the devil or demon; and 5) the *caboclos*.

The dead may take the form of either familiar or strange faces; visions can appear in human form or as *mizuras*, intangible entities sensed rather than seen. When taking the form of an apparition, they can reveal themselves and disappear in an instant. The figure is a vision, a fleeting vision that can be mistaken for nothing more than a sudden breeze. It is quicker than the apparition. There is also the devil himself, which manifests in human form. It can be either him or a demon under his command. And last but not least, there are animals with human characteristics.

The following are narratives about the identified beings:

1) Humanized Animals

The Duck of Igarapé

The Duck of Igarapé is one of the most famous tales in the Island. According to Mrs. Ana and Mr. Milico, the duck is a vision that appears in the form of a white female duckling. The animal was small and was often

²⁴ According to Pereira (2024, p. 121): "The non-humans of Santo Afonso do not have a hiding place, or another world, or land, above or below this one in which we live; they truly share the same world with us. For this reason, I say it is a unique cohabited world. They are among the riverside communities, whether in the Pirí, in the woods, rivers, or igarapés, so their manifestation may or may not occur."

seen emerging a small igarapé, which is nowadays called “Igarapé da Pata,” located in Igarapé Grande. It would often leave the igarapé and head towards the mouth of the Tocantins River. The duck would swim there, as if taking a joyful dip in the river. The animal was often seen by locals. The death of a certain young fisherman is often attributed to this duck, because he bothered it by throwing water and seeds on its feathers.

The botos

In the human-boto relationship, the boto transitions between animal and human. It is worth emphasizing that in this relationship, the *boto* does not transcend its nature and ceases to be an animal, as it does not transform permanently into a human being. While in animal form, the boto can aid fishermen in having a successful fishing trip. In this regard, it is considered a friend, a guardian, a fishing and travel partner. Its danger in those conditions is relative, since the only harm it can cause at most is piercing a fishnet or breaking fish traps. However, when the boto takes on human form, it becomes a threat. What leads a boto to transform into a human being? One of the reasons is simply to do evil.²⁵ When assuming human form, the boto is considered a dangerous being because it can deceive people and lead them into the river, potentially resulting in their deaths.

The *boto* is an animal that is part of the geography of Lower-Tocantins. That is the reason why it is not unusual to see an animal from this species emitting its characteristic cry when emerging and submerging from water. In the ports of Cametá, it is possible to see *botos* in search of food swimming under the bridges near the vessels. A lot of people come closer to those animals and many seem to welcome being touched. The boto is a major draw for local tourism, particularly ecotourism, as many people are eager to get a picture with the animal. Situated in the Mocajuba Municipal Market, in northeastern Pará, approximately 230 km from Belém, the Boto Lookout offers the boto as its main tourist attraction.

²⁵ There is a vast literature on the relationships between humans and *botos* in the Amazon. According to Maués (2006, p. 15-16, 19-20): “The legends about the *boto* are well known in the Amazon. The main one often emphasizes its seductive power over women, when it transforms into a ‘handsome young man’ who appears at rural parties. (...) The theme is often addressed in cities with a tone of mockery or malice, highlighting the supposed ‘naivety’ or ‘ignorance’ of rural men. (...) There are many reports about fishermen who, by chance, catch female *botos* in their nets and, in some situations, copulate with them. These reports emphasize the immense pleasure experienced by the man, to the point that sometimes it is necessary to forcibly remove him from the act, or else he risks dying from pleasure and exhaustion. (...) The reports that refer to the seduction of women by *botos*, however, always concern the enchanted ones, who are considered living human beings, just like any others, but with the difference that they possess supernatural powers due to their ‘liminal’ condition as enchanted ones (...).”

The white dog

On another occasion, a vision manifested as a white dog walking along the edge of the island. Mrs. Ana said one day her husband was fishing when he suddenly saw a white dog leisurely wandering through the island's shore. On the occasion, the dog caused no harm, it simply appeared strolling and disappeared before his eyes right away. Mrs. Ana did not know the reason why the dog appeared, neither could she tell what it was doing in there.

2) The dead

The lady from the festival

A fisherman known as Nhuca went to a festival which happened yearly in Curuçambaba village, located in the municipality of Cametá. During the Our Lady of the Pillar festival, there was an *arraial*.²⁶ During the occasion, the fisherman met a beautiful woman to whom he spoke until late night, when the mysterious lady said she wanted to leave. The man offered to escort her, she said there was no need to, but after insisting, she yielded to his offer.

They left and on the way to the lady's home the fisherman realized they were about to enter the cemetery and found the situation very strange, so he asked the lady where she lived and she answered that she lived not too far ahead. The fisherman told her he could not proceed to the path and had to head back to the festival. The lady said his choice saved him, because if he indeed joined her and entered the cemetery, he would never be able to leave it. She was therefore a dead person who mingled with the living in order to enjoy the party.

Some people report having some kind of contact with deceased individuals. Mrs. Ana claims to have never witnessed a vision, despite having been in the woods before. However, she recounted the incident from the day her brother died. Mrs. Ana was exiting the outhouse, located roughly three meters away from her home, when she heard her brother's voice saying "My time has come, sister." As soon as Mrs. Ana heard those words, she broke down crying. Not long after, she received the news confirming his death.

Ms. Eunice, in turn, claims to have seen her late son. According to her, he appeared when she was laying on a hammock, mourning his death. She was the only one to whom he had paid a visit. He was soaked and wore a garment gifted to him by Ms. Eunice herself. In his apparition, the son

²⁶ A community event or celebration held outdoors and in rural areas. It typically features traditional food, music, dancing, and folk traditions, often in a simple or rustic setting.

asked his mother to stop crying, since her tears detained him from heading to where he belonged. Ms. Eunice recounted that after this encounter, she tried to stop mourning and to come to terms with the fact her son did not belong to this realm anymore, and she had to feel at ease, since he would be fine wherever he was.

Renata, Ms. Eunice's granddaughter, had also seen her uncle, Ms. Eunice's son. Renata was on a boat going through the opening²⁷ when she saw her uncle in the middle of the woods. He did not speak to her, let alone showed a hint of a reaction. All he did was stare at her until the boat was out of his sight.

Neither Mrs. Ana's brother nor Ms. Eunice's son cases are associated with visions, since an apparition is associated with the devil, a being that embodies evil. This can be interpreted as a demonstration of the strength of Christianity in riverside communities, as is the case analyzed here.

3) Visions or Mizuras

The *mizura* from the event venue²⁸

At Santa Maria's church event venue, located on the Igarapé Grande River, a *mizura* manifested through the sound of a horse galloping. At first, the noise was weak, as if the creature was far away, but soon it was coming closer and closer. This occurrence was witnessed by Genisson (one of the authors) and his aunt, Laura; around 6pm, both visited a relative's house to watch a soap opera and while passing by the church's event venue, they heard a gallop that kept coming closer although there was no horse nearby, which made them both run in fear.

Wailing children

According to Mrs. Ana, in the past, the women who served in a big house (which may have belonged to one of the island's first residents) would bury their aborted fetuses by the riverbank. The sound of wailing children can be heard sometimes, especially at noon and by the late afternoon. No matter how much people tried searching, they could not identify where the strange, sorrow-filled crying came from.

²⁷ *Furo*. A small stream where people circulate. It is affected by tidal movements, drying up when the water significantly decreases in size.

²⁸ *Barracão*. Spaces which belong to and are located near Catholic churches. They are used for festive occasions such as dance parties and auctions.

The borrowed oar

Mrs. Ana tells that a vision requested the boat and oar of a late ancient island's resident in order to light a candle in the Joana Coeli village during All Souls' Day. In this village, there was a graveyard in which the Saracá Island residents, as well as the inhabitants from other nearby islands, buried their deceased.

On one occasion, Ms. Carlota, one of the Saracá Island residents, heard a voice asking if she could lend them her boat and oar. She was so petrified no words came out of her mouth. A while after, nearing dawn, the lady heard the same voice saying: "*I came here to give back what I borrowed.*" Since the day was breaking, Ms. Carlota mustered her courage to see who it was. When she went outside, she saw nothing except for the wet oar leaning by the wall and the sound of a voice venturing into the woods, soon vanishing completely. This type of vision is also classified as a *mizura*, since visions do not appear in tangible form, they can be heard but not seen.

This narrative is reinforced by Alandra, who references the case of a woman who would head to other people's homes to borrow a boat while they were fast asleep. Alandra states that she had never seen that woman, let alone heard her, but many people tell this narrative and believe in its existence.

The head smack

Some visions only make noise in order to scare off people nearby. One of those occurrences happened to Geovane (brother of one of the authors) and their aunt's ex-husband. They were fishing by the mouth of the river when they suddenly heard the sound of a wood snapping in half coming from the forest. They searched the trees but could not identify where the noise came from. Geovane stated that when they heard the wood breaking, his fishing companion felt a gust of wind blowing near his head, as if someone had smacked his head.

Some visions grab people with somewhat invisible hands in an attempt to mess with them or cause them harm. Ms. Eunice said that her granddaughter's husband was attacked by a figure. The young man was fishing by a small igarapé when he felt something grab him by the neck. Although he did not see anything, he felt the presence of something grabbing his neck and trying to strangle him.

The strange man

In some situations, the vision may manifest in a human form, particularly in the form of a tall black man, as was the case with Santinha and Joaninha, ancient residents of Saracá. They were pretty young when it happened. On that day they were cutting down stems of moriche palm to weave baskets.

Joaninha claims to have seen a tall, strong black man with thick lips. He was leaning by a tree and stared at them with a fixed gaze. The stranger did nothing save for staring at them in an odd way. The other sister, who was cutting down moriche palm, did not see anything unusual, neither realized what was happening. Joaninha then implored her sister to go back home, where she told Santinha what happened. Since she did not show a reaction or interacted with that man, she did not feel any sort of uneasiness, just fear. That might be yet another proof that visions only cause bigger harm when people somehow interact with them.

The black little boy.

Mr. Milico saw a black boy. One day when he was in the woods picking açai, he spotted a little black boy hidden behind a tree. He was sneaking behind a rubber tree, where he would mess with Mr. Milico, constantly calling him. The boy did it for quite some time, but Mr. Milico pretended not to see anything. Eventually he left, paying no mind to the little boy.²⁹

The man from the boat

Another narrative retells the appearance of a man passing through the woodlands by boat without ever coming back. The accounts indicate the existence of a man with traits similar to those of a deceased resident of the island who was unusually tall. Late at night, said man would pass by Ms. Eunice's house, heading into the opening. The strangest part of the story is that he would always get in there but never got out. Where was he going? Nobody knows. The man, as well as other visions, did not cause any harm, therefore no evil was associated with his presence.

What is a vision after all?³⁰ In the narratives, it is pretty evident visions are manifestations of the devil or of evil beings sent by him. In general, they

²⁹ This account is reminiscent of the narrative about the Curupira, identified in the Lower Tapajós region. In this context, the Curupira is referred to as *Pretinho* (little black boy). According to Vaz Filho (2013, p. 26): "The residents of the Lower Tapajós region believe that the Curupira resembles a dark-skinned boy, hence the nickname 'pretinho,' which in some places is used more frequently than the term Curupira."

³⁰ According to Dona Eunice, 85 years old: "The vision is a manifestation of the devil; he embodies other people, you, me, the devil disguises himself in all sorts of ways. He doesn't mess with me, he knows the Lord is on my side. I tell the devil to go back to hell and I know Jesus Christ will send him back to its

attempt to do evil. They want people to fall into temptation, to commit wrongdoings and acts condemned by society. They also want humans to be influenced by them, meddling with things they shouldn't and giving in to their taunting. Said attitude resembles our society. When we abide other people's taunting, we take the risk of causing actions with severe consequences to us and others.³¹

Dona Eunice's perspective differs from Câmpêra's, as on Saracá Island, visions are seen as evil manifestations directly linked to the devil. Which is why the riverside people of Saracá Island fear them, since vision's haunting nature makes them capable of making a person who sees it go insane, fall ill, or even perish.

4) Devil or Demon

The following accounts address the supernatural kidnapping of two children who were almost taken by an evil being. One involved Mrs. Ana's daughter and granddaughter. Leiliana, Mrs. Ana's daughter, currently lives in Cacoal Island, located in the municipality of Cametá. When she was a child, she used to curse a lot, curses which were associated with the devil, such as "devil," "demon" and "satan."

She would invoke those names regularly, a bad attitude according to local beliefs, since it is believed that the devil would reach those chanting those names. One night, Mrs. Ana heard her daughter's cry for help and noticed something was dragging her out of the bedroom. Mrs. Ana was sleeping in the bedroom with her children while her husband slept in the living room.

When Mrs. Ana realized what was happening, her daughter had already traversed the entire room, whatever was dragging her could not be seen. Mrs. Ana realized it was the devil trying to take her daughter to hell since she was endangered for using swear words. Mrs. Ana was able to save her daughter from being taken away by the devil. When she saw something dragging her

scorching depths."

³¹ "Visions have another form of expression and characterization. They are similar to wandering souls or spirits of people who have already died and wander between the living. They have no connection to hunting, fishing, or the forest. The vision's haunting usually occurs in dark places, abandoned houses, or areas of the house where the deceased used to stay. It is described by the community members as a shadow with a human shape, but it does not intervene in people's lives. The appearance of the vision is mainly reported after deaths and wakes, where people fear the return of the deceased to the world of the living." Passage available in: CAMPERA, Luiza Maria Fonseca. *O lago encantado e o caminho da chuva: noções de corpo, cura e cosmologia no Médio Solimões: Um estudo antropológico em comunidades da RDS Amanã*. 126f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Antropologia) – Universidade Federal do Amazonas. Manaus, 2017, p. 109-110:

[daughter], *"I pulled her back and started praying. I said 'I believe in God, our father. Heaven forbid. I send you back to the depths of hell.' I got her back, she was trembling."*

The other story is about the daughter of Ms. Ana's firstborn, Mr. Humpheres. His wife Julinha was alone at home for most of the day. She occupied herself with house chores, often leaving their daughter in the bedroom while she headed towards the depths of the woods located near their house in search of açaí.

On one of occasions, she came back home and noticed her daughter was sleeping on the floor instead of laying on the hammock as she was before Julinha left. It was as if something had brought her from the hammock to the floor with the intention of taking her out of the bedroom.

Julinha got suspicious and decided to go after a healer in order to understand what was going on. There, she found out something was trying to take her daughter away, since the girl spent a lot of time on her own. It was a vision's work. An evil entity wanted to abduct the child.

5) The caboclos³²

Ms. Emilia is a resident of the Igarapé Grande River. In the past, she used to live with her, now deceased, two brothers. On several occasions, Genisson (one of the authors) saw her passing by, heading towards the thicket³³ farther from Igarapé Grande in her small boat. She always wore a straw hat and lipstick. *"I remember she used to head to the woods wearing red lipstick."* recalls Gillyane, who had also seen her before.

Ms. Emilia would always go to the woods on her own, she would spend a long time there. When she returned, her boat was often filled with several fruits, including a bunch of açaí. She would often say the caboclos helped her gather the açaí. Therefore, there was an amicable relationship between Ms. Emilia and them, because they would keep her company by talking and helping her pick açaí.

The interactions between human beings and non-humans

Based on the assumption that "ontologies are everywhere,"³⁴ the narratives presented here suggest the existence of a world made up of

³² An invisible creature that often assists in gathering fruits such as açaí and cacao. It is a companion to those who engage in labor activities or explore the woods.

³³ Known as "Cabeceira."

³⁴ ALMEIDA, Mauro W. Barbosa de. Caipora e outros conflitos ontológicos. *Revista de Antropologia da UFSCar*,

various beings. They demonstrate that “the narrative is deeply rooted in lived experience and reality.” As it can be inferred, a significant portion of the narratives presented here were not told by those who directly experienced the supernatural events. “One person tells the story lived by the other,”³⁵ which does not make the accounts irrelevant or doubtful. Quite the opposite, it reinforces its social worth, since narratives, whether in the Amazon or any other place in the world, are told since the dawn of time.

The identified and analyzed narratives form a collection of stories rooted in social context and based on real-life experiences rather than daydreams or falsehoods. Those encounters and interactions suggest the realm in which Saracá Island is located is inhabited by distinct beings that share the same physical plane and dimension as us. There are flesh and bone individuals and local animals transiting this single island as well as enchanted beings, visions, demons and non-humans.

Two populations converge and intermingle, with non-human beings revealing themselves and engaging in interactions with humans through previously outlined ways. Besides this single realm inhabited by a multitude of beings, we can identify heaven and hell as part of everyday life, since both realms’ existence is undeniable, at least for the majority of the riverside people of Saracá Island.

In this realm, we also have visions. But why do they reveal themselves only to specific people instead of to the Saracá Island as a whole? Visions and *mizuras* have their own will, similarly to human beings. They choose who and when to make an appearance, they usually appear to those in the woods at prohibited times, such as noon or after 6pm, and on holy days as well. They also prefer to appear in the most remote parts of the island.

In addition, there is the issue of poor conduct among people, that is, the invocation of evil through immoral attitudes such as lack of respect for elders, either physically or verbally, as well as through swearing. Those attitudes attract evil, they are some sort of magnet. Each swear word said brings evilness closer to those who invoke it, that was the case of Leiliana, who was almost kidnapped by an evil being.

Conversely, there can be places more prone to evil. For example, the house in which Ms. Julinha lived was full of visions. Some places were once

v.5, n.1, jan.-jun., p.7-28, 2013, p. 13

³⁵ VAZ FILHO, Flôrencio Almeida; CARVALHO, Luciana Gonçalves de. *Isso tudo é encantado*. Santarém: UFPOPA, 2013, p. 16.

inhabited by other people, who might have stayed in those places after their death, to atone for their wrongdoings. What today is a shrubland or a dense forest might have been a city, a village or the home of other human and non-human beings in the past.

The churches' event venues and the churches themselves are also places full of visions, because many souls head there begging for forgiveness or help. They seek out sacred places to pray, lament, and complain about the injustices they have suffered, in an attempt to reverse the situation so that their souls may be freed from their suffering.

Dreams are also places prone to interactions with non-human beings. A few residents state they have dreamed with visions. Ms. Deusinha once had a dream where a hideous woman asked her to dig a hole between two rubber trees where there would be a lot of gold as long as she did so at night and on her own. In the end, Deusinha did not do what the vision wanted her to, not only that, she also told others about her dream, a secret which once revealed loses its effect.

Non-human beings do not tolerate human transgression; they reject disrespect and disturbance. Since the island is inhabited by diverse beings, some rules must be followed. As previously stated, curfews must be respected, this means people must not wander through the woods at midday and after 6pm. It is also not allowed to yell in the woods, neither harming or killing animals for sport. Those things incite wrath in non-human beings, prompting them to manifest and end such absurdity.

Given the evidence, we can conclude that non-human beings carefully select their appearances and the people who witness them, since not everyone is lucky or skilled enough to see them. Similar to human beings, they are motivated by their own volition, possessing unique desires and aspirations. Some are good, evil, or their alignment is left unclear given the nature of their appearances.

Final Considerations

A robust religious framework underlies the explanation for the existence of these non-human entities. The prominent role of religion in this context has been previously highlighted in studies of rural communities in the Brazilian Amazon; this correlation is likewise evident on Saracá Island.

A portion of the entities depicted here are either perilous, deceitful or both. These beings are the embodiment of evil itself, commonly associated with the devil. It is believed that the devil has the power to enable these beings to cross over from their realm into the human world. When given access to the human realm, non-human beings can haunt, persecute, and ultimately claim the souls of those who are weak in spirit and faith.

Some beings, when left undisturbed, pose no threat to humans. Others simply appear and disappear without offering any guidance or even allowing an interaction. Some of those beings mean no harm. An example is Ms. Emilia's help received from the caboclos to gather açaí and keep her company. She would happily retell those stories.

The reasons for their appearances are endless. Perhaps they wish to be noticed. They might have forgotten they are not alone in this realm or do not concern themselves with being seen. They could have also forgotten to wear the veil that conceal them from human eyes.³⁶

Twelve o'clock and six o'clock are ambiguous moments, as they mark the transition from one time to another. By six o'clock, daylight hours have ended, and the night belongs to beings other than humans, who should be at home resting instead of wandering aimlessly in places they are not supposed to be.

Therefore, it can be observed that: "In the Amazon, for the vast majority of its population, the common way of thinking about the world is far less dichotomous (...) than what is predominant, at least among the intellectualized strata of Western society."³⁷ In this sense, although certain beings can be categorized as good or evil, there are others that escape these two poles, as they do not interact with the riverside people. Are they good or evil? There is no way to tell. What exactly are they? These apparitions could be transient visitors, or they may have inadvertently failed to engage the shroud that masks them from human perception.³⁸

³⁶ According to Descola (2015, p. 13): "[...] the shared reference for most beings in the world is humanity, as a general condition, not specific to humans as a species. In other words, humans and all types of non-humans with whom they interact have different physicalities, in which their identical inner essences are housed, often described locally as clothes that can be given away or discarded, emphasizing their autonomy in relation to the inner selves that inhabit them. Non-humans see themselves as humans, for it is said that they believe they share the same type of soul with humans, even though they are distinct from humans due to their differentiated bodies."

³⁷ MAUÉS, Raymundo Heraldo. O perspectivismo indígena é somente indígena? *Cosmologia, religião, medicina e populações rurais na Amazônia. Mediações*, Londrina, v. 17 n.1, p. 33-61, Jan./Jun. 2012, p. 51.

³⁸ Human and non-human beings have a fully cultural view of their life sphere because they share the

Nowadays, encounter with supernatural creatures are not as frequent as they used to be. Saracá Island evolved much and its population has grown significantly. *“Nowadays you can barely see any visions because there’s too many people, but back then we used to see a lot of visions,”* states Mrs. Ana. Visions dislike noise, the loud sounds and population growth had ousted them from the island. There is a chance those beings are living in remote places or perhaps they simply lost interest in human beings.

Those narratives keep being shared by older people, Grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and older siblings in particular. They’re told in countless situations. Before sleep, by the sway of the hammock, at the docks, at the pier, in the circles where people play cards, peel shrimp and extract cacao beans. Those stories are also spread through social media and phone calls with friends and relatives.

Regardless how they are shared, what matters is acknowledging those stories are alive and are part of the daily life of the riverside people. Those who have been fortunate enough to avoid encounters with enchanted or supernatural beings thank God for deliverance and retell the stories they have heard about those who have had such experiences. Through those means, these stories about people who cherish storytelling continue to be passed down through the generations.

Among many young people, these stories are met with doubt. *“I don’t believe these creatures exist,”* says Alandra, a 23-year-old resident of the Gregório River. *“I think they’re just products of imagination. I’ve never seen them, I’ve only heard the stories.”* She belongs to a group of people that has never seen, and maybe never will, a supernatural creature. Although Alandra does not believe in those beings, she continues to spread the culture by retelling narratives about interactions between humans and non-humans set in Saracá Island.

Unanimously, a portion of the beings mentioned above are seen under a negative light by the riverside people of Saracá Island, since they are part of a realm that is unfamiliar to them instead of the physical realm experienced by this society. The riverside people believe some of those beings are manifestations of the devil or a being under his influence. Others are considered lost souls paying for their sins by roaming through the land of the living in an attempt to influence humans to do evil, as well as revealing

same type of interiority, but the world that each of these entities perceives and uses is different, as they employ distinct bodily equipment.” According to: DESCOLA, Philippe. *Além de natureza e cultura. Tessituras*, Pelotas, v. 3, n. 1, p. 7-33, jan./jun. 2015, p. 13.

themselves under specific circumstances and without interacting with those who feel their presence. It is, therefore, a debt that causes part of these beings to be embedded in the daily life of the island, which is why dreams and attempts at persuasion occur in hopes of treasures being found. Conversely, some beings manifest without offering any explanation for doing so. Despite posing no threat, they instill fear and concern to those who encounter them.

As previously evidenced, the data points to the existence of a singular realm, inhabited by both human and non-human beings, whose routines are interwoven. Many of them provoke one another, causing a great deal of conflict when interacting with one another. The inhuman-beings' apparitions are a reflection of their own will. In other words, non-humans appear because they want to be seen, be it as a response to human transgressions, to induce fear, or to simply provide companionship. These are complex entities, appearing in diverse forms and engaging multiple senses. They coexist with us.

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