

# **,Um Grande Instrumento de Partilha'. A Multi-Voiced Report on an Interactive Introductory Course on Amazonian Lifeworlds at the Institut für Ethnologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München**

**Wolfgang Kapfhammer**

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

**Luana Lila Orlandi Polinesio**

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

**Abstract:** This article is a multi-voiced report on an innovative method of teaching an introductory course on Amazonian ethnology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. This course foregrounds the voices of indigenous colleagues of the postgraduate program of social anthropology (PPGAS) of the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Indigenous interlocutors open up (via videoconference) a panorama of contemporary lifeworlds in Amazonia and reflect on it with their different approach of an *Antropologia Indígena*. This seminar amounts to a modest, albeit effective decolonizing method of teaching anthropology.

*[teaching anthropology, decoloniality, indigenous anthropology, Amazonia]*

## **'Lost in Translation' – A Joint Seminar on Amazonia between Munich and Manaus**

Once during one of our conversations via Skype, which we regularly held as part of an introductory course on Amazonian ethnography at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich with colleagues from the Núcleo de Estudos da Amazônia Indígena (NEAI) of the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) in Manaus, I [Wolfgang Kapfhammer/WK] was concentrating heavily on the screen of my laptop to catch the words of my interlocutor. In the midst of the conversation, I turned around to translate and explain to others in German, only to catch sight of a group of first-year students closely huddled together, arms around each other, eyes and mouths agape. The students were listening as if 'lost in translation' to the words of an elderly Tuyuka shaman practicing at the *Bahserikowi* or Centro de Medicina Indígena, an indigenous-run center for treating clients using traditional

healing methods in the Upper Rio Negro in Manaus. *Kumu*<sup>1</sup> Madu, then shaman working at the center, spoke Tuyuka, which his Tukano-speaking nephew João Paulo Lima Barretto translated into Portuguese, which I finally translated into German for the students in Munich. However, the students seemed to be ‘lost’ not in the sense ‘at a loss to communicate’, but rather ‘rapt’, fascinated by the opportunity to communicate with a venerable representative of indigenous wisdom of the northwestern Amazon.

By broad agreement, nowadays practicing anthropology can only be carried out when it is based on common interests between the two parties involved: during their fieldwork, anthropologists feel obliged to engage with their interlocutors and their concerns, while anthropological museums invite representatives of source communities to lend legitimacy to the exhibition of material objects hoarded in their archives. As it seems, largely left out of this wave of the decolonizing self-assurance of anthropological institutions is the nonetheless essential field of teaching. None of the current introductory works to anthropology dedicate a single paragraph to teaching, much less to decolonizing methods of doing it.

What follows is a multi-voiced report on an interactive introductory course on Amazonian lifeworlds at the Institut für Ethnologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, which allows the inhabitants of this very region have their say. The cooperation partner is the postgraduate program of social anthropology (PPGAS) and the working group, the Núcleo de Estudos da Amazônia Indígena (NEAI) of the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) in Manaus. This working group takes a decisive step further as their indigenous students and graduates are working on an ‘Antropologia Indígena’, i.e. an anthropology not *about*, but *by* indigenous persons. The cutting-edge moment of the seminar is not so much the fact that members of marginalized indigenous minorities have their say rather than academic persons with an exclusive epistemic sovereignty, but that our interlocutors have themselves conquered this academic position and by so doing are submitting our discipline to an inspiring change of perspective. Without getting lost in what too often amounts to labyrinthine theory, first-year students are able to practice the demand for a decolonization of anthropology.

What follows is not a deeply analytical study, but a report on what can be done and how participants talk about it.

## History of the Seminar

When I [WK] was confronted with a demand for a regional course in the curriculum of the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, I opted for an introduction into the ethnology of Amazonia

---

1 A *kumu* is a religious specialist or shaman on the Upper Rio Negro. It can be glossed as ‘master of words’.

due to my longstanding anthropological engagement with the region.<sup>2</sup> To make the course more lively, I came up with the actually simple idea of including my contacts from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) in Manaus, which had grown during many years of fieldwork among the Sateré-Mawé on the Lower Amazon. Manaus has become the geographical and intellectual springboard to the field in the Terra Indígena Andirá-Marau to the south of the city of Parintins. The intellectual 'scene' in Manaus manifested above all in the working group, Núcleo de Estudos da Amazônia Indígena (NEAI), where I encountered a self-assured, urban and academic indigeneity, represented by indigenous students in their majority from the Upper Rio Negro. In order to discuss the contemporary lifeworlds of the Amazon, the idea was that we would first and foremost let local people have their say. By using internet technology, we would converse in Portuguese, which would be translated by me into German for the students in Munich.

Methodologically, the proceedings of the seminar are quite simple. In every other session we connect with an interlocutor, usually an indigenous colleague from Manaus (more recently also from the UFOPA in Santarém) or interlocutors of the Sateré-Mawé living in Parintins, which I know from my fieldwork. Also included are non-indigenous teachers and students from the NEAI talking about their research with indigenous groups in the Brazilian Amazon. Mostly we start the interview by asking the partner to tell us about their life trajectory. This initial talk on individual experiences within Amazonian lifeworlds almost always sets the agenda of the talk. Thus, it is not an interview with prepared questions, but a lively talk springing from the reflections of the interlocutor. Every now and then I have to interrupt in order to translate into German for the students. These translations also provide an opportunity to ask for further ethnographic explanations if necessary. The students are asked to produce a short discussion paper after each talk, which shows that the bulk of the message did get across but also to leave room for their own reflections (see below). Parallel to the talks, the seminar conducts a conventional syllabus on Amazonian ethnography. For the first-year students in Munich, this class is an opportunity to bridge, at least virtually, the distance between metropolitan universities in Europe and peripheral areas of research interest in the Global South, which usually characterizes the teaching of anthropology in its initial phase.

We started this idea of the Interactive Seminars when we met Wolfgang Kapfhammer here in Manaus through our colleague, Professor Luiza Garnelo. Wolfgang was very interested in the things we were starting to do at NEAI, which was welcoming and

---

2 I do research and have collaborated with the Sateré-Mawé of the Lower Amazon since 1998, where I have done several prolonged periods of fieldwork and visited the region almost yearly since 2009. The point of entry to the region is always the city of Manaus, where I was fortunate to establish long-standing ties of collegiality and friendship with many members of the Postgraduate Program of Social Anthropology (PPGAS) of the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM).

brought indigenous students into the Research Center, NEAI, to think with them of strategies to promote their participation in postgraduate studies in anthropology. At that time, Wolfgang had collected a series of articles published by [Estadão] about the indigenous realities in urban contexts, and, based on the interest he brought us, we started talking to the indigenous members of NEAI, who also live in urban context, and little by little the idea of doing seminar activities was born.

In the beginning, things were more internal to NEAI. Then Wolfgang started to teach a course in Munich, and we started to think about the possibility of Indigenous People from here [Manaus] talking online with students there [Munich], and that was something that stimulated both groups. It was very interesting because there was a real exchange of feelings and interests between the indigenous students and the students from Munich, so it worked out very well, and over time we improved. Each year, Wolfgang's discipline incorporated in the seminars the participation of indigenous students from NEAI who were carrying out their research. It was an idea that worked very well.

...

In time we reached the format we use today, and this initiative, started back there, had very important consequences beyond the virtual dialogue between indigenous students and the students in Munich. So, to conclude, I think it was one of the most assertive activities that we had at NEAI in terms of the internationalization of the program, involving the indigenous perspectives, giving recognition to our program, which has been highlighted for this visibility of Indigenous Peoples, and that too is somehow situated back there when we started having these conversations with Wolfgang that led to these seminars (Prof. Dr. Carlos Machado Dias, 2022).<sup>3</sup>

For our first seminar in summer 2016, I [WK] was intrigued by a multimedia piece published by the conservative newspaper *Estadão*. I was impressed that the features of this publication took up issues which I knew very well from my own field experience, but which have hardly ever been taken up in recent ethnographic work on Amazônia. The so called *etnologia indígena* had become ever more cutting edge as regards anthropological theory, but it is strangely oblivious of the everyday lived reality of Indigenous Peoples such as urban migration, demographic crises in indigenous areas, the concomitant loss of food sovereignty, pauperization and increasing dependence on welfare transfers, inadequate health services and so on.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the title

<sup>3</sup> Citations from indigenous and non-indigenous interlocutors from Manaus were solicited especially for this article. Because they are explicitly personal statements, we opted not to anonymize them.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Graeber's critique of the political implications of the so-called 'ontological turn' (2015:31n46). See also bibliography for Wolfgang Kapfhammer's works on topics like evangelicalism, dependency on governmental transfer programs, and engagement with Western Fair-Trade markets among the Sateré-Mawé.

of the multimedia piece, 'Favela Amazônia', which I had thoughtlessly copied for our seminar, did not go down too well with our interlocutors. Luckily, instead of expressing ill feelings, given our pessimistic perspective on Amazonian lifeworlds, right from the start our indigenous interlocutors insisted all the more on their own perspectives and agendas.

### 'Nossos Proprios Conceitos' – The Indigenous Perspective

Although our interlocutors, mostly those from the Upper Rio Negro, were keen to present their own theoretical approach to an *Antropologia Indígena*, the knack of opening up our interviews to reflections on our interlocutors' various life trajectories opened up a space to relate to multiple and diverse aspects of Amazonian lifeworlds.

The choice of our interlocutors from many different social and cultural backgrounds and contexts provided a broad panorama of indigeneity in contemporary Amazônia. The core group of participants all have their cultural backgrounds in the Upper Rio Negro region: Dr. João Paulo Lima Barretto (Tukano), Padre Dr. Justino Sarmiento Rezende (Tuyuka), Dr. Dagoberto Lima Azevedo (Tukano), Silvio Sanches Barreto (Bará), and Jaime Diakara, anthropologist, artist, and shaman, as well as traditional shamans active in the *Centro de Medicina Indígena Bahserikowi* in Manaus as *kumu* Madu (Tuyuka) and *kumu* Ovidio (Tukano), and neo-shaman<sup>5</sup> Bu'u Kennedy (Tukano). Younger indigenous students of anthropology were Walter and Roque Waiwai as guests from the UFOPA in Santarem, the latter doing ethno-musicologist work, Alexandre Waiwai, focusing on evangelical missions and the ethnogenesis of his group, José Mura, political activist and anthropologist of a group struggling to regain ethnic identity, Jonilda Houwer Gouveia, Tariana, doing ethno-entomologist work, Rosijane Tukano, concentrating on a female perspective on Tukanoan cosmology, Regina Vilacio and her daughter, the highly visible indigenous influencer Sâmela Sateré, from the Sateré-Mawé Women's association (AMISM) working out of Manaus and reconnecting with their female comrades in the far away *Terra Indígena Andirá-Marau* on the Lower Amazon, Mariazinha Baré, Josi Tikuna, Clarinda Ramos, working on Sateré-Mawé song traditions and now chef of the indigenous restaurant *Biatüwi* in Manaus, Nilva Borari, another guest from the UFOPA and member of a group of so-called 'indioemergentes', striving to reconstruct and affirmate their indigenous identity, and Elatze Farias, Sateré-Mawé and journalist for the distinguished online-magazine *Amazônia Real*. Finally, there are collaborators from the Sateré-Mawé residing in Parintins, such as members of the *Consórcio dos Produtores Sateré-Mawé* (CPSM) associated with the Sateré-Mawé Tribal Council (CGTSM), Obadias Batista Garcia, Sergio Garcia and

---

5 This is Bu'u Kennedy's self-declaration, a reference to the personal fusion of traditionally indigenous and non-indigenous elements, mostly from the esoteric scene.

*Eliaque Oliveira* running an indigenous enterprise which processes and commercializes forest garden products (such as *guaraná*) to European Fair-Trade companies, advocate Dr. *Tito Menezes* and his father *Lucio Menezes*, and *Josias Sateré*, teacher and author of various works on Sateré-Mawé culture.

At least for the core group of our regular contributors from the Upper Rio Negro, the Interactive Seminar served as an outlet to get across the basics of their own project of an *Antropologia Indígena*, an anthropology done *by* Indigenous People, not about them. As the scenarios of Amazonian lifeworlds laid out in the reports of the protagonists themselves show, the decision to enrol at the university was never made without taking into account the experiences the individual has made before in her/his life: in this sense one can speak of a ‘return from a homecoming’ (*retorno da viagem de volta*), as Prof. Gilton Mendes dos Santos does. This is not an oxymoron, as the students, MAs and PhDs of the NEAI have become disconnected from their cultural homesteads due to neo-colonial circumstances and then returned more often than not by a traumatic reshuffling of their lifeways, before they opted for a transformational intellectual process which again could only function according to their own conditions.

Our entire effort (at NEAI) is, first, to try to understand what an ‘other anthropology’ would be, decolonized: that is, what is the contribution of an indigenous perspective to the anthropological discipline, and what is new in the academic production of an indigenous person that is not just a matter of learning the theories and methods of anthropological science? At the same time that this question is raised, we seek to put into practice an exercise we call ‘indigenous reflexivity’, that is, the attempt to find native categories that better explain the ways of life, discursive and practical, of Amerindians, fleeing to the maximum of the categories already constructed by science in general and by anthropology in particular.

This search is far from trivial, as it requires an extraordinary effort on the part of indigenous researchers because it presupposes, first, deconstructing the ‘colonizing categories’ of science, and then rebuilding in its place new conceptual buildings in a way that is to be understood outside traditional indigenous contexts in the world of science. This movement is a kind of ‘return trip’, since indigenous students interested in this exercise leave their traditional contexts, come to the Western academic world, return to seek new categories with their native interlocutors and then return again to translate them to the general public, academic or not.

It is in this context that the Interactive Seminars are presented as a privileged moment of interlocation, allowing this ‘indigenous reflexivity’ to promote concerns within the classical European sciences, in a center of academic production far from the indigenous reality (Gilton Mendes 2022; see also Mendes Santos and Machado Dias Jr. 2009).

Dr João Paulo Lima Barretto, a Tukano and a frequent collaborator in our seminar, took pains to expound to us his and his colleagues’ concept of an Indigenous anthro-

pology of the Upper Rio Negro based on 'our own concepts' (*nosso próprios conceitos*).<sup>6</sup> This kind of ethnography rests on an arduous process of reflexivity, not in the sense of a (potentially) narcissistic self-communion, but by doing fieldwork with one's own relatives.

It is difficult to take this reflexivity on indigenous anthropology to another part of the world because the researcher from the Alto Rio Negro has a different research model: it is research on his own thinking, his own reflections. For the university of the 'Old World', it must be different to see the Indigenous People speaking about their epistemologies. When I was reflecting about the Interactive Seminars, I remembered the first foreign ethnographers who accompanied the missionaries or a delegation, recording and filming. In the past, when anthropologists and missionaries traveled to distant places, they were already gathering knowledge from our parents and ancestors, but over time this was forgotten, ignored. Historically, indigenous knowledge was not considered science, it was considered popular knowledge or indigenous common sense.

So, for the universities of the Old World like Munich, my participation in the seminars is not a retribution, it is not a contribution of scientific production by the university to the world, nor is it an ontological turn. It is, yes, an indigenous anthropological exercise for the epistemological circulation of knowledge on other levels. I, as an indigenous researcher, who sat next to my parents, also made the same journey as the previous researchers, traveling, going through difficulties, without gasoline, without food. It is not a counterpart, it's a willingness to socialize the knowledge of our ancestors, the ancestral knowledge of the unknown world. If humanity had knowledge of this unknown world, it would not be in the way it is now, in this form of fragmented concepts.

We are protagonists of our own stories, we are ethnographic authorities, we are taking back our knowledge from oral to written form, going beyond our territories and reaching new epistemological territories, to be understood, recognized and valued through the university. We Indigenous Peoples also have our own knowledge, our own epistemology, research methodology, language, production technique. Taking this knowledge to a university in Europe, showing that we are masters of our knowledge, using our methodology according to our local customs, a transmission of knowledge from father to son and from mother to the formation and transformation of the son. From the son, with all these tangible and intangible assets of his ancestors, emerges a new construction in indigenous science, in north-

---

<sup>6</sup> In the case of the Upper Rio Negro, this indigenous ethnography rests on the conceptual 'tripod' (João Paulo) of north west Amazonian understanding of the foundational effect of mythic narratives (*kihiti*), a poetic force of healing based on the former (*bahsese*), and the ritual organization of these primordial powers (*bahsamori*). These anthropologists from the Upper Rio Negro mostly come from dynasties of religious specialists, where esoteric knowledge has been passed on over generations. Sometimes they refer to themselves jokingly as *paperakumuã*, 'paper-shamans' (see bibliography for the recently published works of indigenous NEAI alumni).

west Amazon, from listening to the speeches of the elders. It is not just a science of common sense, it is a cultural, linguistic richness, a way of thinking cosmophilosophical management.

All areas of human sciences think that Indigenous Peoples don't have their science. So, given this historical context, because we are within universities, for me, as a researcher it is an opportunity to take indigenous knowledge from Amazon, Brazil, to another university. Take our knowledge to this new generation that is not aware of the indigenous culture. It is interesting to see how others, from an entirely different culture, listen intently about this complex knowledge. For us indigenous researchers, theory-practice is difficult: the two totally different worlds want to connect and form a single science. In general, science is unique: what is different are ways of conceptualizing cultural elements. When the Old World opens up, through the teacher, he is showing to his students, who are new scientists, that this unknown world of the lowlands also has its science. The proof of this is the native himself speaking of his knowledge. It is no longer the foreign researcher, it is no longer the traveler, it is the indigenous speaking about its own history with its own oral language to writing (we are using some words in the eastern Tukano language, one of the languages accepted as official by the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, in Amazonas). Our difficulty in understanding Portuguese and foreign languages are conflicts, but also convergences of a science that we are building together (Silvio Sanches Barreto, Bará, 2022).

Justino Sarmiento Rezende, Tuyuka, catholic priest and with a PhD in anthropology (in his own words: 'I try to be a good Padre and a good Tuyuka') sees the Interactive Seminar with Munich as an opportunity to 'globalize' the epistemologies they are working on.

When I arrived at the Post-Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at UFAM, I participated in the Nucleus of Indigenous Amazon Studies, NEAI, and there was this project of classes with students from Germany. I saw the interest from the German students, intermediated by Professor Wolfgang Kapfhammer, as something very good. The interest in Amazonian issues, in indigenous issues, caught my attention. As a member of NEAI, I participated following what the [indigenous] students before me were doing, and then I also had a conversation with the [Munich] students. I was [in the seminar] with Bu'u Kennedy, who works with shamanism.

Each [Indigenous] People has its own knowledge, its mythological narratives, its narratives about festivals, ceremonies, rites, this represents many things, they are cultural variables, so, as we were from different ethnic groups, each of us also tried to share with students from Germany what we knew, what we were working on, what our parents, grandparents said. That was important because, when there is a group that wants to know more, it encourages us, it motivates us to organize our knowledge, to seek more, to expand our knowledge, that is why the exchange we



had was very valuable. And due to the NEAI partnership with Germany, the professors Carlos, Gilton, were encouraging us to participate in these moments, which was also important in the sense of making knowledge visible, in the perspective of the internationalization of indigenous knowledge, that is, that our knowledge was known outside Manaus, outside Brazil, in Europe, in this case Germany, so we saw that this partnership was important because of that, important to, let's say, 'globalize' our knowledge.

The students in Germany, with Professor Kapfhammer, serve as bridges for our knowledge to reach further away from us, to go beyond regional borders, national borders. Of course, I also thought that students came to Brazil to know our realities, from what place we are talking about, so it would be very important for us to pass on our knowledge to them not only unilaterally, but for them to also bring their knowledge to our research center, to anthropology students in the Amazon. Those are my observations (Justino Sarmiento Rezende, Tuyuka, 2022).

In a similar vein, Dagoberto Lima Azevedo, a Tukano, looks at the seminar as an opportunity to gain German students as 'multipliers' of indigenous knowledge.

This Interactive Seminar for me is a welcome by Professor Wolfgang's students, they are attentive students, who want to hear and listen to the experiences of the indigenous anthropologists, our research, our trajectory. It is a very good welcome, capable of approaching the knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples of the Upper Rio Negro, specifically of the Tukano people, in my case. I find it very important for them to know, hear and listen to our own language, our concepts, how we understand and explain our knowledge, which we call 'indigenous theories'. I felt a great openness from them to welcome our knowledge, with Professor Wolfgang translating from Portuguese into German.

After hearing and listening to our research experiences, Professor Wolfgang's students will in the future be multipliers of our indigenous theories. Each one of us who participates in the Interactive Seminars, as indigenous anthropologists, presents our experiences to them. I believe this helps them to listen to the sons of the land, the Indigenous Peoples ourselves speaking to the German students. Before, it was the non-indigenous who carried our voices, the knowledge of the peoples from our region. They would spend a few months or years doing research here, and then they would take everything they saw and were able to understand to Europe, where they would present it. In a certain way, they were spokespersons of our knowledge.

Wolfgang opens this door to us, this opportunity that the sons of this region ourselves take the knowledge to show that we Indigenous Peoples ourselves have our indigenous theory, our epistemology, our own science, with its own specificity. This provides mutual understanding and the opportunity for us indigenous anthropologists to take our research to other spaces. Our indigenous theory is gradually being known and welcomed in the spaces of other universities.

I think the German students had an opportunity to listen to our experience, our thinking, they made a 'trip' to us, listening to our experiences. (Dagoberto Lima Azevedo, 2022).

Jaime Diakara, Desana, artist, anthropologist, author and shaman, who had the opportunity to appear in person in the 2022 edition of the Interactive Seminar, stresses the 'travelling' dynamics of epistemologies (and bodies), referring to the Amazonian buzzword of '*atravessar*', to ferry across a river, in German: '*übersetzen*', which also means to 'translate':

I'm Jaime Diakara, from the Desana ethnic group, research member of NEAI-UFAM. When NEAI started this partnership with the University of Munich, I participated in the Interactive Seminars before and after the presentation of my Master's degree work. It was very important for me to share with the students and the professor. In this trajectory of exchanging experiences focused on our concepts, our anthropological reading, based on our theory of knowledge, the epistemology of indigenous knowledge, there was a long journey of taking information to the other side of the world, through the [internet], discussing, bringing our languages, our expression, my wild dialogue (*diálogo selvagem*) to the students. I presented my work on *ayahuasca*, a way of expressing myself through drawings. I realized that the students were very interested in seeing my work through drawing, how I was bringing a new anthropology into the anthropological field, through drawings, through colors, graphics, through rites, through expressions, and how to activate all this. In this respect it was very important for them to hear how the indigenous are building an anthropology in contemporary times, this new anthropological perspective, and that was what I saw from their view, the journey of the students of the University of Munich. ...

After traveling on the [internet] without being present [physically], I was invited by the professor to travel to Munich and personally get to know this anthropological body-to-body [situation]. I took a trip crossing from Manaus to Munich, to Germany. This experience was also very important for me. Getting to know personally, experiencing another culture and presenting my work in the forum:<sup>7</sup> how do Indigenous People see the environment, how do Indigenous People express an anthropology, how do Indigenous People think of this world not only as a theory, but also experience it in practice?

After the forum, I made a presentation [in the seminar] about how we are developing our perspectives at the university [in Manaus] within the UFAM community. After that, we presented a small art and drawing workshop, on body drawing, the meaning of drawing, the practice of drawing art, the use of graphics at the time of rituals, differentiating them from basketry graphics, pottery, musical instruments

---

<sup>7</sup> An event organized by the International Office of the LMU.

and malocas, what is the meaning that each graphic brings to society, which brings these potentialities of identification of each people, as of the Desana people. For me it was very valuable to share with the Munich undergraduate anthropology students within these cultural exchange seminars.

It was in this context of exchanging with the teachers, the dialogue with them, that anthropology approached the indigenous culture. Anthropology wanted to reveal indigenous knowledge through research, so that it understands indigenous culture, but it did not fully understand indigenous anthropology in the way of thinking the philosophy of the Indigenous People, in the way of managing the world, in the way of managing things, of dealing with nature and the phenomenon of nature. My participation in this exchange was very important, a more anthropological, more physical journey, this trip I took. This trip was already during my PhD studies. I am very grateful for the partnership that NEAI formed with the professor and the University of Munich, where we ... are taking our anthropological canoe across the sea to Germany (Jaime Diakara, 2022).

Last but not least, two short comments by two of the younger students of the NEAI, the first one by Rosijane Fernandes Moura, a Tukano, whose concern is to add the female perspective to Upper Rio Negro cosmology.

Together with the growth of Indigenous Peoples' participation in conferences, assemblies and seminars, indigenous women are gaining more and more space. In the academic field, this participation is still timid, though despite the small number of women, their works are gradually gaining ground among the works developed by indigenous men. In that sense, the Manaus/Munich Interactive Seminars, in which I had the pleasure to participate, contributes to opening the space to the reflexions of indigenous women.

In addition to enabling the knowledge exchange, the Interactive Seminars were an opportunity to affirm the female presence to the Coordinators, due to the fact that participating in the event was only possible because of my position within the Post-graduate Program, PPGAS/UFAM, as deputy representative of the Indigenous Collegiate, as well as one of, if not the only indigenous woman within the Núcleo de Estudos da Amazônia Indígena in the year 2021/2022. Our participation was an opportunity for indigenous researchers, especially indigenous women, to bring our traditional knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation with our unique perspectives and our experiences inside and outside the community, reinforcing the wide range of knowledge that women possess, and making them authors of their speeches.

However, I should point out that the short time of participation and the need for translation (from Portuguese to German) made it impossible to have a complete interaction between the parties, which is a detail that can be solved and that does not diminish the importance of these seminars that are a great instrument for sharing knowledge (*grande instrumento de partilha*) (Rosijane Fernandes Moura, 2022).

It may be a truism, but Amazonian lifeworlds are of course not exclusively indigenous, nor are the members of the NEAI, and, maybe not even the new *Antropologia Indígena*. So we asked Taynara Sanches da Silva to summarize this particular Amazonian perspective on the Interactive Seminar:<sup>8</sup>

The Manaus–Munich 2022 seminar promoted a direct connection between researchers and students from different continents. Through virtual and face-to-face dialogue about the different forms of world conceptions, there was an exchange of knowledge between the ontologies of the Amerindian world of the northwest Amazon and the non-indigenous world of young Europeans.

The event promoted the possibility of meeting and exchanging experiences between the academic community of different universities, from different realities. Through indigenous knowledge that understands the universe in its integral form as a complex network of relationships that integrate all beings, whether natural or supernatural, the dialogues of indigenous researchers with younger people contributed to the construction of young thinkers on the European continent, giving them a perspective of how multiple the world is and its lived realities in the Amazon.

The knowledge propagated by indigenous researchers in the seminar sessions reaffirms their ethnic identities, language, customs, culture and ancestral knowledge, using access to information on the technical and academic knowledge of non-indigenous society, and planting a seed of knowledge for the construction of a new vision of the world by younger people (Taynara Sanchez da Silva, 2022).

## The Perspective of the German Students

While the Brazilian counterparts of our Interactive Seminar were actively standing up for their own agenda for an *Antropologia Indígena*<sup>9</sup> and what it meant to get there, the German students in Munich, most of them only in their second semester, were largely unprepared for the Amazonian realities of life. This was not merely because of an informational gap, but due to the structural problem of teaching anthropology in Western Europe, the geographical, social, economic and political distance from these

8 Besides the fact that many members of the NEAI provided as welcome technical and organizational backup, the seminar was also an opportunity for non-indigenous members to present their research. To name but a few: Guilherme Soares on multiethnic quarters in Manaus, Mario Rique Fernandes on the music of the Apurinã, and Luiz Davi Vieira Gonçalves' immersive work on Yanomami shamanism.

9 As Prof. Gilton Mendes (cited above) has put it, the seminar presented 'a privileged moment of interlocution, allowing this 'indigenous reflexivity' to promote concerns within the classical European sciences, *in a center of academic production far from the indigenous reality*' (Gilton Mendes 2022, my emphasis).

realities of life with which anthropology usually deals. The Interactive Seminar not only transported ethnographic facts and data on Amazonian living realities, but provided the opportunity for an ‘encounter’ for the students, moments more powerful than the mere transmission of knowledge that set in motion the affects of impugning one’s own cultural embeddings.

What follows is a string of statements by the Munich students which show the transition from being initially startled by ‘other’ ways of thinking and talking to first attempts to integrate this differentiability into one’s own realities of thinking and living.<sup>10</sup>

For me, the conversation with Dagoberto and João Paulo was my first anthropological contact, a first tiny little ethnographic research. I found the talk and the narratives very interesting, and I think this contact with the Tukano has been an excellent idea (Minna W., 2017).

Everything we have discussed with João Paulo ... so far, was highly interesting, but admittedly it was not always easy to retrace it with our Western notion/thinking because it is a question of completely different worldviews and perspectives – more precisely, Amazonian lifeworlds (Lisa H., 2018).

Many thanks to *kumu* Madu, who let us participate in a complex cosmology with its notion of the *Wai-mahsã*. *Kumu* Madu will be remembered as a fascinating and impressive personality, though very alien to me (Eva N., 2017).

Personally, I think it is important to see the contact between systems of knowledge as complementary and not mutually exclusive. To make it comparable makes this contact often easier and facilitates a logical approach. This could counter the image or feeling of radical absurdity that one possibly initially feels. The cosmologies in question may be basically different, but the mere fact that they are in themselves logical makes them relevant to me. Because why should something different, which makes sense in itself, be wrong in the first place, only because it contradicts one’s own notions of this world? You have to abstain from assessing these systems and treat them as equivalent in order to make the insight into another system possible at all. I think you can understand other systems of knowledge, but maybe you will never really ‘believe’ in them or be convinced by them, because the logic of our lifeworld radically contradicts the other one. Everybody grows up in her/his own lifeworld and can only acquire knowledge within that one. May be ... indigenous students prove that you can live and think within both systems of knowledge after all without feeling a permanent conflict? (Anna D., 2019, after a talk with *kumu* Ovidio).

I find the Tukano worldview very interesting. ... *Kumu* Ovidio explained that everything is out of balance for quite some time. People take without giving, and

---

<sup>10</sup> We opted for the anonymization of students’ statements, because since 2016, the year of the first Interactive Seminar, many may have already left the university. The statements are excerpts from the papers written by the students, which mostly always included (self-)reflections.

instead of interfering [only slightly] with the world of the spirits, it is largely destroyed. He said that people need not be surprised that more and more people get sick ... the *Wai-mahsã*<sup>11</sup> are so mad there is hardly any escape. The Tukano notion of a unity of body and soul is a good impulse to see ourselves a little bit more as an unity because bodily symptoms of illnesses can have psychic causes. Especially one point has made me think: for me it was clear that there is something like karma, but I never could get used to the idea of being punished for your bad doings. But the belief of the Tukano ('if I do something bad, something bad can also happen to somebody else, and if somebody else does something bad, something negative can happen to me') in my opinion is something that can boost the whole community, because everybody strives to keep a balance and not be the one person guilty for the bad luck of others (Miriam W., 2019).

It was an important step by Clarinda to give up this practice<sup>12</sup> and break with the gender stereotypes of her culture by studying anthropology and research the Sateré-Mawé from her own perspective. I hope in this way it may be easier to give an insight into the alternative lifeways of a foreign culture. Clarinda Ramos can be a role model for many. It is time that we learn from indigenous cultures how to live sustainably and to give them back what has been taken away from them (Miriam W., 2019).

... In the subsequent discussion we debated whether these tendencies<sup>13</sup> eventually destroy indigenous culture or not, if these tendencies were to be valorized positively or negatively or how their negative consequences could possibly be avoided. I agree with my colleagues' notion of culture as a process rather than a static construct. I think it is impossible to preserve a culture within a condition that probably hasn't existed in the first place. Indigenous groups always have changed and influenced each other and have been influenced from outside by colonization, evangelical priests, African slaves and capitalist lifeways, and they still are. The longing for consumer goods that make life easier is understandable, and can be observed the world over, not only in Amazonia. Yet I think the tendencies among the Indigenous Peoples of Amazonia towards a capitalist lifestyle are rapid and drastic, whereas precious knowledge about nature and with it its valorization in the cities may be lost in the future. At this point, to work on a system which would enable Indigenous People to acquire the desired goods, education etc. without having to leave their home and live in the cities under precarious conditions should be the core of development work. This presupposes the social and political equality of

---

11 'Spirits', but actually human beings existing under differential conditions, as our interlocutors from the Upper Rio Negro explained.

12 To make a living from manufacturing handicraft.

13 The talk was about the practice of the CMI – *Bahserikowi* to offer traditional indigenous healing methods in a non-indigenous urban context, as well as increasing the urban migration of Indigenous People in general.

treatment of Indigenous Peoples that is possibly difficult given the current political situation in Brazil (Linda N., 2018).

In this seminar, we had the opportunity to get in touch with many aspects of modern indigenous life in the Amazon region. A broad focus ranging from the history of several ethnic groups since the first contact with European culture, difficulties in modern indigenous life, the different mythologies of certain ethnic groups, as well as different rituals and everyday lives gave us a view of how complex and very interesting these regions of the world are and have been. I personally was really fascinated with the relationship between man and nature and how it is mythologically regulated to maintain sustainable access to our environment. Concepts like *Buen Vivir*<sup>14</sup> should have a great impact on global discussions concerning the future of our planet and human society (Elias F., 2017).

Furthermore, the interactivity with indigenous stakeholders within a teaching context was clearly identified as a decolonizing step by the students. Interestingly it was seen not so much as an educational method, but as an encounter that triggered a ‘decolonizing’ overhaul of one’s own mindset.

This attitude<sup>14</sup> represents a kind of decolonizing of one’s own thinking ... João Paulo’s aim is to integrate indigenous thinking and logic into the science of anthropology. He reclaims a differential thinking also with a view to the future: that is, breaking out of one’s own thinking and making us aware of the fact that our thinking is just one possibility among many equivalent others, would count as a success. General openness must be maintained to meet this claim and open up possibilities for it. In my opinion, this consciousness should be conveyed more (e.g., in schools), in order to be able to scrutinize one’s own thinking and be reflective. ... Yet, to perceive this arbitrariness and diversity can lead to new insights and exchanges of knowledge, experiences with other systems of knowledge and therefore should be encouraged. I think that with his work João Paulo creates awareness for thinking in different categories and sensitizing us to what from our perspective are ‘alien’ systems of knowledge. He creates a new perspective on our own system of knowledge (Anna D., 2019).

The two systems of knowledge are therefore not compatible because the indigenous schema of classification differs fundamentally from the Western system. Especially because of socially pre-structured categorizations, anthropologists have a hard time analyzing a culture without thinking within their own logics and structures. The thinking of field researchers has to be decolonized in order to find access to new patterns of thinking and categorizing so that anthropologists finally succeed in representing the researched according to their own categorizations. The anthropologist João Paulo considers this change to be an ontological turn: ‘wrong’

---

14 To consider differential epistemologies as equal in principle.

statements by [non-indigenous] researchers should be set right. ... In order to raise tolerance of indigenous groups, indigenous thinking and logic must be integrated into anthropology. Western thinking is too entrenched, which is why it is necessary to break up one's own classifications. It is probably not possible to abstain totally from one's own patterns of thinking, but this should be the concern of anthropologists researching other cultures as far as possible. The highest priority should be to research at eye level, that is, the systems of reference should not be hierarchized only because they seem to be more 'logical' to us (Lena R., 2019).

When João Paulo now writes a book about indigenous knowledge, it could be seen an appropriation of a Western concept, but also as a powerful way of representation and participation. Indigenous representatives must conquer epistemological power back from anthropologists. It is not our job to interpret others, but to learn to understand them. That should not involve elevating one's own over another system (Sebastian R. Ch., 2019).

João Paul asks for greater openness towards indigenous concepts. For Barreto the opening to alternative understandings and experiences of the world is at the same time a liberation from intellectual restraints within science, which creates possibilities for an alternative future, alternative paths. To overcome Western path dependencies seems to me highly relevant in the face of allegedly intractable global heating and the often ineffective top-down approaches in order to cope with the climate crisis. We have the duty to find conditions for an opening up of science and should always reflect on which of our preconceived notions conflicts with this opening. Anthropology should shift its focus on knowledge *about* others towards a reflection on the conditions and the method of a transcultural open exchange. Instead of isolated and one-sided translations, anthropology should become a science of mediation or ... of interpreting (Sebastian R. Ch., 2019).

## Conclusion

When talking about Indigenous People in the metropolis, the predominant narrative tends to reify indigeneity as a success story of global players raising their voices the world over. Once fragmented indigenous societies coalesce into 'singularities acting together', as Hardt and Negri define their notion of 'multitude', often heralded by Western counter-culture as if they were the ferment for an alternative design to the hegemony of the capitalist mode of living. However, this perception once again opens the door to the political, ecological and spiritual projections of our own qualms, fears and utopias in the face of the planetary crisis.

When I [WK] inadvertently chose the moniker '*Favela Amazônia?*' (after all, with a question mark) as a title for our first Interactive Seminar in 2016, our indigenous interlocutors reacted by showing me my error. It was not the moral precept of a 'de-



victimization' of indigenous societies (like the 'strategic essentialism' of non-indigenous stakeholders with their own political agenda) that our indigenous interlocutors insisted on, but the fact that they have found new resilience in the midst of often grueling neo-colonial conditions, not the least by developing their very own version of a reflective anthropology. Perhaps the most important lesson of the seminar is that indigenous creativity is always preceded by the thorny path of having to cope with the adverse conditions of neo-colonial structures.

The Interactive Seminar is not so much dialogical but rather functions through assertive and affirmative conversations, albeit from a perspective which turns around the hitherto 'irreversible' vector of the anthropological acquisition of knowledge: in the Global South the person invested with the position of the 'anthropologist' has nowadays changed and has become more diverse.

For our indigenous interlocutors, the Interactive Seminar is not only a platform for negotiating their version of an '*Antropologia Indígena*', but is part of a person's struggle to reconstruct individual cultural embeddings. It is a moment to break through the wall of silence on the metropolitan 'contact zone', a silence which still hovers over the peripheral contact zone (Kapfhammer 2015). Fortunately, indigenous talk has never died down to complete silence, but survived even under most adverse conditions. Rosijane Tukano, who herself had literally lost her voice as a schoolgirl when her Desana was ridiculed and she still did not master Portuguese, told us how her mother practiced her mother tongue in the Salesian mission's boarding school under threat of punishment:

Sitting at the table, I listened to my mother, Elza Maria Desana, as she told me how it was as an inmate in the Salesian mission, and the hard routine the children and young people were subjected to. She not only brought to mind the daily physical hardships, but also that it meant that their own language was forbidden, how they whispered like the wind when they conversed, and soon broke out into hilarious laughter, which had to be immediately subdued again, so they wouldn't be punished, beaten, and isolated (Fernandes Moura 2023).

## References

- Azevedo, Sueti Dagoberto 2018: *Agenciamento do mundopelos KumuãYe'pamahsã. O conjunto dos bahsese na organização do espaço* Di'ta Nêhktë, Coleção Reflexividades Indígenas, NEAI / EDUA, Manaus.
- Diakara, Jaime 2021: *Gaapi. Uma viagemoporeste e outros mundos. Estudo Indígena Desana*, Ed. Valer / NEAI, Manaus.
- Estadão, Favela Amazônia. Um novo retrato da floresta, <https://infograficos.estadao.com.br/especiais/favela-amazonia/>, accessed January 14, 2023.
- Fernandes Moura, and Rosijane Nûmio Kihití (forthcoming): *Sich erinnern heißt Leben, Widerstand leisten!* DieKulturschock, <https://diekulturschock.de/archiv/freiheit-2-ausgabe-wise23-24-die-kulturschock/>, accessed November 1, 2023.

- Graeber, David: Radical Alterity is Just Another Way of Saying „Reality“: A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. *HAU. Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2):1–41.
- Kapfhammer, Wolfgang 2004: De „Sateré puro“ (*sateré sese*) ao „Novo Sateré“ (*sateré pakup*): mitopraxis no movimento evangélico entre os Sateré-Mawé. In: Robin M. Wright, ed., *Transformando os Deuses vol.II, Igrejas Evangélicas, Pentecostais e Neopentecostais entre os Povos Indígenas no Brasil*. Pp. 134–193. Campinas: Editora Unicamp.
- Kapfhammer, Wolfgang 2009: Divine Child and Trademark. Economy, Morality, and Cultural Sustainability of a Guaraná Project among the Sateré-Mawé, Brazil. In: Aparecida Vilaça, and Robin M. Wright eds., *Native Christians: Modes and Effects of Christianity among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas*. Pp. 211–228. Ashgate: Farnham.
- Kapfhammer, Wolfgang 2012: Amazonian Pain. Indigenous Ontologies and Western Eco-Spirituality. *INDIANA-Estudios Antropológicos sobre América Latina y el Caribe* 29:45–169.
- Kapfhammer, Wolfgang 2015: Expanding the Contact Zone, Sharing Knowledge / Positions, Humboldt Lab Dahlem, , <http://www.humboldt-lab.de/en/project-archive/probeuehne-7/sharing-knowledge/positions/index.html>, accessed October 14, 2023.
- Kapfhammer, Wolfgang 2017: The Art of Forest Life: On Human-Animal Relationships among the Sateré-Mawé on the Lower Amazon, Brazil. In: Felipe Guillaume Marchand und Vander Velden eds., *Olhares cruzados sobre as relações entre humanos e animais silvestres na Amazônia (Brasil, Guiana francesa)*. Pp. 251–273. EDUA: Manaus.
- Kapfhammer, Wolfgang, and Luiza Garnelo: ‘We bought a Television Set from Lídia’: Social Programmes and Indigenous Agency among the Sateré-Mawé of the Brazilian Lower Amazon. In: Ernst Halbmeyer ed., *Indigenous Modernities in South America*. Pp. 131–162. Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing.
- Kapfhammer, Wolfgang and Gordon Winder 2020: Slow Food, Shared Values, and Indigenous Empowerment in an Alternative Commodity Chain Linking Brazil and Europe. *Sociologus* 70(2):101–122.
- Lima Barreto, João Paulo 2018: Waimahsá: *Peixes e humanos*, Coleção Reflexividades Indígenas. NEAI/EDUA: Manaus.
- Lima Barreto, João Paulo 2022: *O mundo em mim: Uma teoria indígena e oscuidados sobre o corpo no Alto Rio Negro*. IEB Mil Folhas: Manaus.
- Mendes dos Santos, Gilton and Carlos Machado Dias Jr. 2009: Ciência da Floresta: Por uma antropologia no plural, simétrica e cruzada, *Revista de Antropologia* 52(1):137–160.
- Nosso, Leonencio, and Dida Sampaio (n.d.): Estadão, Favela Amazônia. Um novo retrato da floresta, <https://infograficos.estadao.com.br/especiais/favela-amazonia/>, accessed November 1, 2023.
- Núcleo de Estudos da Amazônia Indígena (NEAI) 2018: Omeró: *Constituição e circulação dos conhecimentos* Yepamahsá, Coleção Reflexividades Indígenas. NEAI/EDUA: Manaus.
- Ramos, Clarinda Maria 2019: A saga por úni cocam in ho possível, Cadernos do NEAI 2(8). <https://cadernosdoneai.wordpress.com/2019/10/28/a-saga-por-unico-caminho-possivel-por-clarinda-mariaramos/>, accessed October 30, 2023.
- Rezende Barreto, João Rivelino 2018: Formação e transformação de coletivas indígenas do noroeste amazônico. Do mito à sociologia das comunidades, Coleção Reflexividades Indígenas. NEAI/EDUA: Manaus.
- Sarmiento Rezende, Justino ed. 2021: *Paneiro de saberes: Transbordando reflexividades indígenas*. IEB Mil Folhas/Coleção Mil Saberes: Manaus.
- Sodré Maia, Gabriel 2018: Bahsamori. *O tempo, as estações e as etiquetassociais dos Yepamahsá (Tukano)*, Coleção Reflexividades Indígenas. NEAI / EDUA: Manaus.