

Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626

Volume 12 | Issue 2

Article 2

11-2-2014

Between Distinct Voracities: The Hydro-energetic Machine and the Iyakaliti's Response

Juliana de Almeida

Universidade Federal do Amazonas (UFAM)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

de Almeida, Juliana (2014). "Between Distinct Voracities: The Hydro-energetic Machine and the Iyakaliti's Response", *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 12: Iss. 2, Article 2, 93-98.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70845/2572-3626.1182>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol12/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Between Distinct Voracities: The Hydro-energetic Machine and the *Iyakaliti's* Response

Juliana de Almeida

Universidade Federal do Amazonas (UFAM)

Among the Enawene-Nawe, inhabitants of the middle course of the Juruena River,¹ male bodies are considered the ultimate fishing power. They are analogous to the body apparatus of the male deity *Dokowi*, whose parts mimetically hold the agency of fishing apparatus: his veins, testicles, eyes, and nails formed a variety of species of fish poison²; his ear originated the fishing hook; and his waist became a fishing trap.³ Armed with this instrumented fishing-body, the Enawene-Nawe annually recall—in their fisheries —*Datawali's* revenge for the death of his son *Dokowi*, murdered by the fish.⁴

In today's world, fish are responsible for appeasing the ravenous desire of spirit beings that inhabit landforms (*iyakaliti*) and also help to obtain protection and healing through the intervention of heavenly spirit beings (*enoli*). The existing order is maintained through the distribution of food, drinks, dances, and songs in which fish act as mediators of relationships between humans and non-humans.

In the last decade, the construction of hydroelectric dams in the upper Juruena River, considered by the Enawene-Nawe as their region of origin and also habitat and breeding site for certain fish species, has culminated in the drastic reduction in fisheries supply. Facing fisheries failure, starting back in 2009, buying farm raised fish has been the alternative to supply rituals. Brazilian government's announcement of the planning of dozens of hydropower plants for this river basin foreshadows the disproportionate reach of the situation for the Enawene-Nawe, among whom fish figure as a central element in the system of reciprocity and maintenance of life.

The Enawene-Nawe are about 700 people who inhabit the periphery of the Southern Amazon, and whose daily lives are marked by four *economic-ceremonial* seasons endowed with a sharp vitality that breaks the opposition between ritual and everyday life (Silva 1998). It is through their ritualistic life that they work continuously and exhaustively against threats to the existing order. This is based on respect to the precepts and rules governing the extraction and use of resources which are within the domain of spiritual beings.

The annual cycle begins with the corn harvest, when the *iyakaliti* seek the shamans to communicate their desire to eat corn porridge. This marks the beginning of a period called *iyaõkwa*. During the low river waters, in a period of around two months, the men-holds and all the women remain in the village, while the other men-explorers leave the village for building fishing dams. Armed with a big quantity of fish, the expedition returns to the village that, in the following months, becomes a ritualistic place with offerings accompanied by musical and choreographic performances. The end of this season involves the ceremonial planting of manioc fields. The ceremonial seasonal cycle continues with the planting of maize fields, which is accompanied by the *lerohi*, another ceremonial phase. Just like as the *iyaõkwa*, this ritual is performed to please the *iyakaliti*. The gathering of honey and the fishing expeditions using fish poisons mark the completion of *salomã* and *kateoko*, ceremonial cycles dedicated to the *enoli*. Thus, this cycle is renewed.

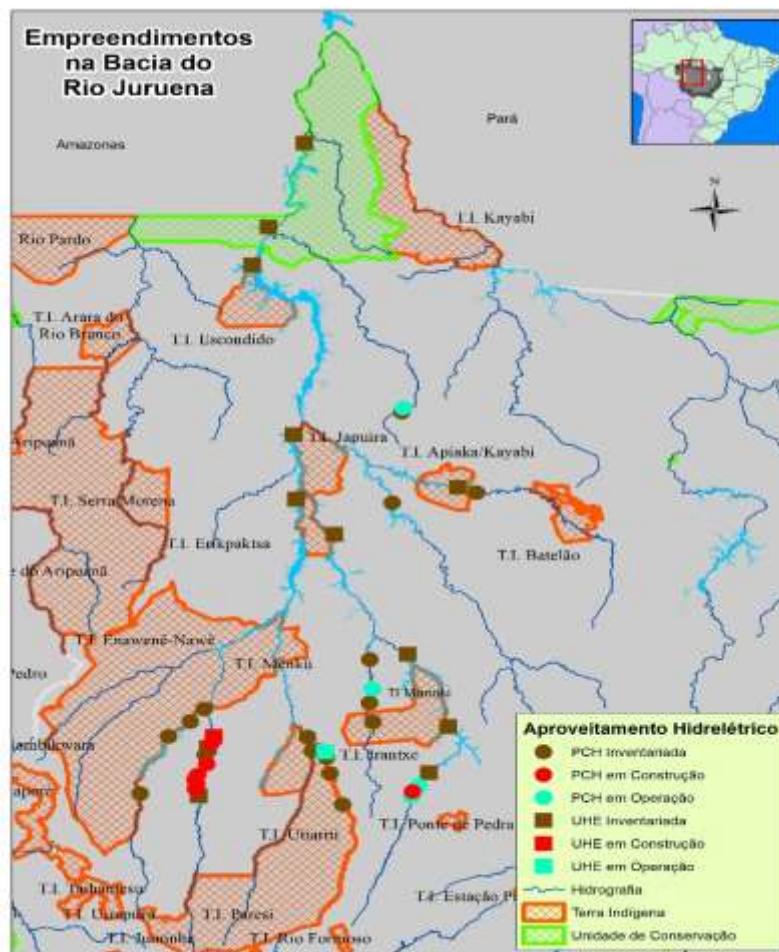


Figure 1. Hydroelectric projects in the Juruena watershed. Source: Operação Amazônia Nativa (OPAN) and Instituto Centro de Vida (ICV), 2013.

Annually, three large fishing expeditions are undertaken to supply this *feast of the spirits*.⁵ For these expeditions, the Enawene-Nawe take advantage of fish concentration at certain parts of the river, due to seasonal variations. Two of these fisheries are held between the months of August and October with the use of fish poison (certain plant species). They occur during the period in which fish are concentrated in lagoons, during the dry season. The third and most important fishing event occurs early in the beginning of the low tide, held after the spawning by locking the river through small dams built with tree trunks and allocation of fish traps. This device is a forest engineering technique, and might be considered the largest exponent of the Enawene-Nawe fishing systems (Mendes dos Santos and Santos 2008).

The *iyakaliti* are fishery mediators. Owners of the places inhabited by fish, they are the ones leading them to the river headwaters or lagoons. They negotiate with the Enawene-Nawe the release of the fish, through the offering of vegetable salt. *Dalokwalise'atokene*, a master of chants, said that "salt is like money," engendering an exchange network between humans and non-humans.

However, the fish presence is not restricted to the mediation of relationships between humans and non-humans. The fish play a prominent role in the various forms of exchange among the Enawene-Nawe, since fish supply is a basic condition for reciprocity within a range of social relationships. Fish is also the main dietary source of protein, since the consumption of red meat is prohibited.

Whereas Enawene-Nawe's daily lives are governed by rituals and rules governing the interaction with the spiritual worlds, the same is not true for non-indigenous Brazilian people. This mismatch in worldviews and societal organization poses a great risk for the Enawene's existence. *Kawali*, another master of chants, stated that;

If you kill the rivers, the fish, the trees, the *iyakaliti* will become revengeful and kill all Enawene-Nawe... The non-Indians ravage everything, until there will be no more fish, no ritual, no ancestors, and thus we will die. All of us will die, including the non-Indians, the difference is that we know that, but they don't.⁶

The state of Mato Grosso is placed on a transition region between two biomes; the Savanna and the Amazon. It also hosts the headwaters of two major South America river basins. Besides the sharp advance of agribusiness across the state in recent years, the region is also the target of hydropower expansion driven the PAC policy (Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento/Program for Acceleration of Growth), run by the federal government (Brazil / EPE / MME 2008). The Juruena Hydroelectric Complex is part of the PAC initiative, consisting of a sequence of eight small hydropower plants⁷ (PCH – pequena central hidrelétrica/ small hydroelectric dam). PCH's licensing process is facilitated because they are believed to have least damaging impacts in comparison to large dams (Rezende 2012). However, the construction of these dams, associated with government stimulus, have resulted in situations such as those observed in the Juruena valley; a sequence of small dams were built stretching an area of about 100 km, without any commitments and efforts for the analysis of the cumulative and synergistic effects (Almeida 2011; Rezende 2012). With the consolidation of this system of small hydropower plants, the government is now investing in research for the deployment of large hydroelectric plants in the same watershed. The heavy investment in research on the hydroelectric potential of this region demonstrates the strategic role of the Tapajós watershed in Amazon's hydropower exploitation in the next decades.

Often, the implementation of hydropower plants in Brazil has been designed concurrently to the installation of waterways for transporting grains (mainly soy), cotton, meat, and minerals, among other goods (Brasil/Governo Federal 2011). The call for improvement in infrastructure has on its favor a number of environmental and economic arguments. However, the stimulus for the expansion of the agricultural frontier will also further intensify the pressure for deforestation and degradation of the Savanna and the Amazon Rainforest. The future scenario for the Juruena basin might be even more concerning when we take into account the cumulative consequences of large scale infrastructural development planned for the Teles Pires and Tapajós⁸ rivers at the watershed scale.

The concomitant licensing of the Juruena Hydroelectric Complex and the intensified research in the region was soon perceived by the Enawene-Nawe and received with displeasure. Besides the impacts referenced by environmental studies, a number of questions arose: uncertainty, lack of information, difficulty in dealing with the rational-positivistic logic of licensing procedures, and internal disagreements and conflict. In one of these meetings, a representative of the federal government asked "How might six hundred Indians hinder the development of over a hundred million Brazilian citizens?"

Nevertheless, the turmoil generated by this process caused the continuous interruption of rituals due to the volume of meetings between the dam consortia and the Enawene-Nawe to discuss compensatory arrangements. Negatively affected by the situation, the Enawene-Nawe began to miss some musical sequences, which is considered a big risk. This context, combined with low fish availability, fell relentlessly on them. The extenuating circumstances were believed to be responsible for the death of two important masters of chants, putting many people in danger, vulnerable to *iyakaliti* attacks.

Whereas for the Enawene-Nawe this context is configured as an inexorable response to non-indigenous interventions in *iyakaliti's* dwellings, officers from the Mato Grosso state environmental agency (SEMA-MT) attributed the low fish catches to the use of fish poison by the Indians. As described above, *Datawali* avenged the death of *Dokowi* developing all fishing apparatus from the body of his son. Since then, the fishery is repeated and the revenge remembered. Aware of the potential effect caused by the death of *Dokowi*, the fish warned the Enawene-Nawe that their fishing-machine would never be able to extinguish them.

However, the world order mediated by the negotiations between humans and non-humans has been undermined by the voracious desire of the hydropower machine that definitely blocked the river. Besides the troubled context of negotiations and (later consolidated) the eminence of fish scarcity, the possibility for the Enawene-Nawe to interrupt the execution of the hydropower complex was never considered, which shows the asymmetry of power in the relationships between these two worlds.

The Enawene-Nawe have attempted to suspend the construction of these dams by using different strategies such as blocking roads and bridges and by sending documents to government agencies. They have also been pro-active in requesting further clarification of impacts, revision of the calculation of compensatory arrangements, and requiring proper consultation in decision-making processes. Despite numerous lawsuits presented by federal prosecutors to suspend the construction, a decision of the Federal Supreme Court (STF) ruled the continuity of the project.

The continuity of the construction, as well as the refusal of agencies and of the Supreme Court in responding to the Enawene-Nawe questionings, resulted in a drastic action: a group of men and women assembled an expedition with the aim of burning the construction site of the Telegraph small dam.⁹ "Why did we burn? It was not good for us! ... We could no longer perform the Iyaökwa. This was happening all the time because of the PCH, the people there (in the village plaza) having meetings. The fish died because of the river's dirty water".¹⁰ Nevertheless, this extreme act did not ease the blocking for the participation of the Enawene-Nawe (and other indigenous peoples in the region) in the licensing process for these projects. The main argument for this impediment was that these dams were located outside the territory demarcated as Indigenous Land.

Currently, part of Juruena Hydroelectric Complex is under operation. Gradually, other projects have been licensed and installed in Juruena tributaries. Starting in 2011, the Enawene-Nawe has received, through their association, a monthly stipend as a financial compensation for permanent impacts not mitigated by these projects. These funds have been invested largely for buying fuel for the boats (vehicles used for fishing expeditions),¹¹ purchase of farm-raised chicken (in sumptuous amounts) offered in healing sessions undertaken by shamans, and, especially, for purchase of farm-raised fish (especially tambaqui, *Colossoma macropomum*) in large amounts to supply the deficiency of fisheries after the construction of the hydropower plants.

For the Enawene'nero (women), lowered fishing caused by dams, as well as the acquisition of fish originating from aquaculture as an alternative to supply the ritual, has generated diseases and problems of mediation in the relationship with the spiritual beings. This is an issue of great importance, since it affects the development of their children as human-fishers. In addition to the weakening of the children due to the consumption of farmed fish, a critical issue relates to the fact that fish disappearance endangers the implementation of fishing practices operating in the formation of the male *ethos* among the Enawene-Nawe. From the women's point of view, the process of becoming-fisher can only be established through the continuous development and improvement of the practices and rituals, in which the male bodies need to be engaged.

The replacement of river fish by farmed fish did not resolve the arrangement of relationships with the spiritual beings, who are dissatisfied with such exchange. With the failure of their dam-fishing rituals and the advance of hydroelectric dams, the Enawene-Nawe try to develop alternatives to deal with the voracious desires of the hydropower machine and the *iyakaliti*. Owners and residents of the regional geography, the *iyakaliti* watch with utmost severity the deterioration promoted by hydroelectric plants in the landscape, as well as their shocks to the instrumented fishing-body of the Enawene-Nawe.

Notes

¹ The Juruena basin is located in the Brazilian central-western region, in the State of Mato Grosso.

² Timbo is a generic term for a range of roots and barks of trees that decrease water oxygenation, a property that forces the fish to the surface, facilitating their capture.

³ The latter is considered the most exemplary of fish predation.

⁴ The information presented in this article results from research carried out among the Enawene-Nawe in 2010, entitled "High Voltage in the Forest: The Hydroelectric Juruena Complex and the Enawene Nawe," added to preliminary reflections of my Masters research in Social Anthropology at Federal University of Amazonas, in progress.

⁵ A term used by anthropologist Virginia Valadão film-maker to represent Enawene-Nawe ritualistic. The documentary film entitled "Yäkwa: The Spirits Feast" is available at: <http://vimeo.com/16941667>

- ⁶ Interview by Survival International, 2006 Available at: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/povos/enawenenawe>.
- ⁷ The hydroelectric inventory of the Upper Juruena basin was authorized by ANEEL on March 16, 200.
- ⁸ The Tapajós River is formed from the junction of Juruena and Teles Pires rivers. There are plans for the installation of seven large plants in the Tapajós River basin, and four in the Teles Pires River.
- ⁹ Among the eight projects of the Juruena Complex, the Telegraph PCH is the closest to the Enawene-Nawe Indigenous Land (30 km).
- ¹⁰ Ministério Público Federal, 2010. Perícia Antropológica: Impacto das PCH's sobre a população Indígena Enawene-Nawe, Incêndio na PCH Telegráfica e Oposição a construção de 83 PCHs no rio Juruena pelos Enawene-Nawe.
- ¹¹ Even after the low fish yield, the Enawene-Nawe have managed to keep their fisheries.

References

- Almeida, Juliana
2011 Alta tensão na floresta: os Enawene-Nawe e o Complexo Hidrelétrico do Juruena. In: Arruda, Rinaldo. S. V., Andrea Jakubaszko and Marcos M. Ramires (Orgs.) *Reflexões Indigenistas*. Campinas: Editora Curt Nimuendaju.
- Brasil, Ministério de Minas e Energia (MME), Empresa de Pesquisas Energéticas (EPE)
2008 *Avaliação Ambiental Integrada – AAI da Bacia do Rio Juruena*. Available on: <http://www.epe.gov.br/MeioAmbiente/Paginas/AAI/BaciadoRioJuruena.aspx?CategoriaID=101>. Access on August 15, 2013.
- Brasil, Governo Federal
2011 *Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC 2011-2014)* Available on: <http://www.pac.gov.br/transportes/hidrovias>. Access on August 15, 2013.
- Lima Rodgers, Ana P. R. and Juliana Almeida
2013 Sonoridade e Captura: sondando o incomensurável no *ijaõkwa* Enawene-Nawe (no prelo).
- Mendes dos Santos, G. and Geraldo M. Santos
2008 Homens, peixes e espíritos: a pesca ritual dos Enawene-Nawe. Campo Grande/MS. *Tellus*, n. 14, p. 39-59.
- Operação Amazônia Nativa (OPAN) and Instituto Centro de Vida (ICV)
2013 Empreendimentos hidrelétricos na bacia do rio Juruena In: Operação Amazônia Nativa (OPAN) and Instituto Centro de Vida (ICV). *In Juruena Vivo*. Cuiabá-MT [Mímeo].
- Rezende, Leonardo P.
2012 A Análise do Impacto Cumulativo de Barragens Hidrelétricas. In: Rezende, Leonardo P. and Jorge A. Dergam. *Proteção da Biodiversidade e Construção de Barragens Hidrelétricas*. São Paulo, Fiuza. p. 145-268.
- Silva, Marcio F.
1998 Tempo e Espaço entre os Enawene-Nawe. São Paulo/SP: *Revista de Antropologia da USP*, 41(2): 21-52.