Indigenous Peoples in the Guianas: Contemporary Ethnographies

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This special issue of Tipiti is dedicated to recent ethnographic studies conducted among Indigenous peoples in Guianese Amazonia. It highlights the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers from diverse institutions and nationalities engaged with Arawakan (Wapishana), Cariban (Katxuyana, Makushi, Tiriyó, Wai Wai), and Tupian (Zo'é) language speakers, who predominantly reside along the borders between Brazil, Guyana, and Suriname, in the central portion of the region. The articles included in this issue provide a glimpse into contemporary research in the Guianas, covering a wide range of topics including conviviality, gender, kinship, morality, emotions, death, ritual, music, space-time, movement, memory, orality, mythology, partnership, and ethnographic authorship. They not only shed light on the enduring fertility of key debates in regional ethnology, but also reveal significant transformations in anthropological paradigms and the lived experiences of Guianese peoples.

Covering coastal areas, savannas, tropical forests, and mountain ranges, the Guianas region, situated in northern South America, is conventionally regarded as an “island,” bounded by the waters of the Amazon, Negro, and Orinoco rivers, the Casiquiare channel, and the Atlantic Ocean (Rivière 1984, 2). Inhabited by groups speaking diverse languages from the Cariban family—and, to a lesser extent, also by Arawak, Tupi, Yánomami, Sáliva, and Warao-speaking groups—this “island” has been alternatively classified as a “linguistic area” (Goeje 1924), a “cultural area” (Gillin 1948; Galvão 1979), and finally, an “ethnographic area” (Rivière 1984; Mellati 1997; Gallois 2005), holding a prominent position in the anthropological literature on the Indigenous peoples of lowland South America. The area, artificially delineated and isolated for heuristic purposes (Gallois 2005, 16; Rivière et al 2007, 252), is associated with some of the ethnographic monographs that pioneered the modern period of ethnological reflection on kinship in the Indigenous Amazonia, as well as influential syntheses regarding native regional systems of the continent (Rivière 1984; Gallois 2005; cf. Viveiros de Castro 2002a, 100-103; Rival and Whitehead 2001).

In this introduction, we offer an overview of the main paradigmatic traditions that have placed the Indigenous peoples of the Guianas at the forefront of debates within Amazonianist ethnology. Focusing on efforts at synthesis and refraining from attempting an exhaustive
survey of the extensive ethnographic literature produced in the region, throughout the introduction—but especially in the section where we present the contributions to the volume—we illuminate the influence of classic paradigms on recent studies and the emergence of unprecedented concerns and contexts for disciplinary dialogue and ethnographic work in the Amazonia. It is noteworthy that this issue is possibly the first to include texts on the ethnology of the Indigenous Guianas authored by Indigenous researchers, who themselves belong to the Wai Wai people. Their articles, written in collaboration with non-Indigenous researchers, demonstrate the necessity for diverse authorial and methodological approaches in the context of the increasing Indigenous presence in academia, particularly in anthropology. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the issue features contributions from three anthropologists with over a decade of research experience, who have revitalized their ethnographic production through new interests and theoretical approaches. Lastly, we highlight the fact that some of the articles presented here are based on peripatetic ethnographies, indicating that mobility persists as a theme, and also emerges as a method, in Guianese ethnology.

We celebrate the vitality of the research collected in this volume, which, without any aspiration towards synthesis, is published forty years after the release of Individual and society in Guiana by Peter Rivière (1984) — and almost twenty after the publication of Redes de Relações nas Guianas, edited by Dominique Gallois (2005).

Images of the Guianas

Although conceived of as an “island” since the publication of “Tribes of the Guianas and the left Amazon tributaries” (Gillin 1948) in the fifth volume of the Handbook of South American Indians (Steward 1946-1950), the Guianas region only began to take shape within the ethnographic literature between the 1960s and 1980s, when the first monographs and theoretical concerning the Indigenous peoples of the region came to the public. Mainly crafted from researchers’ experiences with Indigenous peoples speaking Cariban languages, pioneering ethnographies such as those on the Akawao (Butt Colson 1954), Wai Wai (Fock 1963; Yde 1965), Wayana (Hurault 1968), Trio (Rivière 1969), Ye’kwana (Civrieux 1970; Arvelo-Jiménez [1974] 1992), Maroni Caribs (Kloos 1971), E’ñepa/Panare (Dumont 1976), and Piaroa (Overing 1975) were central to the drawing of these contours, which began to gain greater consistency in collections such as Carib-speaking Indians: culture, society, and language, edited by Ellen Basso (1977) based on a symposium held at the 40th International Congress of Americanists. After associating a set of “traits” with the linguistic family (Basso 1977, 17), the compendium highlighted the sociocultural diversity of Cariban peoples, distinguishing three different “types” and questioning the relevance of a comparison based solely on their linguistic affiliation. The author thus pointed out that “each ‘type’ is not uniquely Carib,” as it “could include non-Carib-speaking” neighboring peoples, underlining that historically discrete groups, through a process of ecological adaptation including the establishment of trade, marriage, ritual, and political alliances, appear to have developed a set of shared cultural systems, which in some regions [...] have resulted in truly “multi-ethnic” societies. (Basso 1977, 19)

The delimitation of a Guianese regional framework gained greater substance with the compilation Themes in political organization: the Caribs and their neighbors, edited by Audrey Butt Colson and Dieter Heinen (1983-84) and published in the journal Antropologica, also following a symposium held at the 44th International Congress of Americanists (Manchester, 1982). Drawing on the flourishing regional scholarship between the late 1970s and the early 1980s (e.g., Armellada and Butt Colson 1976; Velthem 1976, 1980; Villalón 1978; Henley 1979, 1982; Moráles and Arvelo-Jiménez 1981; Thomas 1982; Gallois 1981, 1984-85, 1985, 1986; Mentore 1983-84, 1984), the introduction of this volume revisits Basso’s (1977) inquiry,
emphasizing that it “has always appeared highly unlikely that Carib speakers qua linguistic family, constituted in all respects a discrete and unique unity” (Heinen 1983-84, 05). The author pointed out the arbitrariness of constructing an analytical framework based solely on linguistic affiliation, highlighting “the many links at the ideological level between a variety of Guiana peoples, Carib and non-Carib” and observing that “there are no hard and fast ethnic boundaries between Caribs and their neighbours” (1983-84, 5-6). Despite their reliance on a linguistic criterion, therefore, both the anthology edited by Basso and that edited by But Colson and Heinen underscored the appropriateness of a regional approach, proving pivotal for the shaping of the “Guianese area,” more definitively established with the influential release of Individual and society in Guiana (Rivière 1984).

In spite of the importance of the aforementioned monographs and syntheses for shaping the Guianese regional framework, there is no doubt that the ethnographies concerning the Tarëno (Trio/Tiriyó) peoples by Peter Rivière (1969) and the Piaroa, by Joanna Overing (1975) stood out during this period. Presenting the first comprehensive descriptions of Amazonian kinship systems, these ethnographies laid the groundwork for numerous monographs produced later, influencing the analytical trajectory of Amazonian ethnology from the 1980s onwards (e.g., Viveiros de Castro 1993, 156-157; Rival 1999, 213-214; Rival and Whitehead 2001, 3-18). The authors were the first to question the pertinency of descent theory in the context of lowland South America, pointing to the need to develop a conceptual framework suitable for describing the Indigenous peoples of the continent (cf. Overing 1977). Though this questioning originated from ethnographies on the Guianas, it quickly gained greater reach. Indifferent to descent — and thus lacking corporate groups such as lineages, clans, moieties, or age groups — these peoples were conceptualized as cognatic and endogamous societies, practicing symmetrical marriage alliance and using a “two-line” or “two-section” kinship terminology. Faced with the absence of any other formal social groupings, local groups formed “autonomous political units,” composed of a “chief” or “leader” and their extensive bilateral kin (Rivière 1969, 104; Overing 1975, 69). “Egocentred” around the figure of the chief/father-in-law, these “societies” were characterized by an individualistic nature that would later be generalized to the entire Guianese context (Overing 1983-84; Rivière 1984).

In Marriage among the Trio: a principle of social organization, Rivière (1969) conducted a detailed investigation of the kinship system of the Tarëno (Trio/Tiriyó), an Indigenous Cariban-speaking people inhabiting the border region between Brazil and Suriname. Focusing on social organization, a classic theme in Anglo-Saxon anthropology, the author explored the issue of avuncular marriage, understood as an ordering principle of this society. “Partly incestuous and partly licit,” the practice of marrying one’s sister’s daughter (ZD) was interpreted by Rivière as an “empirical solution to a deeper attitudinal conflict which exists as much at the level of thought as at the level of action” (Rivière 1969, x; emphasis added), namely, the distinction between “inside” and “outside,” which had “practical value in the ordering of their cosmos, both social and natural” (1969, 279). Examining avuncular marriage through the lens of Lévi-Straussian symmetrical alliance theory, the prescription of marriage with one’s sister’s daughter (ZD) and/or bilateral cross-cousins (MBD, FZD) was interpreted by the author as indicative of this society’s refined endogamous nature. Extensively observed, this rule would serve to reaffirm consanguineous ties—especially those between brothers and sisters—thereby suppressing affinal relations. The adherence to this rule was identified as the main feature of this marriage system, which would find an echo in the kinship terminology of the Trio peoples. Along with the preference for uxorilocal post-marital residence, the prescription was related to the necessity of controlling women, regarded as scarce “human resources” (Rivière 1969, 280-281).

Overing (1975) followed the path opened by Rivière in The Piaroa, a people of the Orinoco Basin: a study on kinship and marriage, a monograph focused on the eponymous people,
speakers of the Sáliva language and native to Venezuelan Amazonia. Taking the residential units—the itsole—as the object of analysis, the author emphasized the importance of the articulation between kinship and politics in the constitution and perpetuation of local groups. Although ideally formed by the bilateral kin of the chuwarumwang, “chiefs” or “leaders”—and therefore conceived of as located cognatic communities—the residential units would depend on the diversification and reiteration of marital exchange to perpetuate themselves. In other words, in the absence of descent, a principle of “multiple alliance” constitutes, and simultaneously continues, the social forms. According to the author, therefore, Piaroa life would be marked by a complex dialectic between affinity and consanguinity, in which the principle of symmetrical alliance or restricted exchange becomes the critical nexus of the social system. This system is marked by the manipulation of prescriptive technonymy and other procedures of diversification and repetition. Based on Piaroa data, Overing dissociates certain “structures of reciprocity” from descent and exogamy, articulating marital exchange and marriage prescription to endogamy in a decisive manner unprecedented in Amazonian scholarship.

The dialectic between affinity and consanguinity was explored by Overing (1981, 1983-84) in subsequent works, in which she conducts a comparative analysis of ethnographic regions of central Brazil, the Guianas, and the northwest Amazonia. In this comparative framework, the interplay between interiority and exteriority emerges as a foundational aspect of the Indigenous socio-cosmologies of lowland South America, wherein “society can exist only insofar as there is contact and proper mixing among entities and forces that are different from one another” (1983-84, 333). Overing posits that, in contrast to the central Brazilian and northwestern peoples with their systems of moieties or segmentary exogamous groups, the Guianese appear to exhibit an “amorphous” social structure that is “atomistic, dispersed, and highly fluid in form” (1983-84, 332). The author reinforces the analysis presented in earlier writings, portraying these peoples as practitioners of a Dravidian kinship terminology and a prescriptive marriage rule resulting in (ideally) endogamous cognatic groups. Moreover, Overing contends that for the Guianese peoples, marital exchanges should be confined to local groups, within which relationships between cognatic and effective affines ought to be restricted. Affinity—and thereby difference—becomes a principle for the constitution and perpetuation of local groups, conceived, therefore, as “total groups” (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2002b, 413). Nevertheless, this very affinity—inherently perilous, since associated with cannibalism and warfare, and hence, with predation—should be projected outwards: affines would need to be transformed into consanguineal kin, which would happen through a mechanism of terminological (re)classification. The composition of social space in the Guianas in this framework entails a continual movement of transmutation from the external (synonymous with danger and boundless differentiation) to the internal (a realm of safety and undifferentiated unity). The ideal of endogamy, epitomized by the consanguinization of affinity, thus serves as a mechanism for the domestication of differences.

Less than a year later, Rivière’s (1984) Individual and society in Guiana was published. The work is a milestone in the ethnological literature on the peoples of Indigenous Amazonia, providing a synthesis of various regional ethnographies produced between 1960 and 1980, and establishing a “social structure” specific to Guiana. Drawing on the propositions of Pierre Clastres (1974), Rivière strives not to portray the Guianese peoples in a negative light, arguing that “the looseness of social organisation should not be seen as a disadvantageous lack of formal institutions, but as a positive attribute,” and highlighting that “if the peoples of Guiana have not developed complex social structures, it is because they have no need for them” (Rivière 1984, 4). Rivière’s earlier insights (Rivière 1963, 1977) were finally generalized into a model that portrays the region as inhabited by dispersed local groups organized in small and unstable villages, adhering to a cognatic kinship system, and employing a two-line prescriptive relationship terminology, with tendencies towards endogamy and uxorilocality (Rivière 1984, 4).
In this model, endogamy and uxorilocality are considered mechanisms for the control of scarce human resources—that is, for the control of labor production (and thus sons-in-law), and of reproduction (and thus women)—expressed through a prescriptive symmetrical alliance responsible for maintaining the production and reproduction of “wealth” within the confines of the same local group. Echoing Overing, Rivière asserts that “exchanges with the other are marked more by reciprocity than by predation,” underscoring that “the outside is essential for the existence and reproduction of the inside, [but] it is also dangerous, and dealings with it should be kept to a minimum” (2001b, 17; authors’ translation). The ideal of autonomy of local groups is here mirrored in the metaphysical realm:

There is a remarkable alignment between the sociological ideals characterised by the consanguineous, endogamous, and autonomous nature of residential units and the metaphysical and cosmological concepts dominated by a conceptual relationship between the inside and the outside, associated respectively with security and danger, similarity and difference. (Rivière 2001b, 11; authors’ translation)

Rivière agrees with Overing that relationships between exterior and interior would only be possible when transformed by a mechanism of expulsion of differences: the “other,” a stranger belonging to the “outside,” is perceived as kin when residing in the same location. The affinal thus becomes consanguineous; the other, consequently, becomes the self; difference, therefore, turns into identity. These would, in summary, be the results of the “typical xenophobia of the region,” which is marked by egalitarianism and reciprocity.

**Emphases on otherness and domestic conviviality**

Considering the extent and intensity of the exchange networks, the exogamy statistics, and the historical dynamics of appropriating otherness practiced by the peoples of the Guianas (Butt Colson 1973, 1983-84, 1985; Dreyfus 1983-84, 1993; Gallois 1984-85, 1985, 1987; Velthem 1995; Farage 1991; Whitehead 1990), some ethnologists influenced by Rivière’s sociological model were skeptical of the idea that Guianese social organization is uniquely the result of frustrated atomism and an endogamic ideal (Albert 1992, 155; Viveiros de Castro 1986, 275; 1993; Viveiros de Castro and Fausto 1993; Costa 2000, 80-116; Grupioni 2002). In his influential critical reception of the model, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1993) suggested that the limitations of Rivière’s synthesis lay in treating the endogamic ideal as the underlying principle of any and every form of political relationship; or, rather, in reducing politics to kinship.

Viveiros de Castro (1993) also highlighted that the British anthropologist made a decisive contribution to the development of studies on the Amazonian Dravidianate by distinguishing between two aspects of affinity that were often conflated: “effective affinity,” associated with brothers-in-law brought together by marriage, and “affinability,” related to a person’s potential to become a relative by affinity. This distinction, however, overlooked the fact that just as the effective affine tends to be treated as consanguineal once incorporated into the local group, foreigners and even enemies tend to be classified as affines both attitudinally and terminologically. The quintessential affinity relationship, in this sense, would be one not subsumed by marriage, that is, a relationship of “potential affinity.” Subsequently, Viveiros de Castro (2001, 2002b) linked this concept to Amerindian perspectivism. Considering that the language of affinity predominates in relations of alterity—whose participants, although sharing a spiritual virtuality that is usually anthropomorphic, differentiate themselves through the creation of specific bodies common to their consubstantial kin—the author recognized in perspectivist thought a contrast between the conditions of potential affinity and consanguinity, where the former is conceived as given and the latter as constructed.

The thesis of Amerindian perspectivism resonated with and influenced the ethnographic production of various Amazonian anthropologists. Authors such as Anne-Christine Taylor
(1996, 207) and Aparecida Vilaça (2002, 2005) noted for their respective ethnographic contexts that the construction of a human perspective, common to consubstantial kin, is a continuous and constant process, precisely because relations of alterity destabilize specific corporalities, thereby determining the position of a subject. Consequently, the human condition results from the collective maintenance of certain practices necessary for the construction of determined bodies. It is not difficult to see how such elaborations resonate in ethnographies of the past few decades, influenced by the “animist” turn in Amazonian ethnology and its critiques of analytical anthropocentrism (Bird-David 1999; Descola 1992; Viveiros de Castro 1996a; Lima 2005). We also find them in recent works that encompass broader anthropological or interdisciplinary debates to reflect on “multispecies” or “more-than-human” relations involving Amazonian peoples, as exemplified by some of the texts in this issue, such as those by Ruben Caixeta de Queiroz, George Mentore, and Laura Mentore.9

In any case, it is important to highlight the path initially paved by Overing (1981, 1983-84) towards dismantling the dualism between alterity and identity and the opposition between the cosmological and the sociological, no longer conceived as rigidly separated domains. Although the author identified an endogamic principle governing Guianese local groups that led to the domestication of differences and the consanguinization of affines, she also recognized the dialectical importance of the presence and affinalization of potentially dangerous strangers, deemed crucial for the continuity of such socialities10 realized in exchange relations. In her terms, “it is only through affinity that reciprocity can be activated” (1983-84, 344).

It is also noteworthy that, by recognizing how Amazonian kinship is constructed against a backdrop of ontological instability, authors such as Taylor, Vilaça, and Viveiros de Castro have, in some ways, converged with Overing’s earlier formulation regarding the perilous relational environment outside the local group as a driving force for the construction of collective similarity and internal endogamic security. Later, Overing (1999; Overing and Passes 2000) and other scholars revisited this argument, focusing instead on domestic conviviality in ethnographic contexts across different Amazonian regions. In their introduction to the anthology *The anthropology of love and anger*, Overing and Passes emphasized that this new analytical focus largely resulted from the recognition of a reductionism of Amazonianist ethnology, which had until then been overly focused on broader relations of alterity and their aggressive aspects. This contributed to the exoticization of the region’s peoples and overshadowed their quest for “emotional comfort in daily life” (2000, xi) and aesthetics. Amazonian conviviality is not merely about coexistence; it involves an aesthetic of action, ways of acting and relating that are considered morally appropriate, beautiful, and pleasurable.

In this approach, poetics and feelings are two aesthetic manifestations deserving greater anthropological interest, especially considering that their study could contribute to the decolonization of the discipline, which was heavily influenced by the rational vocabulary of “Western grand narratives” (Overing and Passes 2000, 5, 19). Inspired by the debates in the Anthropology of Emotions that have flourished since the 1980s (Heelas 1986; Leavitt 1996; Lutz 1988, among others), the authors discerned that, for Amazonian peoples, affective expressions are not separate from intellectual ones, and that valuing feelings as part of Amazonian sociality is therefore not the same as advocating for the predominance of emotions over reason. While an interest in emotions may not dominate recent ethnographies of the Guianas in general, several articles in this special issue (those by Hoskins, George and Laura Mentore, and, to a lesser extent, R. Y. Wai Wai) give them anthropological relevance and reflect on the everyday and domestic conviviality of peoples such as the Wai Wai, Makuxi, and Wapixana.11

Based on the understanding that Amazonian peoples use a vocabulary of affections and feelings to reflect on their sociality, Overing and Passes proposed a new approach for the region’s ethnographies. This approach aimed to distinguish itself from the grand anthropo-
logical paradigms, which, according to them, employed a lexicon typical of modern jural
thought that was based on the dichotomy between public and domestic domains (whereby
the latter was often conceived as a socially less relevant or nonsocial space, and the former as
a predominantly political and moral space). This would be a rights-based morality, that is,
one guided by the transcendent and coercive principles of law. On the other hand, Amazonian
morality, being virtue-centered, would primarily value childrearing, caring relationships, trust
and cooperation, as well as the daily manifestation of these same virtues. The intention to
overcome the inadequacies of grand anthropological theoretical paradigms tied into feminist
critiques of the jural foundations of their vocabulary and the modern hierarchy that would
associate the two types of morality with gender: that of men and public life, centered on
rights, overshadowing that of women and domestic life, centered on virtues (Gilligan 1982;
Benhabib 1992; Baier 1995). In alignment with this feminist critique, Overing and Passes
highlighted the socially and morally significant nature of Amazonian domestic relations.
Nevertheless, inspired by Strathern’s (1988) original reading of gender relations in Melanesia,
they pointed out the limitations of such a critique for understanding socialities in the South
American lowlands. There, the focus of women’s and men’s actions in both collective and
domestic domains would be similarly “directed towards the same production of domestic
kinship, growth, and fertility” (Strathern 1988, 318). The authors noted that in Amazonia,
therefore, both genders would be oriented by a virtue-centered morality.

Overing’s (1999; Overing and Passes 2000) critique of the theoretical transposition of
contractualist concepts and premises, and her corresponding appreciation of the convivial
domestic environment—until then overlooked or undervalued in ethnographies of the Gui-
anas and other Amazonian regions—resonates in more recent works. These studies, focused
on cassava cultivation and processing, highlight the gendered nature of these vital activities,
emphasizing them as predominantly feminine and associated with the construction of conviv-
iality among mothers, daughters, and sisters who share the domestic space (see L. Mentore in
this volume, and also Heckler 2004; Girardi 2019, 144 ff; Maizza and Cabral de Oliveira 2022).
These works provide a feminist critique of Rivière’s “political economy of control” paradigm
(1984), and particularly his text “Of women, men and manioc” (1987), in which he examines
ethnographies of the Guianas and northwestern Amazonia with emphasis on the material of
Christine Hugh-Jones (1979, 173). Characterizing the cassava processing work by Barasana
women as laborious and “routinised,” the ethnographer suggested that, while conferring
prestige on men who sponsor ritual events where a fermented cassava beverage is necessarily
served, this female activity would get less social recognition than other, male activities that
are considered riskier. In close dialogue with the Marxist anthropology of Meillassoux (1981)
and studies on gender such as those by Ardener (1978) and Hirschon (1978), Rivière (1987,
188) compared the degrees of the social control of women in the two ethnographic regions,
suggesting that particularly in northwestern Amazonia, male political prestige resulted from
an “expropriation” of women’s labor, which at best afforded them domestic relevance.

As previously noted, Overing rejected the exclusive association of the domestic space
with the female gender, considering particularly caregiving and childrearing as activities that
mobilize the interest and participation of both men and women. As a result, it is primarily
the jural target of her critique that is echoed in recent feminist readings of cassava cultiva-
tion and processing relations in the Guianas and beyond. These echoes can be heard in the
emphasis on the political relevance and the creative, non-“routinised” nature of domestic
sociality (Heckler 2004; L. Mentore in this volume); in the valuing of an aesthetics of conviv-
iality and care, in contrast to sociologizing anthropological abstractions and their focus on
male-dominated spaces and relations (L. Mentore in this volume); and in the demonstration
that women’s caregiving and childrearing capacities are neither confined to the domestic space,
nor necessarily tedious and predictable, but potentially involve occasionally tense relations
with plants, their owners, or spiritual guardians, thereby composing multispecies socialities (Maizza and Cabral de Oliveira 2022; L. Mentore in this volume). Finally, we observe that this latter approach has expanded the conviviality paradigm to include relations of alterity, which the editors of The anthropology of love and anger predominantly identified with contexts of warfare and predation, conceiving them as “negative examples of just what sociality should not be” (Overing and Passes 2000, 6).

Networks of Relations

Two decades after Rivière’s and Overing’s pioneering works on kinship and social organization, and at the same time that Overing and Passes turned to domestic and everyday conviviality, Redes de relações nas Guianas, edited by Dominique Gallois (2005), reignited the debate about an analytical model for the social life of the Indigenous peoples of the Guianas. Based on ethnographic studies then carried out by a group of Brazilian researchers from the University of São Paulo, the work seeks to challenge the image of autonomy, closure to the outside, and suppression of difference that had become typical of the region. Instead, it explored the yield of the notion of “networks” (sensu Latour 1994) to conceptualize Indigenous interactive dynamics and propose an analytical paradigm that could accommodate more comprehensive relationships.

The collection strives to overcome the ethnic, geographic, and local boundaries enshrined in the regional literature, shifting its focus to the existing multicommunitarian and multiethnic exchange circuits in the Guianas, and highlighting the absence of rigid limits between “exteriority” and “interiority” (Gallois 2005, 13). This shift expanded the scope of research, allowing the inclusion of the western and eastern extremes of the Guianas—the Yanomami on one side, and the Wajãpi and peoples of the Uaçá (Galibi, Galibi Marworno, Karipuna, Palikur) on the other, with the Wai Wai, Katxuyana, Zoé, Tarêno (Trio/Tiriyó), Wayana, and Apalai in the center. The authors foreground an aspect of Guianese sociality that had become peripheral in anthropological debates about the region, although it was already present in earlier ethnographic literature: the active pursuit to establish and maintain links and connections outside the local group. In addition to other human Indigenous and non-Indigenous collectives, this openness to the outside world includes supernatural invisible beings and animals. This renewed perspective on the Guianas dialogues directly with earlier attempts to better characterize Indigenous alliance regimes, driven in particular by the aforementioned contributions of Overing (1981, 1983-84) and Viveiros de Castro (1986, 1993). Besides social organization and kinship (Grupioni 2005), the chapters of the collection are dedicated to the themes of war (Duarte do Pateo 2005), shamanism (Sztutman 2005), and the exchange of goods (Barbosa 2005).

Complementarily, the book Redes de relações nas Guianas brought back the discussion of spatiality and temporality in the Guianas. This discussion arises from the contrast between two images of sociality in the region, shaped, on the one hand, by the endogamic ideal present in Rivière’s model and, on the other hand, by the intense networks of intermarriage, trade, and war present in the historical-ethnological literature (Butt Colson 1973; Thomas 1972; Coppens 1971; Roth 1974; Farage 1985, 1991; Gallois 1986; Dreyfus 1983-84, 1993). Based on field research with the Tarêno (Trio/Tiriyó) peoples in Brazil, Grupioni (2005, 33) argues that the contrast between these two images, described as the “Guianese paradox,” could be the result not only of a circumstantial “atomism” arising from the context of colonial contact, but also of the predominant structural-functionalist approach favored by studies undertaken between the 1960s and 1980s. Opting for an approach closer to the “macro-levels of organisation” (Butt Colson 1983-84, 12), Grupioni (2005, 34) draws attention to the “swampy terrain of socio-political units in the Guianas” and Indigenous socio-cosmological investment in the editors of the volume, Dominique Gallois. Although not born in Brazil, she conducted her master’s and doctoral research among the Wajãpi in Amapá at the University of São Paulo between 1975 and 1988. From the 1990s onwards, Gallois, along with Lux Vidal, coordinated a group of younger researchers at the same institution in their investigations in the Guianas region.

15. See Overing’s (1981, 1983-84) aforementioned formulations on the inseparability of native sociologies and cosmologies, with difference being the metaphysical organizing principle of Amazonian Indigenous societies: these can only exist through contact and mixture. Additionally, consider Viveiros de Castro’s (1986, 1993) elaborations on the meanings of affinity and its value as a central socio-cosmological operator for Americans, which resulted in a critique of the atomism and closure of the notion of society as a monad. This critique was supported by other structuralist-inspired ethnologists such as Taylor and Vilaça.
in maintaining differences within local groups. These differences are glimpsed through the activation of diverse collective identifications, referring to the “continuations” or ancestral origins of individuals, which would make up “units” that the Tiriyó language defines by the suffixes -yana, -koto, and -soto (“people”). The Guianese emphasis on differentiations inside the local groups, maintained through the use of alternative ethnic identities, is a theme that had been addressed in ethnographies prior to the collection. Among the Wai Wai, for example, these differentiations were articulated to questions of political organization—more specifically, the constitution of villages—, and also to historical transformations triggered by the influence of external factors (see, for example, Caixeta de Queiroz 1999; Howard 1993, 2001; and Dias Junior 2005, the latter of which was carried out within Gallois’ research group).

In a debate following Redes de relações nas Guianas, Rivière (et al 2007) responded to the criticism that he had not taken into account the historical depth of Indigenous exchange and communication circuits in his synthesis. In defense of the synchronic emphasis of his approach, he argued that the image of closure and atomism of Guianese societies was not a distortion resulting from a methodological limitation of the ethnographers of his generation, but rather a reflection of the Indigenous peoples’ own tendencies in a specific historic moment, between the early nineteenth century and the 1970s. Grupioni (2005, 33, 36) had already observed that a historical coincidence could be related to the image of atomism present in Guianese modern ethnographies, which was consolidated as a theoretical corpus at the same time that the peoples of the region found themselves “introverted” due to the cuts in pre-colonial networks of relations. Indeed, this period was marked by drastic depopulation as a result of the advances of expansion fronts, and by the weakening of the old exchange networks mentioned by eighteenth-century travelers. Taking this into account, Rivière recalled that, in the mid-twentieth century, missionary activity played a decisive role in bringing about significant changes in settlement patterns in some areas. Especially among the Tiriyó and Wai Wai, it led to the concentration of Indigenous people in larger villages that were further apart, making it difficult to move between them. The author then argued that the historical context should be more seriously considered as a crucial aspect of the critique of atomism, insofar as, from a diachronic perspective, changes in living conditions could influence Indigenous understandings of their own world. He added that fieldwork carried out at different times could result in very different images of the same people or the same region. The author argued, in this sense, that the researches conducted between the 1980s and 1990s by members of Gallois’ group would have coincided with a period of renewed regional transformation that was marked by the growth of the Indigenous population, a fresh round of territorial dispersion, and a resurgence of inter-local articulations. Rivière (et al 2007, 265) finally suggested that both depictions of the Guianas may be accurate, as Indigenous peoples likely oscillated “between an ‘open’ and a ‘closed’ view of their world.” From this perspective, the contrast between closure and openness would be a matter of emphasis; that is, a result of the intensity of Indigenous engagement in communications with the outside world and the contexts of the fieldwork of the authors involved in these debates. 17

Recent ethnographies in the Guianas

To some extent, the alternation between “closure” and “openness” remains present in ethnological literature on the region, which simultaneously consolidates the contours of the Guianese regional system and demonstrates its enmeshment within a wider lowland South American socio-cosmological fabric. Characterized by a diversity and vitality similar to those noted among these peoples, the growing contemporary production is marked by an enormous theoretical and thematic variety, as the contributions gathered in this special issue demonstrate. Presenting a sample of this production—which it is impossible to fully

16. This article was critiqued by Rivière (et al 2007), who argued that the author reified unilinear descent groups as spouse exchangers, a model that had been outdated for the Dravidian systems of the Guianas since the initial analyses by himself and Overing, as previously mentioned. In subsequent publications, Grupioni (2006, 2015) revisited the investigation of the multiple “peoples” (-yana) of the Tarëno, a feature that is also present among other Carib-speaking peoples in the Guianas. In the Wai Wai context, the theme of internal multiplicity within local groups is addressed in Valentino’s recent work (2019) focusing on the Katwena and Tûnayana.

17. The idea of an alternation between openness and closure to the outside, as proposed by Rivière, had previously been suggested in Redes de relações nas Guianas, as summarized by the following excerpt from Grupioni (2005, 50): “the image that emerges from our research is one where openness and closure, dispersion and isolation, exogamy and endogamy, descent and alliance do not exclude each other but complementarily oppose one another.”
address in a single volume, given its vastness, richness, and robustness—these contributions are dedicated to established themes within the ethnological literature on the Guianas, many of which are revisited from a renewed perspective. In particular, it is important to note the articles that highlight the continued significance of kinship in the region, now reconsidered with attention to its interaction with pan-Amazonian themes such as corporeality, conviviality, gender, and domesticity (see Hoskins, Grund, and G. and L. Mentore in this volume). Additionally, contributions that focus on the centrality of movement in the construction of the person (Ribeiro and Grund in this volume) and the inscription of memory in the originary landscapes (see J. X. Wai Wai and Caixeta de Queiroz in this volume), revisiting the pressing issue of space-time in the regional system, should be mentioned. Finally, the centrality given to Indigenous moral philosophies and ethical principles is noteworthy, as some of the articles in this volume take inspiration from these for reflections on anthropological practice and the limits and potentialities of partnerships established with native peoples (G. Mentore and Caixeta de Queiroz).

Opening this special issue, the article “Archaeology and Indigenous history from the Wai Wai perspective,” coauthored by archaeologist Jaime Xamen Wai Wai and anthropologist Ruben Caixeta de Queiroz, recounts an ethnographic fieldwork expedition to the Kikwo river, a tributary of the upper course of the Mapuera river in northwest Pará, Brazil, which was inhabited by the Wai Wai in the mid-twentieth century.18 The ancient villages located along this river were abandoned with the arrival of North American Protestant missionaries, who, once established in southern Guyana by 1950, attracted Indigenous peoples living on the Brazilian side of the border. The article unfolds around Jaime Wai Wai’s efforts to locate the villages of his ancestors and understand the events that occurred there.

The authors adopt an innovative approach, incorporating Indigenous concepts and methods into archaeological research. Inspired and provoked by works of collaborative archaeology (Silva 2002, 2009; Jácome 2011, 2017; Cabral 2013) and emerging Indigenous archaeology (Million 2005; Atalay 2012; Tschucambang 2015), Jaime Wai Wai grounds his field research in the Wai Wai perspective on time and landscapes, which does not accommodate rigid distinctions between “material” and “immaterial,” “artifact” and “nature,” “myth” and “history.” The elements of the local landscape are described as resulting from the presence and actions of human or other-than-human persons. To locate the ancient villages, Jaime Wai Wai learned to recognize the types of vegetation that grow in these places decades after their abandonment. The article is thus dedicated to presenting the Wai Wai ways of experiencing places and the ancestral memory contained in oral accounts, referring to a classic theme in Guianese literature—namely, that of social space and time (see Overing 1977; Butt Colson 1983-84; Gallois 1994; Grupioni 2005). Wai Wai history is inscribed in the geography of the journey, in the landscape of the Kikwo river, sustained by the young researcher’s relationship with the memories of his father, Poriciwi, who guided the expedition. As Caixeta de Queiroz summarizes in the text, the archaeology conducted by his coauthor consists of “excavating his relatives’ memory” rather than of digging the earth.

The article “Women’s routes: gender, mobility, and knowledge among the Makushi of southern Guyana,” authored by Lisa Grund, delves into the concept of space, a longstanding focus in Guianese ethnology since Overing’s seminal work (1977). This contribution underscores the enduring relevance of discussions on space for research in the region, highlighting the importance of movement in the daily lives of the Makushi in the tri-border area of Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela. Drawing from her ethnographic experience in southern Guyana, the author emphasizes the central role of the “walker” (asakîîrî) in fostering conviviality among the Makushi, who experience their journeys as encounters with the Other and find in movement a source of practices and knowledge essential for the renewal of life. The article approaches the theme with renewed vigor: by foregrounding the Makushi women’s movements, Grund

18. The article was developed from Jaime Xamen Wai Wai’s master’s thesis (2022).
intertwines two facets of Guianese sociality that have traditionally been related to, on the one hand, the “domestic economy of intimacy,” and, on the other hand, to the “political economy of alterity” (sensu Viveiros de Castro 1996b). In doing so, the author (re)presents the centrality of female care in fabricating a sense of “community” in Guianese everyday life, demonstrating women’s active role in weaving relations with “Others.” Grund’s ethnography challenges the image of Indigenous women’s “immobility” present in Rivière’s (1984, 1987) model, and referred to by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996b) as a “political economy of control.”

The centrality of female care in the construction of conviviality in the Guianas and the feminist critique of the “political economy of control” paradigm are also explored in Laura Mentore’s contribution “Replication and growth in cassava cultivation and uxorilocal women’s relations among the Waiwai.” Based on her experience with Wai Wai and Wapixana families in Ereopoimo, southern Guyana, Mentore describes the emotional collapse of a Wai Wai family matriarch brought on by a minor culinary mistake she made while processing cassava alone, without the help of her daughters. These daughters, like many other adult women, were increasingly occupied with jobs or political roles, and ceasing to reproduce the female relations necessary for maintaining uxorilocality, which revolves significantly around cassava planting and processing. Drawing on Rivière’s (1984) synthesis of native social organization in the Guianas, L. Mentore corroborates the uxorilocal tendency he pointed out, while also emphasizing the importance of female relations, particularly of sorority, for the construction and perpetuation of this socio-spatial pattern. She thus highlights the biased nature of the Guianese communal model conceived by Rivière, which prioritizes the decisions of a father-in-law leader and his relationships with male affines, manipulated through the control of women’s productive and reproductive capacities. According to her, Rivière’s perspective would align with Rival’s (2001) earlier work, a precursor to contemporary debates in Amazonian anthropology on human-plant relationships focusing on cassava planting processes, specifically their growth and replication capacities, which inspire the conceptualization of certain social relations (Daly 2021; Miller 2019; Cabral de Oliveira 2020). Rival (2001) viewed cassava planting through the replication of manihot stems as a noncreative process and contrasted it with the spontaneous propagation of plants through seeds, seen as sexual reproduction, which she associates with cross-gender human marriage relationships. L. Mentore, in contrast, does not limit human creativity to procreation and childrearing: she highlights the creative nature of female domestic relationships, offering a Strathernian reading of Indigenous conceptions of the replication of life (of plants and people) as a process dependent on regenerative intervention, an episodic cut capable of generating the new (Strathern 2017; 2021).

The dialectic between affinity and consanguinity reappears in Charlotte Hoskins’s article “Don’t come crying to my funeral,” in the dynamics of affection in mortuary rituals. Drawing on her ethnographic experience among the Makushi of Surama, Guyana, the author describes a domestic funeral marked by the contrast between the bodily practices and related emotions of the closest relatives of the deceased on the one hand, and of members of other family nuclei on the other. In alignment with the works of Laura and George Mentore in this volume, the author highlights the anthropological significance of emotions, which, anchored in ethical and moral principles, shape Makushi sociality. Rather than constituting a “moral disorder,” the exaggerated displays of vivacity by those less close to the deceased allow the bereaved family to oscillate between a state of sadness (demonstrating concern for the deceased) and one of celebration, as enacted by the visitors. Hoskins observes that this affective contrast provides insights into transformations in Makushi thanatology and funeral practices: while death is still perceived as resulting from human agency, the closest family is the main suspect of having caused it, whether intentionally or through negligence, and is therefore compelled to demonstrate sadness and conduct the funeral ceremony meticulously. Unlike in the past and in other parts of Amazonia, the Makushi of Surama do not radically sever ties with their
dead, nor do they seek to erase them from their memory (Carneiro da Cunha 1978; Overing 1993; Taylor 1993). In the past, a death would provoke the structural transformation of the village and, ultimately, its fragmentation. Today, however, sedentary Makushi villages no longer disband when a member dies. Nevertheless, through emotional states and dissonant behaviors during the funeral ritual, the communities continue to reconfigure their networks of reciprocity. Hoskins thus offers an original interpretation of the theme of the spatialization of social relations, which is also reformulated by L. Mentore and Grund in this volume.

Emotions are also brought to the forefront in “Propagating conviviality: Waiwai cultural transformation of moral depravity” by George Mentore, which addresses this theme alongside a reflection on the construction of body and personhood among the Wai Wai peoples of southern Guyana. The contribution approaches these discussions through an emphasis on the “beyond-the-human,” highlighting the centrality of cassava in the daily lives of these communities. According to Mentore, the sharing of food and the labor involved in cassava cultivation illuminate not only the production of a sense of contentment and satisfaction that underpins an “ethics of wellbeing,” but also the emergence of a “virtuous sociability” arising from a consideration of sentience in its intimate relationship with thought in the Wai Wai way of life. Through a critical and reflective approach that addresses the dilemmas derived from transsemiotic translation, Mentore places Indigenous sentimental experience at the forefront, demonstrating its importance for an ethics of care intrinsic to “being alive” and, therefore, for the construction of the “embodied person” in the Guianas. The anthropologist engages with Gow (1989) in his reading of the paradigm of “productive consumption” to outline a contrast between this ethics and that underlying the capitalist economy, and to highlight Wai Wai people’s embodied ability to create and maintain vitality in their daily routines.

In “The experience and the moral of the myth” by Ruben Caixeta de Queiroz, an ethical system and a moral philosophy are unveiled through a narrative shared with the researcher by Honorato Tinama, an elder of the Katxuyana, a Carib-speaking people native to the Cachorro river in northwestern Pará, Brazil. Attentive to Indigenous knowledge practices and motivated by Honorato’s concerns regarding “excessive hunting,” the author reflects on the ethical and technical precepts the Katxuyana associate with peccary hunting. Caixeta de Queiroz aims to contextualize the narrative, which is available in audio form for readers of this volume of Tipití. According to the author, the narrative reveals the “moral of the myth” and the narrator’s purpose to highlight overhunting as a consequence of young people’s disconnection from their traditions, which the story’s recording seeks to preserve. The method of emphasizing the narrator’s context, combined with the full reproduction of the narrative, echoes Peter Gow’s (2001) Malinowskian approach. Proposing a “more minimalist” approach than Gow’s, Caixeta de Queiroz addresses the postmodernist challenge to ethnographic authority by prioritizing “listening (and less analyzing or interpreting) to the stories told by the Katxuyana elder rather than his own explanations about the narrated events, their circumstances, and the moral he draws from his narrative.” This approach differentiates him from ethnologists of the Guianas (Overing and Passes 2000; Rivière 2001c; Girardi 2019) and other regions (Fausto 2008), whose mythological exegesis or theories of socio-cosmological relations might overlook the literary, contextual, and moral dimensions of the myth.

A care for native oralities is also present in “Kita goes to Kwamalasamutu” by Fabio Ribeiro. In the article, the author delves into the experiences of Kita, a young man from the Zoë people, who in 2010 embarked on a journey to the village of Kwamalasamutu in the far south of Suriname, along with chiefs and pastors from Tarëno (Trio/Tiriyó) collectives. Following an approach that emphasizes the centrality of autobiographies for describing Indigenous meaning-making practices (Rubenstein 2002; Sáez 2006; Oakdale 2007), Ribeiro presents these experiences through Kita’s narratives, which weave together the episodes experienced by the young Zoë with the knowledge, practices, and relationships mobilized during his encoun-
ters with Indigenous and non-Indigenous (kirahi) people. Ribeiro’s contribution highlights the inventiveness of the Zoë, expressed not only through Kitá’s multiple narratives but also through the encoded language (nimim) created by his people to establish discreet relations with the Tarëno. Additionally, the article underscores the narrator’s willingness to teach his kirahi listener about the relational practices that define true Indigenous diplomacy, a notion expressed in Portuguese by the term “friend”. Partially connected to the Zoë concept of pijan and the Trio word pawana, this notion introduces us to the ethics governing partnership relations in the region, thereby bringing a classic debate in Guianese literature to the forefront.

A dialogue with the debates initiated by Overing (1999; Overing and Passes 2000) on affective expressions and the aesthetics of action involved in conviviality among Amazonian peoples is also evident in “Music in Wai Wai tradition,” coauthored by the anthropologists Roque Yaxikma Wai Wai and Ruben Caixeta de Queiroz. The article, derived from Roque Wai Wai’s master’s research (2022), offers an ethnographic account of Wai Wai music, with particular attention to the use of flutes. Roque Wai Wai begins by exploring the musical universe of his ancestors, a knowledge that ceased to be transmitted to younger generations due to the influence of Christianity, which associated the music with “Satan,” leading to fears and prohibitions. Roque Wai Wai describes the process of becoming an apprentice to some of the old, wise Wai Wai musicians. In addition to listening to and recording stories related to the instruments and songs—some of which are available for readers of this volume of Tipití to listen to—the researcher had to learn how to make and play his own flutes. As part of his learning process, Roque Wai Wai participated in the expedition to the Kikwo river reported by Jaime Wai Wai and Ruben Caixeta de Queiroz in the article that opens this special issue. Together with his grandfather Poriciwi, they visited the place where krekreki bamboo grows, which is cultivated by the Anaconda People. A special flute is made from this plant species, the sound of which is greatly appreciated by the Wai Wai. The study incorporates native concepts related to the notion that the Wai Wai translate as “music” and includes a classification of wai wai music according to its purpose that considers the context of performance and the effects of listening in producing social states and individual dispositions. Special attention is given to the production of joy, whether in daily life or in ritual contexts during festive occasions. In the realm of seduction, music acts to produce sexual or romantic desire, understood as an enchantment or “spell” with high disruptive potential, heightening conflicts generated by jealousy and revenge. Finally, in a brief dialogue with the work of Aleman (2011), the authors agree that, despite intense changes in Wai Wai musicality due to external influences (the introduction of new instruments, new styles, and an ideology opposed to shamanism), an Indigenous morality and philosophy remain active in this musicality, helping to maintain a distinctly Wai Wai way of being.

We begin and conclude this special issue with the contributions of Wai Wai researchers, as we believe that the emergence of an ethnology produced by Indigenous authors is bringing with it a new and vigorous movement of the renewal of anthropological reflection in the Guianas. Amidst a surge of work produced by young authors—including non-Indigenous ones—influenced by diverse disciplinary traditions, the current period has fostered more inclusive and collaborative research and writing methodologies, as we have endeavored to illustrate in the preceding pages. The scope we have chosen for this introduction, focusing on efforts at synthesis rather than summarizing the entire voluminous ethnographic production on Guianese Indigenous peoples, has meant sacrificing dialogue with materials that emerged after 2005, whose ethnological importance we nonetheless recognize. 21 We are also aware that the articles gathered in this special issue end up privileging the peoples of the central Guiana region, leaving out studies with most of the Kapon and Pemon peoples of the highlands, and with the Yanomami, Ye’kwana, Wajápi, Galibi, Kaliña, Galibi Marworno, Karipuna, and Palikur in the eastern and western regions of the Guianas. These absences attest to the impossibility...
of encompassing the profusion of new ethnographies in an initiative such as this volume. Moreover, texts by other Indigenous authors from the Guianas were left out.22 In Brazil, we have been experiencing the convergence of mobilizations by political, artistic, and intellectual movements of Indigenous peoples reaching new spaces of participation and protagonism (for example, the influential works of Kopenawa and Albert 2015 and Krenak 2019).

In terms of academic research, a key factor has been Indigenous people's increased access to universities in recent decades. This expansion has been accompanied by policies for inclusion and permanence in educational institutions across different Amazonian regions, including, in the Guianas, the northwestern Pará state, Roraima, and Amapá. Against this setting, the first Wai Wai anthropologists and archaeologists, such as those participating in this volume, are graduating. In general, they are committed to strengthening and valuing their own cultures and are associated with complex knowledge production contexts. We believe that the emerging ethnology, conducted by Indigenous people, once again demonstrates the strength of their intellectual creativity and their ability to shape new modes of existence in the face of the historical transformations they are experiencing, in the Guianas and elsewhere.

22 For instance, the postgraduate works of André Souza (2014), Alexandre Aniceto de Souza Wai Wai (2018), Viviane Rocha Ye’kwana (2021), and Ana Manoela Primo dos Santos Soares Karipuna (2021, 2022).
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