Beyond nature and the supernatural

Some reflections on religion, ethnicity and traditions of knowledge[1]

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Abstract

Most studies of religion are founded on the relationship between nature and the supernatural. This dichotomy allows a supposedly mystical dimension to be distinguished from a politically pragmatic dimension of human behaviour. In this view, therefore, religious conduct differs in nature from the political. Taking an opposite tack, this paper proposes to overcome this dichotomy by seeing the connections in this universe as primarily technical-political in kind, a result of the social organization of relations and interactions of individuals, considering religion as an *organizational type*. Thus, taking as examples the ethnographic Guarani-Kaiowa of Mato Grosso do Sul and Tabajara of Paraíba, I shall try to show how these indigenous people, each in their own way, establish connections in the universe, setting political communities, defining domestic and ethnic identities and drawing traditions of knowledge.

Keywords: religion, ethnicity, tradition of knowledge, politics, cosmology.

Resumo

A maior parte dos estudos sobre religião se funda na relação entre o natural e o sobrenatural. Essa dicotomia sustenta uma suposta dimensão mística, a ser distinguida de uma pragmática do comportamento humano. Nesses termos, a conduta religiosa difere, em natureza, do político. Indo na direção oposta, o presente artigo propõe superar tal dicotomia, vendo as conexões no universo

primariamente como tecnopolíticas, resultado da organização social das interações e relações entre os indivíduos, e considerando, portanto, a religião como um *tipo organizacional*. Assim, tomando como exemplos etnográficos os Guarani-Kaiowa de Mato Grosso do Sul e os Tabajara da Paraíba, buscarei mostrar como esses povos indígenas, cada um a seu modo, estabelecem conexões no universo, configurando comunidades políticas, definindo identidades domésticas e étnicas e delineando tradições de conhecimento.

Palavras chave: religião, etnicidade, tradição de conhecimento, política, cosmologia.

Introduction

In the introduction to the book *Political Anthropology* (1966), Swartz, Turner and Tuden define the political act as a phenomenon on the basis of three characteristics: being public, possessing specific aims, and implying power relations. Through this minimal definition, the authors look to delineate a specific field of analysis, attempting to distinguish political behaviour from other kinds. Referring, for example, to a ritual context where they admit that the aforementioned characteristics may be applicable, they are still reluctant to consider the ceremony part of a political field since it is located within the domain of religion:

If we look at the religious ceremony from the point the view of the processes by which the group goals are determinate and implemented (how it was decided that a ceremony was to be held, how the time and place were determined, how the things to be used in the ceremony were obtained, etc.) we are studying politics. If, however, we look at the ritual from the perspective, say, **of the way it relates the group to the supernatural and the way this relationship affects the relations among the constituent part of the group, we are studying religion – or at least we are studying something other than politics** (1966: 7, my emphasis)

Relating a human group to the supernatural appears to be sufficient to distinguish a religious act from the political. Indeed the authors feel no need to consider or explore the issue further, or to illustrate the specific effects of two supposedly different behaviours. This decision appears prompted by an axiom founded on a latent ethnocentric acceptance of the Nature/Culture dichotomy, which thus also presumes the existence of the Supernatural.

Over the last few decades, though, what could be described as a form of ontological ethnocentrism has been subjected to significant critiques, each looking to highlight the many possible ontologies manifested by different peoples. Authors like Latour (1994), Ingold (1988, 2000) and Descola (1992) have shown how numerous indigenous peoples make no distinction between nature and culture, a dichotomy emergent from the western tradition that over recent centuries has assumed the role of a base epistemology, dividing the scientific field between the natural sciences and the humanities (Latour 1994, Ingold 1988).

Descola (1992) in particular, analysing the viewpoint of the indigenous peoples of the South American lowlands, highlights a specific mode of relation he calls 'animist.' He observes that for these peoples many of the species we Westerners categorize as 'animals' or 'plants' possess typically human attributes, such as langua ge, social organization, desires, etc., and are therefore treated as subjects. Seen in these terms, the Nature/Culture distinction appears inapplicable to Amerindian ontologies, thus confirming our own ethnocentrism in relativistic form. Exploring this animist phenomenon as a revised form of Tylorian animism, though, Descola argues that this kind of ontology involves the socialization of Nature, making it the symmetric opposite to totemism as the naturalization of Society. Approaching the material in this way, Descola only partially accepts the relativistic challenge posed by the Amerindian context: indeed he prefers to retain the Nature/Culture dichotomy for analytic purposes, a way of attributing meaning to "myths, rituals, systems of classification, food and body symbolism, and many other aspects of social" – as he states in a work co-authored with Pálsson (Descola & Pálsson 1996: 2).

This methodological stance becomes even more audacious and systematic in a wide-ranging work (Descola 2005) in which the author defines various modes of identification and modes of relation, delineating four possible ontologies: animism, totemism, naturalism and analogism. All these are defined, the author argues, through the dichotomous interplay of physicality and interiority: thus animism establishes the similarity of interiorities and the difference of physicalities, totemism the similarity of interiorities and the similarity of physicalities, naturalism the difference of interiorities and the similarity of physicalities, and analogism the difference of interiorities and the difference of physicalities. Descola explicitly constructs these

four ontologies through a binarism revolving around a symmetrical axis, which orders the relations between the terms in strict compliance with the primary dichotomy, Nature/Culture, insofar as the internal/external opposition itself reproduces specifically western metaphysical dilemmas. Rather than observing the existence of different points of view onto the reality of the cosmos, considering them a challenge to the western analytic framework itself, therefore, Descola, pursuing a classic heuristic exercise, continues to base his analysis on old parallel dichotomies.

My argument here is that comparing different ontologies is not perhaps the ideal response to contemporary anthropological challenges, as George Marcus (2013) recently emphasized in warning of the risk of reproducing past analytic concerns, considering it more productive to engage in epistemological ruptures. This appears to be the path taken by Ingold (1995, 2000), for example, who for some time has warned of the risks of dichotomous thinking and the need for our analyses to move beyond the nature/culture distinction, encouraging an approximation between the natural and social sciences. The very overcoming of the distinction between mind, body and environment, pulverizing the difference between interior and exterior, reveals a perspective opposite to that proposed by Descola. His ideas concerning life in the cosmos as an entanglement of vital lines that circumscribe things (Ingold 2007 and 2012) are highly promising, principally in terms of an analysis of technical concatenations (operational chains). On the other hand, in pursuing this approach, Ingold highlights some aspects while, in my view, failing to pay due attention to others. For example, the symbolic dimension, power and political behaviour, as well as other manifestations specifically derived from the social and the cultural – factors typically addressed by Anthropology – are little explored by the English author. This arises, perhaps, from the emphasis given to the need to develop closer connections with the natural sciences. However this approach leads Ingold to envisage the entanglement of vital lines in a somewhat unspontaneous form: the notion of a 'thing,' as something open and in continuity with the threads forming it, is contrasted with the notion of an 'object,' the latter considered of little use value by Ingold, related to the consideration of boundaries, sharply marked lines that delimit closed figures (2012). And this brings me to the point I wish to stress. Is the act of closure really any less significant than that of release in terms of comprehending the flows that form the universe? What roles do the

social and the culture perform in defining this movement?

On the question of culture as a concrete entity, authors like Schwartz (1978), Barth (1969, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1993, 2005) and Hannerz (1992) have already developed extremely important analyses into how information, images, concepts, things, materials and so on can be distributed between individuals and groups, forming specific patterns. These authors have provided a detailed exploration of the idea of culture as a continuous open flux that tends to leak and distribute information and things uniformly. The production of cultural diversity, however, requires an unequal form of sharing the contents transmitted by this flow: this is achieved through the social organization of these contents. Barth (2005) specifies that the properties of the social include forming boundaries and allocating cultural positions and contents in a differentiated form, enabling specific cultural forms to be generated through an interactive process, while also enabling the effects of the experiences of individuals to be silenced or even erased through the exercise of power.

In the classic introduction to his book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, first published in 1969, Barth already displayed a concern with the effects of social organization on the cultural flux. Approaching the problem naturalistically, the Norwegian author compared the reproduction of a species with that of an ethnic group, observing that this is made possible in the former case through the isolation of genetic material, while in the latter case this is rendered unviable by the variability of cultural material. The reproduction of the ethnic group involves the maintenance of a boundary whose characteristics become extolled over time by valorising just a few select cultural traits (diacritic signals). Hence the ethnic group amounts to an 'organizational type' combining a specific form of social organization and specific cultural traits in a singular way in each context. What links one ethnic group with another here is the fact that both maintain boundaries and through them regulate cultural materials derived from flows at larger social and territorial scales.

Over the course of his research into the different modalities of channelling cultural flows, Barth perceived that the most inclusive in terms of scale is the formation of traditions of knowledge.[2] He began, therefore, to studying

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2   The Norwegian author does not provide an axiomatic definition of 'tradition of knowledge.' He mainly looks to understand how cultural currents are channelled, forming traditions that show a certain degree of coherence, maintained over time. This aim in mind, he states: "So we must go into each of the streams we identify, as a universe of discourse and (i) characterize its salient patterns; (ii) depict its production and reproduction, and its

these traditions, focusing attention on the modes of knowledge transaction and how they lead to distinct effects in terms of how concepts, ideas and models are propagated, depending on whether the codification and transmission of information occurred through writing, verbalization or performance. This resulted in the potential to map the mass of information and materials, their density and the distribution in time and space. Since the ethnographic material gathered by the author referred to Southeast Asia and Melanesia, Barth worked both with Hinduism and Islamism, traditions centred on the figure of the guru, and with those traditions focused on shamanic practices developed in initiation rituals. Hence he was able to observe and analyse, in comparative form, how cosmologies are constructed and how meaning is given through them to the experiences of individuals in the universe concerned, as well as how the modalities of mobilizing the forces and materials circulating in this universe are engendered.

Since they are focused on attributing meaning to cosmic movement, traditions of knowledge, as analysed by Barth, allow us to re-examine the question of the specificity or otherwise of religious behaviour. Gurus, sacerdotes and shamans all manipulate the forces of the universe in some form and by so doing attempt to maintain or increase their prestige vis-à-vis its beings. Seen in these terms, their acts are clearly political in nature, like any other act that pursues specific aims and implies power differentials. In what way, then, could we consider religion to be something specific? In my view, just like the formation of ethnic groups, the construction of a religion implies the generation and maintenance of boundaries. While in the former case interethnic interactions and relations are regulated through boundaries, in the latter cosmic interactions and relations are administered through multiple dimensions. I argue that what allows us to define religious specificity is precisely the modality of relation and interaction that occurs through the dimensional boundaries in the universe, expressed in cosmologies. In effect,

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boundary maintenance; (iii) in this depiction discover what makes it cohere, and leave it as an open, empirical question how and to what extent its ideational contents achieve logical closure as a tradition of knowledge. We likewise must identify the social processes whereby these streams intermesh, sometimes with interference, distortion and even fusion. Moreover, we may find each stream to be characterized by a different essential dynamics. For example, the fundamentalism of Islam – where all scholarship inevitably gravitates back to the one shared, finite text of the Koran – is impossible to produce in a world where Durga steps down into a congregation and speaks. This is a sociological, not a purely logical, assertion; and it represents a plea for a broad sociology of knowledge that shows how the traditions and their parts are constituted by showing the processes that generate them" (Barth 1989: 133).

this division enables an unequal distribution of beings and modes of relating and interacting, something that requires the institution of specific social roles (of sacerdotes, gurus, shamans, moral authorities, and so on) and specific values that legitimize the actions and interpretations of these figures. The interdimensional boundaries therefore become primarily responsible for constructing differences of degree between elements and forces, and so for producing hierarchies in the universe, whose organization and peculiarity have to be apprehended empirically, analysing the characteristics of each tradition of knowledge and its inculcation of a particular cosmovision. For this reason I believe it is useful to approach religion as an organizational type. In some cases it may be possible to observe that some traditions, as well as producing relational hierarchies, can construct organizational types across interdimensional boundaries that include ontological provinces taken to differ from each other in terms of nature. I believe, however, that in no circumstances are we authorized to generalize this distinction to all cosmologies, taking it – as the majority of phenomenological approaches do – as an *a priori* definitive of religious facts. This kind of ontological ethnocentrism keeps alive the distinction between nature and the supernatural, contrasting the domain of the sacred with profane behaviour, considering mystical experience as something rooted in human psychology. This approach has already been subject to various critiques by exponents of the so-called 'Roman School of the History of Religions' (Brelich 2005, Sabbatucci 1976, 1978 and 1991). As an alternative, they emphasize the importance of the historical formation of each religious fact and thus of its singularity. Approached in these terms, the very formation of the Western tradition, along with the ontologies promoted by it, must be considered something entirely singular too, indicating the need to avoid extending its categories, including analytic ones, to other contexts without effectively relativizing the distinct points of view involved.

Having freed ourselves from the analytic distinction between nature, culture and the supernatural, therefore, and recognized ethnic identity and religion as forms of socially organizing relations, interactions and mobilizations of forces across boundaries, we can turn to the specific concern of the present article: what relation is established between ethnicity, religion and tradition of knowledge?

Barth, for example, was more interested in the intersection of these social formations than with their concatenations and interconnections. As

I explored in a paper co-authored with Barbosa da Silva (Mura and Barbosa da Silva 2012), this results from the Norwegian author's premise that cultural pluralism is determined by flows channelled by distinct traditions of knowledge traversing different ethnic groups (Barth 1984). However in his analysis of cosmologies in the making in the Ok River Valley in the New Guinea Highlands (Barth 1987), the author identifies what he defines as sub-traditions of knowledge through the ethnonyms of local communities (such as Baktaman, Bolovip, Telefolmin, Telefolquin, Tifalmin and so on), generating a certain ambiguity concerning the role of the ethnic and the local in this process. Indeed the local situation and the specific experiences of individual members of the communities are shown to be essential to how concrete symbols (like tubers, blood and bones) are manipulated, and to how performances are interpreted during initiation rites. So although Barth strove to delineate a specific tradition of knowledge in the Ok River region, this takes shape through sub-traditions that are in fact revealed as themselves "local traditions of knowledge" (Ingold and Kurttila 2000). In the latter, the local dimension and ethnic factor seem to play a significant role in the formation and diversification of the tradition as a whole, requiring, therefore, a deeper analysis.

Barth conducted his studies in New Guinea in a region where the colonial conditioning factors were fairly limited. What does this mean, therefore, for the relation between cosmological constructs and ethnicity in those contexts where colonial activities have been implemented for centuries? In this article I explore precisely the latter kind of situation, focusing on two indigenous contexts in Brazil: the Guarani Kaiowa and the Tabajara, in Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraíba states respectively. This choice was defined not only by my ethnographic familiarity with both contexts, but primarily by the fact that they exhibit fairly distinct characteristics in terms of colonial impact and the effects of the latter at local level, resulting in specific forms of concatenation between ethnic identity, tradition of knowledge, domestic ecology and community organization.

The rest of the work is divided into two sections. In the first I provide a description of their historical trajectories, cosmological constructs and ethnic manifestations, while in the second I develop an analysis of the presented data, showing how the factors indicated above are mutually interconnected, defining singular religious forms in equally singular

socio-ecologico-territorial contexts.[3]

Historical processes, cosmological constructs and ethnic identity among the Kaiowa of Mato Grosso do Sul and the Tabajara of Paraíba

The Guarani Kaiowa[4] – or Paî-Tavyterã, to use their autonym[5] – are currently located in the far south of the modern-day state of Mato Grosso do Sul and in Western Paraguay. Over the last four centuries they have experienced significant transformations in terms of their modalities of access to the geographic spaces in which they undertake their everyday activities, as well as the configuration of interethnic relations, largely characterized by armed conflicts and specific forms of distributing forces and power.

At least five centuries ago, the ancestors of the Kaiowa, denominated Itatim during the colonial era, were located in a region north of their present location and extending between the Serra da Bodoquena and the Pantanal (Melià 1986, Melià et al. 1976, Gadelha 1980, Thomaz de Almeida 1991, Mura 2006). The Itatim were assailed by a number of different actions, some of them confined to missions by the Jesuits and raided by *bandeirantes* in search of slaves, as well as being attacked by the Mbaya-Guaycuru, their principal enemies in the region. The military imbalances caused by the Europeans through their introduction of completely new weapons and warfare techniques allowed the Mbaya-Guaycuru, equipped with horses, as well as the *bandeirantes* themselves, to obtain military supremacy over the Itatim, leading to significant defeats for the latter. The Jesuit missions were destroyed, many indigenous people were enslaved, others died in battles, and others still succumbed to the diseases brought by the Whites (Susnik 1979-80, Thomaz de Almeida 1991, Mura 2006). The end result of this process was a sizeable reduction in the Itatim population with indigenous families moving to settle in the territory today occupied by the Kaiowa (Mura 2006).

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3   For a definition of *socio-ecologico-territorial context*, see Mura 2006 and 2011, as well as the second section of this article below.

4   Here I shall adhere to the rules for transcribing Guarani terms most widely used in Paraguay, omitting the acute accent on oxytonic words, since these comprise the majority in the indigenous language.

5   The term is a composite of "Paî (man) – táva (abode) – yvy (earth) – ete (true) – rã (future suffix)," which can be translated as "the men who will be destined to live (in relation to the time-space of origins) in the true abode of the earth." However it should be noted that the term 'Kaiowa' is today widely accepted in Brazil and the name most used by individuals from the population concerned, which is why I shall refer to them by this term here.

After gold was discovered in Minas Gerais during the first decades of the seventeenth century, the interests of the Portuguese colony shifted. Raids by *bandeirantes* became less frequent and the indigenous population was able to remain in these new spaces (Thomaz de Almeida 1991). Although precise information is unavailable, we can suppose that the populations concerned maintained relations with the colonial world, principally with the Jesuit missions of Guairá, either directly or though the intermediation of other Guarani groups,6 inhabitants of a region bordering the area occupied by descendants of the Itatim (Barbosa & Mura 2011). This supposition is primarily based on information provided by explorers of the region like Eliot and Lopes. The latter, working in the service of the Baron of Antonina a little less than a century after the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Americas, in the mid-nineteenth century, came into contact with Kaiowa groups and reported the presence of fabrics and metal objects obtained through trading activities (Mura 2006, Barbosa & Mura 2011).

Until that moment, relations with the colonial world, or with its post-colonial State forms, would almost certainly have been intermittent. The second half of the nineteenth century represented a major change, though, including a steady intensification of the relations between the Kaiowa and the Whites that continues until the present day. First were the activities of the Baron of Antonina, who, looking for a channel of communication between Mato Grosso and Paraná, promoted contact with indigenous families in order to settle them in villages. This aim in mind, he turned to Capuchin priests for assistance in creating a reservoir of labour to work in transporting merchandise (Barbosa & Mura 2011). This period was succeeded by the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-70), which resulted in Paraguay's defeat and redefinition of the borders. This territorial redefinition between the nation states was followed by the implantation on both sides of the border of large yerba mate harvesting companies – like Industrial Paraguaia in Paraguay and Matte Larangeiras in Brazil – which were responsible for employing thousands of indigenous people and peasants on the plantations (Thomaz de Almeida 1991, Brand 1997, Mura 2006). The Guarani-Kaiowa, along with the Guarani-Ñandéva, their neighbours, worked on the yerba

6   Today known, among other denominations, by the ethnonym Guarani-Ñandéva, located to the south of the Kaiowa territories.

mate plantations on a flexible basis, with the indigenous families involved in periodical but systematic work, which they called *changa* (Melià et al. 1976, Thomaz de Almeida 1991, Mura 2006). Through this activity – an updated form of the *conchavo libre* operating during the period of Spanish rule with the aim of allocating workforces to the *encomiendas* (Susnik 1979-80) – the indigenous groups were able to obtain goods not produced by themselves, such as tools, metal containers and blades, fabrics, salt, soap and so on. This dynamic provoked a redefinition of the mobility of families and how their dwelling spaces were allocated (Mura 2006).

The decline in the yerba mate trade from the third decade of the twentieth century led to the large companies losing their monopoly and an increase in occupation by colonists, mostly arriving from the south of Brazil, helping consolidate control of the national borders (Thomaz de Almeida 1991, Brand 1997). This gradual occupation was also stimulated by initiatives from the Brazilian State. The latter, through the recently created indigenist agency, the Indian Protection Service,7 backed the creation of eight small reservations between 1915 and 1928, aimed at the 'village settlement' of the Kaiowa and the Ñandéva populations living in what was then still the state of Mato Grosso (Thomaz de Almeida 1991, Brand 1997, Mura 2006). At first only a few indigenous families settled in these reserves, the majority continuing to occupy the region in capillary form. However the installation of cattle ranches, implementation of the Dourados Agricultural Colony under the Vargas government, and the waves of deforestation brought by the introduction of mechanized agriculture all led to the progressive and compulsory expulsion of indigenous peoples from where they were living (Thomaz de Almeida 1991, Brand 1997, Mura 2006). This resulted in a swelling of the population in the reservations between the 1960s and 70s, along with the development of power structures promoted by FUNAI, which had replaced the SPI, and by the work of the Presbyterian church through the *Caiuá Evangelical Mission*. In these reservation spaces, enemy families were forced to live side-by-side, shamans were persecuted by indigenist agents and missionaries, their ritual instruments burnt in public and they themselves submitted to various forms of humiliation (Thomaz de Almeida 2001). The situation quickly become

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7   Until 1917 the agency was called SPILTN, the 'Indian Protection and National Workers Localization Service,' a name clearly expressing the agency's double task of stimulating colonization while broad geographic spaces were liberated through the establishment of miniscule reserves for the indigenous population (see Lima 1995).

unsustainable: indeed at the end of the 1970s indigenous families had already begun to campaign to return to their places of origin. This was the start of a struggle that has swelled in size over the years since and that continues to the present, with ups and downs in terms of recognition of their territories (Thomaz de Almeida 2001).

The historical facts recounted above form an experiential base that marked Kaiowa life. I turn now to describing the Kaiowa cosmovision and consequently the interpretation that they give to the events taking place in the universe, including how they explain and define interethnic relations and other modalities of interaction between the beings and elements of the cosmos.

According to the Kaiowa, the universe is defined by three main stages of cosmic development: *Áry Ypy*, the space-time of origins; *Áry Ypyrã*, the current space-time,[8] and *Ararapire*, the space-time of the end of living well, or the end of the world. The first stage itself divides into three distinct moments. The first moment, cosmogonic and theogonic, involves the creation of the cosmos itself by Ñane Ramõi (Our Grandfather) who constituted himself through *Jasuka,* an originary, vital substance with creative and generative qualities. Afterwards he gave rise to Ñande Jari (Our Grandmother) from his feather diadem and then created the first gods, with whom he also made the spaces of the universe. Some divinities also created the Earth, which at first was the size of a small disc about ten centimetres in diameter. Following a quarrel with his wife, Ñane Ramõi ascended, without dying, to his current abode in the highest level (*yváy*) of the universe (Thomaz de Almeida & Mura 2003).[9] The second moment of this cosmic era is defined by the activities of Ñande Ru (Our Father), the son of Ñane Ramõi and Ñande Jári. This figure created the forest trails and expanded the Earth by adding his own level. The third moment centres on the epic of Ñande Ru's children: Ñande Rykey Pa'i Kuara (Our Older Brother, the Sun) and his twin brother (but understood to be younger than Pa'i Kuara), Jasy (the Moon). Searching for their father, both are involved in episodes in which they establish the most important institutions in existence today (Mura 2006).

Áry Ypy is singularized by the fact that all the individuals populating the universe possessed shamanic powers, were immortal and communicated

8   Understood as the future indicated by the suffix 'rã' in relation to the time of reference, which here would be the past.

9   For more details on this phase of the cosmos, see Cadogan 1962, Melià et al. 1976, Chamorro 1995.

with the same language. In this period the universe was unstable, all beings able to manifest feelings like anger, hate, cowardice and so on, as well as illicit behaviours like infidelity, violence and betrayal. In this unstable context, which twice led to the destruction of the Earth surface, Ñande Ru became angered and upset by the bad behaviour shown by most of its beings. In response he closed the passage allowing communication between the nearby spaces of the Earth and those found beyond *Yvy Rendy* (the shining aura of the Earth), sealing it with *Jasuka*. This event and its associated transformations inaugurated *Áry Ypyrã*, the present space-time (Mura 2006).

One of the first actions was the transformation of the originary subjects as they became attributed with their present-day forms and behaviours, such as crawling, fleeing in fear, being solitary, qualities characteristic of those beings we Westerners would identify as animal species. This transformation is taken as a decline, since the separation between the regions beneath and beyond *Yvy Rendy* implies the division of beings between the impure and unstable spaces of the former and the pure and stable spaces of the latter. This separation is hierarchical rather than symmetrical, since the levels are arranged vertically, beginning with the lowest and most degrading on the Earth's surface, or below, to those where the perfect and most powerful beings live, close to the firmament. The *járy* (owner-beings or guardians) were also distributed according to the same principle. For example, So'o Járy (owner of the game 'animals') and Kagui Járy (owner of the forest) reside beneath *Yvy Rendy* and comprise potentially malevolent beings (Mura 2006).

Another kind of transformation is represented by the division of the cosmos into two dimensions: the dimension of the sensible world in which all beings communicate and interact through the five senses, and a parallel dimension, perceived by most only in partial form, through signals, principally acoustic and visual. This division between dimensions allocates fundamentally mortal and immortal elements to each respectively. In the sensible world, bodies, through which the five senses are manifested, are inhabited and animated by elements that control them. For example, the Kaiowa individual is composed of at least three active subjects that vie for control of the body (*tetê*), including the *ayvu* (the soul-person, or kin), which is embodied after baptism and proceeds to one of the levels beyond *Yvy Rendy* after the body's death (or removal of its control), reuniting with kin on the terrestrial plane and then returning to its level of origin; the *ã*, the carnal soul that

grows in the body and becomes *ãnguê* after the latter's death, establishing its dwelling in the *Kururuy*, the lake of toads, which is situated beneath *Yvy Rendy*; and finally *tupichúa*, the 'animal' soul, which determines the individual's temperament. Other malevolent agents may also become embodied or may control the body at a distance – such as the *ãnguê* of other dead people, the *ayvu* of those killed violently, or by sorcery, malevolent substances and so on (Mura 2006).

Finally we have another division of the universe into what we can define as two cosmological spheres, focused on regulating interethnic relations. Technical skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours were not all divided up equally among the different human groups. Hundreds of years of interaction with White people means that the Kaiowa have focused special attention on elaborating concepts and explanations for the former's powers and resources and on how to deal with them. To understand this concern better, it is worth presenting, albeit in summarized form, the narrative telling of the emergence of the first White person (*karai*) and the consequences.[10]

In *Áry Ypy*, the time of origins, a daughter of Pa'i Tani – another name for Ñane Ramõi – called Tupã Sy Ka'acupe married a man by the name of San José. The children of Pa'i Tani treated him as a brother-in-law, expecting him to act reciprocally towards them. However San José failed to do so. One time his brothers-in-law went to warn him that a certain place would be struck by bolts of lightning to purify the environment. He ignored the advice, however, and was fatally struck by one of the bolts, turning him to ashes. His wife begged her father to revive him and he agreed, but since ashes are white, San José, re-emerged, acquired the same colouring. After this time San José began to accumulate different objects and materials all for himself. This was the 'beginning' of the White Man, and since the couple had many children, all of them this same colour – including Jesus Christ – White people are conceived today as the heirs of these characteristics. Another important factor is that while the other descendants of Pa'i Tani (likewise divinities) who kept the colouring of the Kaiowa also inherited the capacity to transform beings into other beings, Jesus Christ, who is the *járy* (owner) of the Whites, lacks this power, making him hierarchically inferior to the other divinities (Mura 2006).

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10   Here I present the version given by Atanásio Teixeira, a renowned Kaiowa shaman. For a more complete version of this episode, which forms part of a longer and more complex narrative, see Mura 2006.

The third space-time, represented by the end of living well (*Ararapire*), is not conceived by the Kaiowa to be posterior to *Áry Ypyrã*, but partially overlapping. Indeed they do not think of the apocalypse as an instantaneous event but as something already under way, which can be deduced from the negative aspects that increasingly affect the everyday life of the Kaiowa. This process is inexorable and will eventually lead to the destruction of the Earth surface for the final time. Nonetheless the *Ararapire* does not have a constant pace and can be sped up or slowed down at the will of the gods in response to the actions of humans and in particular the Kaiowa.

We can turn now to consider the situation of the Tabajara. As elsewhere in the Brazilian Northeast, Paraíba was subject to heavy colonization making intensive use of indigenous workforces and slaves from Africa. At the start of the seventeenth century the Portuguese crown granted two *sesmarias* (land concessions) on the south coast of the state where the village settlements of Jacoca and Aratagui were founded to be run by the Jesuit order (Mura et al. 2010). Most of the families located there were taken to belong to the Tabajara group, but, as was commonplace during the period, these spaces are also likely to have been the destination for families resulting from the *descimentos* (relocations) of indigenous peoples from the dry inland sertão region. Following the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Americas in the mid-eighteenth century and the promulgation of the Pombaline Edict,[11] these village settlements became secularized and transformed into small towns in 1762 (Conde and Alhandra), enforcing the compulsory use of Portuguese by the indigenous population and abandonment of their native languages, as well as encouraging marriage to non-indigenous spouses (Mura et al. 2010). Almost a century later, by now in the Imperial period, the implementation of the Lands Law (issued in 1850) meant that the two *sesmarias* – which, despite the process of miscegenation and administrative rule, had effectively remained under indigenous control and their leaders recognized – became subject to wide-ranging reforms. These eventually led to the indigenous population losing control of most of their spaces with the political status of indigenous territories. They began to receive small family lots, totalling less than 5% of the spaces previously at their disposal. The rest of the region became

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11   In 1757 the Marquis de Pombal, a government minister in Portugal, introduced legislation (the 'Diretório') that regulated life in the colony (Brazil) with a pronounced effect on its indigenous peoples.

the destination for a new wave of colonization, forming smallholdings and enabling the creation of local powerful figures, who gradually created large estates, and who over the course of the first half of the twentieth century forced the indigenous population to abandon the already meagre spaces to which they had been confined (Mura et al. 2010).

Hence, as we reach the mid-twentieth century, the indigenous peoples, along with other social sectors associated with them following the Pombaline Edict (like the black and poor white populations) no longer had exclusive possession of the places they inhabited, nor any political and ethnic unity. But this did not necessarily mean their departure from the geographic spaces they had occupied for centuries. Most families remained for decades within what had once been the *sesmarias*, this time as small *posseiros* or *moradores de condição* ('conditional residents') paying what in this region is called a *dormida* (for the right to have a house and a space to grow crops within a much larger property controlled by a landowner) in exchange for working one or two days per week for the patron. This type of relation undoubtedly gave birth to a system of domination typical of the plantation (Wolf 2003, Palmeira 1977, Garcia 1989) – in this case subjecting individuals mainly through coconut production. However the schema left room for the development of other activities during the rest of the week, like hunting, gathering and fishing in the rivers and the mangrove swamps along the coast. A degree of mobility was possible, therefore, which meant people could continue to explore and use the territories in capillary fashion, despite no longer having exclusive possession over them. Consequently the members of domestic groups that lived in coastal localities, whose activities were primarily fishing-based, would travel to visit relatives who lived within the former *sesmarias*, taking fish and obtaining root crops in return, and vice-versa (Mura et al. 2010).

Over the decades the power relations generated significant tensions, which resulted in the political campaigns of the 'peasant leagues' and the movements fighting for agrarian reform. In the wake of these actions, 22 rural settlements were formed on the south coast of Paraíba from the 1970s onwards, most of them populated by families whose domestic groups had lived in this region for centuries (Mura et al. 2010). Another significant phenomenon was that the diversity of the land ownership situation in the former *sesmarias*, which included areas of vacant lands, led to the formation of small local communities, with a concentrated black population, today in

a process of regularization as quilombola territories.[12] Finally in very recent times – that is, over just the last eight years – territories have been claimed by approximately 1,000 indigenous people, who recognize themselves as descendants of some of the original domestic groups from a locality within the old *sesmaria* of Jacoca. This region is denominated Sítio dos Caboclos de Pau Ferro, and coincides with a significant portion of the lots distributed to indigenous peoples in the second half of the nineteenth century. These *caboclos*, as some of the elders still describe themselves, today use the name Tabajara as the ethnonym attributed to their remote ancestors. Hence they are not only claiming land, they are engendering a process of political reorganization, reviving family ties, constructing community discussion mechanisms and promoting ritual activities, among other modalities of constructing collectivities (Mura et al. 2010).

This centuries-long process of colonial and postcolonial domination had significant consequences for community politics, as well as the definition of ethnicity on Paraíba's southern coast, producing discontinuities in local organizational forms, a topic to which we return in the next section. However it is worth emphasizing that from the viewpoint of family reproduction and a specific way of life, we can encounter a significant number of experiences focused primarily on regulating domestic ecology through a specific moral and cosmological framework that forms the common heritage of most inhabitants from the south coast of Paraíba, not just the Tabajara. This framework is related to dealing with well-defined environments, like rivers, mangrove swamps, the sea and the forest, where human activities are conditioned by the relation with owner-beings such as the Mangrove Father (owner of the rivers and their surrounding areas), Comadre Fulozinha (owner of the forest), Zé Pelintra (owner of the paths and the intersections) and the Mermaid (owner of the sea), as well as the punished souls wandering through the region.

The relation with these beings is conditioned by the person's moral posture, depending on whether his or her body is 'open' or 'closed,' which implies displaying an illicit or licit form of behaviour, respectively, to the

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12   Anthropological discussion of the concept of *quilombo* and *quilombola* was later reflected in a Presidential Decree (4887/2003) which states: "For the purposes of this decree, quilombo-origin communities are considered ethnic-racial groups, based on self-definition, with their own historical trajectory and specific territorial relations, presumed to have a black ancestry linked to the resistance to historical oppression."

owner-being in question while carrying out techno-economic activities in the environment concerned. In the case of the relation with the Mangrove Father, a man attempting to catch fish will prove unsuccessful if he has committed adultery or gone with prostitutes since his body will be 'open' to impurities as a result of this behaviour. In this case the punishment may be days or even weeks of unsuccessful fishing, a period during which the individual must abstain from sex in order to purify himself. If the man comes face-to-face with the Mangrove Father – a being who may appear in the guise of a fisherman with a canoe – he cannot stare at him, since this would indicate a show of envy or interference in another's fishing secrets. This kind of behaviour would also lead to a complete failure of any activities pursued in the region's rivers. The Mermaid, meanwhile, is a being that inhabits the coastal waters and is feared for the storms that she can provoke, although she can also help fishing. In the case of Comadre Fulozinha, any hunter or gatherer who intends to delve into the forest first needs to present its owner-being with tobacco and perhaps sweets, since the being in question typically displays an attitude similar to that of a child. If this ritual is not respected, Comadre may punish the infractor, making him lose his sense of direction and become lost in the woods, or entangled in vines, unable to extricate himself, in extreme cases even losing his life. Zé Pelintra, for his part, is an easily offended and highly irritable being, capable of provoking disease and even killing, though he may also be a powerful ally in the curing process, depending on how he is treated. Someone seeking his help or company should offer rum and tobacco. Finally the punished souls are the spirits of the dead whose punishment is linked to deeply inadequate behaviour when they were alive.

As well as the perambulations and activities of the aforementioned beings, there are also the enchanted cities, located in the territory that once contained the two *sesmarias* cited earlier, in another dimension, but whose presence is indicated by geographic features, rocks and plants (like the jurema tree). Vandezande (1975) recounts the presence of a dozen such cities in the 1970s, among which we can highlight Tambaba City, located on the beach of the same name, which was swallowed by the sea, the visible signs of which are the stones emerging from its waters. This location, identified by the Tabajara as highly important, was still until the mid-twentieth century a space of rituals in which the jurema tree cult was performed along with the *toré*, a dance widespread among indigenous peoples of the Northeast.

Contexts, dynamics and connections

The historical processes and the cosmological information relating to the Kaiowa and Tabajara show significant differences, which result from the formation of distinct socio-ecologico-territorial contexts over time. Making use of this notion of contexts, in another work I sought to understand "how human and non-human elements, in the position of subjects or objects, in a particular place, are related and interact with each other, forming socio-technical systems and mobilizing the forces of the cosmos at their disposal" (Mura 2011: 114). In the configuration of these contexts, the territorial dimension proves extremely significant since the dispute for spaces can combine distinct modalities of accessing and using the resources found within them: not only those deriving from the location itself, but also those directed there by flows of all kinds of materials (including information, concepts, ideas, etc.). Constructing territories on the basis of the trajectories and historical experiences of individuals and groups implies the formation of cultural models of conceptualizing space, which can be understood as territorialities. Hence it is the intersection of these actions and conceptualizations that gives life to a territorial dynamic, resulting in the configuration of the kind of context described above, where the formation of cosmologies and moralities has a significant influence on the evaluation and attribution of meaning to individual and collective experiences, comparing them with each other. This comparison is seldom undertaken in symmetrical situations: instead the differential power interactions influence and condition the individuals and groups disputing the right to access and use a particular geographic space, as well as understand and situate this region within the universe as a whole.

Bohannan (1960), studying the impact of European colonization in Africa, had already emphasized the implications that Western conceptions of land may have on people who manifest a very different view. Based on an idea of the division of space into delimited, measurable and commercializable parts, these conceptions contrast with a geographic perception defined more by landmarks in the territory (with a strong symbolic value) that are ritually and cosmologically constructed. Oliveira (1998) in turn proposes the notion of a *process of territorialization* as a way of comprehending the effects on specific populations of the attribution of delimited and invariable spaces by administrative powers, such as those found under colonial rule or linked to the policies of nation states. The author observes that this process is far

from one-way, however, eliciting responses from the affected populations that include cultural elaborations and the redefinition of their relations with space and its resources.

Using this framework of proposals, therefore, I shall look to analyse how the Kaiowa and the Tabajara give meaning to these contexts (deriving from colonial, neo-colonial and territorial processes), thereby contributing to their construction.

The socio-ecologico-territorial context that took shape in the southern cone of Mato Grosso do Sul resulted from the asymmetric relations established between the White and indigenous populations, in accordance with the historical process described briefly in the previous item. Such asymmetries produced tensions from the first decades after European conquest, provoking rebellions among various Guarani groups and stimulating the development of millenarist movements and other responses to the colonial power over the ensuing centuries (Susnik 1979-80, Melià 1988, Pompa 2003). At the same time, these indigenous populations also had diverse experiences of economic cooperation over this period of time, generally occupying a subordinate position as suppliers of labour (Susnik 1979-80, Barbosa & Mura 2011). It was this experiential legacy of conflicts and technical and economic involvement over the course of time (becoming more intense during the twentieth century) that enabled the Kaiowa to conceptualize the different materials and attitudes brought by the Whites and establish various forms of cooperation with them. The presence of the White population significantly transformed the repertoire of elements available within known geographical spaces, though it also led to the compulsory introduction of rules for accessing the same, linked to trade and private property. The few lands still solely in the possession of indigenous peoples became surrounded by rural warehouses, urban centres and highways, which, combined with the region's rivers, woods and fields – the latter ceasing to be sources of sustenance exclusive to the Kaiowa – configured a range of diverse environments in terms of access and use (Barbosa da Silva 2007 and 2009). To ensure access to these environments and regulate the experiences and uses of resources arising from these experiences, a cosmology, along with a moral framework derived from the latter, were constructed and refined over time, adapting to the demands of each moment. In the previous section I provided a schematic description of the essential factors of the cosmology: now I turn to analyse

its peculiarities and consequences in terms of administrating relations and interactions in the universe.

The first consideration to be made concerning the Kaiowa cosmological constructs is the absence of any substantial distinction between gods and humans; the distinction between beings in the universe is one of degrees not types, establishing hierarchies of powers and behavioural forms. The absence of any distinction between divinities and men becomes even clearer when the former are united with the latter through kinship ties. The Kaiowa refer to the gods generically as *ñánde rykey*, 'our older brothers.' The three-generation family, the basis of the social organization of this indigenous people, becomes a mirror of the original families, today living in celestial levels and the centre of gravity for all indigenous activities and behaviours. Obviously, as is common in indigenous cosmologies, this formulation becomes an axis around which the people's relations and interactions in the universe are articulated, with an emphasis on those formed by kinship lines. Hence the relations with divinities can clearly be understood as connections by descent within a maximal lineage, centrally located in the cosmos.

Another function of descent is to establish originary ties with the collateral lineages through which interethnic relations are defined, among which we can highlight those maintained with the White population. As we saw in the narrative on the origin of White people, the latter are consanguine kin of the Kaiowa, descendants on the female line of the same common ancestor. However the ties of affinity that gave rise to the marriage of Pa'i Tani's daughter established a failed relation in terms of the obligations between brothers-in-law, manifested as the divergent behavioural models of San José and Tupasy's older brothers. This behavioural divergence founds the contrast between *ñande reko* ('our way of being and living') and *karai reko* ('the White way of being and living'), attributing different skills to each group of descendants in a hierarchical rather than symmetrical form. Hence the White population inherited the strength and capacity to multiply plastic, glass, metallic and electronic materials, and so on, as well as the power to produce and administer large quantities of agricultural and livestock produce. They also made negative use of their wealth, occupying geographical spaces where indigenous peoples lived and acting against the latter in extremely violent forms. On the other hand, Jesus, the ancestor to whom White people can trace a relation, is unable to transform beings into other beings, or guide

the fate of the universe, speeding up or slowing down the 'space-time of the end of the world' (the *Ararapire*): these are the prerogatives of the gods from whom the Kaiowa directly descend, and it is the latter's task, through their shamans, to give impetus to these actions.

The shaman plays a central role in determining cosmic relations and interpreting individual and collective experiences. His effectiveness is always under evaluation, though, usually through a close assessment of his powers to cure (people and the environment), as well as identify sources of sorcery attacks and communicate the *tekorã*, the behavioural rules periodically sent to the Kaiowa by the gods. The efficacy and powers of the shamans derive from their training and their acquisition of *ñengáry* from powerful beings. These prayers are specific to each shaman, allowing him to move through the universe, traversing the different dimensions created during the final stages of the 'space-time of origins.' In this way he enhances his senses, obtaining powers that enable him to hear and see beings that other Kaiowa can only glimpse and sense at most. The powers obtained are amplified and perfected throughout his life, in constant dialogue with the gods, seeking to reach increasingly higher levels of the universe with the aim of attaining the firma-ment where the supreme divinities abide. This dialogue involves a double recognition: on one hand, the gods must recognize their Kaiowa kin and his moral capacity to receive the *ñengáry*; on the other, the neophyte must recognize during the training phase that he is indeed dialoguing with his *Ñande Rykey* (older brothers – the gods). The danger is one of being tricked by beings from beyond *Yvy Rendy* (the shining aura of the Earth) who can give the shaman powers but who are malignant, meaning the shaman runs the risk of turning into a sorcerer. To avoid this happening, the shaman appren-tice must maintain an adequate moral posture, attempting to imitate the behaviour shown by the gods in the present. Indeed the latter live, body and soul, in part of the universe that is stable, pure and perfect, while the Kaiowa are bound to a body whose impurities bind it to the surface of the Earth. Imitating the behaviour of the gods perfectly can lead to a level of purifica-tion of the body so high that the shaman can ascend to beyond *Yvy Rendy* in life (with his body) and turn into a *kandire* (immortal). These are exceptional cases, however, with few examples existing over the course of history. It is more usual for shamans to live with the contradictions of the present, looking to limit their effects, on one hand conditioning those who trust in

him to give meaning to their actions, while, on the other, trying to persuade the divinities to be benevolent with their younger brothers, the Kaiowa. The shamans therefore construct moral frameworks that serve as a reference point for judging cases of failure in individual and collective behaviour – such as, for example, when they are unable to breed large numbers of cattle or accumulate many goods, claiming that this is an attitude of White people rather than the Kaiowa, who should adhere to the principle of reciprocity (*teko joja*) and foster a way of being and living based on good cooperation and mutual support (*teko mbo jeko porã*).13

In similar fashion to what the Kaiowa do with the behaviour of other beings (like jaguars, maned wolves, snakes, monkeys and other beings, and their respective owner-spirits), the comparison with White people engenders processes that allow flows of materials (cultural and otherwise) to be channelled, simultaneously defining a specific and interwoven tradition of knowledge and ethnic identity. In this process, it does not matter that these materials have been produced in distant places – whether industrial goods or items coming from the region's forests and fields. Impelled by their curiosity and using imitation as a cognitive instrument (cosmologically founded as a property of the 'space-time of origins'), the Kaiowa pursue multiple experiences, some highly successful, others less so. It is precisely the shamans' evaluation of these successes and failures that shapes the construction of the indigenous tradition of knowledge, imposing their own principles for using the acquired objects and their mutual obligations in opposition to others. In sum, they must reproduce, refine and propagate *ñande reko* ('our way of being and living'), always in a quest for living well (*tekove porã*). This aim requires them to fight, since White people are continually attacking this system of life, removing its vital supports such as the spaces from where the families originated. The fight for land has therefore become central to the cosmology itself, just as, at this historical moment, it is essential to persuade the divinities that now is not the ideal time to accelerate the destruction of the world.14

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13   The interplay of the sequences of *jekoha* (supports) enables the Kaiowa to relate to, interact with and connect subjects in the universe: so individuals are supported by their near kin, who are supported in turn by grandparents (as leaders of the extended families). The latter, for their part, are supported by a particular physical space, from which they originate: these places are supported by the Earth, which is supported by the main cross, which is itself supported by the universe.

14   Among the Guarani during the colonial period, various attempts were made by shamans to assemble a retinue of indigenous people to dance and sing non-stop with the aim of joining the divinities in life (see Melià

since Kaiowa still exist on the Earth and, since the latter are their younger brothers, it would be unjust, and indeed an immoral act, to kill them.[15]

We can conclude, therefore, that in the case of the Kaiowa, religion, ethnic identity and tradition of knowledge are heavily interwoven. The historical process of colonial and neo-colonial domination were insufficient to wipe out the political organization of the local communities, still less the experiences derived from the domestic ecology of the three-generation extended families. Although from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards the indigenous population had been subject to processes of territorialization intended to restrict the spaces of indigenous life and to public policies designed to implement power structures within the few, tiny indigenous lands allocated to them, and even despite seeing their shamans being humiliated by Presbyterian missionaries, they paradoxically reproduced and refined their tradition of knowledge, adapting it at each moment. This tradition has, for example, included the appropriation of objects from the Jesuit era that symbolize power, such as crosses and the ceremonial rods of the *cabildantes* (the councillors of the Spanish colony). However, it has completely altered these objects, transforming them into *chiru*, object-subjects with other meanings in the universe and used by shamans and the leaders of extended families. In response to attacks by Presbyterian missionaries, people have also sought to ritually reunite the *chiru* scattered or abandoned following pressures from the former (Mura 2010). Finally, this tradition enables the entire universe to be comprehended as one vast political arena in

1986, Susnik 1979-80), thereby accelerating the end of the world. Reports from the 1970s tell of cases among the Pai-Tavyterã of Paraguay of entire communities that began to dance with this same objective (Wicker 1996), their hopes frustrated, or rather their perspectives realigned. In Mato Grosso do Sul, the renowned shaman Pa'i Chiquinho, from the Panambizinho area, one of Egon Schaden's most important informants, headed a similar movement that lasted for more than two decades, between the 1950s and 1970s, according to the present-day indigenous population. In terms of future events, the declarations made by the leading shaman Paulito Aquino, Chiquinho's successor, reveal the expectation that this world order will end one day with the collective ascension of the Kaiowa to the *karoapy*, the celestial level (*yváy*) located near to the dwellings of the gods (Chamorro 1995).

15   Here it is worth citing key statements made by Atanásio Teixeira, one of the most renowned Kaiowa shamans living today, at the height of the land conflict in the Ñande Ru Marangatu encampment in Mato Grosso do Sul, August 2000: "...we shall always be brothers of the Ñande Rykey [gods]. Although today we use different clothing and adornments to the Ñande Rykey, they will recognize us by the necklace, voice, *ñembo'e, jeguaka* and so on. They'll recognize us by these adornments. Even though we've gone astray because we no longer behave like them, even though we live differently to them now, since we get drunk, violent, play around a lot, even though our clothes, food, attitudes and way of being are different to Our Brothers, even though we want to be different to them, it's impossible because they are our legitimate Brothers, they are our beginning, they always like us! They accept us, they don't exclude us because of our new behaviours. They have the mission and obligation to care for their little brothers whatever the situation" (Mura 2006: 6).

which a variety of human and non-human subjects relate and interact with each other, defining strategies, searching for advantages, looking to persuade or even trick the interlocutor, and so on. Hence it creates a dynamic focused on a constant search for 'living well' and, consequently, for averting the end of the world (Mura 2006).

I turn now to consider the socio-ecologico-territorial context that emerged on the south coast of Paraíba. The fate of the indigenous peoples in these spaces was very different to that of the Kaiowa. As we saw in the previous section, they were forced to mix with other populations over time, abandoning their native languages and finally losing control over the *sesmarias* in which they had been settled. These colonial and postcolonial policies have been identified by Oliveira as the first process of territorialization experienced by indigenous populations of the Brazilian Northeast, involving a slow pulverization of collective indigenous identities until they become unviable (Oliveira 1998). From the first decades of the twentieth century, this process was followed by another implemented by the Brazilian state through its indigenist agency, the SPI, whose effects proved to be the contrary of the earlier process. For the State, an indigenous population's right to land was dependent on proving that they were Amerindian through the manifestation of a specific form of social organization and typical ritual practices. Families and groups organized themselves precisely around these demands in order to obtain recognition of the trajectories and forms of violence suffered by themselves, demanding compensation of the same through territorial rights and assistance from the State.

It should be said that for the Tabajara the effects of this second process of territorialization have been fairly recent. As we have seen, they began to manifest their ethnicity just eight years ago. This, however, did not provoke a radical change in lifestyle, since the families were able to reproduce their domestic groups and main activities. The changes took place more at the level of local political organization, resulting in the weakening of community ties and a consequent diversification of family trajectories – with many families forced to join the diaspora or move further apart from each other over the last few decades. This type of experiential diversification also resulted in an array of different religious choices among the contemporary Tabajara adhering to Pentecostalism. Despite these organizational weaknesses, from the viewpoint of a domestic ecology and the moral framework associated

with it, all the families managed to reproduce principles and memories associated with *caboclos* (as the elder members typically describe themselves). It was precisely the memory of these families and the moral principles associated with them, as well as the violent attacks experienced over more than a century of history, that formed the basis for the identity claim of the present-day Tabajara, leading to a reversal of the drifting apart of families and the construction of a new political community. This process has emerged as the fulfilment of a prophecy made by the late Antônio Francisco 'Piaba,' a man with special abilities, possessing magical qualities that made him physically vigorous, powerful and brave, as well as a curer of animals and a prophet (Mura et al. 2010). The content of this prophecy was passed on to his grandson, Carlinhos, today the leader of the Tabajara, claiming that one day a brave, unselfish youth would appear, ready to sacrifice his personal ambitions to fight for his people. This youth would unite the dispersed kin and lead them in demanding from the powerful their rights to lands taken from them by force, an endeavour that the prophecy said would prove successful. This young man was identified in the figure of Ednaldo, who sacrificed his career as a footballer to devote himself precisely to uniting the Tabajara people and claiming their territorial rights alongside Carlinhos and other leaders, all belonging to lines descending from original families of the 'Sítio dos Caboclos' (Mura et al 2010, Farias & Barcellos 2012).

The reconstruction of community ties and the definition of narratives referring to the family trajectories became ritualized through periodical meetings of dozens of Tabajara. These meetings were later held in an *oca*, built in Barra de Gramame, in the rural settlement where the leader Carlinhos lives, and the population also began to hold the *toré* dance, a ritual performance that ensured them greater recognition from other indigenous peoples of the Northeast and the various public bodies, including FUNAI (the National Indian Foundation). Initially, however, this dance provoked concerns among the Pentecostal Tabajara who considered it contrary to their own religious practices, leading to tensions between members of the indigenous community. These tensions were manifested precisely via the public and community dimension of the *toré*, since the behaviour of the Pentecostals in relation to the beings populating the region differed from where religious interaction between these beings and the human subject is private or familiar in kind. Here it is worth citing the statements made

by João Boinho, a fervently Evangelical Tabajara elder from the Assembly of God Church, during a visit to the places from which he originally came. There he recalled an episode that had happened to him when he was young. João was walking from Jacumã to Sítio dos Caboclos when suddenly a figure approached him very quickly with something flashing in his hand, a blue light so intense it shone as far as the neighbouring town of Conde. Startled, João thought it was someone who wanted to rob him, but as they drew close, the being jumped and disappeared, and the Tabajara man hurried away as quickly as possible.

This account – rich in details which I summarize here for reasons of space – was told in the presence of Tabajara leaders and other elderly informants, most of them Pentecostal. Everyone wanted to give their opinions on the event and comment on this figure, all of them agreeing that it was a spirit called João Gala Foice. João Boinho described this creature as having a protuberant belly and very thin legs, always carrying a kind of lamp. He wanders throughout the region, though his home lies in the enchanted city (called Piranguinha), located near to Gurugi, a region in the municipality of Conde. João Gala Foice is a spirit paying a penitence after killing his own wife and child with a scythe.

João Boinho says that since he became an Evangelical, he no longer sees this being and, in a broader context, relating to fishing activities, he claims that Gala Foice does not interfere in these activities, which are under the sway of the 'Mermaid' (in the sea) and the 'Mangrove Father' (in the rivers). Furthermore, comparing these two beings with João Gala Foice, he says that the former are not being punished: "*The Mangrove Father and the Mermaid are natural things, they derive from the nature of God,*" adding: "*Doesn't everything have an owner? With nature it's the same*" (Mura et al. 2010: 170).

Hence the conversion to Pentecostalism has not lead these Tabajara to reject the existence of certain beings as mere superstition. On the contrary, the memory of them, along with the details of their characteristics and their actions in the cosmos, are very clear. What is claimed, however, is that Pentecostal practices help people to stop seeing them and thus avoid being haunted or punished, revealing a technique of protection and cure similar to other kinds undertaken by shamans.

On the south coast of Paraíba the relevance and fear of these aforementioned beings is evident, as well as their connections to the techno-economic

practices of the Tabajara. These connections play a fundamental role in the ongoing formation and adaptation of a moral framework that serves as a reference point in the development of the domestic ecology, implemented and interpreted by experienced people, the most important of which are the male and female healers (*rezadores*) involved in curing practices in the domestic environment. From the cosmological viewpoint, these beings are extremely active and people have to interact with them on an everyday basis, configuring a very particular form of religious interaction. However here we also have to examine the effects of colonial domination and the process of territorialization experienced by the indigenous population concerned. The main outcome of these processes was the loss of any political unity, as well as making it impossible to build a cosmological framework over time that situates them genealogically as a central element in the history of the universe and the relation with the divinities – as we have seen in the case of the Kaiowa. In fact, the present-day Tabajara, along with other social groups populating the south coast of Paraíba, reproduce their cosmologies primarily in the domain of everyday life, for now detached from an ethnic dimension that allows the comparison of attitudes, channelling ideas and concepts and organizing them in a way that defines group exclusivities.

As becomes clear, the domestic dimension has proved the most enduring, its activities enabling the reproduction of local moralities over time, while also favouring diverse forms of associating these beings, their attitudes and the events related to them with others that are more spatially and temporally distant. Hence through a local tradition of knowledge, the families today identifying themselves as Tabajara, but also others who form part of social networks from the south coast of Paraíba, immerse themselves in broader cultural flows, selecting concepts, ideas, figures and events from them that match the demands of their domestic life, establishing various degrees of activities with the beings making up the pantheon, which itself is continually being transformed. Biblical beings and events relating to distant places and times, for example, have become absorbed – sometimes in a fairly nebulous fashion – into a spatiotemporal background that, compared to present-day life, presents a certain degree of passivity. Many of these figures acquire the characteristics of a *deus otiosus* or 'idle god,' who in some cosmologies gives life to the world and the different human groups (Brelich 2003), but who performs no active role afterwards. These figures enabled a universalist

vision to be introduced, an *oikoumene* in which these diverse human groups are to a certain extent equivalent. However in this case the role of the 'space-time of origins' in defining the moral framework of reference is heavily reduced: instead the families more often take elements from their everyday experiences to shape the principles and moralities guiding individual action. The unification of the social network in terms of a moral community is defined primarily through such experiences, centred on specific techno-economic activities and a family lifestyle. We can also observe – and this is an essential point – that it is through these experiences, along with the knowledge arising from them, that an ethnic identity can be formed in the terms under which the Tabajara presently define it. In fact, the second process of territorialization described by Oliveira (1998) allows indigenous populations to organize these contents in a more comprehensive and public form, to the point of provoking reflections not only on their own origins, but also on how to connect these to the beings with they interact everyday.

It is impossible to predict the future of these cultural elaborations without running the risk of producing a futurology. However it is worth recounting, by way of comparison, the case of the Pankararu who have felt the effects of the second process of territorialization for more than seventy years. This indigenous people became engaged in cosmological relations that they today define as 'tradition,' centred on the worship of the *encantados*, 'enchanted ones,' in parallel with the penitence practices related to the 'spirits of the light,' whose effects mainly derive from the first process of territorialization. The latter practices also have a Pankararu connotation given that the indigenous families attribute their own meaning to them (relative to the way in which they are understood by non-indigenous penitents). However 'tradition' has increased in influence by manifesting and promoting ethnic exclusivity at collective and political levels (Mura 2012).

The Tabajara are still in a very early phase of community organization. However, one important leader – who represents an influential lineage and is simultaneously a Presbyterian from a Pentecostal church – is already taking part in performances of the *toré* dance after some initial hesitation. Such attitudes show how political processes of community organization are simultaneously forms of connecting ethnic identity with family identity and, in turn, with the modalities of relationship in the cosmos, configuring specific religious interactions.

Conclusions

The ethnographic examples presented here allow us to perceive how politics, as a technique that enables connections and the diversification of power relations, plays a fundamental role in the formation of cosmologies, the definition of group identities (not just ethnic), the construction of territories and the formulation of traditions of knowledge. In both examined cases – each characterized by a striking asymmetry in social relations as a consequence of colonial and postcolonial domination – religion, as a specific modality of the social organization of roles, relations and interactions in the universe, proved important to defining local responses to what were considered negative conditions of existence by formulating cosmic architectures and dynamics, along with moral frameworks that afford an active role to the indigenous groups considered.

As we have seen, religious acts are defined through specific socio-ecologico-territorial contexts, implying equally specific modes of relating these acts to other acts and concepts that define the local political organization and group identity. The most striking differences, from the viewpoint of the contextual configurations, are those relating to the conditions that family groups have at their disposal for becoming organized in local and ethnic communities, as well as for defining public and comprehensive ritual praxes. These conditions are what allow the construction of particular ways of linking group identity to a much broader organization of the universe, defining a particular cosmological framework.

In the case of the Kaiowa, we could observe that, despite centuries of colonial and neo-colonial domination, they have managed to maintain some degree of organizational autonomy. Even in adverse situations they were able to configure their local political communities, organizing rituals and maintaining the figure of the shaman central to the administration and interpretation of the relations and interactions in the universe. This allows the indigenous people concerned to construct, over time, a cosmovision that situates them in a prominent position in the interaction with the gods with whom they maintain kinship relations, as well as ensure themselves a central role in defining the times and modalities in which the end of the world will take place. Hence religion is closely linked to the definition of ethnicity, where the interethnic comparison of principles and behaviours becomes a constitutive part of the formation of a tradition of knowledge,

strongly centred on local experiences. The Tabajara, for their part, never had this opportunity having progressively lost their local political autonomy. However the families managed to reproduce behaviours and modalities of constructing meanings to the actions of their members through a domestic ecology. This led to a diversification in the cosmological relations established both with those beings related to everyday activities, which allow the formation of a moral framework from which behaviours can be judged, and with other beings and levels of the universe, which end up being less exclusive. In this case religion is not intimately linked to ethnicity. However in this situation too there is a tradition of knowledge becomes apparent, one constructed primarily through local experiences – a tradition that, with a change in the contextual conditions, can form the basis for constructing group identities and consequently for redefining the cosmological framework of reference.

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