

Videos and writings that talk about origin: ancestralism and the memory of ridges, streams and the Wapishana people

Ananda Machado

Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3363-2587>

Abstract: The question that guides this article is: to what extent does the publication of videos and books in Wapishana contribute to the prestige and dissemination of the knowledge of this people? There is a need for materials in the Wapichana language to be used in indigenous schools. From 2020 to 2023, videos and books were published in Wapichana, Portuguese, and English, as a result of the research National Inventory of Wapichana and Macuxi Linguistic Diversity (INDL) in Serra da Lua Region/RR. The study allowed young researchers to listen to their grandparents, film, transcribe, and translate their speeches, to strengthen the use of the language. This text aims to reflect on the videos Kayzyd daya'u (About Serra da Lua), Namachiwe'u da'ynau, Atury Wa'u, Marupá daya'u (History of Marupá), Kywai dunuzuinhau kasarai kadyz kid (Types of indigenous medicines), Stories of Clóvis Ambrósio and Wapichannau da'yau (History of the Wapichana), contributing to broaden the vision of those who don't know this indigenous people and their territory, helping to broaden the vision of those who were unfamiliar with this ethnicity. The methodology was netnographic and the main results were perceiving the relations between documented texts and the discussions about the Wapishana language, territory, literature and materials for teaching Wapishana and history. The theoretical references mainly include works by indigenous intellectuals discussing transpersonality, memory, resistance, spirit language, subjectivities, visions and poetics about existence. In this way, man is the protagonist just as much as the mountain range and the river. And this coexistence brings an idea of a person-territory.

Keywords: Wapichana history; indigenous literature; linguistic documentation.

1 Introduction

Singing, dancing and living the magical experience of suspending the sky is common in many traditions. Suspending the sky is to broaden our horizon; not a prospective horizon, but an existential one. It is to enrich our subjectivities, which is the matter that this time in which we live wants to consume. If there is a desire to consume subjectivities – our subjectivities. Then let us live them with the freedom that we were able to invent, not put them on the market. Since nature is being assaulted in such an indefensible way, let us at least be able to maintain our subjectivities, our visions, our poetics about existence (Ailton Krenak, 2019, p.32-33).

The subjectivity of the Wapishana world is present in their songs, dances and stories that broaden the vision of those who were unfamiliar with this indigenous people. The grandfathers and grandmothers of the mountains, rivers, streams and lakes are people who enchant us and help to raise and keep the sky where it is. This article aims to contribute to the understanding of the worldviews and poetics of the Wapishana.

The Wapishana narratives discussed here were heard and filmed by young indigenous researchers, transcribed, and translated by them as part of the Wapishana and Macuxi research project named National Inventory of Linguistic Diversity (INDL) in the Serra da Lua Region (RSL)/RR. The edited videos are available on the YouTube channel¹ of the Program for the Appreciation of Indigenous Languages and Cultures of Roraima (UFRR Extension) in Youtube[1]. They are documents with subtitles in Wapishana, Portuguese and English. These orally disseminated narratives are also part of publications in books in these three languages. In the few cases in which the videos were not originally filmed in an ancestral language, we decided to include the translation into the Wapichana language in *Paradkarynau Kaydyz dia'a Ruraimaa: As Línguas na Região Serra da Lua* and in the subtitle of the videos.

The voices of people, mountains, streams, rivers, lakes, animals, plants, especially in indigenous languages, reveal the transpersonality of these beings. Sonyellen Fiorotti (2022) inspires the discussion on indigenous perspectivism and multipersonality:

From perspectivism and multipersonality we can glimpse that the construction of the subjectivity of indigenous peoples can assume other ontological bases that shift from the categories of Western societies, for example, from race, social class, rationality and even identity to species, cosmosocial agency, sensoriality and transpersonality (Fiorotti, 2021, p. 2).

In the conception of the Macuxi researcher and writer, an intersectional conception can be perceived. She interprets indigenous ontological bases from various perspectives and daring to contemplate categories that have been denied for so long by Western societies. Sonyellen Fiorotti (2022) draws primarily on her studies of Macuxi and Taurepang literatures, but her discussions also include Wapichana. Viveiros de Castro (1996) also observes these specificities:

Animals are people, or see themselves as people. This conception is almost always associated with the idea that the manifest form of each species is a mere envelope (a 'garment') hiding an internal human form, normally visible only to the eyes of the species itself or to certain transspecific beings, such as shamans. This internal form is the spirit of the animal: an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness, materializable, so to speak, in a human bodily scheme hidden under the animal mask (Viveiros de Castro, 1996, p. 117).

The author's perspective also can be related to the Wapichana's, in which the relationship with the animals and the land requires listening to them. The stories we learn about when watching the videos with Wapishana voices reveal an idea of territory that does not treat its elements as natural resources, but rather as beings, as important as people and

¹ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFNnXq7fpg22K_6lySlCo_g

the animals. Man is the protagonist, as are a mountain range, animals, plants and a river. And this coexistence brings an idea of territory that is different from geopolitics, including other concepts and relationships.

Ingold (2012, p. 29) underlines the importance of listening in the relationship with indigenous peoples, "[...] listening and being advised by what they tell us and healing the rupture between being and knowing. This healing should be the first step towards a more open and sustainable way of living." Therefore, listening to these Wapichana storytellers is a unique opportunity.

Haraway (2016) considers territories and bodies as "unbounded," discusses the symbiosis between animals, humans, and non-humans, and criticizes these dichotomies: "The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, [...], nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all ideologically in question" (Haraway, 2019, p. 177, our translation). Here, we question the separation between ancestral and contemporary.

The memories shared in the videos and books start from a distant past and continue into the present, being narrated by those who are today at the forefront of this ancestry. Daniel Munduruku (2018) refers to this memory-resistance:

Memory is a link with the past without giving up what we experience in the present. It is what puts us in deep connection with what our people call Tradition. [...] Memory is what commands resistance, because it reminds us that we do not have the right to give up, otherwise we will not be living up to the sacrifice of our first parents (Munduruku, 2018, p. 1).

In Roraima, several wise men tell stories in their own languages about the origins of their people, their communities, the names of the mountains, the streams and the people. The videos produced with funding from the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN), edited and subtitled in indigenous languages, Portuguese and English, allow us to access these worlds. It is also possible to learn about the landscape of each narrator's community.

It is important to remember that there are speakers of the Wapichana and Macuxi languages in some other regions of Roraima and also in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, but in this article we focus on videos produced in the Serra da Lua region, a territory that is predominantly inhabited by Wapichana indigenous people. In this context, there are communities such as Água Boa, Wapum, and Marupá, in which practically all residents speak the Wapichana language fluently. Other communities use the indigenous language less in their daily lives, with, in the

case of Tabalascada, less than 10% of its population speaking the Wapichana language fluently.

The Wapichana language belongs to the Aruak linguistic family and is currently spoken in the Serra da Lua region by approximately 4,000 people out of a total of over 10,000 people living there. There are communities with over 90% speakers and others with less than 10%. Even though leaders, grandparents, teachers and institutions aim to strengthen the use of this ancestral language, monolingualism in Portuguese has been growing in the region. That is why it was also important to document the language and reflect on this process.

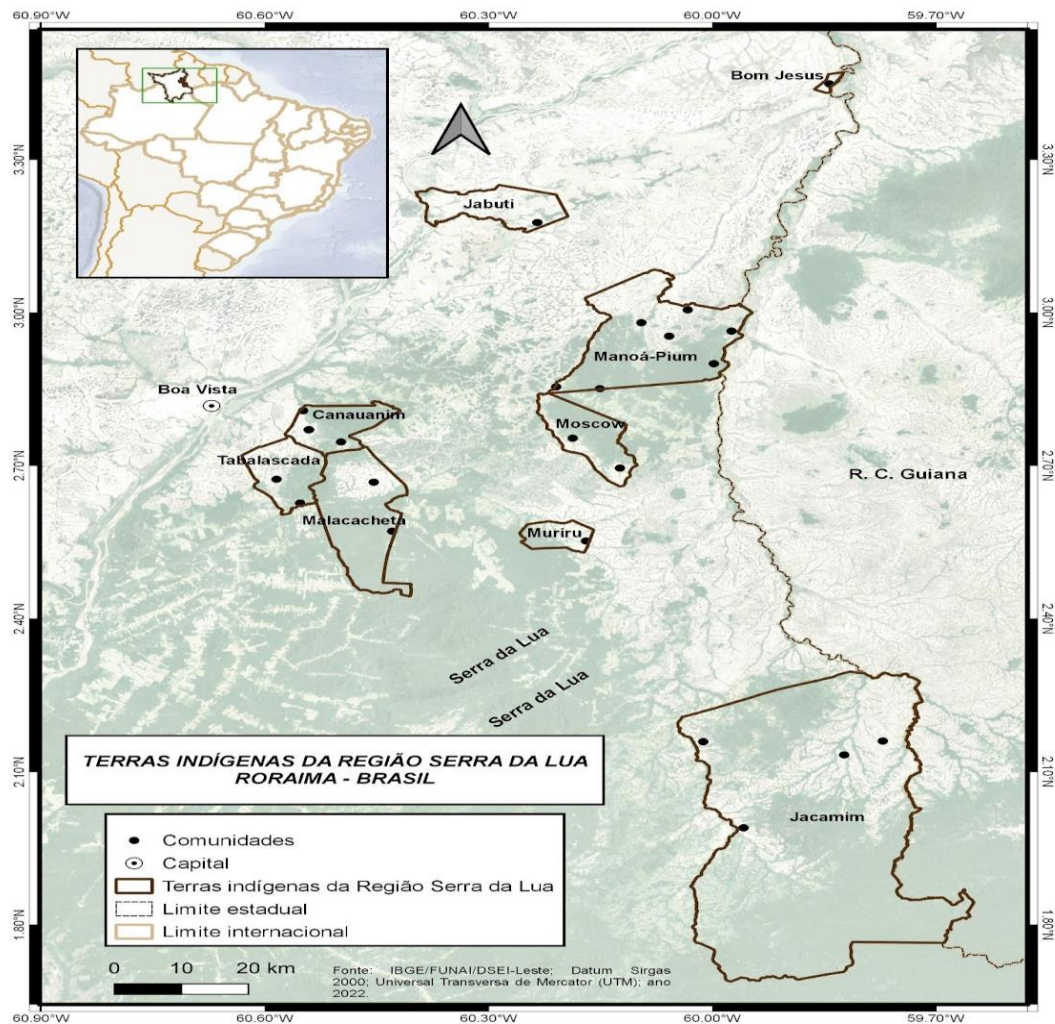
The documented videos are important oral references for the new/ancestral indigenous history that we intend to teach in universities and schools in indigenous lands, to decolonize the sources and listen to indigenous leaders. These stories highlight different relationships among beings, the territory, time and space.

In Wapichana there are interesting classifications regarding the typology of speech. When something that was lived is narrated, experienced, it is called *kuadpayzu* and when the story was not lived by the narrator, it is classified as *kutuanhauda'u'au*.

When their texts refer to their origins, they recognize the power of this ancestral word that allows the expression of memory. Cristino Wapichana (2021, p. 7) tells: "In the beginning of everything, when the sky lived nearby and everyone spoke the same language, it was a true *puri* (Magic)". In the process of documenting the Wapichana language, the objective was to honor this language and ancestral memory.

There are Wapishana concepts that make us perceive a particular epistemology/world, for example, the word *saadkariwei* means both drawing and writing. Some people call indigenous peoples agraphic, but cave paintings are ancient inscriptions that configure a type of writing. And in the case of the Wapishana, in Brazil, they began to be taught to read and write in alphabetical writing as early as 1932, in the Tabalascada community. Poetically, this coincidence in using the same word *saadkariwei* can be interpreted as the act of drawing memory with alphabetical writing.

Picture 1 – Indigenous lands in Serra da Lua Region



Source: Machado, Bethonico e Santos (2023, p. 13).

In Macuxi, *Panton* means history, but also literature, and can encompass both oral storytelling and written storytelling. The research aims to reveal these specificities that broaden our notions of literature, history and source analysis methodologies.

To contextualize the territorial scope of the research in the Serra da Lua Region, we will now show that it is located in the state of Roraima, in the municipalities of Bonfim and Cantá, and comprises a group of nine indigenous lands (*Tabalascada*, *Bom Jesus*, *Canaunim*, *Jabuti*, *Jacamim*, *Malacacheta*, *Manoá-Pium*, *Moscow* and *Muriru*), which were approved from 1982 (*Manoá-Pium*) to 2005 (*Jacamim* and *Tabalascada*). There is currently a demand for expansion of some indigenous lands. Studies are underway and the INDL Wapishana and Macuxi

research in the RSL is a reference that could be part of the dossier, contemplating the memories of the ancestors who lived in the Wapishana territory well before the invasion.

In the Wapishana language, *Amazad* means time and space in the same word. The young researcher Joice Wapishana, who collaborated with INDL, also uses *Amazad* to translate world, territory and land. Based on Wapishana epistemology, we can perceive their logic and distinctive way of expressing and classifying their world. Understanding these specificities is a way of understanding indigenous lives from perspectives that are different from Western ones.

The methodology used here was netnographic, as our starting point was the analysis of videos available on the internet, thus being a research mediated by digital technology. The main results were perceiving the relations between the documented texts and the discussions about the resistance to the use of the Wapishana language, the conceptions and processes of naming and understanding the territory.

Ferraz (2019) helps us to think about netnography when he states that, "[...] the keys that unlock the understanding of communication technologies lie in the adaptation of methodological techniques that occur through a comprehensive approach to the field of study, exploring it to understand how activities take place [...]" (Ferraz, 2019, pp. 59-60).

Netnographic research invests creatively, taking advantage of the diversity of data that the virtual environment offers. Therefore, netnography (nethnography=net+ethnography) is predominantly used for the analysis of social media (Santos; Gomes, 2013). It arises from the need for research to address the multiverses available online.

By adopting this methodological approach, from January to February 2025, we analyzed 6 videos available on the YouTube channel of the Program for the Promotion of Indigenous Languages and Cultures of Roraima (UFRR Extension). We emphasize that the selection followed the delimitation to those that mention the origin of the mountains, streams, and the Wapichana people, adopting as central categories the ideas of "memory," "ancestry," and "identity."

Our theoretical framework primarily includes works by Indigenous intellectuals² who discuss transpersonality, memory, resistance, language, and spirit, delving into their subjectivities, visions, and poetics of existence. The man/woman is the protagonist, just like a mountain range or a river. And this discussion/coexistence brings a different idea of territory than geopolitics, including other conceptions and relationships.

The first part of this article addresses the memory of the mountains, the second refers to the origin of the streams, rivers and lakes. And the third and final part analyzes the videos that narrate how the Wapichana originated and where the name of some places in their territory comes from and where the names of the indigenous communities and lands came from.

2 The Memory of The Ridges

In these ontologies, territories are vital space-times for every community of men and women; however, they are not only that, but also the space-time of interrelation with the natural world that surrounds them and is a constitutive part of them. In other words, the interrelation generates scenarios of synergy and complementarity, both for the world of men and women and for the reproduction of the rest of the other worlds that surround the human world. Within many indigenous worlds and in some Afro-descendant communities in Latin America, these material spaces manifest themselves as mountains or lakes that are understood as having life or as animated spaces (Escobar, 2016, n/p).

To speak of the memory of the ridges is to acknowledge the leading role of the mountain being, listening to his voice and the words of those who live in Serra da Lua. The very name of the state of Roraima and many other places in the region comes from the Macuxi word Roraimê, which means large blue-green mountain.

Maurício Negro, in the book *Tomoromu: a árvore do mundo*, translates the meaning of the word Roraima as "cashew mountain," "green mountain," and "mother of the winds" (Wapichana, 2021, p. 38). According to the illustrator, this name refers to an ancient geological formation (Wapichana, 2021). Thus, knowing the memory of

² Ailton Krenak (*Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo*, 2019 and *Futuro Ancestral*, 2022), Altaci Correa Rubim (interview at the VI Epilirr, 2023), Davi Kopenawa (co-authored with Albert, *A Queda do Céu*, 2015), Cristino Wapichana (*Tomoromu A Árvore do Mundo*, 2020) and Kamu Dan Wapichana (*Makunaimã Taanii Makunaimã's Gift*, 2021), Daniel Munduruku (*Literatura indígena e as novas tecnologias da memória*, 2012 and *Tecendo Memória*, 2018) and Gersem José dos Santos Luciano (Intercultural Education: Rights, Challenges and Proposals for Decolonization and Social Transformation in Brazil *Educação intercultural: direitos, desafios e propostas de descolonização e de transformação social no Brasil*, 2017).

the names and what these mountains hold is a way of connecting with our indigenous ancestry.

From Indigenous oral narratives, different interpretations of these memories and constant updates emerge. And when we refer to memory, we seek to contemplate the meaning that Munduruku (2018) works with, when he considers it interesting to remember that memory is what takes us back to the beginning of everything, to origins, to the start, to the creator; it reminds us that we are a thread in the Web of life, being only one thread. Without it, the Web unravels. Therefore, remembering this is important to give meaning to our being in the world. Memory is fundamental in shaping the body that resists (Munduruku, 2018).

We prioritize the use of indigenous languages at INDL and in our other researches, because we believe that it is mainly through them that people express the memory of these ancestral indigenous worlds. These ancestral languages are then the material of this memory that resists.

The spoken texts of the Wapichana sometimes mix languages: Portuguese, indigenous, English, both oral and written. And these heterogeneous elements (Glissant, 2005) intertwine and interpenetrate, creating unprecedented languages and arts. The Martinican anthropologist Glissant (2005) points to an impossible monolingual future and defends linguistic openness, since "[...] the human imagination needs all the languages of the world" (Glissant, 2005, p. 51).

Glissant's (2005) thought goes in the direction of his place of origin, which is an inductive "archipelago," exploring "open islands" and the unforeseen, harmonizing writing, orality, Portuguese, indigenous, and English languages, and vice versa, imprinting the unpredictable as a way of "[...] tuning in to the present in another way: poetics [...]" (Glissant, 2005, p. 107). He considers that through the traces and residues present in memory, it is possible for peoples to recompose a language, artistic, literary, and poetic manifestations. Thus, from the memory of the language and songs from the territory of origin, they create something unpredictable. (Glissant, 2005).

Indigenous languages and literature are ancestral wisdom, connecting people and spirits. From the perspective of some indigenous intellectuals such as Altaci Kokama, these are spirit languages. For the linguist, indigenous peoples are territory and are nature itself. And they show this through the language with which they

express themselves. For her, language policies are shamanic “because language is spirit. All shamans, elders who speak their languages, converse with the spirits of the forest, the woods, the rivers, in their indigenous languages and do not converse in any other language” (Rubim, 2023)³.

This awareness of the power that speech and memory hold in these ancestral yet contemporary languages reiterates the relevance of the INDL Wapichana and Macuxi research at RSL. There is a spirituality recognized by Kokama and a transcendental connection made with these languages, which is also identified by Dr. Luciano (2017), a PhD in anthropology. He speaks of the spiritual power of indigenous languages and how it is through them that peoples communicate with all beings that live in their territories, including those we call nature.

Language is one of humanity's most impressive and impactful creative abilities. It is the means by which human beings humanize each other, that is, while identifying each other, it also distinguishes them from other animals. However, this distinction does not in any way imply hierarchy, since in terms of communication or language capacity, all beings are equal. Thus, for the Baniwa it is also the means by which they communicate with other beings in the world and with the world itself, since for them, communication between beings is the secret to the balance of the cosmic world. A shortage of game, for example, can be the result of a lack or poor communication between shamans and the superior spirits of the hunt. Communication, language and dialogue are, therefore, essentially of the spiritual and transcendental order (Luciano, 2017, p. 296).

Based on these ideas, it is urgent to understand that all languages are necessary and that one is as important as the other. Gersen Baniwa recognizes the power that indigenous languages have to communicate not only with what we call human beings, but also with all these beings that are treated by indigenous peoples as people as well. And we also realize that language has the power to make these crossings and contribute to the balance and well-being of all peoples.

Wapichana elders told us that many shamans live forever on top of the mountains, most of them under a tree. And some stories say that they dance on top of the mountains. In the Jacamim community, for example, according to Mr. Anastácio, the shamans live and dance on top of the mountain, where they hold parties and dance, which is why one of the mountains in the Jacamim Indigenous Land was named Kunayapkary Diykyl - Dance Mountain.

³ Lecture at the *VI Encontro de Professores e Intérpretes de Línguas Indígenas de Roraima – VI Epilirr* (04/10/2023).

Anastácio narrated in the video that his grandfather, the shaman, said: “When we get sick, the beast can take our soul to a good place, take everyone’s soul to dance on top of the mountain” (Machado, 2024, p. 78). He also said that in some cases people get sick and the shaman pats leaves and manages to cure them, bringing the souls back to life.

In the same indigenous land, there are many mountains and stories, among them, those of the Muriru Indigenous Land, where the mountains and streams also “speak”. The Pakaradykyu- suitcase mountain, a name that probably came from the relationship of the Atoraiu and Wapishana with the invaders, describes the shape that is seen in the distance, outside the demarcation of the indigenous land, but which is part of the symbolic Wapishana territory, highlighting the difference between the demarcated land and the much larger territory that was part of the Wapishana world well before the separation between Brazil and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

Picture 2 – *Pakaradykyu* – Serra da Mala – Indígena Land of Muriru



Source: Machado, personal archive (2014).

The Wapishana call the region where a moon-shaped light appears on top of the mountain range *Serra da Lua* (Moon Mountain). The video *Kayzyd daya’u*- About Serra da Lua⁴ explains how many people fell ill from that light, which is the eye of the beast that lived there. Charles Mateus's narrative tells that at that time they did not

⁴ <https://youtu.be/QzsNAI532yU?si=dkQ04iYCIsoUsnul> (with subtitles in Wapichana) and <https://youtu.be/GRg-NIHk5to?feature=shared> (with subtitles in portuguese).

know how to make arrows, but there was a *Tainamai* tree that looked like a *murici* tree. Its branch became the weapon with which the *Atoraiu* and *Wapishana* defended themselves from the beast, with the help of the shaman and with the arrows from the tree they planted on top of the mountain.

At that time, the *Atoraiu* fled their homeland and came here to live under the mountain. At that time, they didn't have a name yet. They were living there and their pursuers were looking for them, but they didn't know where they were living. They were living under the mountain, hunting, farming, and that's how they were living, but one day a sickness with severe pain came upon them. They became ill and didn't know what the illness was or why they became ill. One night, they were looking at this mountain and they saw, on top of the mountain, a light like the moon. They thought about it for a long time: "What is that?" They didn't know, but their relatives died, one after the other. [...] Another night, at midnight, this beast's eye appeared again, like the moon, like the new moon. It shone on top of the mountain. The *Atoraiu* didn't know what to do. There were no shamans with them at that time. One day, a shaman appeared, a shaman who knew how to cure the sick. He arrived there and found them very sick. - I'm going to see what it is! Then he looked at these sick people and said to them: - Do you see the thing here on top of the mountain? - We saw it. - How do you see this eye? - Like the rolled up moon, like the crescent moon. - So... it's the one who's sending the disease that's going to finish you off. [...] They say that at that time, they didn't use arrows, they didn't know how to make arrows, but there was a tree like the *murici*, called *tainamai*. It's with this tree that the *Atoraiu* get strength. When they fought with other people, they would sharpen this *murici*, the *murici* branch. And the person would fall right there, already dead. [...] Soon the shaman told them: - I'm going to help you. After this, you'll never get sick again! But there were few of them left, they were already dying. The shaman worked on this creature, no one knows what it is. But he has a house on top of the mountain, in the big hole, under the rock and in the rock. He put his head under the ground, tied it tightly, no one knows with what! Only the shaman knows. Then he locked him in the rock, so he wouldn't leave with the *Atoraiu*. - Now it's done, the beast will never finish you off (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 19).

Some say that there are no more *Atoraiu* in Roraima and that this language is no longer spoken in Brazil, but those who live in *Serra da Lua* still call themselves *Atoraiu* speakers. However, they are isolated people, with no one to talk to. We identified one person in *Muriru*, another in *Marupá*, and heard the story above, which proves the presence of *Atoraiu*. In this way, these existences are confirmed and the territory is named and makes sense to the *Wapichana*.

There are constant confusions and misunderstandings related to narratives that claim the non-existence or that confuse names and meanings. Francisco Augustinho de Oliveira told about the origin of the name of a mountain range, a stream and the community at the same time, the territory in which he lives: "the *Namachi din* (jaguar), has his mountain range there called *Jacamim* Mountain, where

there was a jaguar, called *Namachi din*” (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 24).

And he continued:

For a long time now, they have called it *Namacchiwe'u*, but it is not a bird, it is a jaguar that the ancients used to see, and heard its roar, in the past its roar was still heard. And then we started to grow, and then they left, I don't know where this jaguar went. And that is how they called our community of *Jacamim*, they thought it was a bird, but it was a jaguar, and that is the story of the *Jacamim* community (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 25)⁵.

Before watching the video with Francisco's narrative, other versions of Jacamim as the name of the mountain range, the stream, the community and the indigenous land, only mentioned the bird, without mentioning the “jaguar that the ancients used to see”. The Wapishana story is told by them, revealing details that deserve to be contemplated and not forgotten.

In Roraima, we have only two distinct seasons: summer and winter. And in the winter, it rains a lot, especially in the mountains, when the rivers and lakes sometimes fill up and sometimes disappear. The Wapishana world is also revealed through the waters of the rivers, streams and lakes.

3 Origin of igarapés, rivers and the lakes in the Serra da Lua Region

We are definitely not the same, and it is wonderful to know that each one of us here is different from the other, like constellations. The fact that we can share this space, that we are traveling together, does not mean that we are the same; it means exactly that we are capable of attracting each other through our differences, which should guide our life path. Having diversity, not this idea of humanity following the same protocol. Because up until now, this has only been a way of homogenizing and taking away our joy of being alive. (Ailton Krenak)

Inspired by the words of Krenak (2019), we fight against the homogenizing pressure that falls upon the use of indigenous languages, oral narratives, and other ancestral knowledge. Listening to a constellation of Wapichana women further strengthened this struggle, because gender equality also needs to happen. Mother Earth is a feminine reference for so many cultures; thus, the connection of women with these beings and meanings is very strong.

We listened to Izabel Wapichana, when she said that the *Igarapé Jacaré* was named that way because many alligators live there. The wise *Wapichana* showed in

⁵ <https://youtu.be/lffMenZc3h4?feature=shared> (With subtitles in Wapichana) and <https://youtu.be/SzF6Gt6mVIE?feature=shared> (With subtitles in Portuguese).

the video how there is also a lot of the *muriru* plant there. According to her, this plant keeps the water very fresh, fills the *Igarapé* with fish, alligators and even *sucurijus*.

[...] *muriru*, we *Wapichana* call it *wararab*. This lake is the place for alligators, there are a lot of alligators here, that's why there are a lot of *muriru* too. The alligator lives here, professor, that's why there are a lot of fish, there are a lot of fish because there are alligators, and this here is food for the alligator and the fish too, it makes the water very cold for the fish, that's what the elders used to say about this *muriru* (Machado, Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 32)⁶.

I had never seen a *muriru* before, they explained to me what it was like, and it was important to go to the stream and see the plant up close and understand how the shade it provides keeps the water cool and attracts fish, alligators and even *sucurijus*. This also helped us understand the name of the community that was already mentioned here.

The narrator's speech above highlights how important it is to listen to and disseminate women's voices. The protagonism of indigenous women (chiefs, teachers, leaders of organizations, researchers, writers, narrators) is increasingly growing and contributing to the emergence of a less sexist and violent world.

Scholars call these languages indigenous, ancestral, originary, and maternal. Therefore, women have a crucial role in sowing ancestral knowledge. In this way, the voices/words of indigenous women resonate and strengthen our collective struggles.

Younger leaders than Izabel also collaborated in the research. Professor Susete Wapichana explained that the stream that gives its name to her community is called Strong Wind, because, especially in the month of October, the wind passes by and takes the roofs of the houses.

That's why in Wapichana we call it Strong Wind. Nearby there is also a stream called Wind Water, in *Wapichana* it is called *Away kuwary punaa*. So that's what happens every year here, that's why *São Domingos* is called Strong Wind (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 33)

The community that is now called *São Domingos* was formerly called *Vento Forte*. We can see that the wind is the protagonist in this narrative, an element of nature, like plants and animals, that is an agent and directly influences the construction of meaning and what happens in the territory.

The naming processes in Portuguese, with saints' names, brought marks of the colonization experienced in the region. There are some names of streams that

⁶ <https://youtu.be/G4NeKt9HZxc?feature=shared> (subtitles in Portuguese) and <https://youtu.be/SboY1tkA6Qc?feature=shared> (subtitles in Wapichana).

were born from a miscommunication of the colonization as well, such as *Moscou*. The narrator Charles Mateus explained:

There is no big river in this place, only *buriti* palm groves, Angel Lake, small floodplains, and you can find different types of fish and many *mussums* in the water. During the dry season, the *Wapichana* drink water from the well, and many *mussums* are found in the well, and the *Wapichana* have another name for it: the *mussum*. One day a visitor arrived, visiting his relatives. He didn't know how to speak Portuguese properly. His relatives were fishing, and they only spoke Portuguese: - This is where we fish and its name is *muçum*, they said to him in Portuguese. So they went back, they caught many fish, and they arrived back home. Soon the visitor said: - Yes, there are many fish in *Moscou*. He tried to say *muçum* in Portuguese, and his relatives smiled. - Good - now they said: - Now never again, the name of our place will be *Mussum*. From that day on, the name will be *Mocou*, and so the name became big in the white people's notebooks until today (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 34).

In Charles's speech, the passage "it became big in the white people's notebooks" highlights the complex role of writing and documents that non-indigenous people made and make. To this day, that is how they call the place.

The stories of the waters, beyond the great rivers, move knowledge and senses. They are grandparents, ancestors of the *Wapichana*, the *Krenak* and other indigenous peoples and live above and below the earth.

Ailton Krenak (2022), in the book *Futuro Ancestral* (Ancestral Future), refers to rivers and waters as sources of life and also as grandparents. "It doesn't matter if we are above or below the Rio Grande; we are everywhere, because our ancestors, the mountain-rivers, are in everything, and I share with you the uncontainable richness of living these gifts" (Krenak, 2022, p. 8). Krenak has traveled the world, paying attention to the waters:

I paid more attention to the waters than to the urban buildings that overlook them — because all our human settlements, in Europe, Asia, Africa, everywhere, have always been attracted by rivers. The river is a path within the city, which allows movement, although people have long since decided to settle in cities (Krenak, 2022, p. 8).

For Ailton Krenak (2022), rivers are and call life to them. But at the same time, the author denounces our distance, and states that we need to listen to the rivers again. The videos with the stories of the rivers are a way of getting to know what those who still listen to the river communicate to us.

This civilizing idea. We have always been close to water, but it seems that we have learned very little from the speech of rivers. This exercise of

listening to what watercourses communicate has produced in me a kind of critical observation of cities, especially large ones, spreading over the bodies of rivers in such an irreverent way that we have almost no respect for them anymore (Krenak, 2022, p. 8-9).

Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima, is also experiencing this situation of forgetting and stopping to hear the voices and names of rivers in indigenous languages. When Krenak refers to cities, he criticizes citizenship and coined "*Florestania*". According to him, *Florestania* can be thought of as "[...] a new field of claiming rights", in which, in relation to the idea of citizenship, the people of the forest stated that "[...] they wanted the fluidity of the river, the continuity of the forest" (Krenak, 2022, p. 75-77):

[...] the statement florestania was born in a regional context, at a very active moment in the social struggle of the people who live in the forest [...] they realized that what they wanted was not to be confused with citizenship – it would be a new field for claiming rights (Krenak, 2022, p. 75).

The member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters referred to a movement in defense of rivers, the forest and the lives of all beings that live there. "Women, children, men, people of all ages" (Krenak, 2022, p. 77), called by the author as subjects of rights, empowered and resilient: "[...] when they arrived to make the colonization lines, those who stood by Chico Mendes's side stood up [...] they organized a peaceful resistance to the State's actions" (Krenak, 2022, p. 76). In the narrative of indigenous authorship, there is mention of their wisdom and courage,

[...] they stood between the trees and the chainsaws, blocking the paths of those who arrived to make demarcations and preventing the urban finger [...] from pointing out ends within the forest. They did not want stakes or lots, they wanted the fluidity of the river, the continuity of the forest (Krenak, 2022, p. 77).

Thus, for a long time, the forest peoples have acted from the perspective of defending the forest and their worlds. Krenak (2022) attributes the struggle in defense of diversity as the only way to continue living and, according to him, "[...] only in this way is it possible to conjugate mundizar, this verb that expresses the power to experience other worlds, that opens itself to other worldviews and manages to imagine pluriverses[...]" (Krenak, 2022, p. 83).

Water, the source of life, is what the author calls the "river-us," but most of the population disrespects it, as happened in the Mariana tragedy. For Krenak (2022), people need to listen again to the music and whisper of the waters.

This river-grandfather of ours, called by the whites the Sweet River [...]. On silent nights we hear its voice and speak to our river-music. We like to thank it, because it gives us food and this wonderful water, broadens our worldviews and gives meaning to our existence. At night, its waters run fast and noisy, their whisper runs down the rocks and forms rapids that make music and, at that time, the rock and the water involve us in such a wonderful way that they allow us to conjugate the we: we-river, we-mountains, we-land (Krenak, 2022, p. 9).

Krenak (2022) also refers to the Amazon River as one that welcomes so many other rivers and returns water to the sky, which in turn returns rain to the earth. For him, the waters of the sky and the rivers mix.

It is fascinating to think that the great river that gives its name to the Amazon Basin originates from a small stream of water in the Andes mountain range to form that aquatic world. It carries many other rivers, but also the water that the forest itself gives to the clouds, and that the rain returns to the earth, in this a wonderful cycle in which the waters of the rivers are those of the sky, and the waters of the sky are those of the river (Krenak, 2022, p. 10).

Thus, “watercourses are capable of traveling long distances, finding new paths, diving into the earth and — why not? — flying.” In this way, the people of the waters listen to the spirits that give life and meaning to their world.

Further up from *Cruzeiro do Sul*, in the middle *Juruá*, is the territory of the *Ashaninka* relatives. [...] Our relatives who live there on the border between Peru and Colombia live in floating villages, built on platforms over the water. They are a people who need living water, the spirits of the water present, the poetry that it provides to life and, for this reason, they are called people of the waters (Krenak, 2022, p. 10).

Krenak (2022) contrasts the greed of those who live in cities with those who live on and from the water. Ancient peoples, who speak ancestral languages, continue to live on the water without the feeling of being better than it. They know how to listen to the rivers.

On Lake Titicaca, there is an ancient people who also live on platforms, in the water. There, in that space, everyone is born and dies, small animals are raised, and children play. They live on and from the water, this power of life that has been shaped by the noisy presence of urban humans, who always want more and, if necessary, build *Belo Monte*, *Tucuruí*, and build dams in every basin to satisfy the infinite thirst of their cities, home to those who no longer know how to live in the waters and forests (Krenak, 2022, p. 11).

Unfortunately, those who kill rivers are unaware of these stories. We need to listen to these voices of nature and indigenous leaders. Reading works with texts written by indigenous authors is essential.

And here I am constantly surrounded by the sound of water, including underground rivers, which makes me think of the book *Los ríos profundos*, by the great Peruvian writer José María Arguedas. In it, the spirit of the waters cuts through valleys and mountains, bringing stories and wonders wherever it goes (Krenak, 2022, p. 11).

The life of the rivers is our life. The cycle of water and animal and plant life governs the Wapishana sociocultural calendar. For example, there are types of potatoes cultivated by them that dry out completely in the summer and sprout again in the winter. And bodies of water have a great influence on this cycle.

I am intrigued by the possibility that some of these bodies of water will survive us without suffering the humiliations and fractures to which others have been subjected. For, it must be said, these rivers that I invoke here are being mutilated: each of them has its body torn by some damage, be it by mining, by the undue appropriation of the landscape (Krenak, 2022, p. 11-12).

Surviving to tell these stories of our grandparents and others is the goal of most indigenous peoples around the world. In Brazil, the Temporal Framework has been threatening and continues to appear in new formats, ways of invading and threatening these people who protect the waters and forests and should be heard, read and respected.

4 Videos that narrate the origins of Wapichana and some indigenous peoples of Brazil

Many INDL videos address topics that fit into the discussion of origin: *Kyb Baara Zy'ykau-* Drawing on Stone⁷; *Marupá Daya'u-* About Marupá⁸; *Dunuzuinhau Kasarai Kadyz kid-* Types of Indigenous Remedies⁹; History of Clóvis Ambrósio (1, 2, 3, 4, 5¹⁰, 6¹¹ and 7¹²). Thus, the words of a young teacher, a braider, a healer, and a coordinator of tuxauas (chiefs), generously teach us about the ancestry of their territory. The Wapichana leader, who has served several times as general coordinator of the tuxauas of the Serra da Lua Region, recounts how the demarcation of the Indigenous Lands took place:

⁷ <https://youtu.be/7nBSYogfXRE> and <https://youtu.be/lmXzkDxw3VA>

⁸ <https://youtu.be/F2WLZPGNFvE> and <https://youtu.be/3aAj1wCYwGY>

⁹ https://youtu.be/_INgntxDe5U

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/Df0GgGbNa1Q> and [Histórias de Clóvis Ambrósio parte 5](#)

¹¹ <https://youtu.be/96Znqe175U4> and https://youtu.be/N3pc_TMN0VE

¹² https://youtu.be/QUIR_YKvxHA

In *Serra da Lua*, it was demarcated into islands. *Bom Jesus* only has 859 hectares, so it is the smallest land we have. In 1987, we created a legally representative organization, the Indigenous Council of Roraima was created, I was part of this organization as a member, there were 11 of us at that time, *Macuxi*, *Wapichana* and *Taurepang* (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 23).

The categories of territory and indigenous land are different and what was approved is clearly much smaller than the islands mentioned by Ambrósio. One of the regional coordinators who also took on this role more than once was Simeão Messias. We quote his words below:

[...] we are aware of what we are saying, because where we walk in the mountains there are centuries-old trees and cuts made by the *balata*, by the *balateiro*, who cut them down to extract the milk to make rubber. So that's a bit like our companions. Comments like that, we walk to say that it really is our place and our ancestors were there. So it proves so much because the centuries-old trees are there. Those cuts where the *balateiros* cut them, that's a bit of the demarcation [...] (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 31).

The narrator made references to the marks of colonization, with the work of the *balateiro* indigenous people and also what proves the extension of the territory, in the case above, the *Malacacheta* Indigenous Land.

The Wapichana have a strong connection with their territory and they often name it after the people who live there. Anastácio Mundico Terêncio explained why his community was named *Chimerid*:

We call our community *Marupá*, it is the name of a tree, it is there throughout the forest, there are many of them. That is why we brought the sapling, and now it is big, and so we show which one is called *Marupá*, this one here. And so our grandchildren will know why we call it by this name. It is good for making boards, when it is closed, it should be placed in water, let it stay for 2 weeks or a week, and that way it will not spoil (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 26).

Archaeology studies material references and these are important markers in the delimitation of ancestral indigenous territories. Young researcher Arlene Wapichana spoke about the rock engravings we visited in the *Jacamim* Indigenous Land:

On this stone we are seeing how they made the designs to make it look beautiful, these others here are rounded, these other round ones have two lines in the middle, here is another one, here is another one that was braided, another one the same way, another one here too. We are here looking at the image of the stones (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 26).

In addition to archaeological evidence, oral history provides further information about their origins. Charles Wapichana narrated his version of the origin of the Wapichana. They lived in the sky and descended to earth through a straw braid they made. Historically, the Wapichana are known for being excellent braiders. Their first arrow caught a curassow. Perhaps that is why one of the translations of the people's name is "descendants of black", because the curassow is black. We have included the words of the first Wapichana language teacher in Brazil, Charles Mateus, in the rest of this article:

In the past, the Wapichana's place was in the sky, but they knew about the existence of the earth. At that time, there was an old hunter and archer named *Katam*. And up in the sky, he had already killed all kinds of hunt. One day, he went hunting and saw a huge bird perched on a tall tree. So he went slowly, as far as his arrow could reach it. He shot it and managed to hit it, but the bird carried his arrow and fell far away. But he managed to see where it fell and so, all happy, he ran straight there. He arrived and didn't find what he had shot with his arrow, just a huge hole. And he looked inside and saw that there were different types of wildlife there. At that time, the ground of the earth was not very far from the sky. Soon, *Katam* thought: "I'm not going to tell anyone." So he went and cut some buriti palm eyes and braided them long, then tied them to the foot of a huge tree and threw them down until he found the ground. Then he took his bow and arrow and descended, braiding a rope made of buriti palm leaves, until he reached land. And when he reached land, he saw different types of animals and birds too. He didn't know which one to shoot at and only shot a curassow. [...] Then he returned to his place in the sky. He got there and said to them [...] Let's go there! [...] Soon *Katam* thought and said to them: - Now relatives, let's make a house for us to live in (Machado; Bethonico; Santos, 2023, p. 16)¹³.

There are some indigenous narratives that tell of their origin in the sky. There is also Kopenawa Yanomami who wrote about the Fall of the Sky. Krenak talks about postponing the end of the world by telling stories. With this article we seek to contribute in this direction.

5 Closing remarks

The initiative to write the project, approve it, develop it during the Covid-19 pandemic and complete the National Inventory of Wapishana and Macuxi Linguistic Diversity in the *Serra da Lua* Region/RR would have been impossible without the demand and support of indigenous leaders. IN INDL the connection between the young researchers and their grandparents was very strong and beautiful. It's worth remembering that the criteria for selecting the researchers was suggested by

¹³ <https://youtu.be/7JeWhhgZPhg?si=0-P0G3KInqeGodDM>

Wapishana leader Clóvis Ambrósio, a strategy that worked very well for documenting the language with the natives and for strengthening Wapichana ancestral memory.

In this work, we present a reflection on the relationship between documented texts and discussions about the relationship between language, territory, literature, and history. We hope that the analysis we have conducted here can encourage continued explorations into listening to and reflecting on these relationships and research possibilities, with the aim of valuing Indigenous epistemologies based on oral narratives.

We also expect that the videos, books, and this article can contribute to indigenous schools, universities, teachers, and students. In this way, we especially hope to reach the teaching of the Wapichana language, literature, history, Portuguese, and English. We hope that, increasingly, young people with knowledge of technology will be able to document the speech of their grandparents.

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MINI BIOGRAPHY

Ananda Machado

PHD in Social History by UFRJ. Post-doctorate in Literature Studies by UFF. Professor at the Indigenous Land Management Course, at the Post-graduates Programs in: Languages, in Education in the Amazon and Professional in History tuition, at UFRR. Researcher PQ CNPQ, coordinator for the Research Group of Indigenous, African and Caribbean Literature and for the LEELLI-PPGL-UFRR.

E-mail: ananda.machado@ufrj.br

Translation by **Clarice Machado Piragibe**