

2025

Issue Theme: Oral History in a Digital and Audiovisual World — Rio de Janeiro

Orality and Image Among The *NOKE KO'Í* (KATUKINA) Of The Western Amazon

Andréa Casa Nova Maia and Wladimyr Sena Araújo

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), andreach.bh@gmail.com

*Translated into English by Andréa Casa Nova Maia

Recommended Citation

Maia, Andréa Casa Nova, and Araújo, Wladimyr Sena (2022) "Orality and Image Among The *NOKE KO'Í* (KATUKINA) Of The Western Amazon," *Words and Silences*: Vol. #12, Article #1. Available at:
[\[https://ioha.org/journal/articles/orality-and-image-among-the-noke-koi-katukina-of-the-western-amazon/\]](https://ioha.org/journal/articles/orality-and-image-among-the-noke-koi-katukina-of-the-western-amazon/)

Words and Silences is the Digital Edition Journal of the [International Oral History Association](https://ioha.org/). It includes articles from a wide range of disciplines and is a means for members of the oral history community to share projects and current trends from around the world.

Online ISSN 2222-4181

This article has been brought to you for free and open access on ioha.org – it has been accepted for inclusion in *Words and Silences* following a peer-review, editorially responsible process.

ORALITY AND IMAGE AMONG THE *NOKE KO'Í* (KATUKINA) OF THE WESTERN AMAZON¹

Andréa Casa Nova Maia²
Wladimyr Sena Araújo³

Key-words

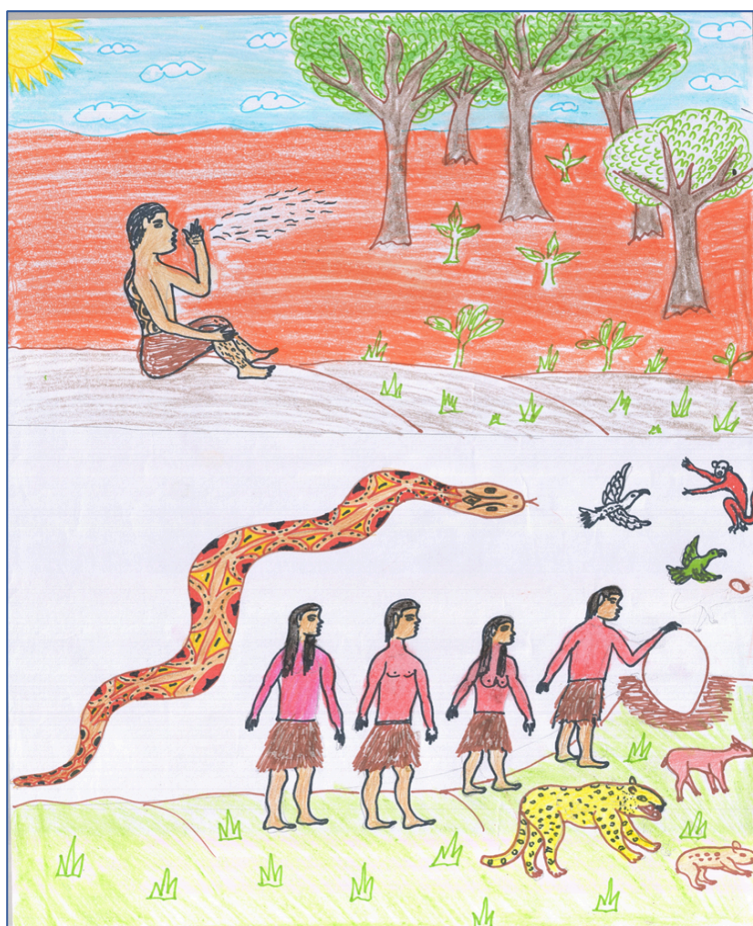
Oral History, Amazonia, Visual Culture, Image, Katukina Indigenous community

Image 1 -

¹ We would like to thank Vitória Luyza Cardoso Barbosa, whose master's research is entitled “Museu Magüta: memórias, conflitos e políticas de afirmação identitárias em fronteiras étnicas do Alto Solimões (AM) no período de Redemocratização brasileira (1985-1998) - o estudo do caso Tikuna”, which is currently underway at the Graduate Program in Social History (PPGHIS) at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Andréa Casa Nova Maia, for her collaboration in gathering sources for this article.

² PhD. Professor of Brazilian Contemporary History at the History Institute of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

³ PhD. Anthropologist and post-PhD researcher at the Social History Graduate Program of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).



Author: Rivaldo Rosa da Silva Katukina. *Private Collection.*

INTRODUCTION

The Campinas Katukina Indigenous Land (IL), home to the Noke Ko'í (Katukina Pano) people, is located near the BR-364 highway, 66 km from the administrative headquarters of Cruzeiro do Sul, Acre. The I.L. covers an area of 326,240 km² according to 2022 data from the National Indian Foundation⁴ (FUNAI) and its population is made up of 798 indigenous people, 392 of whom are female and 406 male, according to the same year's data from the Secretariat of Indigenous Health/Special Indigenous Health District (SESAI/DSEI). Below, images 2, 3, and 4 geographically illustrate the territory occupied by the Katukina Pano, respectively: Acre in the traditional division of the Brazilian map; the division of the state's municipalities, with emphasis on the city of Cruzeiro do Sul; and the state's indigenous lands, with emphasis on the Campinas Katukina IL.

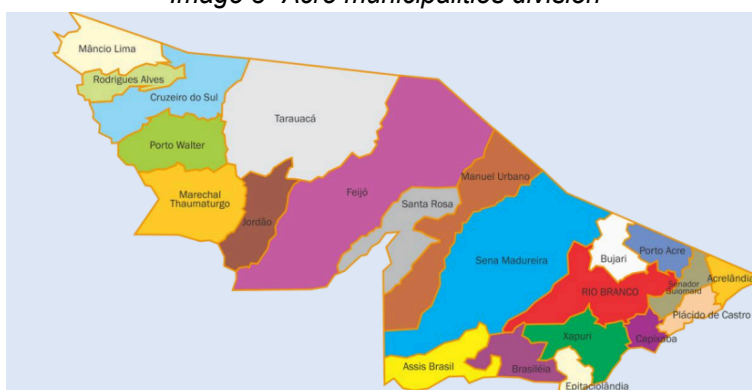
⁴ The organization's name was changed to the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples in January 2023.

Image 2 - Geographical location of Acre in Brazil



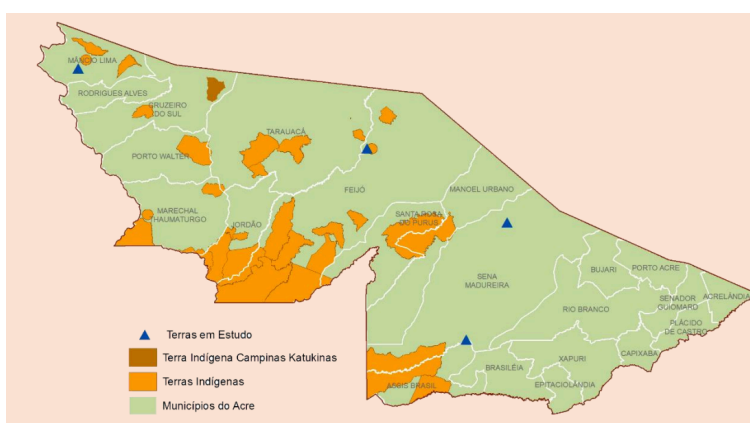
Source: IBGE (2007)

Image 3 -Acre municipalities division



Source: Portal Gov.br

Image 4 - Map of Indigenous Lands in Acre available on the Katukina Atlas



Source: Funai (2023), IBGE (2016)

The *Noke Ko'ĩ*⁵ - self-designation of the Katukina Pano⁶ which means “true people” - are an indigenous people located mainly in two indigenous lands: the Gregório River IL - shared with the Yawanawá - and located in Acre; and the Campinas River IL, which is located on the border between Acre and Amazonas. According to data from the Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA), they speak the Noke Vana (Katukina) language, which belongs to the Pano linguistic family. They are divided into 6 clans (Varinawa, Kamanawa, Nainawa, Waninawa, Satanawa, and Numanawa), whose criterion is unification, with no consensus on matrilineality or patrilineality. According to Góes (2009), it is preferable to say that six ethnic groups make up the Noke Ko'ĩ of the Campinas Katukina Indigenous Land and not the opposite.

Contact with non-indigenous people - also known as “whites” - took place from the end of the 19th century and also in the 20th century. The first contacts were not friendly, as the Noke Ko'ĩ were often constantly on the move due to the so-called “correries,” raids carried out by Brazilian rubber tappers whose aim was to eliminate the indigenous populations to free up the rubber plantations. These episodes led to the dispersal of the Noke Ko'ĩ, whose oral memory of this moment in the history of the ethnic group carries with it the sadness and horror of the memories of the elders who had their bodies raped and who passed on this memory to the younger ones. Subsequently, the indigenous themselves began to work for the rubber company, whose impacts on the preservation of their traditional ways of life are manifold. From the moment they entered the rubber plantations, they started to acquire new habits and undergo changes in their social organization.

TIME AND MEMORY: MYTH IS HISTORY

The Katukina consider the following to be historical moments: I) the time when they lived in a mythical hole (they were souls) and, with the mythical alligator (jarakawati), crossed the Solimões river - Amazon; II) the time they went through “correries”; III) when they were forced to work in the rubber plantations for rubber bosses; IV) the highway's time (BR-364). All these times are articulated and are taken up in practices and representations of the present time. The present time of this people is directly related to the extent of memory. According to research produced by the Indigenous

⁵ There are variations in the spelling of the ethnic name such as “Noke Kuin” and “Noke Ko'ĩ”.

⁶ The Katukina Pano differ from the Katukina of Biá, who call themselves Tükuna.

Component Studies (ECI)

In Western societies, mythical and sacred times are presented separately from historical time. For the Noke Koï, like other indigenous peoples, the perception of times is intertwined, because this is how they understand their existence. Therefore, the ancient stories are a set of narratives whose expressive meanings describe the origin of the people, their beliefs, and traditions. These narratives don't lose the connection between the ancestral past and the present (ECI, 2022 apud ATLAS DA TERRA INDÍGENA CAMPINAS KATUKINA, 2023, p. 2).

In most cases, until they made contact with white people, indigenous peoples were unaware of the chronological and linear forms of time present in Western society. According to Daniel Munduruku, in an interview with Revista Cenarium, in general, “indigenous peoples have a conception that time is circular, like the cycles of nature. They don't see time as something linear, but rather as something that feeds itself, unfolding and projecting itself forward” (REVISTA CENARIUM, 2024). This means that the past belongs to the ancestral memory that shapes the identity of each indigenous individual and the present refers to the moment that these peoples experience most intensely. Each person has a routine in which the present is the maximum expression of their temporality. The longing for the future is a Western construct based on the time of the clock, of production, of the accumulation of material wealth; in which happiness is always a horizon to be reached. For indigenous peoples, however, there is traditionally nothing more important than the present.

However, the presence of the future in the discourse of indigenous peoples is becoming increasingly frequent. This is because the way Western society has historically treated nature and its relationship with the peoples of the forest has a direct impact on the possibility of a future. In this sense, “the future is here and now” (KRENAK, 2020a, p. 47) because it is in the present that possibilities for ways of life can be rebuilt and rethought to guarantee the existence of a future and not annihilate plural existences. While hegemonic society worries about what is to come in an incessant search for a horizon that never arrives, indigenous peoples understand that:

If there is a future to be considered, that future is ancestral, because it was already here. I like to think that all those we can invoke as

becoming are our companions on the journey, even if they are immemorial, since the passage of time ends up becoming a noise in our sensitive observation of the planet (KRENAK, 2022, p. 11)

In this sense, for indigenous peoples, the intertwining of past-present-future follows a cyclical notion of temporality in which waiting for the future risks losing the perception of the present, the here and now, which can be acted upon, based on references from the past, to make the future possible. The cyclical time of indigenous peoples shows that the future depends on the present, which in turn is shaped by the past. In that regard, to look to the future for answers to present problems is to make it impossible for the future itself to exist. In this sense, only the references to ancestral indigenous memory based on the idea that nature is the support of existence can be used to think of a future. According to Ailton Krenak, human beings who think of themselves as individuals detached from nature are doomed to their failure.

For a long time, we have been lulled into thinking that we are humanity. In the meantime - while the Wolf is not around⁷ - we have become alienated from this organism we are a part of, the Earth, and we have come to think it is one thing and we are another: the Earth and humanity. I don't see where there is something that isn't nature. Everything is nature. The cosmos is nature. Everything I can think of is nature.

These ancestral knowledges, which are invocations of new ways of coexisting, are passed down from generation to generation through orality and are fundamental to the subjective existence of indigenous peoples. In the words of Davi Kopenawa,

I was born in this forest and have always lived in it. Today, my children and grandchildren grow up in it. That's why my words are those of a true Yanomami. They are words that remained with me in solitude after the death of my elders. They are words that the spirits gave me in dreams and also words that came to me listening to the white people's slander about us. They are firmly rooted in the bottom of my chest. These are the words that I would like to make heard, now, with the help of a white man who can make them heard by those who don't know our language (KOPENAWA; ALBERT, 2015, p. 73-74).

For a long time, the most traditional historiography considered agraphic peoples to be “peoples without history” or “prehistoric”, based on the idea that “history” comprises the period when societies with writing were in force. From this point of view, oral memory societies were also considered pre-logical because, since they did

⁷ Krenak refers to a Brazilian children's song called "Let's Play in The Forest While The Wolf is Not Around".

not master writing, they could not produce knowledge (FREIRE, 2008). Nevertheless, long debates since the 19th century have recognized oral tradition as a source of knowledge, so that the distance between letter and word is attenuated. In this sense, knowledge is independent of writing and, therefore, indigenous peoples are holders of ancestral knowledge that can suspend the sky⁸.

Indigenous knowledges, however, are not immune to historically constructed social and ethnic relations. Historian E.P. Thompson emphasized the importance of considering the historicity of culture since culture is a historical, dynamic, and flexible product. In this way, cultural structures influence the practices of individuals, but should not be recognized as chains that imprison and prevent subjects from acting in a certain way that does not conform to “traditional customs.” These notions are important for later thinking about how the inauguration of the BR-364 highway and the transmission line affected the way the Noke Ko’i came to understand time in a way that is different from that elaborated and hitherto consolidated by ancestral memory.

It's worth pointing out that the indigenous peoples of the Western Amazon generally don't distinguish between myth and history. The ancient stories that make up the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples are a fundamental part of their ontological and cosmological composition. The notions of “myth” as a fanciful narrative cannot be attributed to indigenous peoples - and, in this case, to the Noke Ko’i - because their memorial narratives are an expression of their truth, their past, their present, and their future. The way Western historical science has treated knowledge as true only when mediated by the scientific methods of the Western canon is incompatible with indigenous peoples' ways of knowing, feeling, and experiencing the world.

Through their cosmogony, the Noke Ko’i of the Campinas Katukina Indigenous Land

⁸ The expression “suspending the sky” is related to Yanomami ontology, which links the fall of the sky to their oral memory. Davi Kopenawa Yanomami says that this once happened and the forest we know today was once the sky that collapsed. The inhabitants of that ancient forest, in turn, were thrown underground. According to the shaman, the sky is falling again, ever closer, under the constant threat of shattering over our heads thanks to the threats of white people to the lives not only of the forest, but also of the indigenous peoples. The urgent challenge is to prevent the destruction of multiple worlds and preserve the richness of differences. In the words of Ailton Krenak, we need to “postpone the end of the world”.

relate that at the beginning of everything, these people inhabited a sacred hole called Maroke, whose top was covered by a spider web veil, in which the first maloca existed. It was from this hole that the Noke Ko'í people were taken by Kapnotxari, the great creator spirit. They were spirit and with their departure they became matter.

Image 5 - Emergence of the Noke Ko'í people according to their indigenous cosmology



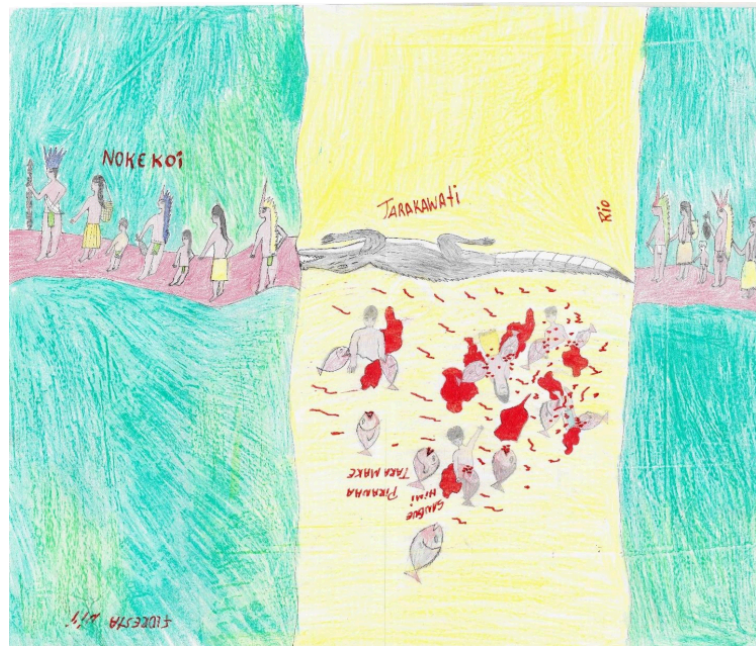
Author: unknown

Source: *Atlas of the Campinas Katukina Indigenous Land* (2023)⁹

After climbing out of the hole, the Noke Ko'í began their migratory journey, which according to the people's origin story is linked to the primordial tragedy in which the crossing of the Solimões River is marked by the revenge of an alligator (tarakawati) that had offered to act as a bridge for the people to cross. However, the alligator asked the Noke Ko'í not to hunt its offspring; but a Noke ko'í killed an alligator, breaking the promise. From then on, the alligator asked every Noke Ko'í to open their mouth before crossing and, when it found out who had eaten its grandchild, it turned around, letting part of the people fall into the waters of the Solimões and be devoured by piranhas. So, one part of the population crossed and the other stayed on the other side of the river, in the Amazon, and those who remained no longer wanted to cross. This narrative justifies, through ancient history, the first diaspora of these people.

⁹ The Atlas of the Campinas Katukina Indigenous Land is part of the actions of the Basic Environmental Plan of the Indigenous Component - CI-PBA, resulting from the Indigenous Component Studies - ECI, within the scope of the environmental licensing for the implementation of the 230 Kv Transmission Line (LT), Feijó - Cruzeiro do Sul section.

Image 6 - Mind Map Depicting the Crossing of the Noke Ko'í with the Help of tarakawati and the Tragedy that Occurred



Author: unknown

Source: *Atlas of the Campinas Katukina Indigenous Land* (2023)

For indigenous peoples, time is circular because it is always based on the origins of each people. Ailton Krenak believes that:

Our idea of time, our way of narrating it and seeing it as an arrow - always going somewhere - is at the root of our deception, at the root of our detachment from life. Our relatives Tukano, Desana, and Baniwa tell stories of a time before time. The Mayans and other Amerindians also have these plural narratives. They are stories from before this world existed and even allude to its duration. Being close to these narratives greatly expands our sense of being, and takes away our fear, and also our prejudice against other beings. Other beings are with us, and the recreation of the world is a possible event all the time (KRENAK, 2020a, p. 37).

Ancient and sacred stories, orality, traditional knowledge, and indigenous ontologies are fundamental to the continued existence of these peoples. These diverse narratives make up not only their histories but also their memories and identities. Understanding the world through ancient stories (because these indigenous people don't separate myth and history) is not about fantasizing, but about making sense of what is connected to being indigenous. Unfortunately, some find it difficult to

understand that this way of interpreting and understanding the world is also valid and, above all, vital for indigenous peoples. In the words of Davi Kopenawa: “Our thoughts expand in all directions and our words are old and many. They come from our ancestors. [...] That is why our memory is long and strong” (KOPENAWA; ALBERT; 2015, p. 75).

In this sense, the world can be recreated, but only based on the plurality of ways of being and existing:

Our time specializes in creating absences: of the meaning of living in society, of the very meaning of the experience of life. This generates a great deal of intolerance towards those who are still capable of experiencing the pleasure of being alive, of dancing, of singing. And there are many small constellations of people scattered around the world who dance, sing, and make it rain. The kind of zombie humanity we are being called upon to join cannot tolerate such pleasure, such enjoyment of life. So they preach the end of the world as a way of making us give up on our dreams. And my provocation about postponing the end of the world is precisely that we can always tell one more story. If we can do that, we'll be postponing the end (KRENAK, 2020, p. 13).

IMPORTANT ROLE PLAYED BY ANCIENT HISTORY

Access to the past is often mediated not by the exclusivity of experience, but by the direct experience of facts that have happened, but they only acquire meaning from other archetypal elements from different fields such as the cultural, the symbolic, and the imaginary. The relational aspect is important because it can refer to the cultural event - real or imaginary - that founded the community, which thanks to it recognizes itself, preserving the memory of its beginnings. The ancient history told by indigenous people gives access to the past. Mythology, which is ancient history in indigenous speech, ends up performing a function of conservation, but also of transmitting the past. Memory acts in a double way concerning the past: it mythologizes the past and, in turn, is mythologized by it. Memory and history are communicating vessels in a single process of reconstructing the face of the past, which not only guarantees its preservation against the ravages of time but also facilitates the possibility of transmission and translation from one generation to the next. Forest-scented history subverts the order of things, provoking re-readings of the world. How can we develop tools capable of not only rescuing them, bringing them out of the darkness, but also

interpreting them and bringing them as close to us as possible, making them shine? Today we're going to learn a little about the history of the Katukina people and, with great respect, realize the beauty of using oral tradition and the images they create to present their history, which is not separate from the myths.

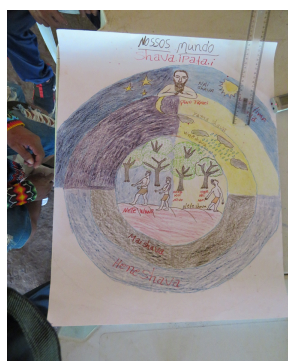
MIND MAPS - ANCIENT HISTORY AND MEMORY OF ORIGINS

Mind maps represent, in as much detail as possible, concepts and information that are normally scattered around an environment, in this case, villages, communities, and indigenous land. They therefore correspond to ideas and concepts, making it possible to give shape and context to past events, present situations, and visions of the future.



Participative workshop
Photo: Wladimir Sena Araújo

These representations can be more general, containing more comprehensive information, or they can be sectorized and developed in the form of themes, allowing for a densification of expressions and information.



Participative workshop
Photo: Wladimyr Sena Araújo

The image above is directly associated with the narrative of the emergence of the people. This narrative is the result of a reflection that the indigenous people made on the mental maps that were built.

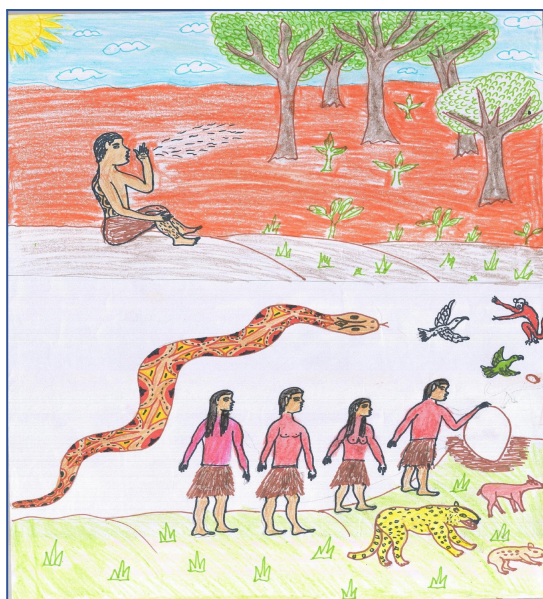
“We emerged from a cave [hole]. That's when Kapnotxari asked us to leave and look for a place to live. We came from the Solimões river. When Kapnotxari pulled us out of the hole, we came along the riverbank looking for a way across.” (Hoshonawa Noke Ko'i).



Authors: Collective construction Noke Ko'í - TI Campinas Katukina - March 2022.

“Many people were eaten by piranhas. The river was clean, but it became full of blood. When it turned, one part of the population crossed and the other stayed on the other side of the river, in the Amazon.” (Hoshonawa Noke Ko'i).

“Kapnotxari wondered how the people were going to live without food. Then (...) he took a flower from a tree and blew it into the wind, and birds appeared. He took another flower, blew on it, and then animals like monkeys, chaplains... and finally, he took another flower from another plant, said a prayer and blew on it, and then the land animals came, like deer, these animals. That's how it came about. (Saí Noke Ko'i).



Author: Rivaldo Rosa da Silva

“What are we going to drink? Because if there's no water, there won't be life on earth. So he took out a stone that he always carried and stuck it in the ground until a water spring came out, and then the water appeared. Then he spat in the water so that the water wouldn't run out, he prayed that the water would become fresh. From there, water appeared. He created the waters to maintain life on Earth” (Saí Noke Ko'i).



Author: Rivaldo Rosa da Silva

Final Considerations

Times are inscribed in each other and reappear in specific situations through symbolic representations. Everything is history, and myth is ancient history, always updated in the present. Oral tradition and images are articulated through mind maps and interview narratives, with images being a way of making storytelling possible. Narratives and images are discontinuous, with logic for the indigenous people. Images and narratives recall the past, giving the present its place of ancestry.

SOURCES

ATLAS OF THE CAMPINAS KATUKINA INDIGENOUS LAND. 2023. Available at: <https://campinaskatukina.org/biblioteca/>.

AC24HORAS. Decisão dos índios Katukinas viabiliza acesso à energia elétrica menos poluente no Vale do Juruá. 02/12/2023. Available at: <https://ac24horas.com/2023/12/03/decisao-dos-indios-katukinas-viabiliza-acesso-a-energia-eletrica-menos-poluente-no-vale-do-juru/>.

AGÊNCIAS DE NOTÍCIA DO ACRE. Governo assina termo de cooperação técnica com associação do Povo Noke Ko'i. 26/04/2024. Available at: <https://agencia.ac.gov.br/governo-assina-termo-de-cooperacao-tecnica-com-associacao-do-povo-noke-koi/>.

EIXOS. Diretores mudam posicionamento e Aneel libera linha de transmissão no Acre. 10/12/2024. Available at: <https://eixos.com.br/energia-eletrica/diretores-mudam-posicionamento-e-aneel-libera-linha-de-transmissao-no-acre/>.

G1. Após reunião entre MPF, empresa e lideranças indígenas, obras de 'linhão' de energia entre Rio Branco e Cruzeiro do Sul são retomadas. 17/04/2024. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/ac/acre/noticia/2024/04/17/apos-reuniao-entre-mpf-empresa-e-liderancas-indigenas-obras-de-linhao-de-energia-entre-rio-branco-e-cruzeiro-do-sul-sao-retomadas.ghhtml>.

IBGE. Political map of the state of Acre. 2007. Available at: <https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/index.php/biblioteca-catalogo?view=detalhes&id=66948>.

PAPO DE ÍNDIO. "A impunidade é a mãe da violência": os Katukina À margem da BR-364. Available at: https://cpiacre.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/PI_A-impunidade-e-a-mae-da-violencia-os-Katukina.pdf.

PORTAL GOV.BR. Map of Acre. n.d. Available at: https://www.gov.br/defesa/pt-br/arquivos/programa_calha_norte/pcn-estado-do-acre.pdf.

PORANTIM. A vida dos povos - os Katukina e a relação com os não-índios. 2009.

Available at: <https://www.docvirt.com/docreader.net/HemeroIndio/1703>.

VARADOURO. Atravessando terras indígenas, linha entre Rio Branco e Cruzeiro do Sul é inaugurado. 17/12/2024. Available at: <https://ovaradouro.com.br/atravessando-terras-indigenas-linhao-entre-rio-branco-e-cruzeiro-do-sul-e-inaugurado/>.

VARADOURO. Noke Ko'í denunciam impactos ambientais na construção de linha, e obras são paralisadas. 15/03/2024. Available at: <https://ovaradouro.com.br/torres-e-samaumas/>.

REVISTA CENARIUM. Daniel Munduruku desafia visão não indígena: 'Tempo é circular, como a natureza'. 2024. Available at: <https://revistacenarium.com.br/daniel-munduruku-desafia-a-visao-nao-indigena-do-tempo/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALMEIDA, Maria Regina Celestino de. Os índios na história do Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2010.

CUNHA, Manuela Carneiro da. Índios no Brasil: história, direitos e cidadania. São Paulo: Claro Enigma, 2012.

DELGADO, Rafael Coll *et al.* Mudança da paisagem amazônica na área do Projeto de Assentamento Dirigido Santa Luzia, em Cruzeiro do Sul, AC.

FERREIRA, Fernando, A construção da BR-364 de Rio Branco a Cruzeiro do Sul - Acre: sonhos, desilusões e desafios dos viajantes da estrada. *Das Amazônias*, Rio Branco, v. 6, n. 2, p. 51–67, 2023.

KRENAK, Ailton. A vida não é útil. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020a.

_____. Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020b.

_____. Futuro ancestral. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2022.

KOPENAWA, Davi; ALBERT, Bruce. A queda do céu: Palavras de um xamã yanomami. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015.

PESSOA, Marina Margarido. O “Etnozoneamento em Terras Indígenas” do Acre

como ferramenta de Gestão Territorial: O caso da Terra Indígena
Campinas/Katukina. 2010. Available at:
<http://www.realp.unb.br/jspui/handle/10482/7514>.