

The Art of Being *Crente*: The Baniwa Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Sustainable Development

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The central objectives of this article are to describe and analyze the Baniwa Art Project, a sustainable development project based on intensive production and commercialization of basketwork, which the Baniwa Indians of the Northwest Amazon (population approximately 12,000), with the assessment of the SocioEnvironmental Institute (ISA), a major NGO in Brazil, launched in the late 1990s. The goals of this project were to enhance the value of the Baniwa basket-making tradition, increase production within the limits of the sustainable use of natural resources, generate income for indigenous producers and their political associations, and train indigenous leadership in the skills of business management. This very successful project was initiated shortly after the creation of the Indigenous Organization of the Içana River Basin (OIBI) and essentially involves 16 of the more than 100 Baniwa communities of the Içana River and its tributaries in Brazil. This article reflects on how young Baniwa evangelical political leaders, with the support of the NGO, promoted the rise of individualism, as well as the introduction of Western values of economic and political success. This generated conflicts with more “traditional” values and practices of egalitarianism producing an increase of witchcraft accusations. The case of a young Baniwa leader who coordinated both the political association and the Art Project illustrates extremely well the sorts of grave conflicts that emerged. This article will also reflect on modifications in human/spirit relations following the introduction of evangelicalism and sustainable development projects. For this, I shall cite extensively from a recent interview I conducted with a Baniwa political leader regarding his perceptions of the relations between evangelicalism, the political movement, and the meanings for the Indians of the notion of “sustainable development.”

Key Words: Sustainable development, religion/nature/culture nexus, witchcraft, ethnopolitics, baniwa

Baskets are part of a very ancient weaving tradition that clearly links the Baniwa of the Northwest Amazon to their natural and spiritual environments. For several generations now, the Baniwa (population approximately 12,000) have sold these baskets on the market to purchase the things they need; recently, they created an entirely new form of organization to commercialize these baskets, through a sustainable development project called “Arte Baniwa,” or Baniwa Art, which had the assessment of the SocioEnvironmental Institute (ISA), a major NGO in Brazil.

The Baniwa Art Project was an initiative of Protestant evangelical communities in partnership with the ISA. Although Baniwa basketry was sold on the market well before the creation of the OIBI and Baniwa Art Project, it was often through an exploitative system controlled by river merchants. Following the regional, pan-indigenous political movement of the 1980s and the expulsion of the river merchants, Baniwa evangelical communities both assumed control over the local indigenous association, initially founded by young Catholic leaders, and the production of Baniwa basketry. Since the implantation of the Baniwa Art Project, young evangelical leaders, supported by the NGO, have rapidly risen to power. This case study raises issues that are relevant to current anthropological discussions of “sustainable development projects;” critical reflections on the “middle-ground” consisting of indigenous political leaders, NGOs, and anthropologists; and the analysis of indigenous cosmologies in the context of interference by outsiders in the relations of humans to the spirits of nature.

Context

Anthropological analyses of “development” projects and so-called “sustainable development” have a long tradition, going back to at least the 1970s and 1980s. This article draws from these discussions as well as my own work in international NGOs in the early 1980s, such as the Anthropology Resource Center (ARC, Inc.), one of the first international NGOs to link the question of indigenous peoples’ rights, environmental protection, and the human consequences of large-scale “development” projects in the Amazon (Wright 1997). “Alternative models” or “ethnodevelopment” had been the subject of discussions among Latin American anthropologists (Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira) since the 1970s, while indigenous peoples were organizing international conferences on this subject in the early 1980s.

A key actor in the situation we will be discussing was the Brazilian NGO, known in the 1970s as the Ecumenical Center For Documentation and Information (or CEDI), a consortium of social, environmental, and pastoral projects connected to various Protestant churches in Brazil. The most important of their projects was called the “Indigenous Peoples in Brazil” (*Povos Indigenas no Brasil*) or “PIB” program which was dedicated to documenting the situation of indigenous peoples (a dramatically poor situation in the late 1970s), publishing an encyclopedic series of volumes on their situation, and assessing various indigenous peoples on their land rights, control over natural resources, etc. With the fast-growing environmentalist movement on the global scene in the late 1980s, the PIB Program began seriously discussing the

possibility of changing its structure and form, by separating from the CEDI consortium and setting up its own base in the city of São Paulo. It changed its focus too, by explicitly allying its internationally-known and respected tradition of research and indigenist activism with large European NGOs and funding organizations interested in supporting local-level efforts in Brazil and other Latin American countries connected to indigenous peoples and the environment (e.g., the European Community, Alliance for the Climate, the Horizon Foundation, Norwegian Rainforest Foundation, Gaia Foundation, and many others). The new organization became known as the ISA, or Socio Environmental Institute, which is today one of the most successful and powerful NGOs in Brazil, operating on a budget of over 13 million Reais (or US\$ 7.5 million) per year. Its slogan marked the new alliance: "Social and Environmental are written together." The history of Amazonian Indians and Ecopolitics in Brazil can only be partially understood without taking into consideration the critical role of the ISA and its allies. In some areas of the Amazon, such as in the Northwest Amazon, it actually performs the role of the state government itself in assessing indigenous affairs. In this regard, the ISA, allied with a few important indigenous NGOs of the Northwest Amazon (the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro [FOIRN] and the Indigenous Organization of the Içana Basin [OIBI]) have created a "middle-ground"¹ through which a direct link has been forged between transnational and local-level politics. As I shall show, this "middle-ground" was shaky in many ways because of the symbolic dominance of certain key figures in the politics, and the imposition of a model that privileged and shaped specific indigenous organizations, while excluding others.

The case study and interview with native leaders presented here illustrate what Conklin and Graham have pointed to as the "structural tensions in transnational-local alliances that view indigenous aims through Western lenses and rely on a few bicultural individuals as leaders" (1995: 704). This article seeks to elaborate on this very important observation by (1) presenting native analyses of this shaky transnational/local alliance and (2) critically analyzing the construction of a system of symbolic dominance in which certain NGOs, indigenous and non-indigenous, are privileged over others, and the problems this has produced. Although the ISA should be praised for its exemplary commitment and achievements on behalf of the indigenous peoples, nevertheless, it does not escape a more critical lens for *not* dealing adequately with pre-existing rivalries and tensions; in fact, by privileging some organizations, it has exacerbated these tensions.

In 1997 I was invited by a local association of Baniwa Indians, called the ACIRA (Association of Indigenous Communities of the Aiary

River), to assist them in preparing a book of their sacred traditions and stories of creation. This was part of a larger project to publish the traditions of all the twenty-two ethnic groups of the Northwest Amazon region, in a series called “Indigenous Narrators of the Rio Negro Region,” organized by the ISA and the regional pan-Indian organization called the FOIRN, and funded by several European foundations. By that time, the ISA had conducted a massive survey of all the indigenous communities in the Northwest Amazon region, as well as Co-directed with the FOIRN the operation of demarcating the entire indigenous area. It was then discussing with the FOIRN the critical question of what sorts of sustainable development projects might possibly be implanted in the region, which could use or generate resources with which the native peoples could sustain their economic, nutritional, and educational needs. Several pilot-projects had already begun by that time: aquaculture (fish-raising) in several communities; alternative schools in others; and the sale of indigenous artwork. For the Baniwa, who had had many years of experience in the latter, this was of most interest to them.

It seems to have been the strategy of the ISA that, once the community surveys had been done, the coordinators in consultation with the local leadership, would select certain communities where such projects for sustainable development could be tested, as in “pilot projects.” Amongst the Baniwa communities, the community of *Pamhaali* on the middle Içana River, for reasons I will explain below, was selected to be on the receiving end of the line of a massive input of financial and material resources that would presumably attract other Baniwa communities to participate and establish their own local projects.

Several years after finishing the book of Aiary traditions, I began to receive telephone calls from the Baniwa with whom I had worked expressing sincere disappointment that they were not part of any of the bitter projects and asking me to assist them in setting up their own schools and aquaculture tanks. Despite the problems the lack of an assessor was causing, the ISA stated that it had too few technicians to send to the Aiary to assist the Indians in setting up their projects. Thus, I returned to working on this subject with Baniwa communities who had *not* participated in the Baniwa Art Project but had sought to set up a similar project on their own. Many of the critiques which these communities have voiced to me about the project are, in large part, the justification for writing this article. These “outsider” communities were precisely those who defended their “traditions” (myths, shamanism, rituals) against the attacks of Protestant pastors and who were excluded from the growing political movement coordinated by predominantly evangelical communities.

My overall question, then, seeks to relate the religious tensions to the undeniable political and economic success of the Protestant communities, which was supported by the ISA.

This article is divided into two main parts. The first discusses the relation of Baniwa economic history and religion beginning with the introduction of evangelical Christianity in the 1950s and the exploitation of basket-weaving by outside merchants in the 1970s. The second presents a brief description of the objectives and structure of the BAP, its successes and problems. These problems arose from social and political setbacks primarily affecting the indigenous leader. These setbacks can be seen in terms of (1) an imbalance in the ethic of reciprocity in human-animal-spirit relationships and (2) the rise of individualism in the prophetic, evangelical, and—now-corporate—movements. I shall illustrate these points by analyzing how the young indigenous leader and coordinator of the project, named Andres Fernandes, struggled through grave attacks by witches against his leadership and success; and by presenting the reflections of a leading Baniwa intellectual and political figure, Gersem Santos, who, at my request, discussed his perceptions of “sustainable development” projects in general among the Baniwa and the Art Project in particular.

History

Although Baniwa baskets have had an important presence in regional markets since at least the 1970s, it has only been since the late 1990s that the principal Baniwa political organization, called the OIBI (Organization of Indigenous Communities of the Içana River Basin), in collaboration with the Socio-environmental Institute (ISA), have sought to stimulate production within environmentally sustainable limits, organize commercialization of the baskets along fundamentally different economic and social principles from the predominantly exploitative system of the past and encourage the professionalization of the basket-weaving economy.²

This enterprise has been very successful—and may grow even more in the future—largely due to the extraordinary collaborative efforts of two individuals, the coordinators of the indigenous organization and the NGO whose vision, competence, and skills turned the Baniwa Art Project (BAP) into a viable and sustainable enterprise. There is strong reason to believe that religious and socio-political reasons also shaped the ways in which the project was conceived and evolved. The indigenous leader, an evangelical Christian, is a member of a culture that has a well-established prophetic tradition,³ and I believe it is possible to show how he was strongly influenced and affected by his religious

beliefs and his people's tradition in the manner in which he negotiated the Baniwa Art Project. In some ways, the programs of spiritual reform advocated by the prophets of the past, as well as the Protestant ethic introduced among the Baniwa in the 1960s, bear similarities to the goals of the sustainable development project advanced in the BAP. All of them had among their objectives, political and economic autonomy; all, however, confronted strong obstacles from within Baniwa society that have to do with imbalance in the individual's relation to society and nature, as expressed in cosmological terms and specifically notions of sickness.

About a generation after the Baniwa had converted to evangelical Protestantism in the 1960s, I and a French ethnographer, Nicolas Journet, conducted our doctoral field researches in the Northwest Amazon—he on the Colombian side of the border, I on the Brazilian side. Both of our ethnographies sought to reconstruct from the memories of the elders what seemed to us either to have disappeared altogether from religious practice or had gone underground and was only practiced in secret.

One of the first things to strike both of us was the enormous amount of time the Baniwa and Kuripako⁴ were dedicating to basket production for sale. Mostly, but not exclusively, the men were deeply engaged in this activity in the majority of the villages. Several hundreds of dozens of baskets were being produced every three months for sale to Colombian traders. Following the *aviamento* system typical of the Amazon economy, the Indians would buy goods on credit, which was noted in the merchants' ledgers. In one of my first field notebooks, I wrote (1976):

In most villages where they stopped, the merchants left 'collection notes' for baskets which, they claimed, people owed. Sometimes these notes, I was told, were merely old and paid-off debts rewritten on new paper and handed out by other merchants. Each basket—which takes 2–3 days of work to produce—was purchased at about 50–60 cents apiece regardless of size and quality. It was common for people to stare in shock at the 200–300 dozen baskets loaded up in specially-rigged canoes, and say, 'they're robbing us' (Fieldnotes, I).

Journet recorded his views around the same time that

since 1972, they [the Kuripako] have had such success on the national and international market that the basket-weaving has turned into a permanent occupation among the Kuripako and at the same time, has extended to neighboring Cubeo, Wanano, and Tucano groups (1980: 172)

In 1975/76, the market provoked a fever of production. This fever has diminished now [1980] and the production of baskets is considered by

the Indians to be very unlucrative. It is worth noting that the price for the baskets has not changed in more than ten years, while the merchandise sold by river merchants has gone up from 30 to 100%.

Journet analyzed the consequences of increased market production among the Kuripako of Colombia at the beginning of the 1980s: The Kuripako had developed a new productive sector, exclusively commercial, which was interfering with traditional subsistence activities; the Kuripakos' purchases were not restricted to production objects but rather consumer goods the renewal of which produced a constant dependence on the financial market; the debt that governed most transactions introduced a system of deadlines and fixed quantities that contributed to disorganizing subsistence activities; and the calendrical nature of the model of acquisition and appropriation of white goods fomented unequal accumulation of goods that were not getting redistributed. Journet concludes by observing that

what we can see clearly is a deep contradiction between the development of new material values and old cultural values . . . The new religion plays a kind of intermediary role between the two, given that it requires certain aspects of sociability but it also comes from the same origins as the white merchandise and promotes its valorization.

Thus, the critical transformation that the Kuripako faced was one of values: "A contradiction exists among the Kuripako between the development of production for internal use and commercialized production." Journet's outlook at that time was negative on the issue of commerce in Kuripako lives for in his view it could only lead to the pauperization of the Indian.

By the mid-1990s, Protestant missionaries in Colombia had clearly made inroads to implanting a Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism. Commerce and salaried labor were the activities that most interested converts, and the missionaries supported them in numerous ways (e.g., training mechanics and cattle-raising), particularly if they were individual initiatives.

On the Brazilian side, the intense production of baskets in the 1970s was replaced by gold prospecting in the 1980s. Violent conflicts marked the relations between the Baniwa, prospectors, and gold-mining companies (Wright 2005). Protestant missionaries did little more to control these conflicts than to advise the Indians to seek the help of the FUNAI, which was notoriously in support of gold-mining at that time.

It was in this context and the growing military presence in the Northwest Amazon as a result of the "Projeto Calha Norte"⁵ that the

indigenous peoples mobilized politically through the formation of the FOIRN (Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro), the priorities of which were land demarcation, health, education, and cultural rights. The FOIRN was strategically supported from the beginning by the ISA, and both witnessed the extraordinary process of the formation of over fifty local political associations to represent the different ethnic groups and communities of the area. At the General Assembly that created the FOIRN, the young Baniwa leader Gersem dos Santos voiced the objection of his people to the abrupt changes in Indian policy and imposition of large-scale development projects in the area without previous consultation with the indigenous leadership:

Why this new change, and why the unclear definition on the part of the authorities and principally of this new indigenist policy? Why such urgency at a moment when we also are being confronted by serious problems with regard to the mining companies and mineral works?⁶ Our community that is here, which is seeking the well-being of the communities on the Içana, votes for the non-acceptance of the Northern Channel Project.

And further:

Why is there a need for a new indigenist policy, and from the information that we have just received, within this new indigenist policy, the demarcation of land will be done in a different way, not as extensive areas, but in small areas? We understand that the need of our people of the Içana, living along the riverbanks, is that we have to secure above all what we most need, our habitat, which does not mean just a piece of ground, but a population that lives by hunting, fishing, and gardens. So, why this new change, and why the unclear definition, on the part of the authorities and mainly the creators of this new indigenist policy? (Transcription of the tapes from the Second Assembly of the Peoples of the Upper Rio Negro).

Finally, Gersem pointed to the heart of the problem, with admirable clarity: If development was producing divisions amongst communities, as it was because of the mining companies' presence in the region, then the Baniwa were against it:

Our community of the Içana asks in what way will these benefits, these favors, these social works come to us, even in the near future?⁷ The communities of the Içana have noted recently that with the coming, with the presence of something that is called development, a certain difference from several years ago, among the communities of the Içana, because even today, just a few minutes ago, we have just seen differences amongst groups, groups of indigenous brothers.⁸ There are some who no longer

agree with each other; is that what will happen along with what we call development? And our community can leave it clear here, for the well-being of the communities of the Içana, we do not accept the Calha Norte Project (Wright 2005: 292, my translation.)

The first local political associations emerged among the Catholic communities of the Aiary River and the lower Içana River; however, not more than a few years after they had initiated their activities, those associations were overshadowed by a group of Baniwa evangelical communities, nearly all from the central region of Baniwa territory, and nearly all from the same high-ranking clan, the Walipere-dakenai. This group became known as the OIBI, which assumed leadership in the Baniwa political movement as a whole, and, with the assistance of the ISA, created the project “Arte Baniwa” in 1997.⁹

The Baniwa Art Project (BAP): structure and objectives

The central objectives of the Baniwa Art Project (BAP), as stated in the pocket booklet and on the website of the NGO, are to produce and commercialize Baniwa basketry on the national and international markets. It seeks to enhance the value of the Baniwa basket-making tradition, increase production within the limits of the sustainable use of natural resources, generate income for indigenous producers and their political associations, and train indigenous leadership in the skills of business management.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the BAP in principle would put Baniwa experience with the white man’s economy on a different historical track: It represented a break from their long history with predatory and exploitative economies. In a sense, too, it would complement their religions of resistance such as prophetism and evangelicalism, which always had, as one of their main goals, to break the stranglehold the white man’s economy had over their lives and to introduce moral reforms into their communitarian way of life.

The Baniwa Art Project was implemented at roughly the same time as a series of other alternative projects, such as a new school whose pedagogical objective was to provide a “differentiated” education that would better suit the needs of the Baniwa people; an aquaculture (fish-raising) station built in the same community as the new, alternative school (so that the children could participate in a sort of hands-on kind of education useful for their practical needs of nutrition); training in computer communications, etc.—again, in the same community as the fish-station and the alternative school. All of these projects were spear-headed by the formidable alliance of the OIBI leadership (predominantly

evangelicals, as I have said), and the SocioEnvironmental Institute, with its direct links to major funding organizations in Europe (Horizont, Alliance for the Climate, European Union, Norwegian Rainforest Fund), the United States (the Moore Foundation) and Brazil. What was clearly happening in all of this was a re-shaping of Baniwa social, political, and economic geography: The key community amongst the Baniwa on the Brazilian side of the border was *Pamhaali*, a community of predominantly Walipere-dakenai.¹⁰

The conjunction of these projects was a major success, a model for what could happen in other areas of Baniwa territory as well as in the Tukanoan peoples' communities on the Uaupés River, where ISA has also had a long-term involvement with sustainable development and local political associations. But, in reflecting on the success of these projects for the Baniwa, Gersem Santos—who, we recall, was so critical of the kind of top-down development that characterized the national government's relation to his people—stated in an interview with me in 2006.¹¹

I have no doubt that the projects whatever they are, in terms of their concepts and applied methods, bring material benefits to the Indians and that is what they want, in their post-contact perspective. I understand that the Baniwa life ideal has changed substantially since contact, and is guided at the present time by the life ideal of the Whites: consumption, technology, knowledge, values, etc. I would say that from the ideal point of view, there is a strong tendency and desire for integration, as an approximation to the White way of life without losing otherness or ethnicity. Recently I asked a Baniwa leader if he could choose (without any pressure) between sending his child to a Baniwa school or to a high-level city school, he answered right away that he would choose the city school because it offers better conditions for preparing his child for the future in terms of studies and profession. I don't think that's the Baniwa ideal of twenty years ago. In this sense we can say that the present-day projects do in fact bring benefits. But there is a big problem in this mid-field here, because everything indicates that the Baniwa would like to have these initiatives implemented in their way, according to their customs and traditions in effect and their present-day objectives. One thing is to have an ideal similar to that of the Whites, another thing is how we want to go after that ideal (which in fact they're not going to attain that quickly, since the Whites themselves impose strict limitations, which for the time being are impassable. I see that the formal indigenous authorities who have gained space in the official and formal power structure, aren't even able to break the social barriers of the Whites in São Gabriel [the municipal capitol city, where the headquarters of the FOIRN, the ISA, and the OIBI are all located]). For that reason, the benefits that I am referring to have a very high cost for the indigenous leaders who coordinate and conduct these projects, because they are obliged to follow

the principles, methods and logics of the projects based on the technobureaucratic rationality that violate the principles, methods and logics that guide Baniwa social and political relations, corporative loyalties, forged through unanimous and collective decisions and following group hierarchies, because of formal and artificial decisions, generating disputes of power. The leaders of the projects are basically getting burnt and gradually removed from their communities as a result of this, through threats and persecutions (witchcraft and poisoning). I think that this is the limitation of the projects. Either they turn out perfectly well and thus definitively conclude the process of integration or they do not fully attain their objectives because of the resistance which still exists from the Baniwa culture. They are projects of intervention with established forms, functions, uses and meanings, in which the actors involved confront conflicts of interest, perceptions, strategies, distinct and antagonistic socio-cultural horizons. The projects are a kind of post-contact necessity, like access to material goods that may even facilitate people's day-to-day work. In principle, the Indians do not conceive of the projects along the lines of wealth accumulation and income, although the leaders of organizations may already have incorporated that and may be trying to convince everyone that that is the way-out for the future of the communities.

Gersem's reflections are extremely important to keep in mind as we continue with the narrative of how the Baniwa Art Project got off the ground.

The initial challenges of the project were daunting: to get by marketing the baskets on the regional markets, which were typically exploitative; transporting them over the enormous distance from the Northwest Amazon to the Southeast of Brazil, a distance of 6,000 kilometers; to establish a system of commerce based on principles of fairness until then non-existent in that region or in any other region where indigenous populations have commercial transactions with whites; to test the ecological sustainability of intensive production of the aruma plant, which is the principal resource for the baskets; and perhaps most importantly, gauge what impact a project of this size and complexity would have on Baniwa society and culture as a whole—social, economic, political, and religious organizations and more generally, the relations between humans and nature as these are defined in Baniwa cosmologies (plural sense: evangelical, non-evangelical, prophetic).

Just in terms of the logistics of the project, it represented a major feat of planning and coordination, for it involved training and organizing local artisans to produce a market-quality product, which introduced a new form of organization without precedent in Baniwa history: to transport by canoes, trucks, and boats the hundreds of dozens of baskets, all packed with materials of local origin, from one extreme of the country

to another, passing through various critical points of transferal; then, to organize and supervise the sale of the baskets in large chain stores in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro; and finally, to make sure that the proceeds got back to the Northwest and were correctly distributed into the hands of the artisans.

The project had seed support from two major foundations, one Austrian and the other Dutch, and was assessed at every step of the way by the ISA with its many years of experience in working on complex projects of this type. It had the support of the Brazilian Environmental Ministry and the backing of the regional indigenous organization, the FOIRN (Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro), which was especially interested that the project succeed because it was part of its more global, nineteen-point Program for Sustainable Indigenous Development of the Rio Negro, a proposal that had been presented to the state government of Amazonas.

Regarding the ecological sustainability of intensive aruma (*Ischnosiphon spp.*) production, although it is probably sustainable in certain environments, the question is a genuine concern and probably should continue to be in many environments of the Içana. In much of the Baniwa territory, at least that of the OIBI, there is no aruma, despite an abundance of humid or partially flooded lands. This has to do with the poverty of the soils. In certain conditions, the plant grows well; in others it does not (see Hoffmann 2000, for detailed description, personal comm. 2006). Some communities have just a little aruma, and it easily could be depleted. This ecological heterogeneity certainly contributes to the problem of project-related social inequalities that I shall describe later in this article.¹²

Like any project that seeks to break away from deeply rooted patterns of dependence on intermediaries in an exploitative system (as is typical in Amazonia), the BAP had its share of difficulties in getting started. One economic analysis mentioned that the failure to market baskets in the early 1990s (before the BAP actually got started) was due in part to the “low quality of the product”: “since they still were in a state of economic dependence, artisans continued to produce low quality objects.” Yet, the Baniwa had already decided they had had enough of gold prospecting (in which the returns were very small) and were willing to invest their time and energy, with the support of the FOIRN and the ISA, in basket-weaving, which, truth be said, was not a get-rich-quick economy, but was both ecologically and socially more interesting than the kind of exploitation they were used to. But that meant taking all the preparatory steps necessary: on the one hand (the Baniwa), organizing workshops to train local artisans and producing a manual

for the artisans; on the other hand (the ISA), doing market research for potential outlets outside the Northwest Amazon.

One potential outlet was the annual flower fair, called ExpoFlora, held in the town of Holambra, interior of São Paulo (a community predominantly of Dutch descendants); the idea was to sell the baskets as flower-holders, a beautiful decorative piece for homes and offices. A large order for baskets was placed, and 200 Baniwa artisans produced the baskets on time. But problems with the shipment and the lack of any corporate sponsorship at the fair resulted in poor sales, unsatisfactory for the artisans, many of whom quickly abandoned the project.

One result of the market research was the identification of the major chain of furniture and home decoration stores in Brazil, called Tok & Stok. With the ISA's intermediation, the store bought all of the products that hadn't been sold at the fair and put in an order for more, paying triple the local sales price for each dozen of baskets. Tok & Stok thus became the privileged outlet. At a later point, the major chain of supermarkets, Pão de Açúcar, entered the scene which, besides contributing to the visibility of the products, introduced the element of competitive pricing. Long discussions were held on both sides, by the Baniwa and Tok & Stok, regarding fair prices, and a completely new concept was introduced of "fair commerce" (for an analysis of this market concept and its implementation on the local scene of the Northwest Amazon, see Unterstell and Martins [2004]. According to Unterstell and Martins, there was a short boom in basket production between the end of the 1990s and around 2004–2005, a boom that greatly benefited the indigenous organization, the Baniwa communities affiliated with it, and the ISA—the latter in the sense that it demonstrated the possibility of developing socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable alternatives, thus materializing its belief in the interdependence of biodiversity and socio-diversity. Thus, the project realized the NGO's mission statement.

Despite the initial difficulties of establishing connections with a consumer market, the Baniwa Art Project began a period of accelerated growth and public recognition. The number of artisans grew from its initial 20 to 143; the total number of baskets commercialized rose to at least 10,000 per year. What Baniwa artisans received in return doubled, which meant not only greater buying power but also improvements in the organization of the artisans.

In 2001, important recognition of the project came in the form of two major prize awards in national competitions. Both recognized the innovations achieved by the BAP in terms of resource mobilization and the administration of social projects. The money received from the prizes went to purchasing equipment, greater publicity, and expansion

of the project's facilities. The prizes, according to ISA's coordinator, represented "the results of experiences in formulating a management plan, integrating [local] communities on the one hand and [national] buyers on the other." Other local communities (such as Itacoatiara-mirim, a small community on the roadside near the municipal capital city), which previously had no participation in the project, demanded the technical assistance of the ISA in training indigenous researchers to do environmental analysis for the purposes of intensive use of local stands of aruma. This experience showed in an important way in which the Baniwa could themselves do the local research necessary for production. Finally, in 2006, OIBI leadership went beyond the expectations of technical assessors that the market outlet would remain national at least for the time being, and began personally contacting markets in Austria and Holland to enhance the possibilities of exportation of the baskets.

In short, the project more than demonstrated its sustainability both ecologically and for the estimated 20 percent of the Baniwa population participating in it. It is important to be clear about this however: initially, between 11 and 16 communities out of the more than 100 on the Brazilian side of the border were benefited by the BAP. A report on the project by two researchers of the FGV (Bresler and Oliveira 2005) leaves it clear on every page that the project was entirely directed by the OIBI. Communities that are associated with the OIBI are all located within approximately the same region of the central portion of Baniwa territory. Communities upriver, downriver, and on adjacent streams were, frankly, not included and, for various reasons, objected either to being left out (which did in fact create social problems) or to the way the OIBI leadership was conducting the project (which resulted in setbacks for the leaders, as I describe shortly).

A good part of the reason for these internal divisions had to do with religious rivalries: OIBI communities are predominantly evangelical (though one community, which contributed significantly to basket production, is Catholic). Catholic communities outside the orbit of OIBI influence have had long-standing enmities with the evangelicals (Wright 2005), including violent conflicts, and because the OIBI literally took away the political power of these communities, which had been responsible for the first Baniwa political organization (the ACIBRI, Association of Indigenous Communities of the Içana River Basin). OIBI communities are predominantly members of a large and prestigious clan; they have had traditional rivalries with other large clans both upriver and on adjacent streams. This clan, it can be shown, spearheaded Baniwa conversion to evangelicalism; besides assuming hegemony in Baniwa political organization, it has assumed leadership in the Baniwa Art Project, in aquaculture projects and in an alternative schooling project

(the Pamhaali). It is no exaggeration to say that, in all of this, the OIBI was favored by outside institutions and NGOs, which explains in large part its rapid growth.

Other evangelical communities upriver from the OIBI also resented OIBI's hegemony in the BAP, but for different reasons: Being more fundamentalist evangelical, they disagreed with OIBI's insistence on creating strong relations with the NGO and external market. The first evangelical missionary among the Baniwa, after all, had preached that contacts with the Whites would lead to the damnation of the Baniwas' souls.

The Catholic communities, predominantly of the Aiary River, were the principal defenders of Baniwa traditions against attacks by Protestant missionaries and their converts in the 1960s. The young Baniwa leaders of the Aiary were the first to be summoned by the Catholic missionaries in the 1970s to form local political associations but through a somewhat suspicious sleight-of-hand maneuver, the young evangelical leaders of the Içana took that power from them and formed the OIBI. This local coup was highly resented by the Catholic leadership of the Aiary River but perceived differently by the Baniwa communities of the lower Içana who had formed one of the first political associations, the ACIBRI. The founder of the ACIBRI, Gersem Santos, analyzed the situation as follows:

As far as the discontent of other communities—in the case of the upper rio Içana there is, yes, amongst those of the Içana and Ayari, and it is very strong and unprecedented. The Ayari is the area that has felt most excluded in this story. And there are clear signs of conflicts and threats. But, amongst the Catholics of the lower Içana, with whom I have lived the most, I don't perceive this. They understand that it is their turn and this ends up motivating them to seek to deepen their perspectives, a sort of positive competition and they have other priorities. They have perceived that the collective "community" projects did not produce the desired results, so today they have changed their strategies and seek individual initiatives and promotions in the field of economic survival, and the role of the associations and their leaders has come to be to struggle for training projects such as schools, political participation that they can capitalize on and train individuals in the solution of their problems. Community projects don't enchant them anymore. On the other hand, the financial advantages—although they are not insignificant—are compensated for those who do not participate, by the peace that they live, without having to confront and involve themselves in conflicts. From the point of view of the productive environment, for example, the Indians say that in the past, it was the white bosses who would exploit them, but today it's their own "children" (young people) kin, which for them is more serious.

While the evangelical communities of the Içana were and are in a phase of “enchantment” with the projects and the new forms of political organization, the Catholic communities, according to Gersem,

are in a phase of disenchantment, clearly because they have experiences with other project models (communitarian, ecclesiastical, etc.) but it really is because for the Indians, it’s all the same thing. I think the evangelicals (young leaders) seek to invest in the projects in an attempt to recover the time lost in the period of political confinement to which they were submitted by religion and as a strategy for getting out of the invisibility or negative visibility of being considered backwards, illiterate. The projects are a way of recovering self-esteem to show that they are capable. This is a very positive thing and has enormous potential that the indigenous movement has to potentialize and capitalize on. I think there’s another factor that’s extremely important in this story, that has to do with the anthropological view. The evangelical communities are considered excellent partners by the support groups and financers, because they have been very little corrupted by the surrounding society, thus they are more docile, obedient, and honest for the development of the works of the projects. A kind of ideal of the primitive Indians . . . When we look at the geographical location of the projects on the upper Rio Negro, we can see this very clearly. No-one is interested in working with the Bares or other communities that are more influenced by the cities and the missions.

The case of the OIBI leader and coordinator of the BAP (until recently), however, is particularly revealing of the contradictions faced by the project from the beginning. This leader, whose name is Andre Fernandes, had considerable success and prestige as the coordinator of the OIBI, the head of the alternative school, and the head of the BAP. He had led Baniwa community participation in deliberative councils on public health policy; he was a technical and pedagogical coordinator for the group and was well known outside Baniwa communities. His work is recognized by NGOs and outside professionals as being highly qualified, efficient, and always resonant with the communities’ needs and demands. He was now the vice-president of the regional indigenous organization, and is now vice-prefect of the municipality.

With his experience in various training courses, he is actually one of the most qualified leaders of the regional indigenous movement. He uses his knowledge in an innovative way, demonstrating an enviable ability to facilitate communication and to develop a kind of “intercultural translation” regarding social policies in Brazil. He assists village leaders in understanding the proposals and decisions of government authorities that affect the lives of the indigenous population.

Besides being a member of a prestigious Baniwa clan, people trust his correct management of financial and material resources obtained through projects and partnerships with the NGOs and government entities. He is thus a powerful mediator between public power and indigenous societies.

Despite—or even as a result of all of this—several years ago, Andre was the victim of assault sorcery (by poisoning). The physical symptoms included diarrhea, digestive indisposition, acute weight loss, and intermittent headaches. Psychological symptoms included nightmares, difficulties in concentration, sensation of weakness, depression, and an overwhelming certainty that he, or one of his relatives, would die from sorcery. In his dreams, he would see strange, menacing people eating tapir heart (the tapir is the symbol of his clan), or he would see the boat in which he was traveling sunk in the waterfalls.

During his sickness, he tried several kinds of treatment: medicinal plants, a folk healer, Christian pastors, and chanters. One folk healer diagnosed his ailment as being the result of an attack by the spirits of the forest, called *Iupinai*. These include spirits of all plants, animals, and insects, which, it is said, are constantly at war with human beings for their aggression on nature. It makes sense that this leader, coordinator of the aruma project, would suffer their attacks.¹³ All of these procedures alleviated but did not cure his sickness. Because he is Protestant, Andre hesitated in consulting a shaman but finally did in fact (a chant-blower, not a shaman who extracts sickness by suction from the body of the patient) and it was diagnosed that another powerful shaman had been hired to kill him. The shaman/healer prescribed a rigorous diet, which the leader was unable to follow because of his constantly heavy schedule of political activities.

His symptoms worsened; consequently, he renewed his treatment with medicinal plants, which improved his health. But when he attended an assembly of the local indigenous movement, he ate the meat of a furry animal, which is a type of food strictly forbidden to a person who is recovering from a sorcery attack (because the “mixture” of animal meat with the sickness aggravates the sickness). His condition went from bad to worse within several months. He then sought treatment by another shaman, his maternal uncle. The shaman identified the focus of the digestive lesion that had resulted from the poisoning, but he said he would be unable to cure his nephew if the latter continued with his political activities. It was his political activities and success that made Andre the target of sorcerers, who envied his influential position and the goods obtained through his work. Even if he could be cured, there was no guarantee that he, or another member of his family, would not suffer another attack. Assault sorcery was thus retribution (in the form of aggression) for the inequality produced by his political work.

Andre had to decide whether to continue or abandon the work to which he had dedicated all his efforts. If he continued, he and his family would have to live with the constant threat of chronic or fatal sickness; if he abandoned his activities, he would preserve himself and his family but sacrifice the ideals that are his life and future. Accumulating wealth and prestige was never a stated concern of his; rather, he tried to avoid perceptible differentiations and the kinds of behavior that would incite people's envy or jealousy, and thus deflect attempts at assault sorcery. But he knew that, although his actions were governed by his concern for redistributing goods obtained by the OIBI and the BAP, just the prestige and financial success of both were enough to generate that kind of reaction.¹⁴

The final result of the case: Andre was cured of his symptoms through biomedical treatment, although he expected a new attack at any moment afterwards. In an unexpected move, he decided to confront this constant threat by discussing the problem in an assembly of the villagers of the area. As one observer, a medical doctor and—at the time, my advisee—who was perhaps the closest to the leader during this whole ordeal, observed:

[assault sorcery] is a key element in the social structure of the group which offers a means for action in managing disputes derived from ancestral hostilities, is updated in the context of the appropriation of goods and services generated by public policies, in the dispute for employment, industrialized products and alliances with institutions and non-indigenous spaces of power.

The sick leader is stuck on the crossroads of history. On the one hand, he is inserted into the wider context of the Brazilian indigenous political movement, that seeks to provide Amazonian indigenous peoples with mediators, capable of generating creative solutions for the improvement of public policies which are slowly established on indigenous lands. On the other, he is the member of a specific culture that is governed by the inhibition of social inequality. His culture has in [assault sorcery] an important support for egalitarianism, the control of individualism, and the accumulation of symbolic and material power. [Assault sorcery] thus becomes a safeguard for such contemporary initiatives. But this strategy that impedes differentiation also hinders the actions of innovative members of the group who are internal sources of social transformation. Changes brought about by the political movement contain the seeds of subversion of a social order which tries to protect itself through strategies such as [assault sorcery] (Garnelo n/d).

Like the prophets of the past (Wright 2005), who sought to change their society to protect it from external change agents and to produce a

regime of harmonious conviviality but were sacrificed in return by the very mechanisms of society that paradoxically guarantee egalitarianism, the political leader of the present sought to introduce a new form of social, political, and economic organization to receive benefits from external markets but was sacrificed in exchange for the differentiation that he, as an individual, was believed to have produced. The model of this leader's story can be found in the stories the Baniwa tell of their prophets. Both Gersem and Andre agree that the stories of their culture-heroes, warrior ancestors, prophet ancestors serve as models for them to strategize and plan their next moves. As Gersem said,

I think that our ancestor heroes are indeed our inspirers and serve to motivate us and as a reference. (. . .) I am very proud of them and I think they pass on to us energy and strength to continue, conscious that today our instruments, weapons, strategies and context are very different in terms of perspectives, possibilities and challenges. Today our main weapon is the same weapon of the White man, in the sense that we seek to appropriate for ourselves their knowledge, to our benefit, whether it is to defend our rights to live our way of being and thinking, or to incorporate techniques that help us to improve our working conditions and our daily lives. I think there is a very strong relation from the spiritual point of view with our ancestors mainly from their courage and daring in confronting external and enemy forces, and our greatest fear is that there be no continuity in this with our children, because of our own strategy, when we judge that to dominate the power and knowledge of the Whites, we will prevent them from dominating us.

In the end, the BAP benefited a number of communities but left quite a lot more out, and left many questions to be answered by future experiences and by deeper understandings of how to calibrate Baniwa cosmology with the logic of the market. Gersem analyzed the situation in the following way:

There are concrete, measurable, positive results, if we take into account the volume of resources that several dozen families could benefit from and can continue to generate income and benefits. Nevertheless, it is producing serious problems for everybody, and mainly the leaders that coordinate and manage it, re-kindling ancient inter-sib conflicts. This occurs, first, because it meets the needs of only a few who are benefited, which produces sentiments of exclusion and betrayal of loyalty, and second, because the young leaders do not have sufficient recognition of their authority to impose the procedures and logics necessary to implement market strategies, which generates discomfort, distrust and accusations, as is typical of Baniwa culture. Besides that, in terms of change in the way of thinking about life and material conditions (economy), any project

that affects production, commercialization, money, consumption, and accumulation has the same consequences as a goldmine, that is, it introduces new forms of social and economic relations. Everything revolves around payment, even if it is for an exclusively communitarian use. The challenge is how to reconcile this gap. I don't see much of a way-out, the ideal would be to think of projects that somehow could involve and benefit at least a specific corporate group and get over the ways of financing and administering of bureaucratized projects, allowing the methods of implementation to follow the organizational forms of work, distribution of goods produced and mainly the decision-making that today are centralized in the owners of the projects, the leaders of the organizations and the technicians. I understand that the problem is more complex than that.

The Baniwa Art Project has just recently shown signs that its popularity and successes have reached a plateau and may even be on the downswing. The latest information we have is that about 350 dozen of the small baskets continue to be produced per year and that, although the number of artisans has increased, demand and production have not simultaneously increased.

On the other hand, two surprising developments have recently occurred. First, another "fever" has broken out, so typical of the Amazonian economy, this time for extraction of the forest vine called *titica* (*Heteropsis spp.*) used in the production of chairs, baskets, and bags. In the recent past, in the state of Amapa, the exploitation of *titica* vines got to be so violent to the ecology (*titica* is not sustainable if exploited intensively) that the Environment Ministry severely regulated its exploitation in that state. On the upper Rio Negro, where exploitation is just beginning, the first surveys indicate that returns from the sale of the vine have been quite high (B. Ricardo, pers. comm.).

The second is that gold prospecting has once again sparked the Baniwas' interests. One ex-leader of the OIBI actually has a proposal circulating to implant "sustainable gold prospecting" (*ibid.*). There seems to be little likelihood that this proposal will be accepted by the state government, or approved by the federal government given the disastrous consequences of diamond prospecting on Cinta-Larga Indian land last year and given that the federal government has still not taken any steps yet to regulate prospecting of any kind on indigenous lands. Even if in the very unlikely possibility that gold prospecting would be regulated in a "sustainable" way, specialists doubt whether the Indians would ever really have full control over it and would more likely fall into the hands of the white merchants as has happened so often in the past. Nevertheless, the proposal is circulating.

This case study clearly illustrates the *interpretive/heuristic value* of taking the Baniwa cosmological framework seriously prior to and during the implementation of such projects. It is not simply a case of how a set of “capitalist” relations “went bad” or “failed” as a result of clashes with native ethics. My argument is that, had the development planners seriously taken into account notions we have discussed here—of “egalitarian” relations, “power,” “inequality” and the probable outcome of provoking inequalities, as well as the active and aggressive role of the spirits of nature in reacting to human excesses—perhaps the leader would not have suffered such attacks. Perhaps it would have resulted in a project that was more sensitive to the nature of balance the Baniwa have strived for centuries to keep amongst themselves, and their potential foes (be they rival clans or spirits of nature).

Final reflections

In the particular case of the Baniwa Art Project, how did Baniwa religiosity—especially the relations of humans to nature—come into play in the dynamics of the BAP, and how did “sustainable development” fare in the evolution of the project?

First, it’s clear that both Baniwa Protestant evangelicalism and their beliefs in nature-spirits were key elements. Protestant ethics—in the sense introduced by the first missionaries of a moral Puritanism—define a way of life that the Baniwa adapted to meet their own spiritual needs. It is undeniable that this has been influential in the orderliness and efficiency with which the Baniwa Art Project has been carried out, and this was from the beginning seen in a positive light by the NGO and international funders whose views of sustainable indigenous projects are largely based on modernity and efficiency. But the simple fact of being evangelical in the terms set out by the first evangelical missionary among the Baniwa, Sophie Muller, and her early followers, as we have seen, was not necessarily conducive to establishing friendly terms with “the white man”; to the contrary, it positively hindered these relations for a good many years.

Second, the history of Baniwa religiosity, I think it is safe to say, served as a basis for the manner in which the BAP “took off” and was, for a while, a great success. We have compared the historical rise of prophets and of individualism, coupled with the objective of relief from debts, to the rise of individual OIBI leaders whose projects brought in money to purchase much-desired merchandise, as well as contributing to Baniwa empowerment. OIBI’s principal leader expressed his millenarian vision in an interview in the late 1990s when he is quoted as having said, “The Whites will arrive amongst us, they’ll help improve our living conditions. Once we reach this objective, the world will end” (cited in Boyer 1999).

Third, Baniwa prophetism and evangelicalism, as universalistic forms of discourse and praxis, resonated with the equally universalistic discourse of the NGO regarding bio- and cultural diversity, and sustainable development. D. Pollock, writing of the Siriono and Kraho, has observed that conversion illustrates how, paradoxically, a universal religion can become “a way of preserving local and traditional identity, as well as their microcosmic social integrity.” A similar sort of process seems to have occurred in the resonance between the discourse of the NGO and the prophetic/evangelical traditions.

Fourth, regarding the OIBI leader’s near-fatal illness: local explanations and, more importantly, the local dynamics involved in his misfortune were most clearly related to the dilemmas he faced during the evolution of the BAP. Local explanations referred, first, to assault sorcery by the spirits of nature, the *Iupinai*, as a sort of negative reciprocity for the intensive use he had made of natural resources. Second, assault sorcery came from sorcerers, enemy shamans, who in the form of animals poisoned the leader. Negative reciprocity clearly came into play as a result of the leader’s violation of the social norm that favors the egalitarian ethos. Like the prophets of the past, the leader’s ascension to a position of power and prestige, despite the denials by all leaders that this was what they sought, was exacerbated by the BAP, to the point of triggering the local, traditional leveling mechanism of assault sorcery (conceived of as attacks by shamans, or animal-souls).

Finally, independently of religiosity, the whole episode highlights the dichotomy between, on the one hand, a complex and briefly successful sustainable development project (which still has, I believe, a great potential to grow *if* local rivalries could somehow be more effectively dealt with) that is part of an equally complex and promising regional sustainable development program sponsored by the regional indigenous organization (the FOIRN) and supported by enormous external resources and, on the other, the sporadic “fevers” of extractivism that have characterized the Amazonian economies since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that, today, assume ever more violent forms (e.g., títica extraction, which is eminently non-sustainable, or the so-called “sustainable gold prospecting”). The question remains of whether the indigenous organizations can somehow control these “fevers” or whether they will be witnesses to replays of the past.

On the more general level, it is obviously of great importance that Baniwa cosmology and religious belief in a significant way shaped historical praxis. Had these been taken into account in a more effective way by the planners of the project, perhaps many of the tensions, rivalries, and personal sacrifices could have been avoided. There are certainly many positive aspects of the development program underway, particularly with

regard to education. Nevertheless, there is still a good deal of room for improvement in (1) the question of inclusion of those who have been “left out” until now; (2) the spirituality—that is, the relations between humans and nature; and (3) the democratization of the projects. Somehow, the “pilot” model of sustainable development must be overcome so that more communities can reap the benefits of the new age.

Notes

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1. For a good analysis of the emerging “middle-ground” between eco-politics and indigenous people in Brazil in the early 1990s, see Conklin and Graham 1995.
2. I have written about Baniwa religious and economic history extensively in numerous publications but see especially my two monographs (Wright 1998, 2005).
3. Regarding Baniwa “prophets,” about whom I have written a great deal since 1981 (Wright 1998, 2002, 2004, 2005), I am referring to a continuous tradition that dates to at least the mid-nineteenth century. We may speak of “prophets” because each of them led a movement consisting of Baniwa and other Indians (and mestizos in some cases) of the Northwest Amazon who sought profound changes in morality and social life, through the eradication of undesirable practices especially assault sorcery, who were considered miraculous healers (all were shamans, who *foresaw imminent great changes in the world* (one prophet spoke of the cataclysmic end-of-the-world through fire and the descent of God to earth; another spoke of the definitive end to witchcraft and sorcery; another spoke of the imminent coming of the whites to Baniwa lands; another spoke of the end of sickness among humans). All of them maintained constant communication with the creator divinity who would advise them of events about to take place in the world of humans, and with the deceased. These are prophets, by any dictionary definition.
4. On the Brazilian side of the border, the people are known as Baniwa and sometimes “Walimanar,” or “our descendents”; in Colombia, they are Kuripako and speak a different but mutually intelligible dialect; and in Venezuela, Wakuenai, an ethnonym meaning “Those of Our Speech.” There is no single overriding ethnonym for all three peoples.
5. “Projeto Calha Norte,” or the Northern Channel Project was a large-scale and complex development project introduced into the northern Amazon region by the military sectors of the Brazilian government in the 1980s. It included the building of highways, airstrips, colonization; the redefinition of indigenous lands; and a series of other geopolitical measures intended to integrate the Amazon region more effectively with the rest of the country. The massive upheavals resulting from the military buildup in

the region provoked the reaction of the indigenous communities in the sense of an increased political mobilization; in the Northwest Amazon, this resulted in the creation of a region-wide indigenous federation called the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN), created in 1987 which has lasted until the present day.

6. Gersem is referring to a recent invasion of Baniwa and Tukano lands by thousands of gold prospectors and by large mining companies who disputed amongst themselves and with the Indians control over gold found in the region.
7. Gersem is referring to the fact that the mining companies and the military had promised in exchange for the exploitation of mineral resources on their lands, the Baniwa would receive a series of material benefits and social services, "for the betterment of the communities."
8. Gersem is referring to the fact that just a few minutes before he stood up to speak, there had been a heated discussion amongst the representatives of several communities over whether "development" was a "good thing" or just another lie.
9. For an excellent interview with Andre in the early years of the OIBI, see Boyer 1999.
10. The Baniwa are organized into four or five large phratries, each consisting of five or more sibs or clans, which are ranked according to the order of ancestral emergence in mythical times. Historically, the middle Içana has been the territory of the Walipere-dakenai phratry and the Dzauinai phratry; the Aiary River has been the territory of the Hohodene phratry.
11. Gersem, who received his master's degree in anthropology from the University of Brasilia in 2006, is from the Walipere-dakenai clan. Gersem himself founded one of the early political associations among the Baniwa. He is well-known in the indigenous movement in Brazil for his role in the national project for support to sustainable development amongst indigenous peoples. He was an important leader in the Baniwa struggles against the Projeto Calha Norte and corporate mining on Baniwa lands in the 1980s and was a key political figure on the local and national levels throughout the 1980s and 1990s.
12. Another ecological factor is worth mentioning: The plants seem to sprout exceptionally well even after cutting. At least the first time. But this is because they have an underground rhizome that stores food and energy, and new sprouts are already developed under the soil. Studies of a related species in the lower Rio Negro, however, suggest that the plants are very slow to recover following subsequent cuttings. In this region of the Amazon, even the "good" soils are actually extremely poor, and aruma does not grow or recover quickly unless it is in a light gap or in a garden site following a burn. (Hoffman, pers. comm., 2006)
13. There is a relation of negative reciprocity between these spirits and humans, which results in various sicknesses and misfortunes to humans. These spirits, it is said, lost their humanity because of their impatience and arrogance, which led them to disobey the rules of shamanic apprenticeship. The sicknesses they may give to humans are often skin infections. Misfortunes include storms, accidents (like the sinking of canoes), and frightening children.
14. Recently a film was made about Andre's story and cure: "Baniwa, Uma Mistória de Plantas e Curas" by Stella Oswaldo Cruz Penido, 2008/9.

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