

LOCAL NETWORKS OF KNOWLEDGE, PRODUCTION, AND CIRCULATION OF HANDCRAFTED
OBJECTS MADE BY ARTISANS IN THE AMANÃ RESERVE

REDES LOCAIS DE SABERES, PRODUÇÃO E CIRCULAÇÃO DE OBJETOS ARTESANAIS POR
ARTESÃOS DA RESERVA AMANÃ

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KEY WORDS:

Craftsmen;
Traditional knowledge;
Handicraft objects.

ABSTRACT

This paper refers to the knowhow and skills involved in the production of artisanal objects in three communities located in the Amanã Sustainable Development Reserve (RDSA) in the middle Solimões river: Belo Monte, São José do Urini and Sítio Cachimbo. When analyzing techniques and the traditional knowledge associated to handcrafting, we have identified that the process of production and circulation of objects is carried out using productive strategies that involve different social agents related by kin and *compadrio* (relationship established between the parents and godparents of baptism of children approaching bonds of friendship and reciprocity) bonds. Ethnographic studies focus on qualitative methodologies, emphasizing participatory observation. The aim of this article is to describe and analyze networks related to production and circulation of artisanal objects, their productive strategies and the context of the social transmission of knowledge. An informal work contract of mutual help (*trabalho de meia*) is one of the pillars of handcrafting. This productive arrangement enables access to natural resources used as raw materials in the making of handicrafts for domestic use and sale. Teaching and learning processes are fundamental components for the reproduction of knowledge between generations.

PALAVRAS - CHAVE:

Artesãos;
Conhecimentos tradicionais;
Objetos artesanais.

RESUMO

O artigo trata dos saberes e modos de fazer objetos artesanais em três comunidades situadas na Reserva de Desenvolvimento Sustentável Amanã - RDSA, Médio Solimões: Belo Monte, São José do Urini e Sítio Cachimbo. Analisando as técnicas de produção e os conhecimentos tradicionais associados à prática de um "saber fazer" objetos artesanais, identificamos que o processo de produção e circulação dos objetos é realizado por meio de estratégias produtivas que envolvem diferentes agentes sociais ligados por redes locais de parentesco e *compadrio*. O estudo etnográfico privilegia metodologias qualitativas, com ênfase na observação participante. O objetivo deste artigo é descrever e analisar as redes de relações instituídas em torno da produção e circulação de objetos artesanais, as estratégias produtivas e o contexto ensino aprendizagem presentes na rede de transmissão social dos saberes. Na esteira destes aspectos, destacamos o "trabalho de meia" como um dos pilares da atividade que consiste num contrato informal de trabalho regido por relações de ajuda mútua. Este arranjo produtivo possibilita o acesso aos recursos naturais utilizados na confecção dos objetos e garante a produção e a circulação dos objetos artesanais para uso doméstico e para venda. O ensino aprendizagem é um componente fundamental para reprodução social dos saberes entre gerações.

INTRODUCTION

This article presents analyses made within the scope of a dissertation by Sousa (2011) about ribeirinho¹ material culture that focused on the knowledge and modes of making handcrafted objects in the communities of Belo Monte, São José do Urini, and Sítio Cachimbo, which are located in RDS Amanã in the region of the Rio Urini, Amanã Sector. Local networks of knowledge, strategies established to produce domestic and artisanal objects, and the context of teaching and learning present in the process of socially acquiring and transmitting this knowledge comprise the analytic focus of this study.

We begin from the understanding that the crafts that the artisans produce portray a local way of life and are notable elements of the material culture of ribeirinho communities in Amazonia (SOUSA, 2011), keeping in mind that the productive context reflects a broad range of social relationships. Various studies of material culture, which take different approaches, point out that in different societies the range of objects is crucially important in the process of transmitting and conserving knowledge and reflects the values and worldview of people within their social context (SILVA, 2000; ASSIS, 2006; VELTHEM, 1984, 1998, 2008).

With this understanding, in analyzing traditional production techniques and the knowledge associated with “know how” pertaining to handicrafts, we identified that the process of producing and circulating objects is done through productive strategies that involve different social agents connected by local networks of cooperation based on family ties, *compadrio*, and friendship. In

this paper, we describe and discuss these networks of relationships surrounding the production of artisanal objects, as well as analyze the teaching and learning process used in the social acquisition and transmission of this knowledge, which is being passed from one generation to the next.

We identified a set of 51 types of domestic objects and 23 decorative crafts made by 53 artisans (35 women and 20 men) connected to 23 family units. In the context of this activity, one of the productive strategies that stands out is mutual help (*trabalho de meia*). This type of work is conducted through an agreement describing the division of tasks between the “producing artisan” and the “supplier of raw materials”. These agreements are informal work contracts governed through mutual-assistance relationships, which acquire decisive importance in the productive process and establish a particular production dynamic. This not only facilitates access to the natural resources (wood and non-wood) used in producing objects, but also guarantees the production and circulation of handicrafts for domestic use and sale. The process of learning and teaching in turn complements the network of relationships that are being discussed, as the passage of knowledge takes place through various modalities that complement each other and are a fundamental component of the social reproduction of knowledge between generations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT AND FIELD SURVEY

The RSDA (Figure 1) is a state Conservation Unit, created in 1998 under the category of sustainable use, which seeks to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with the sustainable development of the local populations that traditionally live in and use the natural resources of the area.

Amanã Sustainable Development Reserve (total area 2,350,000 ha)

¹ Term used to designate residents of rural Amazonia, generally living near or along water courses, who have traditionally maintained a peasant economic mode of production.

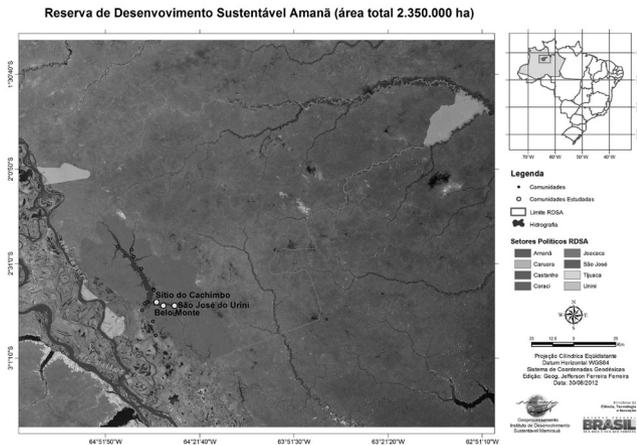


Figure 1 - Map of the area of the Amanã Reserve. Note the yellow points representing the communities surveyed. Source: Department of Geoprocessing, Instituto Mamiaraúá.

The name of this conservation unit comes from Lake Amanã, the largest entirely black-water lake with dimensions that classify it as one of the largest lakes in Amazonia, 45 km long and 3 km wide. Alencar (2007) affirms that Lake Amanã plays an important role in the process of human occupation in the RDS Amanã area since it provides access to other bodies of water that connect with the Rio Negro and the Rio Japurá.

The artisans involved in producing handcrafts live in the ribeirinho communities of Belo Monte, São José do Urini, and Sítio Cachimbo in the region of Lake Urini; they total 55 (35 women and 20 men) distributed among 23 families. Placing them into each area studied, we identified that, of this total, 25 artisans live in the community of São José do Urini, 22 come from the community of Belo Monte, and one nuclear family composed of eight members belongs to Sítio Cachimbo. In this last case, the entire family is involved in the production of domestic objects and decorative crafts.

The main characteristics of these families' production, which differs from that of other local communities, are: greater number of artisans that

are fully active; regularity of production; family labor system; production destined expressly for sale, as well as variety in the repertoire of objects produced and locally used (SOUSA, 2008, 2009, 2011).

Due to these particularities, residents of nearby communities recognize these places as “the places” where excellent producers of a variety of artisanal objects live; these objects include woven baskets, strainers, fans, brooms, paddles, canoes, clayware, and decorative crafts made of *cipó ambé* (*Philodendron fragrantissimum*) and *cipó titica* (*Heteropsis flexuosa*) vines.

Residents of the communities surveyed present socio-cultural characteristics that are mentioned and identified in social categories such as: caboclos², camponeses³, rural producers, ribeirinhos, multiple-crop farmers and ranchers, extractivists, and more broadly, “traditional population” (WAGLEY, 1988; DIEGUES, 1994; WITKOSKI, 2007; ALMEIDA, 2004; LIMA, 2010). In fact, it is important to emphasize that the term “traditional populations” was officially incorporated into Law 9.985/2000, which instituted the National System of Conservation Units, that denotes the direct relationship between the aforementioned “traditional populations” and/or “traditional extractivist populations” and the conservation units (ALMEIDA, 2004).

The field survey was conducted giving preference to qualitative methodologies, especially ethnographic methodologies. Inclusion in the daily practice of making handcrafts was undertaken based on the technique of participant observation (MALINOWSKI, 1978), with the goal of being attentive to the relationships established

² Term used to designate the inhabitants of Amazonia rural subsistence farmers. Also has the meaning of mestizo descendants of Indians and whites.

³ Residents and / or workers in rural, low-income.

in each productive process, observing not only technical processes but the meaning attributed to these by the artisans. Throughout, 2008, 2009, and 2010, eight trips were undertaken, during which we conducted open interviews and utilized audiovisual resources (cameras and mini voice recorders).

To undertake an analysis based in the processes and techniques, it is important to be careful to not limit the ethnographic work to a descriptive process, but to extend it into the discussion of concrete interactions. This brings us an effective dialog about the meaning of the technical processes, according to the social agents who bear the knowledge (SAUTCHUK, 2007).

PRODUCTIVE AND COMMERCIAL STRATEGIES AND LOCAL NETWORKS OF RECIPROCIITY

Socio-anthropological studies conducted in the Middle Solimões region in the state of Amazonas present the characteristics of the domestic economy of local populations whose traditional activities are centered around meeting the consumption needs of the family group (LIMA-AYRES, 1992; PERALTA, 2005; MOURA, 2007; PERALTA et al., 2009; LIMA, 2006, 2010). It is a domestic economy guided by the rural residents, and it is unique in its organization, which is centered in the domestic group itself that is made up of family units, which are mostly nuclear. It is based on the basic unit of production and consumption; in other words, part of the production is destined towards family consumption, and the other part is made for sale on the local market.

Within this logic, production is directly influenced by the family's consumption needs, and production capacity is interdependent with the cycle of domestic life. In this way, the means of obtaining income cause different results for the structure of domestic relations between Amazonian areas, especially with regards to relationships of home production and consumption (LIMA, 2010).

As the form of social organization of labor is based on the family, this characteristic presupposes the involvement of the family unit in different activities. Thus, the artisans, which are the focus of this study, carry out agricultural, fishing, and extractivist (vegetation and animal) activities, and their production of handcrafts is one of the work processes they perform.

Considering the logic of this economy, the topics below approach the different productive and commercial strategies in the productive context of handcrafts, as well as set out the dynamic of this activity, which is directly adjusted to the characteristics of the local domestic economy.

MUTUAL HELP

In the communities where we conducted this study, we observed a work modality that the artisans called *trabalho de meia* or *de meia*, or mutual help. *Trabalho de meia* can be defined as a traditional practice of mutual assistance in which tasks are performed collectively. These tasks are separated into the specialized work of the artisan-producer (the person who treats, weaves, molds, and carves the objects) and that of the collector or supplier of raw materials (SOUSA, 2011).

In general, *trabalho de meia* is mainly used to make baskets, strainers, brooms, and paddles more feasible. These objects have different statuses in the context of this production, due to their position in the market and the value of their use among the farmers and fishermen in the communities studied. In this context, we understand *trabalho de meia* as a trade modality based on reciprocal favors, in which different skills are exchanged. Its contents include a moral statute of reciprocity, in which power, sympathy, and position are at play (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 2003, p. 94). On one hand, there is an exchange of technical abilities qualified by mastering how to make artisanal objects, and on the other hand, there are the attributes of

those who perform the task of extracting the raw materials used to make the artisanal objects.

In other words, we can say that *trabalho de meia* is one of the productive strategies for making artisanal objects. It is also one of the bases supporting the production and replication of this activity, as it is part of the artisans' work dynamic and presents a series of conditioning factors so that this "help" will be activated, as we will describe later.

In discussing the social organization of labor among families of *camponeses* in Amazonia, with emphasis on the diverse forms of work relationships, Witkoski (2007) presents a mapping of the various modalities of mutual assistance relationships, which are regionally called *mutirão* (work parties), *ajuri* or *puxirum*⁴, day swaps, partnership, and *meia*. The author stresses that these work relationships are established in different aspects of social life, and are not exclusive to economically productive activities. In this sense, mutual assistance practices can occur in the context of different productive activities, such as agriculture, fishing, and in social activities including community cleanups, and construction of community centers and churches, among others (2007, p. 172).

According to Witkoski (2007, 173) *apud* Noda et al (1997, 70), mutual assistance relationships, especially *mutirão*, *ajuri* or *puxirum*

[...] *apresentam-se como sendo produto das necessidades econômicas dos camponeses amazônicos. Dão-se através de sentimentos profundos de pertença a um grupo familiar. Na denominação local, essas relações são tradicionais e caracterizam uma situação em que há pouca circulação de moeda. A principal característica é o conhecimento*

dos processos de trabalho nos subsistemas agrícola e no extrativismo vegetal (madeira) e animal (caça e pesca) [...] (2007, p. 173).

[...] present themselves as a product of the economic needs of the Amazonian *camponeses*. They occur through the deep feelings of belonging to a family group. Locally, these relationships are considered traditional and characterize a situation in which there is little circulation of currency. The main characteristic is knowledge of work processes in agricultural subsystems and the extraction of vegetation (wood) and animals (hunting and fishing) (...) (2007, p. 173)]

Although Witkoski (2007) refers to a set of the economic activities performed by "Amazon *camponeses*", we observe that the emphasis on the practice of mutual aid discussed extensively by the author particularly refers to agricultural activities, especially tasks related to clearing land. This is clear in the statements made to this author by the study subjects, whose narratives portray the practice of *ajuri* as "older" and "more traditional", and only after the creation of the communities did people begin to call it *mutirão*.

In discussing the lifestyle of rural families in Brazil, Queiroz (2009) stresses the resurgence of the practice of mutual assistance in all community activities.

These community practices do not exist only at the level of agricultural toil as even the feminine task of embroidery and weaving benefits from them. In this way, the woman who knows how to weave contributes with her work the woman who planted the cotton comes in with the raw materials and the proceeds from the sale of the cloth or the net are divided between both parties. Behaviors like these disappear whenever neighborhood solidarity unravels (2009 p. 69).

⁴Ajuri is a term of Tupi, synonymy of task force or *puxirão*, collective mobilization for mutual assistance among field workers, at the time of mowing, harvesting.

The author argues that the collectivization of activities founded on “neighborly solidarity” through the practice of mutual aid is one of the elements that defines a way of life for rural families in Brazil. In this same sense, Antonio Cândido (2009) describes the various modalities of solidarity practiced among groups of rural caipiras⁵ in the interior of São Paulo, which this author calls “tasks of neighborly cooperation” (2009, p. 195).

The main type of solidarity discussed by the author is the *mutirão*, which essentially consists of a gathering of neighbors who are invited by one person to help in a certain task: demolition, clearing land, planting, cleaning, harvesting, threshing, building a house, spinning, etc. Generally the neighbors are invited, and the beneficiary offers them food and a party to end the work. But there is no direct financial remuneration of any type, other than the moral obligation on the part of the beneficiary to respond to future calls from those who assisted [...] (2001, p.88).

On the same topic, Wagley (1988) refers to “collective work” and briefly describes the “puxirão or invitation”, as it is called in the communities studied by the author. It describes a “group of cooperative labor”, which carries out tasks related to the culture of cassava, generally the heavier work of hoeing on a farm (1988 p. 87). These “cooperative groups” are composed of a varying number of men. The owner of the task (and of the land) sends an “invitation” to close family, to *compadres*, friends, and neighbors. When the event takes place, the “host” takes care of all expenses (coffee, tobacco, and *cachaça*) and the laborers are not paid in money, but the “host” will respond in kind “when the occasion presents itself” (1988, p. 87).

Returning to the literature that discusses different practices of mutual assistance, we suggest that the “trabalho de meia”, practiced by artisans in the communities of Belo Monte, São José do Urini, and Sítio Cachimbo, presents a cooperative character. However, it goes far beyond this, as it is one of the pillars of this activity which is governed by informal work contracts or established rules, although such rules are not necessarily spoken out loud. It encompasses social relationships (and work relationships) mediated by networks of kinship, friendship, and *compadrio*. Greater emphasis, however, is placed on economic interests, moving beyond this field since it acts as an element that drives the production of handcrafts.

Thus, in some aspects we contradict the authors who are dedicated to the study of the rural world in Brazil. These authors describe the modalities of mutual aid practices that are part of the set of characteristics of the rural way of life, but do not give these practices the spotlight they deserve. The importance of these practices is simplified within the scope of social relations.

For Witkoski (2007), mutual aid work practices present in rural Amazonian communities “[...] não apontam para existência de um conjunto de regras que instituem essas relações” [“(...) do not indicate the existence of a set of rules that establish these relations”] (2007 p. 172). We suggest that, in the case of *trabalho de meia*, the principal rule is the division of the product resulting from the partnership into equal parts, whether this product is for consumption or for sale. There are other rules present, but their informality does not reflect them explicitly. Consequently, one does not enter into “*meiada*” with just any partner. It is advisable to have a relationship of trust between both parties. Even if ties of kinship and friendship are fundamental to the viability of the work, kinship itself does not just support a contract; it is imperative to establishing friendly relationships with the intention of “helping” one another.

⁵ Local part of the Southeast and Midwest of Brazil, of rural origin, characterized by subsistence farming and without tenure, term of Tupi origin of *ka'a* (bush) and *put* (resident).

For the supplier of raw materials, it is essential that the produced objects (mainly the woven objects and the paddles) be of good quality. Therefore, it is rare to establish a partnership with artisans who are not experienced and/or are not esteemed locally. For example, Sousa (2011) identified that the artisans of Sítio Cachimbo are requested more frequently to work in the *meiada* system due to the prestige they have attained because the products they make, whether these are baskets, strainers, *tupé* drying ladders, earthen vessels, or paddles, are of undeniable quality. The author observes that the substitution of the partner responsible for the collection and supply of raw materials is common, but the same “artisan-producer” is always maintained due to their recognized technical capacity.

We note that, in the *trabalho de meia* system, labor for collecting raw materials is essential, as the “artisan-producer” does not always have time to perform this task. There are cases in which the artisans, especially women, have difficulty accessing natural resources due to the distances and the dangers entailed in this activity. There are situations in which there is no longer an area nearby where the raw material is available.

Witkoski (2007) identifies the practice of *meia* as being activated principally when the river level rises. This measure is taken in order to join labor forces to guarantee a faster cassava harvest and in this way avoid damages. This activity is called “*dar a roça de meia*”, a practice commonly adopted in fishing, hunting, and in harvesting fruit.

In the context of producing handcrafts, the division of tasks depicted as “specialized and non-specialized” determines how and with whom the *trabalho de meia* will be conducted. Established partnerships and the division of tasks are crucial to the contract’s success. This suggests that the work of “artisan-producer-specialist” is invested with greater attributes, as it requires knowledge and

technical ability, and the collector of raw material is left with the work done in the bush, which is considered to be non-specialized. This artisan’s narrative demonstrates the (contentious) feelings that surround this contract.

Researcher: What is the *meia* system? **Artisan:** it is half, *meia* means that we do and then divide half for one and half for the other, but it is more work for the one who does it than for the person who gets the materials it’s harder for us. **R:** in the case of the baskets, how does it work? **Artisan:** the person delivers the raw *ambé* and we skin it, scrape it, strip it, and then we start to weave. It is here that we do the final service, and in the end half goes to them and half to the person who gave us the vines, but it isn’t a good deal. **R:** Why do you do it? **Artisan:** we’ve done it to help people, but we always note that we lose more. They have less work and we have more. In the case of *arumã*, the way we have *arumã* in this canal, my God, in one day a person can get enough *arumã* for thousands of strainers, and for us to make 50 strainers, how many days does it take? And here for us to do the work we have to scrape it all, strip it, remove the inside, it’s a lot of work. **R:** the basket also needs three types of materials: *ambé*, the vine for the rim (*barba de surubim*) and also the little forks for the wood on the side [to make the base of the basket], and you still have to scrape it all, because if you put it on dirty it looks ugly [...] (sic)

Artisan, 53 years of age - Sítio Cachimbo (Sousa 2011 p. 129/130).

This artisan’s statement is emblematic, seeing that this person is one of the individuals in greatest demand to work *de meia*. This is due to his skill in weaving baskets and carving paddles. Although his statement demonstrates discontent with the profits obtained from *trabalho de meia*, the artisan commonly works within this system. Sometimes he is requested, and other times he seeks out partners. The motive that leads him to work within

this partnership system, despite his expressed displeasure, is principally the fact that the artisan does not have time to extract raw materials, as he is busy with fabricating the baskets and paddles, and with the tasks that surround him every day.

This being the case, we observe that this type of demarcation of tasks between the artisan-producer and the supplier of raw material is not a characteristic of the present, for example, in the practice of *mutirão*, because there is not a division of the territorial spaces to do the work.

Alternatively, for Antonio Cândido (2009), in the *mutirão* there is no presence of direct compensation "of some kind". Nevertheless, in the *meiada* there is the notion of remuneration of one of the parties involved in the contract, in general as a monetary value from the products that are the result of the partnership. This value is calculated by the partners beforehand, although this calculation is not absolute and constitutes an estimate. This means that the artisanal products made in partnership are primarily intended to be sold or traded for basic necessities. Less frequently, two partners may join together to conduct *trabalho de meia* in order to obtain a small quantity of objects exclusively for domestic use. This is a practice established mainly between women.

Having outlined some differences between the two modalities of cooperation, *mutirão* and *trabalho de meia*, we observe that the foundation underlying these informal contracts is a relationship of trust mediated by social networks of kinship, *compadrio*, and friendship. Without the existence of these ties, such "practices of solidarity" could not occur.

Sale of objects

It is in the context of production and consumption of a traditional domestic economy determined by needs which are culturally defined, due to its capacity to exploit the environment through the

strength of family labor (LIMA, 2010), that we will approach the specifics of the sale of handcrafts. In this system of economy, there is a prevailing logic, in which the domestic unit is responsible for the production that guarantees family consumption.

In general, the crafts produced by the artisans of São José do Urini, Sítio Cachimbo, and Belo Monte are sold to the local communities (especially those located in the area included in the Amanã sector, in the immediacies of Lakes Amanã and Urini) and in the towns of Tefé and Alvarães. Domestic objects such as baskets, strainers, and paddles are mostly sold to local residents who dedicate themselves to agricultural and fishing activities. In general, the trade cycle is based on a system of "orders" that can be placed during occasional meetings between artisans and residents, as well as through the mediation of family members, neighbors, and *compadres*, that is, through the social networks present in the communities.

Another type of commercial relationship is established with the vendors residing in the towns of Tefé and Alvarães, and with the local vendor (named "Raimundão"), and consists of the artisans offering a direct supply of objects for domestic use to these buyers. The sale actually takes place depending on the stock that exists in the commercial establishments. For the owners of these businesses, only handcrafts intended for agricultural activities and paddles are convenient to buy, as these businesses' main customers are the farmers and fishermen in the region's rural communities. On the other hand, despite the fact that the artisans have "correct standards" they need to meet for their targeted clients in their communities, this does not guarantee that the traders will acquire their products. If the artisan does not want to return to his or her community with the objects produced, he or she establishes three forms of negotiation with the "boss".

The first consists of reducing the price of the

objects so that the seller has the capital to absorb them. The second manner consists of maintaining the original price, with the artisan receiving only a part of the objects' total value, and the rest of the money being paid during a later trip. The third is based on the trade of objects for merchandise and/or consumer articles that are available for sale and in which the artisan expresses interest. In this last case, crafts are traded for industrialized articles, that is, for merchandise. During these transactions, the artisan's and trader's bargaining power is determined by the type of relationship historically established between these social agents. In this way, dealers' acquisition of the crafts depends as much on existing demand as it does on negotiations and the argumentative skills of both parties.

In fact, we reiterate that the lack of any regularity in the supply of handcrafts on the part of the artisans creates situations that are favorable and unfavorable to sales. Nevertheless, most of the time it is the artisan who is at a disadvantage in this type of trade, seeing as his trip to the city is motivated not only by the need to sell his products, but also to access goods and articles which are basic needs, especially the articles that make up the food hamper of basic necessities. In other situations, when the city traders are running low on objects, they alert the social agents that regularly travel in the municipalities. In this way, "messages" are sent to the artisans by means of people who know them or their family members. Consequently, local networks of friendship and kinship are fundamental intermediaries in the trade and sale cycle.

Another commercial relationship of a regular nature is established with a local trader named "Raimundão". He is a commercial agent with whom the artisans maintain a different link than other traders, as it is strongly influenced by links of kinship and friendship. His condition as a local

resident establishes an extensive and intensive network of kinship, which in turn permits a system of commercial trade with the artisans. Most of the time, this entails the trade of handcrafts for basic necessities; in other words, money is almost always absent from this commercial transaction.

It is mainly this type of commercial arrangement that provides the families with their most basic food items, such as coffee, sugar, flour, oil, cookies, soap, fuel, batteries, and other consumer articles. In general, the artisans trade baskets, strainers, brooms, and paddles for coffee, sugar, salt, oil, and other articles. This type of commercial transaction is similar to the "goodwill" model practiced in the interior of Amazonia in the golden age of the rubber economy, in other words, "supplying credit in the traders' shacks" (*"o fornecimento a crédito nos barracões dos comerciantes"*) (GALVÃO, 1976). What we note is only a change in the type of product which is now offered by the "boss" (the trader). In this case, the handcrafts are also products that measure "customers'" trades for basic necessities.

We reiterate that relationships of this type only occur as the result of a history of pre-established mutual trust, a type of "informal contract" that is based on a principle of reciprocity. In this sense, we can argue that Raimundão is not an ordinary trader, since his network of confidence is the fruit of his stature as a local resident (family member, friend, and *compadre*) and also of his specialization in this area of business, as well as his popularity in dealing with the artisans and other local residents (SOUSA, 2011).

Speaking with Raimundão, we observe the refined level of knowledge that this trader holds regarding the handcrafts. His knowledge reflects a thorough look at the objects that are offered to him, as in the act of selecting the objects for acquisition he uses different adjectives and/or categories such as "well-made" and "poorly-made". In other words,

there is a popular selection criteria which will influence the price and the deal to be made with the artisan. This dealer is even capable of identifying the artisan who made each piece, thanks to the close relationship he has built over time with the artisans. In this sense, characters like Raimundão, who act in the commercial networks surrounding artisanal objects, are fundamental to guaranteeing a dynamic trade system.

On the other hand, the sales cycle for the artisanal objects, known as “decorative crafts”, that are made mainly by the young artisans Miriam, Margarete, Queila, and their mother Ludenira in Sítio Cachimbo (today known as Monte Moreá), is directed towards the dealers located in the Tefé Municipal Fair, who are dedicated to the sale of this type of objects (See RAPOSO, 2006). Another consuming public is the people who visit Sítio Cachimbo, especially teachers in the nearby communities, employees of the Instituto Mamirauá, and Evangelical leaders.

In the specific case of production of crafts coming from the artisans of Sítio Cachimbo, the majority of sales in the municipality of Tefé are the responsibility of young artisan Margarete Aprígio, who developed the skills to carry out this task. After selling the objects in Tefé, the artisan converts the financial resource into personal articles, foodstuffs, and domestic equity for her family. This commercial transaction occurs according to the productive dynamic that is directly linked to the family’s needs. We should mention that, until the middle of 2007, the artisans of Sítio Cachimbo did not usually receive orders. After this time, the family began to receive a regular demand for orders that directly impacted the family unit’s production rhythm and their productive capacity. In this way we observe that the artisans’ preference for selling their handcrafts in the town of Tefé is principally due to easier access to consumer goods for their families, mainly because “rancho” and

other types of basic necessities can be acquired at more accessible prices, increasing the families’ purchasing power.

Another arrangement of commercial trades, which is directly influenced by the local networks of sociability based on kinship and *compadrio*, occurs in the community of Belo Monte. In this community, the artisans mainly make strainers and brooms. Since 2008, it has fallen to the matriarch of the community to produce all of the crafts which are to be resold in the city of Tefé. Before this agreement, the majority of the products made in the community were sold exclusively to Raimundão and the other traders who traverse the communities.

We remember that this arrangement can only be put into practice because the local matriarch and her husband have their own transport (barge with onboard motor) and go to Tefé each month in order to receive their retirement money and other social benefits from the government. At the same time that they sell the handcrafts and other agricultural products, they buy their family’s supplies and take advantage of the trip to stock up on the merchandise for the small store they maintain in their home which serves the Belo Monte community. Most of the time, the artisans do not receive the money that results from the sales of their products. This value is converted into merchandise and/or the purchase of goods and articles they requested previously. According to the artisans’ statements, this arrangement has been satisfactory for the people involved in the transaction since purchasing power is greater in Tefé than in the communities. In general, the artisans that supply the handcrafts have some level of kinship link through blood or affinity with Dona Valdivina, whether her daughters or daughters-in-

⁶ Purchase basic food to feed the family during the month.

law. According to the matriarch, the objective of this “accord” is to help in the sale of the sieves and brooms made by the artisans and to guarantee better prices in Tefé. In playing this role, the matriarch has come to be the main mediator in the sales.

Considered to be the best fabricators of brooms made of *cipó titica* (*Heteropsis spp*), the artisans in the community of São José do Urini make brooms for two local traders. In the commercial transaction made with these buyers, the artisans report that there are two payment modalities for the brooms: “in money” and “in trade”. In both forms, the operation represents variations in price for the brooms. If the payment is “in money”, the broom costs BRL\$ 3.00 and if it is “in trade” (trade for merchandise), the broom costs BRL\$ 3.50.

A similar negotiation is described by Brussi (2009) in the context of the production and sale of bobbin lace in two rural communities in Ceará. The author calls attention to the existence of an “intermediary” who appears as a central figure in maintaining and updating productive and commercial traffic. In this sense, Brussi indicates two sales modalities which are valued by the lace makers: “*fiado e a encomenda, ambas estão vinculadas ao chamado “dinheiro certo”*”. [“credit and orders, both are linked to so-called “right money””] In this way, the guarantee of income related to this activity “*faz com que haja um esforço constante de todos no sentido de obtê-lo*” [“causes everyone to constantly strive towards obtaining it”] (2009 p. 15).

The survey by Brussi (2009) emphasizes that both the production and the sale of bobbin lace establishes a cycle that is not restricted only to the level of commerce, but to other non-monetary goods that circulate, and which is extremely important to the family life of the lace makers.

Along similar lines, the commercial arrangements practiced in the ethnographic context of producing handcrafts, production which is destined

exclusively for sale, involve a network of actors that comes into action in order to facilitate the sale of the products, especially the baskets, strainers, paddles, and decorative crafts made by the young artisans of Sítio Cachimbo. With this in mind, we maintain that one of the main strategies for facilitating trade is taking advantage of kinship and *compadrio* relationships. Through these agents, the artisans reach the local and regional markets of consumers that purchase handcrafts.

THE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESS

As with *trabalho de meia*, the process of acquiring and transmitting knowledge between generations is another important element for maintenance and impetus in making crafts. In this sense, we have identified a group of “pedagogical categories” that are directly linked to the stages of the work and are utilized in producing these objects.

This process presupposes a set of knowledge linked to practices or to a type of practical engagement that delineates ways of producing, acting, and expressing oneself through the artisans’ specific group. Bodily movements and, at the same time, cognitive ideas, direct production. Speech, in turn, acts as a complementary action, but does not represent a decisive factor in learning, as there is a very specific language that parents and other agents express. There is a tendency towards replication, and not repetition, of gestures and processes. It is practical knowledge learned in the universe of an everyday action in the life of the artisan, and subjective and creative know-how produced in the context of social relationships, where new practices are incorporated.

Based on the artisans’ narratives and field observations, we qualify the learning and teaching process into some complementary modalities. These modalities are classified as follows: (i) Practical perception by watching, that is, observation; (ii) Repetition of movements and

gestures; (iii) Having a knack for weaving (iv) Memorizing in the past and making in the present, (v) Making an object while looking at another, and (vi) Dismantling an object to make it again. In summary, we can describe these processes with the following actions: observe, repeat, memorize, recreate, and remake (SOUSA, 2011).

In fact, an artisan can follow the paths of teaching and learning in various ways; there is no standard rule which produces a single way of learning, because each type of object requires different means of learning. There are also unexpected situations that arise, causing a person to learn to make a certain object. For example, an artisan states she learned to make her first basket out of *cipó ambé* (*Philodendron spp*) through a process of dismantling, weaving, and remaking until she was able to finish it. Her impulse to learn did not occur in her youth, but instead after she was married, when she needed a basket, asked her husband to make one, and did not get one. In a moment of anger, she revealed that she made various attempts before she was able to make her first basket, and afterwards never lost her ability to weave. In a process of trial and error, of “weaving and unweaving”, learning takes place.

Often in the act of observing, there is experimentation, mainly on the part of children and young people. By using leftover pieces of raw material (splints, wood, clay for making pots), children tend to put into practice the work they observe. It is in this way that, in an initial moment, spontaneous learning by the children presents itself as play, later will be perceived as helping with work, and finally as an individual action which is active and autonomous.

Sautchuk defends that motor learning consists of a process of “repetition without repetition”. In other words, in seeking to solve a “motor problem”, repetition will be employed in order to build experience, but not to mechanize it. However,

dexterity is not based on a mental representation of gesture, but instead on a loosened relationship of interaction with the environment (2007, p. 249). A specific type of learning that consists of observation (even if it seems to be inattentive observation), a memory honed by practice, and daily experience making the object drives the cognitive universe of the artisan.

The statement of one artisan from the community of São José do Urini reveals how after many years her memory was activated in the moment that she needed to use a kitchen burner. According to the artisan, as an adolescent she often watched her mother make these burners, but said to herself that she would not learn to make that object, believing she would never need a clay burner, because in the future she would be prosperous and would have the financial means to buy herself a gas stove.

[...] eu aprendi quando tinha uns 12 para 13 anos... aprendi com a minha mãe... mas eu não me interessava porque para mim eu não achava futuro esse trabalho ... mas ela dizia minha filha têm que aprender porque vocês vão precisar mais adiante... mas para mim parecia que o que ela falava era brincadeira mas foi uma verdade o que ela falou. Com 17 anos eu casei eu comecei a fazer esses objetos de verdade, o primeiro que eu fiz foi o fogareiro um dia ficamos sem o nosso fogareiro aí eu pensei bem que a mamãe queria que eu aprendesse e agora estamos precisando. Aí eu botei para fazer e acertei, mandei tirar o material [barro e caraipé] eu fiz o primeiro, o segundo e daí foi embora continuo fazendo até hoje [...] Artesã, 40 anos, Comunidade São José do Urini.

[(...)] I learned when I was 12 or 13... I learned from my mother... but I wasn't interested because I didn't think that this work was in my future ... but she said, child, you need to learn because you will need it later ... but to

me it seemed like what she said was a joke but it was true what she said. I married at 17 and I began to make these objects for real, the first one that I made was a burner, one day we didn't have our burner and I thought, well, Mama wanted me to learn and now we need it. So I went to make it, and I did it, I asked someone to get the material (clay and *caraipé*) and I made the first one, the second one, and I'm still making them today (...) Artisan, 40 years old, Community of São José do Urini]

Thus, in the same way that learning is acquired through the networks of kinship, these networks are reproduced by a similar principle. This replication is drawn from the understanding that there are different modes of engagement that convey a learning process that is also differentiated, that is, from fine-tuning and refinement of the practice.

CONCLUSION

In the three locations studied, a set of artisanal objects, such as large and small baskets, strainers, woven fans, paddles, canoes, and clayware, among others, is traditionally produced and represents the modes of manual production that are being passed from one generation to the next in the context of the communities studied. In inventorying, registering, describing, and classifying the objects that are produced, used, and sold, we brought to the center of the discussion elements that explain the local dynamic of this production, as well as reinforced the importance of this activity for the artisan-producers.

The commercial transactions and the productive strategies which have been developed are important to maintaining the activity in full force, deconstructing the artisans' affirmation that "*antigamente a gente fazia, mas não tinha para quem vender*" ["long ago we made it, but there was nobody to sell it to"], or better yet, *não tinha*

"muita saída" [the objects "didn't move"]. On the other hand, the dynamic flow guarantees domestic production of artisanal objects meant for use by the families.

In each place surveyed, the families used different strategies to produce and to reach the market, whether this market was the residents of neighboring communities that frequently needed the baskets, strainers, canoes, and paddles to conduct their own agricultural or fishing activities, or for domestic use. Traders from the communities and from Tefé, in turn, are the principal agents enabling the products to circulate, whether through the "trade" or "money" modalities that the artisans refer to. In this way, the social networks that surround the production and sale of the products are activated in different ways.

The production of artisanal objects, besides being characterized as a domain of a specific knowledge, is presented as a task or, as one artisan affirms, "*é um trabalho que dá muito trabalho e nem sempre tem o valor que deveria ter*" ["it is a job that is a lot of work and isn't always valued the way it should be"]. This work, in turn, places the artisans into cycles of different modalities of commercial trades within and outside of the communities. There are also the exchanges of experiences and redefinition of knowledge in a local network of social relationships that are constantly interacting with the environment.

As we have seen, one of the relationships that permeates the production of handcrafts is *trabalho de meia*, which is agreed upon between artisans and instituted through kinship, *compadre* relationships, and friendship. These links seem to operate as a "certificate of guarantee" that the contract will be fulfilled and/or that neither party will lose in the agreement. In the context of producing the objects, *trabalho de meia* takes on a very specific meaning; the main relationship established is the "trade" of raw material for the artisan's "specialized labor".

In this way we understand that the *meia* system acts as one of the ways to guarantee the artisans access to the natural resources used to produce the handcrafts. Consequently, it provides work for both the artisan-producer as well as the “owner of the raw materials”. There is a contractual pact at play that seeks to meet the interests of both, which are not necessarily the same.

On the other hand, it is very well known that the artisans face problems accessing the natural resources (lacking the time and transportation, or scarcity of resources in the nearby areas) in some seasons of the year, and can only guarantee production if they are linked into *trabalho de meia*. However, this work relationship, by undergoing modifications, imposes dynamics on the activity as new rules can be created and tested, which results in adjustments to the contractual relations. The rules not only serve to guarantee a certain control over the work being performed, but also operate as a way of adjusting and creating work strategies that guarantee the maintenance and effectiveness of producing crafts by the families involved.

If these “solidarity practices” are seen as a domain of social life that directly influences social relationships, we can conceive them as an instrument of understanding which is broader than the social dynamic and all the aspects of social life; in other words, as a “total social fact”, as posited by Mauss (2003). This is because the trades that permeate *trabalho de meia* are not an isolated activity that is purely economic or productive, but instead are interconnected activities. They are trades that support an activity, and are based on a broader set of relationships. As suggested by Lana (2000), trades are at the same time voluntary and obligatory, interested and disinterested. In this way, one of the notable elements of *trabalho de meia* can be its voluntary characteristic, that is, at the same time, obligatory and interested.

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