

ENCHANTMENT EXPERIENCES AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THE MIRAÑA OF CUIÚ-CUIÚ AND
THE PINK RIVER DOLPHIN (*Inia geoffrensis*)

EXPERIÊNCIAS DE ENCANTAMENTO E A RELAÇÃO DOS MIRANHA DO CUIÚ-CUIÚ E OS BOTOS
VERMELHOS (*Inia geoffrensis*)

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KEY WORDS:

Pink River Dolphin;

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Equivocation;

Conservation.

ABSTRACT

This work seeks further clarification on the relationship between the Miraña of the Cuiú-Cuiú Indigenous Land, and its surroundings, and the pink river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*), regionally known as boto. We demonstrate, through the use of ethnographic methods and the theory of Amerindian Perspectivism, how this indigenous group from the médio Solimões relates to the pink river dolphin and how their cosmology is linked to the predation practices, of this animal, used as bait for the capture of the picaratinga catfish (*Calophysus macropterus*). We seek to identify the reasons that lead fishermen to kill, or not to kill, botos. Demonstrating the unique ideas of the Miraña about the pink river dolphin, we intend to call attention to the importance of understanding and valuing the Amazonian cosmologies in the planning and execution of conservation initiatives in the region.

PALAVRAS - CHAVE:

Boto-Vermelho;

Miranha;

Encantados;

Perspectivismo Ameríndio;

Equivocação;

Conservação.

RESUMO

Este trabalho busca discutir a relação entre os Miranha da Terra Indígena Cuiú-Cuiú e seu entorno com o boto-vermelho (*Inia geoffrensis*). Buscamos conhecer, através do uso do método etnográfico e da teoria do perspectivismo ameríndio, como este povo indígena do médio Solimões se relaciona com o boto-vermelho e como a cosmologia por eles construída está ligada às práticas de predação desse mamífero, usado como isca para a pesca de piracatinga (*Calophysus macropterus*) na região. Buscou-se identificar e compreender os motivos que levam os pescadores a matar ou não os botos-vermelhos. Demonstrando as especificidades do pensamento dos Miranha acerca do boto-vermelho, pretendemos chamar a atenção para a importância da compreensão e valorização das cosmologias amazônicas na elaboração e execução de iniciativas de conservação nessa região.

“E isso foi verdade o que aconteceu comigo. É verdade, isso aí é verdade. boto vira gente mesmo!”

- Antônio Preto, comunidade São José do Cuiú-Cuiú

“And this is true what happened to me. It's true; this here is the truth. Pink river dolphinbotos really turn into people!”

- Antônio Preto, community of São José of Cuiú-Cuiú

INTRODUCTION

This project comes from a combination of different research and outreach efforts carried out within the scope of the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Institute: the work of author Juliana Dutra in her role as an environmental educator in the Research Group for Aquatic Mammals at the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Institute (IDSM) in 2012, and her ethnographic research among the Miraña of the Cuiú-Cuiú Indigenous Land (IL); and the research of Rafael Barbi among the indigenous peoples of the region of the middle Solimões and its tributaries. Based on the case study of the relationship between the Miraña and the pink river dolphin (or boto), we seek to reflect on the differences in the thought about animal species on the perspectives of Modern Sciences and Amazonian populations traditional knowledge.

While environmental education activities were being carried out among the Miraña of Cuiú-Cuiú, we perceived a difficulty in working with the concepts and classifications of the Biological Sciences. At the same time, we were presented with rich local knowledge, based on Miraña cosmology and their experience with aquatic environments and its various animal species. The boto, in particular, was described as a potentially enchanted animal, having agency and transformative powers. We thus note the necessity to describe the understanding of the Miraña about this animal.

The narratives regarding supernatural or enchanted beings are a significant part of Brazilian folklore, present in the comprehensive studies published by Luís da Câmara Cascudo (1954) and Alceu Maynard Araújo (1964). In these works, the enchanted boto is featured between *curupiras*, *sacis* and headless mules as a figure of the legends told in Brazil's countryside. While it has become commonplace to view narratives of the enchanted boto as “legends” in folklore studies, this contributes to a stripped importance of the narrators' lived world and obscures the fact that these narratives may be about lived experiences. In this sense, the work of Eduardo Galvão (1955), a contemporary of Câmara Cascudo e Araújo, about religion in the village of Itá, Lower Amazon River, is the first to address enchantment as an active part of his interlocutors' lives.

Galvão (1955) affirms that the residents of Itá define “enchanted” as “a magical force attributed to the supernatural”. He understands that the concept of enchanted is based on both “descriptions of the supernatural of indigenous origin” and “borrowed from Europe”. The enchanted botos are known as “companions of the deep” or “*caruaras*”, inhabitants of submersed cities and kingdoms, familiar spirits that help in the cure rituals of *pajés* and *sacacas*¹. It is considered to be part of a “special category of enchanted beings”, since, while it is different from the other enchanted creatures of the forest, such as *curupira* or *mapinguari*, it may change into different forms. According to the residents of Itá, the boto can transform into a white man, gifted with a spirit and supernatural powers capable of provoking death and insanity.

¹ Pajé is the name for a traditional healer, whose power to heal is related to its abilities in dealing with the entities of the forest and the river. A sacaca is a powerful type of pajé that is able to travel in body and spirit to the bottom of the river.

More recently, through a multi-sited study in the Brazilian Amazon, Slater (1994) documents and analyses a great number of narratives involving enchanted botos. The author discusses the differences and similarities in the stories and in the conception of the enchanted beings, through material collected in the states of Amazonas, Rondônia, Pará and Amapá. Nomura (1996) affirms that narratives of the boto are a striking aspect of the cosmology of Amazonian populations. She states that the boto is described in the narratives as a gifted being with the capacity to transform into a good-looking man (or woman), dressed in white clothing and wearing a hat that serves to hide its blowhole. Rivas-Ruiz (2011) describes that, among the Cocama of the Peruvian Amazon, the boto is considered an esteemed magical animal, capable of transforming into a person, having sexual relations with humans and causing them harm via *feitçaria* (witchcraft). Wawzyniak (2008), through research conducted among the dwellers of lower Tapajós, also documented the boto ability to transform into people and to place an “evil eye” on human beings. In a short book put together by Trujillo and collaborators (2004), brief narratives by the Cocama, Yágua and Ticuna in the Colombian Amazon are recorded, in which the enchanted botos transform into humans, live in submerged cities and seduce men and women. Likewise, the residents of the Paru village, in lower Amazonas, attribute diseases that occur during the period of high waters to the work of the botos (HARRIS, 1996).

In the Cuiú-Cuiú IL, the enchanted appear as a strong aspect of the lived world of the Miraña. The cosmology of enchantment influences the way in which the residents of this indigenous land interact with the *Inia geoffrensis*: for the Miraña of Cuiú-Cuiú, the boto may be an *Encantado* (enchanted). While environmental education activities were

being carried out in that IL, we noted that, upon questioning the residents about the principal characteristics of the boto, the answers were more related to the aspect of enchantment than to the species’ biological or ecological features.

The environmental education activities carried out during the field study were based on the idea that learning about the ecology of the animal makes the learner more sensitive to the conservation of the species. According to this logic, one of the objectives of these activities was to teach the residents of Cuiú-Cuiú subjects related to scientific knowledge about the *Inia geoffrensis* produced by the biological sciences. The relationship of such content with the knowledge of the Miraña is not very significant, based on assumptions that are not shared by scientists and indigenous peoples. Environmental education was establishing a barrier instead of promoting communication between educators and the residents of Cuiú-Cuiú.

In the Cuiú-Cuiú region, as well as in various other areas of the Amazon, the carcass of the boto, as with some caiman species (*Melanosuchus niger* and *Caiman crocodilus*), are being commercialised and used as bait for fishing *piracatinga* (*Calophysus macropterus*). This medium-sized siluriforme fish is valued and consumed primarily in countries such as Peru and Colombia, with a recent consumption increase in Brazil. *Piracatinga* is known for ingesting animals of vegetable and animal origin, including carcasses of dead animals. This feeding habit has resulted in this fish not being valued in the Brazilian Amazon (ESTUPIÑÁN et al., 2003). In the last 10 years, the commercialisation of this fish species by the Brazilian fishing industry has grown dramatically: aiming to reverse the Brazilian Amazon population’s restrictions on *piracatinga* consumption, this fish has begun to be sold under the name “Douradinha” (BRUM, 2011; MINTZER et al., 2013).

During the research period, we noted that many residents were afraid of killing botos and the majority stated having fished for *piracatinga* using only caiman carcasses. It is worth pointing out here that the carcass of the boto is considered the most effective bait in this fishing practice as it has *pitiú* (a strong smell) and a higher amount of fat. Recent data (IRIARTE and MARMONTEL, 2013; MINTZER et al., 2013) suggest, however, that boto meat is still widely used in the region when fishing for *piracatinga*. This apparent contradiction – simultaneously being afraid of and intentionally killing the boto – is revealed as part of a complex relationship between this animal and the populations of the lower Japurá. The focus of the Miraña on the enchanted condition of the boto suggested the need for us to investigate this aspect of their lived world.

Lima (2013) suggests that the theory of Amerindian Perspectivism is essential to the understanding of the enchanted nature of the boto. Perspectivism, as synthesized by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996, 2002), points out that the Amerindian cosmologies assume that animals are potentially human, in according to their perspective. In other words, animals see themselves as people, their bodily attributes are adornments or garments; their food is human food; and their relationships are organized as those of human beings. Therefore, the jaguar sees itself as a human person; it sees its place in the tree as a *maloca* (longhouse); it sees the blood that it drinks as *cauim* (manioc beer). According to the perspective of the jaguar, human beings would be potential prey, viewed by the jaguar as if they were collared peccary.

In according to Perspectivism, Amerindian cosmologies would be multinatural, differing from multicultural cosmologies, Amerindian cosmologies are based on the idea of an extensive culture, expressed by the potential human existence of many beings, according to their own

perspective, and at the same time, in a multiplicity of natures. Differences would be expressed through the bodies, their unique characteristics and their potential. Viveiros de Castro synthesis of the Amerindian Perspectivism points out that Amerindian thought manages the concepts of nature and culture in a different way than modern sciences, for example. In a recent article Maués (2012) defends that Perspectivism would not function as a cosmological presupposition only between Amerindian peoples, being shared by the rural populations of Amazonia. The narratives and theories of enchantment in the médio Solimões are considered by Lima (2013) as life experiences, whose structure originates historically in a perspectivist ontology. In other research situations, in the lower Japurá and at the mouth of the Jutáí, indigenous and non-indigenous interlocutors describe some animals and enchanted creatures in terms of their transformative powers and human-like agency, which can be referred to the theories of Amerindian Perspectivism.

Within the modern sciences, the order of Cetacea, to which *Inia geoffrensis* belongs, is at the centre of a long-time controversy regarding the limits of humanity and animality. Since the 1970s, research about the anatomy of the cortex and what would be considered evidence of the presence of articulated language in Cetaceans provided a change in the ontological statute of these beings (CALHEIROS, 2009).

Bruno Latour (1994) stipulates that modernity is made of separations, such as those between science and politics, nature and culture, humans and non-humans, and of assumptions, such as that of transcendence of nature and the immanence of society. He affirms that these separations and assumptions would be guaranteed by the “Modern Constitution”, his metaphor for a “common text” that would define the agreements around these guarantees. Latour’s thesis, however, is

about what the Moderns do not actually operate through these separations and assumptions, and the Modern Constitution is what can handle the numerous “hybrids” that disturb the guarantees of modernity. The “hybrids” would be created when, for example, politics and nature mix with the sciences, or when it is understood that society is comprised of a growing number of non-human mediators. Based on this theory, and following the analysis by Calheiros (2009), we understand that Cetaceans would occupy the place of hybrids in the contemporary sciences, being the focus of discussions about the limits of the concepts of “human” and “animal”.

As an example, we point that in the year 2010, in Helsinki, the “Declaration of the Rights of Cetaceans”, developed by researchers following the conference “*Cetacean Rights: Fostering Moral and Legal Change*”, proposed the recognition of Cetaceans as non-human persons, subject to rights. The proponents of the declaration highlight that the “scientific research gives us a more deep understanding of the complexities of the minds, societies and cultures of Cetaceans” (HELSINKI GROUP, 2010).

Nevertheless, if Amazonian peoples and scientists attribute a status of relative humanity to the boto, they do this under different assumptions that articulate different concepts of “human”.

METHODS

The Cuiú-Cuiú IL is inhabited by the Miraña people; it is located in the lower Japurá; and its territory is part of the municipality of Maraã. Its residents are part of the Boa União sector, which is in the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve (RDSM). The IL has an area of 36,450 hectares, having begun its identification process in 1992 and finally homologated in 2003. The Cuiú-Cuiú IL does not overlap with the Mamirauá and

Amanã Sustainable Development Reserves (SDRs), but its residents maintain access to the natural resources within the RDSM, under the condition of “users” of the Conservation Unit (CU). “User” is a management category that denominates those who live outside the limits of the SDRs, but who make use of the natural resources therein. In general, the users are residents of communities in the areas surrounding the CUs. The Miraña of the Cuiú-Cuiú IL participate in technical support and outreach programs offered by the IDSM, such as the environmental education program of the Research Group for Aquatic Mammals, through which this discussion is developed.

The Cuiú-Cuiú IL includes the following indigenous communities: São José, Nova Esperança, Nova Estrela, Vila Nova 1, Vila Nova 2 and São Pedro. Near the community of São Pedro, there is the community of Jubará, which initially did not consider itself part of the Cuiú-Cuiú IL, despite its residents having kinship with the Miraña of the other communities. Years later, after its homologation, the residents of Jubará entered into an agreement with the leaders of the IL so that they would forward a request to FUNAI (National Indian Foundation) to revise the area to be one that would include the community (SOUZA, 2012). For this reason, Jubará is still in the process of obtaining official recognition of its lands. Still, for practical purposes, this community is considered in this project as part of the IL, since its residents seem themselves as such. Thus, the only community of the Boa União sector that is not part of the Cuiú-Cuiú IL, and does not identify itself as indigenous, is Açaituba.

The methodology used in this project consisted of a bibliographical study and a qualitative study, defined by the ethnographic method of research. First, we conducted a bibliographical study regarding the relationship between humans and botos, according to different approaches. The

research included reports about the environmental education activities carried out within the scope of the IDSM, in particular, that of Letícia Silva de Oliveira, who carried out environmental education projects in the Boa União sector between 2011 and 2012. We also surveyed reports by other researchers who had done research in the RDSM and whose topics were related to this project. The work was given direction by the contributions of Candace Slater (1994), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996, 2002) and Deborah Lima (2013).

The field research used ethnographic methods, most notably in-depth interviews and participant observation. The author's approach, with regard to environmental education practices, was redeveloped based on identifying the relationships of the local population with the boto, recognising that these are deeply influenced by the cosmological assumptions of the Amazonian peoples.

Ethnographic data were collected by author Juliana Dutra when she was working as an environmental educator with the IDSM's Research Group for Aquatic Mammals. It was noted that the communities of São Pedro, São José and Vila Nova 2 were more open to dialogue, partly due to the good relationship established between these residents and Letícia Silva, who had also worked there on environmental education projects. It was decided that these communities would be prioritised. In order to carry out this research and the education activities, Juliana Dutra spent six months in contact with the residents of the Cuiú-Cuiú IL, alternating her time between the communities, the Floating Base *Preguiça* and at the Mamirauá Institute campus in Tefé.

Contact with these communities was also guided by involvement in daily activities, such as peeling manioc, sharing meals, cooking, attending local soccer tournaments and even participating in

piracatinga fishing expeditions. This exercise resulted in participant observation that, along with meetings focused on environmental education, was important for establishing a trust relationship with some residents of these indigenous communities. Contact with the other communities in the Boa União sector was maintained through environmental education activities, such that some residents of these communities made themselves available to talk about the subject and give interviews.

After establishing a good relationship with the chosen communities, a semi-structured interview was developed and applied, addressing the various aspects of local knowledge about the boto. The majority of the interviews were carried out on an individual basis in the homes of the interviewees, but in some cases, other residents were present, including Odinez Clarindo Moraes, the field assistant whose work was crucial for this research. Beyond supporting the environmental education activities and piloting the boats used for travel, over time Odinez also became the key informant for the study, indicating the individuals with greater knowledge about the subject and providing valuable information about the world experienced by the residents of the region.

It was perceived that some interviewees felt more uncomfortable and intimidated when alone with the researcher, and appeared more relaxed when in the company of another local resident, like Odinez.

The researcher also received visits by the Miraña on the Floating Base *Preguiça*, where they felt comfortable to talk about the research topic. During these moments, they explained how and when botos were hunted; what is Enchantment; they identified local classifications of the boto; they cited locations where there was the greatest number of enchantment displays; and they told

stories, heard about or experienced, in which the boto presented itself as an enchanted being or a “live being”.

Photographic records were taken and 15 interviews were recorded (12 men and 3 women), in accordance with the express agreement of the interlocutors, taking care that these tools would not inhibit them. In this project, we used fictitious names to protect the identity of the interviewees.

In this paper, we chose to treat enchantment as “experience”, before “representation” or “belief”, as we understand that its place in the lived world of the Miraña is not the imagination (cf. GOLDMAN, 2006). We believe that analysing the enchantment narratives as “beliefs” or “legends” will negate the fact that, for the narrators, they are telling the truth – or, at minimum, they will be found at a position of reasonable doubt. The Miraña tell the narratives of enchantment as events, at a specific time, experienced by the narrators themselves or by people they know, and their relationship with the boto is strongly mediated by these experiences and the narratives derived from them.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The Miraña are a Bora speaking group distributed between Brazil and Colombia. In the Colombian Amazon, they are part of the “Peoples of the Centre” (ECHEVERRI, 1997), a collective self-definition that brings together the Miraña and other peoples of the interfluvial Caquetá-Putumayo: Uitoto, Ocaina, Nonuya, Bora, Muiname, and Andoque. The ethnonym Miraña would have originated from Nheengatu “*mira-nhana*” (“people who run”), and there are no self-definition grouping all speakers of their language – self-defined groups are usually patrilocal and exogamic (GUYOT, 1972). Today, the Miraña total slightly more than 2000 people in the Colombian Amazon, and 800 individuals in the Brazilian Amazon (KARADIMAS, 2001; ISA,

2013). In Brazil, they inhabit the Indigenous Lands of Miratu, Méria, Barreira da Missão, Cajuhiri Atravessado and Cuiú-Cuiú, located in the region of the médio Solimões and the lower Japurá, as well as various indigenous communities in the ILs there are not yet demarcated by Brazilian Federal Government.

Historically, the presence of the Miraña in the region of the lower Japurá and médio Solimões is related to forced relocations, which are linked to the indigenous slave trade from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, and to the exploitation of Colombian and Peruvian *caucheros* (rubber tappers) in the 19th and 20th centuries (FAULHABER, 1996). In reports by naturalist travelers of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Miraña are described as a numerous people that waged war against other indigenous of the Japurá – including other groups that spoke the same language – in search of captives, whose destiny was to be rendered to slavery or devoured in anthropophagic rituals (BATES, 1944[1863]; FERREIRA, 2008[1788]; SPIX and MARITUS, 1981[1831]). Paul Marcoy (1875) and Henry Walter Bates (1944), state that the Miraña sold their own children to the colonisers. Karadimas (2001) argues that these would be classificatory children, in an article that addresses this slave trade based on the memory of the Miraña. Using this configuration of ethnonym and history, Faulhaber (1999) defends that the name “Miraña” in the Brazilian Amazon would not refer to a specific indigenous group, as it is a generic name that encompasses various indigenous peoples of Caquetá/Japurá who were reduced to slavery by the colonisers or by other indigenous peoples.

In 1974, Expedito Arnaud studied the Miraña residents on the Caiçara River (Méria) and on the Uarini River (Miratu). He describes a long-lasting stigma placed on the Miraña by the regional population, despite of the fact that the Indian lived

in a similar manner to the other regionals. Arnaud states that the relationship of the Miraña with the “members of the regional society” was ambivalent: “on one hand they sought to hide their tribal past so as not to suffer discrimination, and on the other, they identified themselves as indians in order to guarantee possession of the land they inhabited” (ARNAUD, 1981).

This ambivalence still resounds in the indigenous context of the médio Solimões and its tributaries. During the study, we noted that some Miraña of the Cuiú-Cuiú IL oppose the categories of “indian” or “civilised”. Regionally, “indian” is a category that refers to a way of life or a past marked by the unacceptance of Christianity, lack of goods and commodities, and a history of genocide, slavery and absence of rights. Thus, when confronted with the concept of “indian”, many would define themselves during conversations as “civilised”. The political organisation of the indigenous movements in the Japurá has contributed to a valorization of the category of “indian”, diffusion of the information regarding indigenous rights in Brazil, and a reversal of this stigma.

In any case, while the Miraña have a unique and tragic trajectory in the history of the colonial occupation of the médio Solimões, the way of life of the indigenous people of Cuiú-Cuiú is similar to that of the non-indigenous populations on the margins of the Japurá: they are speakers of Portuguese; they organise their settlements in the form of “communities”; they maintain business and work relationships with different “bosses” and “regatões” (traders); they have high mobility between the forest and the cities, created by the articulation of extensive kinship networks; they focus on the productive activities of fishing and cassava production (SOUZA, 2011).

The Miraña of Cuiú-Cuiú define the enchanted botos as those who “have a spirit”, that is, the

characteristic of a “living” being that, like human beings, is gifted with power and “intelligence”. But, as Geraldo states, “There are botos that are not enchanted. And there are those that are enchanted: this is the one that’s intelligent.” The enchanted boto demonstrates the power to *encantar* (enchant), or *enfetizar* (cast a spell, bewitch) human beings: to carry to its world in the deep of the river the one it is in love with or wants to take revenge against. The subject enchanted by the boto can be taken physically or spiritually to the world in the depths of the river. It should be noted that the *feitiço* (spell) is an aspect of intentionally “causing harm” to people, and it can be sent not only by the enchanted boto, but also by other spirits or by man himself. Dona Maria, considered by the youngest members as a “true indian”, recounts that there are men who, because of jealousy, “paint the skin of another person with black marks.”

Due to its potential to be enchanted, the boto has been given the characteristic of “*malino*”, an Amazonian expression that is close in meaning to pesky or mischievous, and which is different from the idea of evil (LIMA, 2013). Upon being asked about the reason why the boto attacks fishermen in canoes, João answers: “I don’t know; I know that they like to mistreat people.” Despite botos having the capacity to commit “malinezas” (wrongdoings) and bewitch, their free will refers to that of human beings. Slater (1994: 147) states that “the [enchanted] boto can do both good and bad”. Galvão (1955) understands that “the *malinesa* is not a simple antagonistic attitude between man and imaginary forces”, and it is the result of the dominance, protection and control that the enchanted animals have over nature.

Still, in many interviews, the enchanted boto appears as a being for which mistreating human beings is fun and perhaps, for this reason, fear is a recurring element in the interviews. “I was afraid

of it, you see.”; “I am afraid; I’m suspicious, you see, of botos...botos.”; “I was afraid. I was afraid of that boto.” These damaging acts attributed to the enchanted botos are referred to as “*feitiços*” (spells) or “*flechadas*” (arrow or javelin strikes), the latter being the most common reference.

A habit commonly attributed to the botos, which provokes fear in a large number of fishermen, is the attempt to flip canoes. Some state that it does this simply because it is an “evil” and “*gaiato*” (naughty) animal, while others say that the boto’s goal is to enchant the fisherman and take him to its world. Some interlocutors affirmed that one way to send the botos away and avoid their “*rebojo*” (water undulations) in the canoe is to stick a knife in the bottom of the canoe, as described by Adailton:

“So, they taught me that, when it is like that, you grab a knife and stick it in the bottom of the canoe, sticking straight out like that. So that it goes into it, and it goes away from us. Put it in the middle of the canoe. We take it and go like this and it goes in, the point, and it sticks straight out of the canoe and scares it away.”

Everyone is also in agreement that the boto is capable of biting people. Beyond this, it is very common to hear fishermen complain about botos that, “just to be mean”, make it difficult for them to fish by floating and teasing/playing in groups near the canoe, causing the fish to disappear. This is one of the reasons why fishermen try to strike the botos with a harpoon and end up “being put under a spell”.

The most common characteristic attributed to the enchanted boto is that it can exist in the form of a human, at the bottom of the rivers and lakes. “Here in this world where we are, we see him, the boto, and there [at the bottom], are people.” says Odinez. In some cases, however, the boto also appears human above water. Geraldo is emphatic: “It’s true, this is the truth. The boto really becomes

human!”. In various interviews, the residents recount the same beach as a preferred location where the botos turn into people and talk among themselves. Whenever someone arrives, they run to the water and quickly turn back into botos. “We saw the boto basking like that in the hot sun, on the beach. On the beach right in front of us. And he was rolling around there, like this, a person. Later he got up like a person and ran to the water and fell into the water”, says Adailton.

The interviewees concur regarding the attractiveness of the men (and women) into which the botos transform, and who use white, elegant clothing, jewelry and hats. On the other hand, the classic story that portrays botos transforming into men to go to parties, win over girls and then go away, leaving them longing for them and often pregnant, is considered by the majority to be an anecdote told by oldtimers. Some young Miraña told the caretaker of the Floating Base *Preguiça*, in a joking manner, that the researcher, Juliana Dutra, was a boto when she went to a party in a community and left there slightly before midnight. Slater (1994) also relates similar situations during her research in the Brazilian Amazon. In any case, this idea that the botos frequent places and events reserved for humans is very present in the thinking of the Miraña of Cuiú-Cuiú.

The residents also tell of the boto attacking menstruating women when they are in a canoe or washing clothing, or when bathing at the water’s edge. The times cited as the most dangerous for a menstruating woman to be near the water are midday, six o’clock in the afternoon and six o’clock in the morning. The majority of the interviews affirm that the botos attack these women as they feel attracted by their smell of blood and try to have sexual relations with them which, in some cases, can result in pregnancy – in these cases, the pregnant woman does not remember the act. Some interviewees claim that the boto is capable

of impregnating menstruating women in the same way that other animals are. The interlocutors do not understand this capacity as something specific to the enchanted or supernatural.

In the reports of women getting pregnant by the boto, there are two possible endings: the woman dies, since no woman has a body that is able to give birth to an animal; the woman gives birth to beings that are half boto and half child, which are returned to the river, as demanded by the enchanted botos who come to torment the mother in their dreams. Similar narratives were recorded by Galvão (1955).

The interlocutors talk about the existence of enchanted cities in certain places at the bottom of rivers and lakes: "The boto...they say it has another world". The surface of the water is thought of as a means of passage to the world of the enchanted, and the procedures necessary to cross over are known by the enchanted botos and by the *sacacas* (cf. SLATER, 1994). The other people only cross over the boundary when enchanted by the botos. Some interlocutors state that Floating Base *Preguiça* would even be set above one of these cities.

Thus, from the point of view of the Miraña, some people who disappeared from the region live at in the Deep as enchanted beings. One example is José's uncle who, according to José's wife, Carla, was a *sacaca* and, by his own will, went to the bottom of the river to live with a 'boto' that always appeared to him in the shape of a beautiful woman. Carla says that her husband's uncle visited her "in spirit" and informed her that he was in the Deep, saying that she should not suffer because, whenever possible, he would visit her in spirit.

The motives that lead the botos to place spells on people and take them to the Deep are revenge or passion, that is, when the boto "*se engraca*" (fall in love) with a person. In the case told by Sarney, the

botos took a young woman to the Deep because they were in love with her:

"when some time had passed the girl began to feel sad, so he said: 'Boy, what is happening with my daughter?'. Her parents, you know?! Every time they go out, she feels sick. So he took her to a healer to see what she had. So he said that it was the boto that was taking his daughter. (...) He waited for her to sleep. When the family was all sleeping the boto went there and...did his thing with her. It took off all her clothes and had sex with her. [She] got pregnant by the boto. She didn't have [the child] because she died. It killed her little by little."

Lorival, healer of Cuiú-Cuiú, states that the "stricken" are taken by the boto in different forms: in "body" or "spirit". Those that are taken "in body" disappear during events that can be described as uncommon or inexplicable. To have the "spirit" taken by the boto is something that happens after an illness caused by the "strike". In the first case, the *sacacas* and *pajés* intervene so that the body is returned (with or without "spirit"); in the second, they are able to bring the "spirit" back, saving the victim from being taken to the Deep. When the bewitched is taken to the Deep, he also begins to use the *capa* (guise) of the boto, being seen this way on the surface. In these cases, while the enchanted disappear or die in this world, this does not mean that they are actually dead. The term *capa* is used by three interviewees to describe the usual form of the boto.

Situations of individuals disappearing in the rivers are told and discussed by the Miraña in the context of the conversations about the enchanted, even when they happen in distant places. In 2012, a soldier suffered an accident in his *voadeira* (regional name for motorboat) and disappeared in the Solimões River near the municipality of Alvarães. Despite the incessant searches, the body

and boat were not found. According to the residents of Cuiú-Cuiú, the accident was incomprehensible, because there were no *banzeiro* – regional term for the ondulation of the waters provoked by strong winds or movement of boats – nor tree trunks near the boat. The explanation given by the Miraña highlighted the fact that the man had been taken by the botos to the Deep. However, there was no consensus among the residents regarding this version since the others claimed that the man and his *voadeira* were swallowed up by a *Cobra-Grande* (Great Snake), another kind of enchanted creature. Deborah Lima (2013) states that these common references are always updated following recent events involving a known person or place.

Once in the Deep, one must not accept offers of food or sex because, once accepted, one loses hope of returning to the surface. Odinez says clearly: “Look, a person who goes from this world to that one, it’s said that if you eat something there, you won’t come back to this world. You can’t eat. If you eat, you stay there, forever.” Lídia, considered by many as a *sacaca*, said that when the botos began to be “fond of” her, they threw fruit at her house so that she would eat and go live in the Deep. She never ate because she knew that if she ate she would never return. Lídia describes the Deep in a very similar way to that recorded by Galvão (1955) from the residents of a municipality of lower Amazonas in the 1950s: this would be an “enchanted kingdom” similar to a city, where everything shines as if it were covered in gold. João tells about the day when he himself visited the Deep, accompanied by a female *sacaca*:

“It was just the spirit of the woman that worked, you see. Accompanying. I walked a lot there. I passed by many people, people, people, people. Tables and tables of *cachaça*, of beer. Stands of pineapple, and of banana, of *beiju* (cassava bread), of cookies, and of everything. So, all she said to me was not to eat or drink anything. So, I know

that we walked, walked, walked, walked until she said ‘let’s go, we just visiting’”.

Lídia states that what you see in the Deep does not always correspond to the same thing above water: “Their seats are boa constrictors (...). Those *beijuzão* (big cassava bread), it’s all sting rays, the turtles are *salted pirarucu*... the *pirarucu* that is their turtle, their meat”. Joca, who states having been taken to the Deep, confirms having seen the *beiju* sting ray and the *sucuriju* (anaconda) bank. João and others affirm that the sting ray would be, in fact, the hat of the enchanted botos. Odinez explains that the snakes we see are ropes in the botos’ view. Another common relationship is with the manatee which, on many occasions, is said to transform in to an afro-brazilian person.. If the boto is a white man in the bottom of the river, for some interviewees, the manatee is a black man. Lídia explains the totality of these changes in perspective using the metaphor of the “mirror”, stating that “the water for it [Boto] is a mirror, the water is their mirror” and that “the boto is man’s mirror”.

One of the reasons why the botos “strike” people is to get revenge over those who mistreat or threaten them. Slater affirms (1994: 134) that he who kills a boto can be “*panema*”, that is, can be afflicted by a supernatural inability, mostly in hunting and fishing. If the victim is an enchanted in animal form, the consequences can be worse. In Cuiú-Cuiú, some stories were told in which a spell was cast on fishermen after they had intentionally killed, abused or harpooned enchanted botos.

In these reports, the causes that motivated the boto hunt varied: killing to use the meat as bait for fishing *piracatinga*; harpooning or killing in an attempt to avoid disrupting the fishing of *pirarucu* (*Arapaima Gigas*); and finally, there are a few who allege having killed out of “curiosity” or “fun”. It is important to note that the fisherman who

unintentionally kills a boto will not be revenged by it. Similarly, when the animal gets stuck in a fishing net and drowns, the one who used it will not be have a spell cast on him. Also in cases of intentional slaughter, the spell may not be cast. Interviewees claimed having killed botos and did not suffer any consequence, with the majority of these cases being attributed to the luck of "God".

Various cases were written where spells were cast on fishermen after having mistreated botos. In some cases, the boto tries to take revenge on the fisherman who abused it, pursuing him and doing "*rebojo*" to the canoe. The spell, on the other hand, is characterised by high fever and headaches that may or may not be followed by visits from the spirit of the boto that torments the bewitched during the night. If these experiences are frequent, the bewitched can go insane. The symptoms can also include arm pain, "taps" on the head, hallucinations and being pursued by spirits while fishing.

The interlocutors explain that, in these cases, the boto's objective would be to warn the fisherman so that he does not mistreat them further or to take him to the Deep as a form of revenge. The bewitched can be cured before being taken, whether by himself or through the intervention of a *pajé*, healer or *sacaca*. Cures can be administered using baths, potions or rituals where the spirit of the boto is driven away. Garlic is a common ingredient of the remedies to cure boto spells, and is also used as a means to protect against them by hanging it in the door threshold of the houses. Garlic is also cited by Galvão (1995) as an antidote for boto spells.

José recounts that he harpooned a female boto and soon after he felt "a hand tapping him" at his nape. Then Carla talks about her brother, after harpooning a boto, had a fever, headache and was unable to see anything but botos, even out of the

water. Davi killed a boto and for more than a week had pain in his arm. Joca relates being frequently pursued by botos when he goes to *Preguiça* Lake, attributing this pursuit to the fact that he has killed many botos in his life. Ricardo says that if someone does something bad to an enchanted boto, he will be "*flechado* (struck) by the boto", highlighting that his cousin "went crazy" after harpooning a boto. Geraldo states that he had harpooned a boto when he was young and that is why, for many weeks, he saw blood wherever there was water. He tells that, after this experience, he never harpooned botos again. We recorded an enormous variety of narratives such as these, both personal experiences with boto spells, as well as narrating something that happened to third parties.

During the interviews, there were also narratives about what happens when the enchanted boto is harpooned and does not die: the fisherman is taken to the bottom of the river by two men dressed in white who appear to be rowing in his direction; they are called *soldados* (soldiers). Once in the Deep, the poor fisherman finds himself in a large hospital where the harpooned boto recovers as a sick man on a stretcher. In some cases, the fisherman is called to be the one responsible to remove the harpoon tip from the body of the enchanted. Slater (1994) records narratives similar to this one.

The boto's power of revenge in response to aggression by fishermen refers to the possible interactions between humans and botos in the Japurá channel, including fishing for *piracatinga*. In the report by Estupiñán et al (2003), part of the Cuiú-Cuiú territory emerges as being at a "very intense" critical point regarding the slaughter of caiman and botos in order to fish *piracatinga*. However, despite the considerable number of interviewees having declared they practice fishing for *piracatinga* using caiman, a great majority affirm they do not kill botos. This scenario could be due, in part, to the interviewees' fear in speaking about

illegal practices, since the slaughter of caiman and botos for fishing purposes is prohibited by law. There is also confusion, on the part of the regional population, regarding the role of the Mamirauá Institute in relation to that of IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources) and other environmental regulation entities, believing that the members of the Mamirauá Institute have policing and fiscal powers.

Thus, only one resident, who was nervous to give testimony, admitted to having killed botos for the purpose of fishing *piracatinga*, also claiming that “it’s crazy to be afraid of botos because of this spirit thing”. Others confessed having already killed botos, as they were causing problems during fishing, and the majority of the interviewees affirmed not having killed botos. Some claimed not having killed them because the boto is a fast animal and difficult to harpoon; other interviewees admitted they do not hunt botos for fear they will take revenge or due to already having experienced the effects of the revenge spells. Sarney fishes *piracatinga*, but he is adamant that he only uses caiman as bait because he is more afraid of botos than of caiman since the former has a spirit.

During the research period, *Ponto X*, a non-indigenous community in the Aranapu sector, near Boa União, was cited by the Miraña as a location where killing botos for fishing *piracatinga* is a common practice. The community is located in a place where the boto population is abundant during the drought, making it easy to capture them using dragnets. This community was visited three times in order to carry out environmental education activities, and testimonies were collected from young people who fish using boto. They did not discount the power of the enchanted boto, affirming that they are pursued while they sleep and that they only fish for *piracatinga* because they cannot find an alternative source of income.

In the same community, a resident recounted that he had the habit of killing botos, not only to use them in fishing for *piracatinga*, but also for fun, since he believed the boto was a being without a spirit. Over a long period of time, his mother-in-law warned him that, if he continued with this practice, his son would be born with a disability. He continued killing botos even during his wife’s pregnancy and, just as his mother-in-law had predicted, his son was born with serious motor and mental disabilities, which his own family agree make him look like the child of a boto. After this happened, the man affirms that he never killed a boto again, nor will he, as he “learned his lesson”.

Some relationship patterns could be noted between fishermen and botos. A great majority of the interviewed fishermen believe that the one who kills an enchanted is subject to being put under a spell. Also, some claim that, since it is impossible to discern between enchanted botos and common ones, it is best to kill them. These fishermen may have killed botos but, due to bewitching events, decided to stop this practice. On the other hand, other fishermen who also believe in the enchanted power of botos still kill them. They claim that the fact that enchanted botos have been appearing less frequently as of late, there is greater chance of harpooning a boto that is not enchanted, thus leaving the fisherman free of spells. Another group, represented by the fishermen of *Ponto X*, know the spells of the botos, having already been their target, but they continue to kill botos due to the high profitability of fishing for *piracatinga* with boto carcasses.

Lima (2013) presents a report from an Amazon dweller who claims that the increase in population and city growth are causing the enchanted to leave the human world. Slater (1994) also shows that, for some her interviewees, narratives about the enchanted occurred in the past. One of her interlocutors even states that botos do not like big

cities because noise gives them headaches (Ibid.: 51). The Miraña of Cuiú-Cuiú share this idea of a reduction in appearances of enchanted botos. Despite many interviewees having experienced enchantment involving botos, others refer to enchanted displays as something of the past, with the terms 'in old times' and 'old ones' being repeated when the interviewee talks about the subject.

Some Miraña provide another justification for the reduction of the enchanted in the region. For them, the existence of enchanted botos depends on the existence of the "pagan indian", that is, the non-Christian who has profound knowledge of the enchanted. When questioned about why there are so few enchanted botos today, Maria answered: "Because today everyone is *crente* (evangelical Christian), but back then it wasn't so. The people were pagans; no one was committed to God. They knew how to deal with these things [the enchanted]." To the same question, Lorival gave a similar answer: "I believe that the churches have gotten rid of many things, you see?! (...) It has decreased because now everyone is *crente*". Within the same logic, Lídia states that, today, there are fewer cases of enchantment because people have become Christians and pray more and, for this reason, they are "*fechando o corpo*" (closing the body), which makes them immune to the displays of the enchanted.

However, all of these narratives, descriptions and practices related to the boto were widely known by the entire group of interlocutors involved in the study, including youth and children. The enchantment narratives recur in day-to-day conversations and all of them have the knowledge necessary to talk at length about the enchanted. On the other hand, during the environmental education activities in Cuiú-Cuiú, focused on the biological characteristics of the boto, there was an atmosphere of incomprehension. The orientation for these ini-

tiatives included fun activities, such as "memory games" and "puzzles", incorporating questions like: How many months is the gestation period of a boto? How long does the offspring remain with the mother? Are botos solitary animals or are they always accompanied? Even if these activities had been carried out over many months, the residents of Cuiú-Cuiú did not know the answers.

"Enchantment is always dodging its definition", writes Slater (1994). The enchanted being is the one who is part of another order of existence, that uses "guises", is capable of doing magic, was or is bewitched, and has the power to bewitch and enchant its Others. In our collected reports, enchantment appears to be something that can be pondered at length, but which has a mysterious and unknown nature, making it difficult to understand it completely.

The fact that many residents confirmed a relative disappearance of the enchanted boto is an indication that this aspect of Cuiú-Cuiú cosmology is under transformation. Based on the testimonies of her interlocutors, Slater (1994) affirms that the "enchanted are experiencing a forced retreat from the world of human beings".

This transformation is reflected in the different ways in which the residents of the region relate with the boto. There are residents that do not kill botos for fear of their spells, and others who kill out of retaliation for their interference in fishing efforts (damaging fishing nets or eating fish), and also to use the carcass for fishing *piracatinga*. It is tempting to establish a causal relationship between the increase in boto slaughtering, reported by Estupinã et al (2003), with the narratives of reduced appearances of enchanted botos: a lower number of enchanted botos means fewer chances of suffering the retaliation of a spell. However, this reduction needs to be put in perspective, that is, it is explained in relation to a past of intense and

prevalent displays by the enchanted. Thus, the narratives of the Miraña and other populations of lower Japurá leave no doubt that the experiences and stories of enchantment remain.

For those involved in initiatives for the conservation of aquatic species, understanding the relationships between human populations and the botos of the Amazon is a necessity. In the logic of the Amerindian populations, people and animals oppose each other based on differences in their bodies, but each one perceives their body, food, home and adornments as identical to those of people (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 1996; 2002). Encounters between different types of beings (man and boto, for example) will only take place during exceptional moments, exactly when humans are at risk of becoming enchanted and, moving to the perspective of the boto, begin to see them as people.

Therefore, in according to Amerindian Perspectivism, different subjects see the world in the same way, but what they see as “the same thing” is not a coincidence. This means that each type of body, within which the perspectives are shared, will experience the world in a different way. This aspect is illustrated in various narratives, but it is very clear in those that affirm that the enchanted see people in the same way that humans see the botos in the water and, as men “*flechar*” (strike) the botos in their world, the enchanted boto try to “*flechar*” (to strike) them, since from their perspective we are like the botos are to us. What is processed in these cases is an inversion of perspectives between predator and prey, between humans and botos. This is illustrated in the words of Lídia, who says that the seat of the residents of the Deep is the boa constrictor; their *beiju* is the sting ray; and the turtle is their *pirarucu*. In a study of the Cocama of the region at the mouth of the Jutai, the list of the correlations found was even longer, indicating that the various residents of the Deep and humans experience the existence of object-beings in ways that are not coincidental.

CONCLUSION

Our intention in this project was, based on a study of the relationship between the Miraña and the boto, to explain the difficulties in making them communicate the different ways of understanding what we call “Nature.” Discussions and studies around conservation initiatives have pointed out aspects of synergy and disjunction between scientific conjectures and modes of local knowledge (BLASER, 2009; CARNEIRO DA CUNHA, 2009; CEPEK, 2011; PERALTA and LIMA, 2012). Equivocation in the interaction between these forms of knowledge is not only found in the difficulties to produce effective translations of terms, but also in the search to establish possible dialogues between different ontological assumptions. Based on the concept of anthropology as “controlled equivocation” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2004), we ask ourselves if it would be possible to translate the knowledge involved in the relationship of the Miraña, and other populations of the lower Japurá, with the boto. In this case, what we propose is to work deliberately on the composition of a “productive equivocation” in the relationship between local populations and those involved in the production of conservation research and initiatives.

This effort, however, cannot be reduced to simplistic proposals marked by a utilitarian hypertrophy of feelings of respect and fear evoked by botos as a result of their potential enchanting nature. Common points between the Amazonian cosmologies and conservation efforts have been raised in various works (ALMEIDA, 2013; CARNEIRO DA CUNHA and ALMEIDA, 2009; CEPEK, 2011; LIMA and POZZOBON, 2005; SMITH, 1996). Such similarities, however, cannot be thought of as related to the assumptions of conservation biology, nor as simple cause and effect relationships – such as “they don’t kill botos because they believe botos are enchanted” or

“they kill botos because they don’t believe botos are enchanted anymore”.

This also does not mean that we should support our idea that there is an absolute incommensurability between the knowledge about the *Inia geoffrensis* produced in the environment of biological sciences and means of local knowledge. The knowledge of the Miraña around the boto is not exclusively related to the facets of enchantment: the fishermen observe behaviour and patterns in their interaction with the boto (cf. PASCHOAL, 2010), but their knowledge develops in line with assumptions that are different from those of the biological sciences.

The attempt to teach the target public about environmental education activities using biological science concepts that describe the anatomy, habitat and ecological niche of the animal, classifying it in Kingdoms and Phyla, loses a lot of relevance when these individuals, in the role of learner, think about and interact with these animals based on different assumptions. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Miraña are less interested in environmental education activities, not only because of the nature of the content presented, but also due to the lack of fostering a possible intersection between different ways of understanding the lived world.

To Encourage a possible dialogue we must go beyond the common sense assertive that is necessary “to understand the reality” of the populations among which one works. The heart of the question is how their knowledge can be included in debates with the sciences that support conservation initiatives. First, creating this possibility requires that scientists and educators put themselves in the place of learners in the understanding of how Amazonian populations conceive their lived world and relate with the species and environments studied by conservation sciences. This possibility also demands a symmetric treatment of the different knowledge regimes, seeking to not reduce the knowledge

of these populations to the status of “legends” or “beliefs”. The Amazonian knowledge regarding the boto could inform us about different ways of conceiving and interacting with what we call “Nature”, and how these populations define the human being and different beings that populate the world – the target species of the conservation initiatives involved.

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