

ECCAP WG2: Repository of Ethical Worldviews of Nature

Cultivated plants, allied souls: the Jarawara garden

Fabiana Maizza

Member of the *Cesta* (Centre of Amerindian Studies),

University of São Paulo (USP)

Brazil

fabimaizza@hotmail.com

1. Summary

This paper shows the animistic relationship of the Jarawara through their garden cultivation in the Amazon region. The objective of this paper is to show the ontological meaning of a garden cultivation among the Jarawara and by so doing, to show the crucial role of the plants, and their spirits, to this society.¹

2. What is the broader framework that influences ethics within the Jarawara community?

The Jarawara are an Amerindian people of the Arawá linguistic family. They live in the South-East Amazon and form a small group of about 200 individuals. They have their own reserve, called *Terra Indígena Jarawara/ Jamamadi/ Kanamanti*, located in the middle Purus river, between the cities of Lábrea and Tapauá (State of Amazonas, Brazil). The name Jarawara can also be written as Jarauara, Yarawara or Jaruára, but the most used form is the first one, Jarawara. The other members of the Arawá linguistic family are the geographical neighbours of the Jarawara, which live, as they do, by the middle Purus river and its affluent, they are: the Paumari, the Deni, the Zuruahá, the Jamamadi, the Banawa-yafi and the Kulina. The Arawá people are still not very known or studied, although the long years of contact between the Indians and the Whites in the area.

The history of this ethnic group is common for the indigenous population of the region. Living between the Juruá and Purus rivers, they had their lands invaded and have been decimated all along the Twentieth Century, due to different illness as well as the voluntary aggression of the explorers, came searching for rubber. For a long time they have worked in the *seringais* (rubber exploration centres), under the orders of the White bosses, the *patrões*. After years of invasions and the death of many Indians, the Jarawara had their lands homologated and live today almost in autonomy from the Brazilian State, though under the evangelical church influence.

¹ The Ethics and Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific (ECCAP) Project Working Group 2 is focusing on producing an ethical repository of world views of nature. This exercise is to examine whether there are indeed universal foundations underneath the external and superficial coating of differences or whether there are indeed irreconcilable perspectives that lead to different worldviews and approaches to ethics and issues of concerns in different civilisations. It follows up the working Group 1 report on *Universalism and Ethical Views of Nature* (Rai, et al. 2011). We invite scholars from different schools of thought, communities and traditions, to provide a summary of Views of Nature from other communities, with historical references following a general structure to allow readers to compare different traditions for common views of nature. See www.unescobkk.org/rushsap

It is quite difficult to define the broader outlook of the environment concepts within the Jarawara tradition. Among the ‘views of the human-environment relationship’ in the “Universalism and Ethical Values for Environment” UNESCO report (2010), the Jarawara would stand between ‘biocentrism’ and ‘ecocentrism’. ‘Biocentrism’ because for them, the human species is one among other species, and not more important than the others; and ‘Ecocentrism’ because they consider the whole ecosystem in their way of thinking. But, as we will see, it is animism that guides the ethical behaviour of the Jarawara, thus it would be more appropriated to say that the human-environment relationship among this people is built through and by animism.

3. What is the broader outlook of the environmental concepts within the tradition? Biocentric, ecocentric and cosmocentric

3.1. Anthropocentric

No examples.

3.2. Biocentric, ecocentric and cosmocentric

3.2.1. Seed a garden, cultivate relations with the cosmos

The Jarawara classify the plants into two types: domesticated and non-domesticated. The domesticated plants are those cultivated by them in the gardens, and in the areas close to their houses, exclusives of one species. The domesticated plants are divided into two types: the tubercles (the manioc for instance) and the others (corn, pineapple, cotton, etc.). The non-domesticated, or wild, plants are those that the Jarawara don’t cultivate; in this category all the species of the *varzea*² are important, such as the *buritiana*³.

The botanical knowledge, as well as the zoological knowledge, of the Jarawara is immeasurable and, such as for animals, the classification of the plants depends on factors linked to their “*phisicalités*”. This concept created by Descola (2005) and which we will translate as ‘physicality’, aims to understand what is a body for the Amerindians. The author asserts that the “body shape is not only its physical constitution, but a ensemble of biological tools that enables a species to occupy a given habitat and to develop in it a specific existential manner, by which it can be identified (Descola, 2005, p. 190, my translation). This means that the body shape is inseparable from the behaviour that it induces.

As long as we could understand, two factors of the ‘physicality’ of the plants are recurrent in the Jarawara classification. The first one is the ‘body shape’: big plants, small ones, with large or thin trunk, etc. The second one, more subtle and complex, is related to the species physiology: its different properties, medicinal, therapeutic and others. Those two aspects of the ‘physicality’ are the bases of what the Jarawara call “strength” and, as for the animals, are always in harmony with events of the myths.

For the Jarawara there exists a hierarchical chain that goes from the “strongest” plant to the “weakest” one. In the top of the chain we find the *tingui*⁴ species, then comes

2 Whitewater-inundated forest.

3 Scientific name: *Mauritia flexuosa*.

4 We are not sure of the scientific name of the *tingui* (or of the different species of *tingui*) used by the Jarawara. They have told us that it is the same species used by the Zuruahá to commit suicide. Prance says

the pupunha⁵ followed by the cotton; at the end of the chain stands the cará⁶. Those species are the references to which all the other plants are compared to be classified; they say, for instance, “this is a weak plant, it is like the cará”. Not all plants that the Jarawara know are put into this hierarchical chain, it seems to us that only the plants that they use often and that have a cosmological value to them are classified this way. For the Jarawara, the plants have their physical aspect, visible on earth, while their children are spirits, souls (*abono*) that live in the sky.

When a jarawara seeds in its garden a domesticated plant, sometime afterwards the plant grows and can be seen out of the ground. At this moment, when the plant is still short, the Jarawara say that the plant spirit was born and stays besides its trunk, waiting to be searched. This spirit has a baby human appearance and cries. The Jarawara say that it is the child of the plant that it came from. But they also say that it is the ‘child’ of the person that seeded the vegetable.

After coming out of the plant in earth, as a baby, the plant spirit is taken to the sky by other plant spirits that come down exclusively to pick it up. In the sky, a couple of spirits adopt the baby, raise it and give it a name. This couple is usually a plant spirit couple. The Jarawara say that these couple is also the baby plant spirit parents, adoptive parents.

Thus, all domesticated plants, that is, planted by the Jarawara, are also and at the same time, spirits in the sky. What has been said about the “strength” of the plants is also true for its spirits: the tingui spirit, for example, occupies the first position in the hierarchical chain of the spirits “strengths”.

When the Jarawara die, it is time for their spirit to go to the sky⁷. The person should be buried beside a plant that she has cultivated herself once alive. Some hours after the funeral, the spirit comes out of the dead body. By being buried next to a plant and by having its spirit coming out of their bodies, the dead jarawara reminds us, without doubt, the children (the spirits) of the plants; the only difference is that the jarawara spirits are not babies and they are not the only being that comes out of the body. Otherwise, the process that happens to them is very similar to the one described for the plants.

Once out of underneath the earth, the spirit of the dead is fetched by some plants spirits of the sky, its ‘children’ – or, the spirits of the plants that the person cultivated alive. When the spirit arrives in the sky, the people from there receive it. It is “healed”, “cleaned” and it gets younger. The soul is then isolated for some days, reposing and waiting to be whipped. On the right day, the spirits take him to another village, where they know the people – otherwise there would be a fight. There, the jarawara spirit is whipped in the same way as the girls in their menarche ritual. Afterwards, the spirit of the dead and its ‘kin’ go back to their village, where they will stay and live.

There is more than one possibility for the posthumous co-residents. First of all, the spirit can “buy” a father at the sky, meaning, be adopted and having to work for this

that the poison used by the Jarawara to kill fish is Leguminosae vine *Derris latifolia* H.B.K (1978, p. 81), but probably this is the poison used in the arrows. The different species of timbó and tingui used in the Amazon region is a very difficult subject, which still needs studies (see Tozzi, 1998).

⁵Fruit of the pupunheira, plant of the *Areaceae* family.

⁶Scientific name: *Dioscorea trifida*.

⁷There are more than one type of being that comes out of the jarawara dead body, but here we will speak only of the spirit that goes to the sky.

‘father’ as a counterpart. In this case, it will live with the other children and adopted children of this spirit in its village. Another possibility, common to women, is to go to a village in the sky, get married and stay there, living with its husband. Finally, the spirit can go directly to the village where lives a kin jarawara that has already deceased, such as a sister or a son, and stays there to live. This situation, though, happens exclusively to the shamans and his biological jarawara children.

In the jarawara sky, the whipping ritual is the decisive stage in the integration to a village by the spirit, even if as an affine/allied through adoption or marriage. Belonging to a group of kin is primordial in the jarawara sky – as it is in Earth. If the spirit doesn’t become a member of a village, it won’t survive the violent war, where outside the local group, everyone is enemy and cannibal. Getting a name is the crowning of the process: when the spirit receives a name related to its new ‘kin’, normally the plant spirits, the spirit of the dead jarawara has completely joined the group.

Therefore, when the Jarawara cultivate their gardens, they are not only ensuring their subsistence, as we could think from a far look to this society. They are also, and at the same time, creating essential bonds with the plants souls, who will be their posthumous co-residents. Those bonds with non-human beings will be their guarantee of a place in a sky village and of a life (actually, a death) protected from the aggressions of others: enemies, violent, cannibals. Making a garden is thus sowing relations. The same can be said for the shaman. But the shaman’s relations have a more important ontological value, not only to him but also to all the Jarawara, as we will see now.

3.2.2. Shamanism: the shaman’s plants in action

The Jarawara share the Earth surface with different types of beings. Two of them are particularly feared: the *inamati* and the *yama*.

The *inamati* are spirits very similar to humans who don’t have the human body anymore. They would be like dematerialized humans, thus called sometimes “shades”. They normally have a human appearance, but there is always a strange detail that makes them different, hence non-human. They live in the sky or under the earth. Those that live underneath are the ‘old ones’, called *inamati bote*, and walk around searching for humans to kill and eat. They kidnap the Jarawara, put them into a big bag and take them to their dark and cold homes, where they eat their prey. Sometimes when they meet a young jarawara, a potential spouse, they marry them – which make the person die. They often attract their human partners by imitating a boyfriend/girlfriend, and convince the person to make love to them in the forest. The person gets sick straight after and dies rapidly.

The other feared creatures are the *yama*. The Jarawara calls the *yama* ‘beasts’, the difference between them and the *inamati* is that while the second ones appear in a human shape, the *yama* show themselves under an animal one (jaguar, sneak, monkey, etc.). They live in solid ground or under the water. They are by far the most dangerous beings to the Jarawara.

When men go out to hunt by themselves, a ‘beast’ *yama* with a prey appearance might show up. If the hunter, without noticing that is a *yama*, tries to capture the animal, he will faint, lose consciousness, then fall sick and probably die if he doesn’t go back to the village and get healed on time by a shaman. But the *yama* can also come from behind the person, hit her in the back and thus transmit illness, which also will have to be reverted by the shaman. The most interesting point about the *yama* is that they have

animal shapes; or they show themselves to the Jarawara under this shape, but they are the ones to hunt the humans; that's probably the reason why they are so feared.

There are many species of 'beasts' *yama* that live in solid ground, but the most powerful *yama* are those that live in the bottom of the rivers and lakes, they are called *yama maka*. The illnesses that those beings transmit are the most difficult ones to be healed. They mainly show themselves to humans under the shape of aquatic beings, such as the pink river dolphin, or semi-aquatic, like the anaconda snake and the turtle; but sometimes they show themselves as monkeys that live in the varzea region, up on the trees. Just like the terrestrial *yama*, if a fisherman tries to capture a *yama maka* 'disguised' in turtle, for instance, he will immediately be devoured. Or worse, if he is a potential spouse, the *maka* will take him to "his land", under the water, and will marry him; he will then live with the *yama maka* (and die from the human's point of view).

In effect, most of the time that the Jarawara speak about illness they are speaking about the kidnapping of souls by those non-human beings: *inamati*, *inamati bote*, *yama*, *yama maka*. They can use the word *rabika* to describe the condition of the person that had her soul kidnapped. They translate *rabika* by 'craziness', saying: "someone has gone crazy, his head was mad, the beast has taken his soul". This craziness that the Jarawara describe is directly related to the process of a human becoming another type of being, or a perspective change. This process happens progressively, after a fatal meeting at the forest or at the varzea, and can be reverted by a shaman, with the help of its auxiliary spirits.

Viveiros de Castro asserts that in the South-America Indians animism, all beings see the world in the same way, what changes is the world that they see (2002, p. 378). This point of view difference is not a matter of spirit – as all beings have a soul identical to the humans soul – but of body, since the point of view is in the body (Viveiros de Castro, 1996, p. 128). Following this logic, a perspective change is in fact a bodily change; to change bodies is to change perspective, and the other way round. Hence, a jarawara individual that has his soul kidnapped is in the dangerous process of physical mutation, between his human body and the body of the beings that kidnapped his soul. These last ones want him to become one of theirs, to stay with them, to have their body and to assume their point of view of the world – which means, dying from the human point of view.

The shamans, or actually his auxiliary spirits, are the rescuers of a kidnapped jarawara soul. The shaman auxiliary spirits are his 'children': the spirits of the plants cultivated by him in his garden, which come out of their terrestrial bodies and go to the sky, where they live with their kin. The shamans stay in contact with their plant's spirits while the other Jarawara only meet them once they die. The shamans communicate regularly with those spirits of the sky through their visits to the upper scale, taken at the back of one of their 'child' (during the 'shamanic rites'), or when the spirits come down to Earth, called by their 'father'. Those spirits are the ones that, under the shaman's order, go find and get back the jarawara victim's soul. They have to fight severely against the 'kidnapers' and preferably kill them to be able to free the soul in detention. After the release, they have to heal the spirit so that it can get back to the village. Finally, they put the soul back to the body and, after a few days, the person is healed.

As we mentioned, the spirits of the plants are classified according to a hierarchical chain, from the "strongest" to the "weakest", the spirit of the tingui being the "strongest"

of all spirits and the spirit of the cará the “weakest”. This chain is very important in the disputes between the shaman’s auxiliary spirits and their enemies, since it is the respective “strengths” that will determinate who is the winner and who is the loser, or who is the predator and who is the prey.

In the kidnapped soul rescue, the shaman must be conscious of the respective strengths of his auxiliary spirits compared to the enemies, the ‘kidnapers’ strengths. Generally, the shaman should have large gardens, which means many different species of plants and trees, especially those considered ‘strong’ like the pupunha and the cotton. All good shamans must have a big tingui plantation, in other words, a good quantity of auxiliary spirits of the tingui species.

The main utility of the tingui plant among the Jarawara is fishing. In the Amazonian summer, when the rivers are low, the Jarawara collect tingui roots in their garden, smash it and through it in the small rivers; some fish die (asphyxiated) and come up to the surface, others swim with difficulty - they can then be easily fished with the hands or arrows. As has shown Descola (2005, p. 191), the ‘physicality’ of the tingui plant is also the behaviour and the qualities of its spirit, the spirit of tingui. It is precisely this quality, the toxic propriety that performs under the water, which makes the spirit of tingui the most important auxiliary spirit to a Jarawara shaman. Not randomly, but due to the fact that the most dangerous being of the cosmos is the ‘beast’ *yama maka*, that lives in the bottom of the rivers and lakes. Just like the plant of tingui, the spirit of tingui is effective under the water, thus able to revert the kidnapping of souls by the *yama maka*. It is the only shaman’s auxiliary spirit able to achieve such a cure.

A good shaman must confront the hunters of Jarawara souls: the *inamati bote*, the *yama* and the *yama maka*. The first ones, with any of his auxiliary spirits, the last one exclusively with his tingui spirits. Therefore, the Jarawara shaman is above all a good grower, his gardens show concretely the power and the influence that he has; as well as the amount of auxiliary spirits that he can count on for eventual animist’s rescues.

3.3. Ecocentrism

Integrated under 3.2.

3.4. Cosmocentrism

Integrated under 3.2.

4. Human-environmental relationships: Animistic

4.1. Symbiotic

Integrated in section 5.6.

4.2. Integrationist

No examples.

4.3. Apocalyptic

No examples.

4.4. Managerial

No examples.

4.5. Apathetic

No examples.

4.6. Animistic

As all the indigenous South-American societies, the Jarawara are animists. Animism is the “attribution by the humans to the non-humans of a soul identical to theirs – this disposition humanizes the plants and, above all, the animals – what distinguishes the beings are not their souls but their ‘bodies’” (Descola, 2005, p. 183, my translation). In animist societies, the plants, the animals and the spirits have a soul and see themselves as persons. The world is made of different sort of beings that apprehend themselves as people (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, p. 351) and see others not as those see themselves, but as preys or predators. Assert that animals and spirits are persons, is to attribute to non-humans the abilities of conscious intentionality and agency that enable the enunciative subject occupation (*ibid*, p. 372). Animals and others beings endowed with soul are not subjects because they are disguised humans, they are humans because they are potential subjects (*ibid*, p. 374).

The Jarawara speak a lot, although indirectly, about the difficulties of living in an animist world – which is also a dangerous world (Maizza, 2011). The most considerable existential problem for them is to have their soul kidnapped by another type of being, which would mean living with this being, getting its point of view of the world, and dying from the human point of view. This problem is directly related to another one: the generalized war, of everyone against everyone. The Jarawara describe the world as a place where all the beings are always fighting against each other and have immense knives to kill and eat their enemies. Hence the importance to build and to live in villages that are delimited areas of ‘peace’, where people know each other, are ‘kin’, and are geographically protected of the war and of the soul kidnapping.

For the Jarawara, in the sky, as well as in the Earth, there is a great instability due to the constant fighting between the beings: the enemies are everywhere, even in their *post-mortem*. The war in the sky is a war between spirits, mainly domesticated plants (and trees) spirits against non-domesticated plants (and trees) spirits. In a general way, all beings that live in the sky that do not live in the same place/village are potential enemies to each other, and will fight if they meet.

In this world of generalized war – that persists even after death – the plants, or more precisely, the plant’s spirits, are important allies to the Jarawara. The studies of indigenous Amazon societies have discussed much about the animist relation between humans and animals. Or, among the Jarawara, the plants occupy a very important place in their metaphysics.

5. Conclusions

The everyday life of the Jarawara has many activities related to what we call nature: hunting, fishing, gardening, etc. We have tried to show in this paper that actions that to us do not have, and cannot have, any symbolic or cosmological meaning, are in the centre of the Jarawara ontological concerns. This is so because the world that the Jarawara live in is very different from ours. By being animists, the Jarawara consider that

all ‘natural’ things have a soul. Animism, which is often seen only as a ‘type of belief’, takes a different value and sense if considered not only as a way of thinking, but also as a way of living, being, acting and creating the world. For the Jarawara, to plant and to cultivate is not only a means to subsist; it is also and at the same time, a way to effectuate relations, and to prepare a post-mortem life. Beyond that, the shaman’s garden is the concrete demonstration of his power, of his relation with spirits that might save and cure the Jarawara if they fall sick. We believe that when we talk about a worldview, we are speaking of a world more than of a view of the world. Another world: different from ours but just as important.

6. References

- Descola, P. 2005. *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard.
- Maizza, F. 2009. *Cosmografia de um Mundo perigoso. Espaço e relações de afinidade entre os Jarawara da Amazônia*, PhD. Thesis in Social Anthropology, São Paulo, University of São Paulo (USP).
- Prance, G. T. 1978. “The poisons and narcotics of the Dení, Paumarí, Jamamadí and Jarawara Indians of the Purus river region”, *Revista brasileira Bot.*, Vol. 1, pp. 71-82.
- Singh Rai, J., Thorheim, C., Dorjderem, A. & Macer, D. 2010, *Universalism and Ethical Values for the Environment*, Ethics and Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific (ECCAP) Project, Working Group 1 Report, UNESCO.
- Tozzi, A. M. G. de Azevedo 1998. “A identidade do timbó-verdadeiro: *Deguelia utilis* (A.C.Sm.) A.M.G.Azevedo (Leguminosae-Papilionoideae)”, *Rev.Bras.Biol.*, 58 (3), pp. 511-516.
- Viveiros De Castro, E. 1996. “Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio”, *Mana* 2(2), pp. 115-144.
- Viveiros De Castro, E. 2002. “Perspectivismo e Multinaturalismo na América Indígena”, in *A inconstância da alma selvagem - e outros ensaios de antropologia*, São Paulo, Cosac & Naif, pp.347-399.