

Feminist perspectives in Indigenous Amazonia

ALINE REGITANO 

University of São Paulo | São Paulo, SP, Brazil

alineregitano@usp.br

CHLOE NAHUM-CLAUDEL 

University of Manchester | Manchester, United Kingdom

cnahumclaudel@gmail.com

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abstract This introduction draws together the six papers compiled in this special issue and highlights prominent themes from at the Workshop, Feminist Perspectives in Indigenous Amazonia, held in June 2021. What do anthropologists and Indigenous women in Amazonia need from feminist epistemology today? How are experienced and emerging scholars reconciling perspectives centred on the alterity of Indigenous Amazonian kinship systems and cosmologies, which have been so extraordinarily productive and creative for Amazonianists and for broader anthropology, in this era when colonial and postcolonial violence are at the forefront of the political agendas and everyday experiences of many Indigenous women? Women are facing oil companies and organizing in response to new forms of misogyny and exclusion (e.g., from state wealth, education, and formal decision-making). They are also grasping new opportunities conferred by mobility, by the reconfiguration of masculine roles, and by access to higher education. This introduction presents some of the ways that anthropologists and Indigenous women are figuring out what a feminist perspective in Indigenous Amazonia might be.

keywords Indigenous feminism, women's movements, cosmopolitics, egalitarianism, difference, violence

Perspectivas feministas na Amazônia Indígena

resumo Esta introdução apresenta os seis artigos reunidos no dossiê e destaca temas que foram proeminentes na oficina Perspectivas Feministas na Amazônia Indígena, realizada em junho de 2021. O que antropólogas e mulheres indígenas na Amazônia precisam da epistemologia feminista hoje? Como experientes e emergentes pesquisadoras estão reconciliando perspectivas centradas na alteridade dos sistemas de parentesco e cosmologias indígenas amazônicas, que têm sido extraordinariamente produtivos e criativos para os amazonistas e para a antropologia mais ampla, nesta era em que a violência colonial e pós-colonial estão na vanguarda das agendas políticas e experiências cotidianas de muitas mulheres indígenas? As mulheres estão enfrentando empresas petrolíferas, se organizando em resposta a novas formas de misoginia e exclusões (da riqueza do Estado, educação, tomadas formais de decisão) e se valendo das novas oportunidades conferidas pela mobilidade, pela reconfiguração das funções masculinas e pelo ensino superior. Esta introdução apresenta algumas das maneiras pelas quais antropólogas e mulheres indígenas estão descobrindo o que pode ser uma perspectiva feminista na Amazônia indígena.

palavras-chave Feminismos indígenas, movimentos de mulheres, cosmopolíticas, igualitarismo, diferença, violência.



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Introduction

In the 1970s women anthropologists such as Christine Hugh-Jones (1979) and Joanna Overing (1975) began to shed light on gender relations in Amazonia, through feminist lenses. From the 1980s onwards, researchers such as Bruna Franchetto (1996), Cecilia McCallum (2001), Luisa Elvira Belaunde (2005), and Vanessa Lea (2012) pursued this dialogue around gender. Ever since, new generations of researchers have been renewing these debates. Today, the presence of Indigenous women in universities (notably in Brazil) reinvigorates them further. It is perhaps curious that it should still be necessary to defend the importance of reflecting upon gender relations and feminism in Indigenous Amazonia despite a history of renowned and subtle works published over the last six decades. The resistance to doing so arises perhaps firstly from an idea that gender is a minor theme in the literature emerging from the region, when compared to other classic topics such as kinship and alterity; and secondly from a distrust of Eurocentric feminist discourses, which may be viewed as incompatible with Indigenous Amazonian ways of being. This resistance incited us to consider a multiplicity of feminist perspectives and the ways these can be adapted to address the questions posed by Amerindian women today.

Interested in debating not only thorny, classic anthropological themes such as betrothal, the exchange of women, and rape sanctions, but also contemporary questions arising from colonial experiences and legacies, such as masculinist ideologies and violence, we proposed an international workshop on Feminist Perspectives in Indigenous Amazonia. We were inspired by Marilyn Strathern's theory of relational and partial gender and by all the women scholars who have advanced debates on gender in Amazonia. Since Overing's (1986) classic article "Men control women?", it has remained a challenge to find a middle way between analyzing local gender meanings and arrangements – resisting the urge to universalize relations of hierarchy and power between men and women – and privileging feminist attention to women's everyday lives, sufferings, and complaints.

We are still looking for this balance between attention to Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, and the gender arrangements that correspond to them, and a feminist critique of the potential risks to women's lives, bodies, and children, that may come from both inside and outside of Indigenous territories. This is an ever-changing balance that must apprehend the transformations to which people are subject as they move between villages and towns; between worlds inhabited by non-humans, and the majority non-Indigenous, globalized world. This increasing interconnection makes feminist agendas and tools of political struggle ever more relevant and necessary for the Indigenous women of the Amazon region. It is not only the food, religion, technologies, politics, and modes of bureaucratized organization that Amazonian communities borrow from the city; violence, patriarchy, and masculinist ideologies are also



entering villages and the lives of Indigenous women via resource and agricultural frontiers, urban migration, and experiences in schools and hospitals. What is happening in these shared arenas where diverse peoples and worlds meet, and what do these encounters imply for gender relations?

We were surprised that our call for papers resonated with so many scholars, most of them women, from many different places, including, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, USA, France, Italy and the UK. What was intended as an afternoon Workshop, became a three-day online event (14-16 June 2021). It was promoted by the University of São Paulo's Centre for Amerindian Studies, together with the anthropology journal *Cadernos de Campo*, and organized with the support of the Centre's coordinator, Professor Marta Rosa Amoroso. Approximately seventy presenters (including co-authors and discussants) presented forty-seven papers, divided into eight panels. These were entitled: "Women's political engagement in transformation"; "Beyond binary gender"; "Reflections on gendered fieldwork experiences"; "Biomedicine, violence, and the body"; "Feminist re-thinking of Amazonian anthropology"; "Colonialism, state, and silencing"; "Conceptualizing care: Amazonian nurture as politics"; and "Becoming women, structures of experience".

This special issue offers a taste of the diverse themes and dialogues woven by different generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers during our workshop.¹ The authors' reflections were refined through a collaborative network of peer review, in which dialogue and mutual learning was the guiding ethic. These texts are about Indigenous women and their cosmopolitical potential. Our introduction has the humblest intent of using the six articles gathered as a springboard to highlight some key themes and approaches that emerged from the workshop, to raise questions, and to invite us all to experiment with new perspectives.

Women and Cosmopolitics: holistic alterity epistemologies and situated knowledges

In response to our call for papers, several abstracts coalesced around female practices of care and nurture and the ways they may be conceptualized, not as pertaining only to the construction of personhood and consanguinity, but also to politics and cosmopolitics. The panel "Conceptualizing care: nurture as politics" brought the ways human social and political lives are interpenetrated by relationships with plant and animal life, especially in an era of health and environmental crisis. The fuzzy border between some women's expertise as gardeners, mothers, and shamans is demonstrated by Ximena Flores' (2021) work on Awajún (also known as Aguaruna) women's use of a plant, *toé*, to treat their sick children, rather than to facilitate Jivaro men's vision quests (for which *toé* has, until now, been better known). Women cultivate *toé* by caring for the spirit master of the plant, by expertly preparing the plant to administer to their

¹ Discussions from the second panel, about sexual diversity, are not explored here.

sick children, and then guiding the therapeutic process that unfolds thereafter. Flores was in the field when she wrote the final version of the article in November 2021 and her work reflects a current epoch of perceived ubiquitous sickness for Awajún (linked to a rise in HIV/AIDS cases, as well as anemia, gastritis, diabetes, epilepsy, tuberculosis, and other diseases). The therapeutic use of *toé* has risen in prominence now that young people invest in education and Christianity in their quests for long and prosperous lives. Perhaps *toé* had to become sufficiently decoupled from a masculinity rooted in warriorhood to be integrated in a more quotidian struggle for health managed by Awajún women (though male specialists still use *toé*)?

We wish to consider Flores's ethnography in relation to Anne-Christine Taylor's (2000) analysis of the gender implications of Jivaro peoples' predation-focused ontology. This is helpful not only because the two researchers' discussion during the panel (Anne-Christine Taylor, who began her fieldwork with the Jivaroan Achuar in 1976, was the discussant) was so stimulating, but because Flores' ethnography also seems to take contemporary Awajún women beyond Taylor's gender model. Awajún women are cultivating themselves, their children's health, and their female-centered intergenerational networks and knowledge systems through a relationship with a plant whose origin story is all about warfare prowess and prosperity.

The story features Bikut, a lance-wielding, all-seeing man (that is, a man in whom lethal power and shamanic prowess are strong) who, as Flores tells us, also has murderous sentiments towards adulterous women. Bikut becomes powerful and invincible through his continuous incorporation of *toé*, becoming the *toé* plant itself upon death. During *toé* visions, Awajún children encounter White "little doctors" (*doctorcitos*) and nurses wearing lab coats and working in brightly lit clinics. The *doctorcitos* deliver diagnostic and prognostic information that covers wonky bones that need fixing, and encrusted objects or bad smells in the body that require treatment; they also give the patients tips on what we might call shamanic "self-care", for instance, massage and sucking therapies to remove invisible pathogens. How is it that Bikut came to be imaginatively embodied by White doctors? What is the relationship between colonialism and gender relations here? How is it that Bikut and his living male avatars (that is, male *toé* specialists) came to allow women to become powerful and invincible through the incorporation and administration of *toé*? In the panel discussion, Anne-Christine Taylor emphasized some of the ways life seemed to have become more violent and precarious for Jivaro women than it was in the late 1970s when she and Philippe Descola did most of their fieldwork – reflecting a concern frequently expressed throughout the workshop. And yet, what of Awajún women's new leading role in the cultivation and administration of *toé*?

We are used to understanding Amazonian female shamanism in the slot of complementary opposition to that of men; thus in the literature about Jivaroan peoples, women become shaman-like in their relation to Nungkui, the mother of manioc, in processes associated with the management of blood and fertility, and enacted in a relationship to a plant that, because

it reproduces clonally, embodies consanguinity in a pure and idealized form (see, e.g., Taylor, 2000: 329). In the broader literature, the most common pattern is simply an absence of women shamans or curing and incantation specialists that, when it is justified at all, is associated with an incompatibility between these roles and reproductive processes such as bleeding and caring for children. The exception is provided by works that denounce the invisibility of female specialists, tell their stories, and evidence their place in the therapeutic repertoires of their group. These works demonstrate the entanglement between the production of kinship and alterity (Bacigalupo, 1998; Colpron, 2005; Regitano, 2019; Silveira, 2018).

In a similar way, as it is described by Flores Rojas, *toé* takes female shamanism out of the confines of blood and consanguinity and dissolves the borders between specialist and quotidian kinds of communication with invisible resource owners (for example the opposition between anent, which are everyday songs sung by Jivaroan women, and men's periodic or initiatory vision quests). Could it be that – paradoxically – colonial processes have brought the mundane and the heroic into greater symmetry, even as they also introduce “hyper-masculinist” ideologies (Segato, 2014) – new forms of male chauvinism and sexism – that restrict women's autonomy in new ways? Could it be that part of the story of Awajún women's new leading role with *toé* is also the uneven benefits of participation in the national economy to men and women, that frequently undermines the high value placed on women's economic contribution, as well as potentially placing the burden of social reproduction more heavily on the shoulders of women – as with the requirement that women should embody custom?

Another way that we wish to stage an encounter between Taylor's classic analysis and Flores' analysis in this Special Issue, is by considering the epistemic practices of Amazonianist anthropology and the ways that a feminist agenda may challenge them. In the call for papers, we asked whether the argument that a gender analysis is less relevant in politically egalitarian, cosmocentric, alterity-focused Amazonia, might smuggle in androcentrism, that is, the often-unconscious assumption that male experience is normal or primary, and stands for the whole. In “*La Sexe du Proie*” (2000), inspired by Marilyn Strathern's relational model of gender, Taylor spells out the implications of the symbolic economy of predation for a gendered lifeworld. The resulting essay stands out for the relative symmetry with which she treats male and female positions in a predation-centered ontology. Thus, Taylor makes the argument that Jivaroan cosmology is androcentric – “the male perspective dominates in Jivaro culture”, she says (2000: 309, note 1) and constrains women to express their identity in circumscribed ways.

Thus, if men are “dividuals” composed through their relationships with their intimate enemies, especially their brothers-in-law, women's dividuality is hierarchically encompassed; they are the sisters of game animals, for, like them, women are “at once tamed and sexually consumed” (Ibid.: 317) by male predators. Since the “brother-in-law relation is the touchstone of Jivaro sociability and subjectivity” (Ibid.: 328) women's position may be defined by what Holly

Wardlow (2006) calls “negative agency”; that is, young Jivaro wives can sulk and disobey, “within the limits permitted by a society in which masculine domination is strongly and sometimes vigorously affirmed” (Taylor, 2000: 314). Alternatively, they can sing of themselves as pets in anent to remind their husbands to care for them; or sing instead that a husband is acting like a jaguar to reprimand violent behavior. Their alliance with murderous Bikut takes women out of the cozy, clonal sphere of manioc gardening where the holism of Taylor’s analysis places them in a hierarchically encompassed complimentary opposition to men. The latter find their identity in the “quasi-mystical” brother-in-law relation, to evoke Gayle Rubin’s (1975) fierce critique of structuralist kinship theory, which still rings true fifty years after it was penned in relation to predation and brother-in-law focused theories of Amazonia.

Recall that Gayle Rubin was pleased to find in Lévi-Strauss’s theory ammunition to challenge 1970’s feminism’s homogenous reliance on Marxian theory. Rubin thought that this led to the facile assumption that sex oppression would end with the abolition of capitalism. By anchoring sex oppression in marriage exchange, Lévi-Strauss showed that this would not be so because it was rooted in kinship and social reproduction. It is the “matrimonial dialogue of men” (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 496 cit. Rubin, 1975: 201) that confers on its male partners a “quasi mystical power of social linkage” (Ibid. 174) whereas it confers on women an ambivalent status, as at once subjects and objects.

Cuttingly, Rubin pointed out that Lévi-Strauss seemed not to notice that he had constructed one of “the most sophisticated ideologies of sexism around” (Ibid. 200). Amazonianists have done breath-taking work to radicalize a constructivist understanding of kinship based on alliance theory (e.g., Viveiros de Castro, 2001), but with this the practical and ideological dimensions of the brother-in-law relationship have become a touchstone for masculinist Amazonian predation ontologies. Has this not perhaps extended the masculinism of alliance theory? For instance, it is difficult to square theories of Amazonian kinship that lay such stress on male affinity with systems in which women spearhead marriage alliances. This is the case for the Enawenê-nawê among whom mothers of girl children initiate betrothals by offering gifts to mothers of boy children; affinity is thereafter predominantly constructed through cross-sex relationships between girls’ mothers and boys’ fathers, and between mothers in law and their sons in law (Nahum-Claudel, 2019).

Unlike Taylor’s or Nahum-Claudel’s holistic and system-focused analyses, the papers in the workshop tended to stress individual experience, idiosyncrasy, and historical specificity; and they tended also not to strive for a symmetrical account of male and female experience and identity, with everything this tends to imply about opposition and complementarity. Flores, for example, pays particular attention to Awajún women’s idiosyncratic relationships with their plants, following their hints. Women who cultivate *toé* stress that each plant is different because it is produced through a specific suite of cares, meted out by a particular woman, with her own

unique capacities (interestingly, Flores' interlocutors did not recognize Brown's [1978, cited in Flores] typology of *toé*, or perhaps they just were not interested in naturalist typologies). Such a refusal to generalize and abstract offers a refreshing alternative to the system-focused descriptions of human/non-human relations that have shaped Amazonian anthropology. This chimes with the affirmations of Marubo anthropologist Nelly Duarte who, during the roundtable, remembered the words of her then recently deceased mother in 2015, "to be a shaman does not mean to own history. One must appreciate the specificity of any situation, and of the links a person has to history, as well as to what is happening in the present" (*ser o pajé, não significa ser o dono da história. Você tem que valorizar como se produz a situação, e qual é o vínculo da pessoa com a história e com o que está produzindo* – Bonilla; Franchetto; Duarte & Benítes, 2015). In that interview, Nelly Duarte suggests that situated knowledges may be an antidote to a masculinist ambition to encompass everything.

Secondly thus, we stand for partial perspectives. As we noted above, Flores tells us very little about what male *toé* shamanism is about today. In a sense, our curiosity about historical change in the gender division of shamanic labour risks turning this into a symmetrical story about male and female perspectives on *toé* and their complementarity or opposition. But, in interesting ways, the papers in this Issue refuse to do that. That is, they adopt an ethnographic and analytical bias for women's experience and, although this is not novel in Amazonian anthropology, a focus on same-sex relations. In sum, the workshop papers pushed a focus on women's relationships with other women, on female intergenerational knowledge transmission, on female networks, and female collectivity. During the workshop, we heard various presenters apologize for this bias, saying things like: "sorry I didn't talk much about men, I know that if we are going to talk about gender, we really need to consider this..." but we do not think we need apologize. If we are not assuming a heterosexual and binary model of social reproduction (Maizza, 2017)², and if we are resisting a tendency for male experiences and ideologies to stand for the whole, why not eschew holism all together?

² As noted by Maizza (2017), studies of Amazonian kinship are still strongly marked by a "standard relational mode" of heterosexuality (Ibid: 214). Her essay is a tour de force in using ethnography to intensify and radicalize an Indigenous alternative to that way of thinking, something that brings us closer to contemporary queer parenthood models. We think this also applies to the way gender has generally been considered through Structuralist lenses as an oppositional code (male/female); and in terms of a reproductive model of society grounded in heterosexual union, with the naturalized ideas about division of labor that spring from it. In this register, male and female work are the bedrock of an economy in which egalitarianism and autonomy reduce the division of labor to a question of conjugal interdependence and complementarity. The lens of gender has been irrevocably binary and heterosexual, and we are sorry that this Issue does not include any of the pioneering work on queer Amazonia that takes this critique in an indispensable direction.

Female collectivity, political life, and pedagogy

Many papers reflected on the way politics has been conceptualized in gendered, and often androcentric terms in Amazonianist scholarship and sought to rectify this by exploring innovations in women's political participation in Brazil, Ecuador, and Colombia. Beyond local, internal, cosmopolitical models, "politics" is often understood to refer to relationships and negotiations with the State over access to wealth. For many Waorani communities in Ecuador, this is synonymous with oil extraction. Andrea Bravo Diaz's (2021) article is about Waorani women's forceful speech in the context of negotiations with oil companies who are drilling inside their territories, as is the case in the community of Tiwino where Andrea Bravo Diaz spent the most time during her doctoral fieldwork. During Bravo Diaz's fieldwork, villagers had accepted a new borehole in 2017 but had not yet seen the benefits they were expecting to materialize as a result. This was the context for women's forceful speech. While most official negotiators with oil companies are men who conduct affairs in Spanish; women – especially elder women – monopolize a style of speech in the Indigenous language in which the voice is energetic, moves the body, and is dramatically modulated, rising to a high pitch and dropping to a deep, aggressive tone. Rising like a hummingbird, when least expected, such speech is understood to channel social and physical vitality. It is an upsurge of force, vitality, and courage in the body. It is both linked to and distinct from anger/aggression. Women who master forceful speech tend to be witty and to sing well, as both are signs of an inner vitality that can be directed in different ways. While men risk either becoming docile in negotiations or going too far the other way and becoming dangerous when they channel *el hablar duro*, which taps into rage, women can easier perform diplomatic brinkmanship that is so effective in negotiations (cf. Nahum-Claudel, 2018: 9-18; 238-250).

Crucial for Bravo Diaz's analysis is the way she unfolds how this capacity – mastered by a few individuals – emerges from practices of same-sex female collectivity. Political meetings start with this female conviviality, as women group together and greet, sing, and touch, channeling "an energy that will later be expressed in confrontations with Others". In this way, intimacy and alterity are bound together. Indeed, a crucial theme in the workshop was the connection between political engagement and other forms of agency such as weaving, gardening, potting, brewing, and educating children that are typically associated with a female position in Amazonia. In her paper about Kichwa Runa women organizing against oil companies in the Pastaza region of Ecuador, Marina Ghirotto Santos cited one of her interlocutors, whom she calls Hilda: "I won't stay locked in the house. I go to the gardens, I organize." (*Não quero me trancar em casa. Eu vou pra chagra, eu me organizo*). We appreciated this direct expression of the intrinsic link between political organizing and garden work, as forms of power and creativity. Another common thread in this regard was the importance of

intergenerational knowledge transmission, especially between women, including such acts as strengthening the body through garden work, enlivening the body with nettles (Bravo Diaz, 2021 and also Braconnier & Walacou, 2021), sharing sweat (Bravo Diaz, 2021), and taking powerful substances like *toé* (Flores Rojas, 2021) and guayusa (spoken of by Marina Guanabara on the Kichwa Runa).

Some of these practices are specific to female intergenerational knowledge transmission, and some are shared in an undifferentiated way, as seemed to be the case for guayusa-drinking ceremonies. As well as being part of conviviality, child-rearing, rites of passage and therapeutic practices, women across Amazonia are seeking to organize this pedagogy by borrowing institutional forms such as schools and meeting houses. This was the case for Kichwa Runa women described by Mariana Guanabara and Emilienne Ireland (2021) mentions the creation of an all-female meeting house, the Upper Xingu Women's Convention Centre (*Centro de Convenções de Mulheres do Alto Xingu*) launched in December 2021 by young Yawalapiti chiefly women, which is the first meeting space of its kind in the region. Role models are also vital. Bravo Diaz tells us about younger women whose voices are as yet soft and tremulous but who aspire to the forceful speech of their elders. Ana Manoela Primo dos Santos Soares, a Karipuna anthropologist, tells us that even forty years later, Tuíra Kayapó – the woman who held a machete to the Electronorte representative's neck during the successful Altamira demonstrations that halted the construction of the first Belo Monte dam in 1989 – remains an inspiration for Xingu women today.³

Working with Quechua speakers in Ecuador, Sofia Cevallos highlighted the ways that female knowledge transmission may be crucial to resisting “hyper-masculinization”, Rita Segato's (2014) useful shorthand for the ways that colonial frontiers often foster violent and militarized masculinities. In the words of Sônia Guajajara cited by Ana Manoela Primo dos Santos Soares (2021) this is: “the pandemic of machismo that arrived with colonisation” (*o machismo ... [é] uma pandemia que veio junto da colonização*). In her article, Santos Soares transmits the voices of many other women within Brazil's contemporary Indigenous women's movement, gathering up the inspiration she has gained during the online discussion events that have flourished in Brazil during the pandemic.

If same-sex knowledge transmission and collectivities are well-springs of women's leadership, we also discussed its social and spatial conditions of possibility. Uxorilocal residence was a key theme, since this is a very common pattern across Amazonia that is often eroded when new forms of income are unevenly distributed. For instance, Bravo Diaz and her interlocutors see uxori-local residence as a prerequisite to Waorani women's strong speech, precisely because the latter depends on female collective conviviality. Women who live at their husbands' places

³ See *Kayapo, Out of the Forest*, by Michael Beckerman (1989).

(often motivated by access to government services linked to oil exploitation) tend to keep quiet in meetings. Clarice Cohn, who discussed a published article (Cohn, 2019) at the event, also argues that uxori-local residence allows Xikrin women to create collectives as part of their daily routines. Making earth ovens, eating sweet potatoes together while bathing, or doing things that are more markedly “ritual”, like painting bodies with genipap dye, create female solidarity that may be activated for more overtly political ends, like two recent projects: a babaçu palm oil cooperative and a collective female garden. These forms of collectivity are then channelled in female representation in public debates. Meanwhile, Ireland’s work, while it celebrates the opportunities uxori-local residence affords Wauja women, is also a warning not to fetishize “sisterhood”.

Ireland (2021) stresses that uxori-locality favors cross-sex intergenerational knowledge transmission, with the daughters of chiefs being in a privileged position when it comes to sitting at their father’s side and acquiring specialist knowledge (compared to their brothers, who move out when they marry). As uxori-locality has been eroded because younger salaried men are reluctant to live with their in-laws, reducing women’s access to specialist knowledge, Wauja women are finding new ways to access this specialist knowledge. A documentary by a male Wauja filmmaker (Waurá, 2021 cited by Ireland, 2021) shows “about thirty young women dancing in the plaza and all singing confidently in unison, pronouncing every word. Obviously, these women had all thoroughly learned the songs” (usually, when women sing in chorus they follow the lead of a song master, rather than memorizing the words themselves). When Ireland (2021) noticed this, the filmmaker explained that the women had pooled their contributions to pay the song specialist a fee for the right to record this song cycle in full, to memorize it, and perform it publicly. Interestingly, here we see the construction of a new, same-sex collective form of pedagogy that becomes necessary when former avenues to women’s influence are undermined.

In some parts of Amazonia of course – notably among the People of the Centre and Tukano-speaking groups in Northwest Amazonia – virilocal residence has always been customary. In these societies, we see a different dynamic: colonial and postcolonial pressures over two centuries have intensified women’s mobility and their intrinsic association with the outside and the in-between (cf. Lasmar, 2008). Juana Valentina Nieto Moreno’s work with the Murui, one of Colombia’s People of the Centre, tells the story of how Murui women find in movement – be it fleeing violence linked to extractive industries, migrating to work in service, marry, study, or finding kin – a source of power, even while it exposes them to new vulnerabilities. Drawing on Murui women’s narratives emphasizing the power they draw from movement, networks, and territory, she reminds us of Chandra Mohanty’s (1984) injunction to challenge the universal image of Black and Indigenous women as victims. And yet, alongside all this creativity evidenced in Indigenous women’s political lives, and the hope that springs from

it, violence inevitably loomed over a workshop held mid-Pandemic, with Bolsonaro in power in Brazil.⁴ This left an unresolved question: how do we acknowledge the many kinds of violence to which Indigenous women are subjected – biomedical, obstetrical, intimate-partner, structural, environmental, epistemic, and missionary – and that are on the rise, without effacing that creativity?

During the workshop, the relation between violence, embodiment and reproductive processes were explored perhaps most thoroughly in Panel 4 “Biomedicine, violence and the body”. Two groups of presenters (Mariana Queiroz, Sula Kamaiurá and Maria Cristina Troncarelli; Oiara Bonilla, Artionka Capiberibe and Vanessa Grotti) shared the ways in which Upper Xingu women (first trio), and Paumari and Palikur women (second trio), have suffered a series of aggressions as childbirth has been medicalized and urbanized, taking place in hospitals. This starts with the often-forced removal of Indigenous women from their villages to the cities by medical professionals. It extends to every kind of obstetrical violence: verbal aggression, discrimination, interventionist procedures, and medical professionals’ disregard for traditional understandings of the body and ways of caring for pregnant and postpartum women. Considering how Indigenous women, like black women, are most subject to such violence, Bonilla, Capiberibe and Grotti proposed Angela Davis’ concept of “obstetric racism” as a good starting point for understanding such violence. Similarly, José Miguel Nieto Olivar, Flávia Melo, Dulce Mendes Morais, Elizangela da Silva Baré and Vanda Witoto, looking at the Upper Rio Negro and specifically, the town of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, drew attention to the violence that affects Indigenous women and that is the outcome of a politics that produces death and suffering, and that is currently exacerbated by Brazil’s management of Covid-19. Indigenous women from this region have been leading political movements, organizing their own care, and promoting female strength.

Combating gender violence was central to the agenda of Indigenous women during the pandemic. It was a focus, for instance, of the Second Indigenous Women’s March in Brazil, organized by ANMIGA, the National Network of Indigenous Women and Ancestral Warriors (*Articulação Nacional Mulheres Indígenas Guerreiras da Ancestralidade*) about which we will have more to say later. Thus, violence has become central to Indigenous movements and encompasses Indigenous women’s diverse experiences in institutions such as hospitals, schools, and health posts. But how is it possible to account for divergent meanings around what violence is? That is, how is it possible to approach the forms it takes and the specific ways that it affects women’s rights? How can violence as an abstraction operate in our analyses of women’s suffering, fear, and pain, without losing sight of creativity, hope, joy, and desire?

⁴ With a disastrous death toll from Covid-19 and, simultaneously, attacks on the territorial rights of Indigenous and maroon communities

Mixture and egalitarianism / hierarchy and opposition

While same sex organizing and feminine pedagogy are no doubt increasingly important and are rendered more so by new or intensifying machismo that seems to exacerbate male-female opposition, or solidify binary gender ideologies, it is also important not to overstress gender opposition. Amazonian societies are often exceptionally egalitarian, enabling a fluid performance of gender. During the round table, Luisa Elvira Belaunde reminded us of this based on her long experience working with Airo Pai people, whose companionate marriages and weakly coded gender distinction she admires, and partially ascribes to the association of Airo Pai masculinity with the shamanic virtues of wisdom and quiet composure. In this context, rituals tied to blood are joyful occasions that are of interest to the whole community (Jean Langdon echoed this in the round table when she stressed that menstruation offers women a holiday from workaday life). The collaborative ethnography of Olivia Braconnier (a metropolitan French woman who has taught in Wayapi schools) and Silvia Walacou (a Wayapi woman) describes how, upon first menstruation, young women's bodies become the site for a performance of female gender that stresses productivity, power, and resilience, and in which very little importance is given to girls' new reproductive capacity. This resonates with Nahum-Claudel's work on seclusion among the Enawenê-nawê, where men and women are joined rather than set apart by their vulnerability to blood, and for whom idealized womanhood also centers on vigor, strength, beauty, and productivity, rather than motherhood (2018; forthcoming), as is the case also for "swift, resilient, strong and courageous" Wayapi women (Braconnier & Walacou, 2021).

The authors stress similarity and equivalence in the ways Wayapi girls and boys are prepared for adulthood through rituals that seem to join, rather than differentiate, male and female actors. One of the questions that this paper throws up is the way that pedagogy has both a social dimension (it is about learning to be a good community member, woman, and wife) and a cosmological one (it is about keeping the world in balance). It struck us that the social was at least as important as the cosmological in their presentation of the Wayapi "descent of the hammock", whereas the cosmological dimension has often been stressed in Amazonianist work on lifecycle seclusion, at the expense of the hierarchical, pedagogical, or disciplinary potentials of initiation that are often stressed in ethnographies from other parts of the world. In the Wayapi case, cosmology and social discipline are not really in tension because adults are not forcing young people to submit to anything harsher than an ant bite or nettle sting, and the whole event joins people in conviviality.

It is however possible to imagine a disciplinary dimension of seclusion coming to the fore in Amazonia, for instance, when girls are potentially excluded from forms of education that will give them access to national society on a more equal footing with men because they are

required to remain in seclusion (as is sometimes the case in the Upper Xingu today). Conversely, Courtney Stafford Walter presented the case of coeducational boarding schools in Guyana, where Indigenous girls are separated from traditional village education and get their first period at school, where they cannot isolate. These girls live out violent forms of possession by a “grandmother spirit”, a mysterious process linked to memory and loss that seems to mark an experience of estrangement from their communities. This plays out in a way that places them in a peculiar relationship to the boys in the school, who are there both to witness and restrain them during their possession (as they partially lose consciousness).

In this context of a new, institutionalized form of gender undifferentiation, girlhood is being embodied and performed in new and disturbing ways. These gender performances escape more familiar forms of Amazonianist analysis that stress the achievement of stable embodiment and the avoidance of uncontrolled metamorphosis for human persons, whatever their gender (e.g., Vilaça, 2002). Juana Nieto Moreno (2021) calls our attention to a striking example of constraint and discipline around the everyday pedagogy of gender that also takes us away from that framework. A Murui woman (Nieto Moreno calls her “Rufina”) rebelled against her father’s efforts to mold her female body, which she considered simply sexist: why do I have to bathe in the cold at 4am, while my brother stays asleep? Why do I have to eat meat sparingly, leaving the lion’s share for the men? Nieto Moreno and Stafford-Walter remind us that in Amazonia, as anywhere else gendered pedagogy can become a site for rebellion and crisis. Indeed, Nieto Moreno’s paper about Murui women’s mobility as a search for freedom recalls Holly Wardlow’s discussion of highland Papua New Guinean women who seek to escape the bride wealth systems through which they have been raised to become “good women” under male protection. When the system fails them, rather than securing them safety and respect (they are beaten, humiliated, and exploited,) they “jump over the fence” taking a dangerous path that also promises certain new freedoms (Wardlow, 2006).

Of course, resistance and rebellion in the face of gendered social norms can also be collectivized and ritualized. This is just what happens during *Yamurikumã* in Upper Xingu societies that are characterized by hierarchy, opposition, and the performance of alterity. Roles are flipped, spaces are transgressed, and women find parallel channels in which to cultivate satisfaction, joy, and security in a social world marked by gender opposition and hierarchy (Franchetto, 1996: 45). Franchetto nailed this argument in her critique of McCallum’s (1994) analysis of collective rape sanctions in the Upper Xingu. McCallum had argued that just as women’s perception of the sacred flutes was tinged with their fear of collective rape, men experienced an equivalent threat during *Yamurikumã*, a ritual during which men may be aggressed by women (Ibid.: 51). By making this argument McCallum minimized gender antagonism and institutionalized forms of sexual violence to reinscribe complimentary and egalitarian harmony. According to Franchetto, because McCallum’s argument was based on a

literature review rather than fieldwork, it not surprisingly ignored the discourses of women threatened with rape, and reproduced ideologies of cosmological sanction developed in an androcentric literature. Franchetto's answer – and the ways she has squared her Italian feminist pedagogy with her experiences living with Kuikuro women more generally – is perhaps an uncomfortable one for many feminist anthropologists, since it seems to affirm a transcultural female sisterhood rooted in the female body.

What questions are Amazonian Indigenous Women posing to and of Feminisms?

Like Franchetto, Emilienne Ireland is playing with ideas from a feminist tradition and testing and stretching them through her long-term engagement with Wauja women (neighbors of the Kuikuro, in the Upper Xingu) with whom she also shared the trials of marriage and motherhood through her whole adult life. Tacitly, Ireland approaches feminist struggle as a list of things that women in any society may have or lack. This goes with the language of rights to be won, lost, or to “enjoy”, for instance: independence, equal pay, the right to vote, own property, receive education, freedom of movement, sexual freedom, and freedom from harm or violence. While this framework is clearly foreign to Amazonian societies, Emilienne Ireland adopts this perspective because she is interested in how a rights-based language may be inflected by Wauja culture, with its division of labor, hierarchical knowledge transmission practices, and gendered ideologies. One merit of using familiar terms is to create an equivalence between liberal rights-based feminism and Wauja women's historical experience. This has a powerful de-exoticizing effect. It also invites us to query the correspondences; to ask, what is gained and what is lost when we translate Wauja women's experiences into the language of rights?

This may be a thorny issue if we consider the reticence of all the Indigenous women participants in the workshop to identify with a transnational feminism rooted in Euro-American intellectual traditions and histories, urban individualism, and Whiteness. Feminism is alien. And women were wary of encompassing their concerns as Baniwa, Desana, Kuripaco, Marubo, or Kaingang women (these are the groups from which the workshops' Indigenous participants came) with a generic “Indigeneity” which risked bypassing or encompassing their specific situations and experiences.

Listening to workshop participants, especially Indigenous women, it was also notable how strong women's political movements are becoming in regional and national contexts in Brazil. For example, Kaianaku Kamaiurá brought her own experience as an Upper Xingu woman, a leader in her community, member of the Movement of Women of the Xingu Indigenous Territory (Movimento de Mulheres do Território Indígena do Xingu, MMTIX), and holder of a master's degree in Human Rights. Like many of her relatives, she learned how to make use of Western ways of doing politics to defend the life of her people and their

fundamental rights. She reconciles the roles of leadership within the Upper Xingu and outside it (e.g., Indigenous Women's marches).

Kaianaku Kamaiurá's presentation explored links between "patriarchy", as it has been used by feminist movements (e.g., to critique capitalism,) and its potential meaning among her people, who are patrilineal. Here patrilineality implies that a child inherits their ethnic identity, as well as certain kinds of knowledge, from their father rather than their mother. She also builds bridges between Western feminisms and Kamaiurá women's forms of solidarity; for instance, their systems of communication, marked on the body and indecipherable to men; and their many ways of uniting and aiding one another, for instance, pooling their labour to help maintain the gardens of sick relatives. She explained that even if it is men who go to the village's central patio to be seen making decisions, a man's position will be the result of conversations with his spouse while he is unseen in the house. Of course, Kaianaku Kamaiurá's own participation in the village center already provides a counter example to this prototypical feminine participation of upper Xingu women, restricted to the less visible spaces of houses and gardens.

Jozileia Kaingang, who acted as discussant for one of the sessions in Panel 1 – "Women's political engagement in transformation" – reminds us of the strength with which Indigenous women from the south of Brazil have resisted colonialism. Her master's thesis is a rich ethnography of the Kaingang people of Terra Indígena Serrinha in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. It explores female alliances and political networks that were central to resisting a violent history of expulsion and dispossession and remain so today (Kaingang, 2016).

Braulina Aurora and Nelly Dollis Marubo, who spoke during the same round table, also brought examples of women's leadership in fighting the colonization of Indigenous bodies, languages, and ideas. In her article, Ana Manoela Soares (2021) brings not only the voices of her people, but also the voices of many Indigenous women, from different groups in Brazil, who are fighting for women's lives. Here we may recall the history of Indigenous women's associations in Brazil, and the patterns of organization and institutionalization since the 90's that have been described by Cristiane Lasmar (1999). Today, resisting the violence of a genocidal government, we find, once again, women's networks flourishing.

The second National March of Indigenous Women (*Marcha Nacional das Mulheres Indígenas*) saw almost five thousand Indigenous women, from 172 different groups from all over Brazil. They gathered in Brasilia in September 2021, during a public health and political crisis. This was a four-day event around the theme "Indigenous women: reforesting minds to cure the Earth" (*Mulheres originárias: Reflorestando mentes para a cura da Terra*), which sought to call attention to gender violence and government reforms that would effectively end the

demarcation of Indigenous territories in Brazil (the so-called, *Marco Temporal Indígena*)⁵. It is important to note here that Indigenous sovereignty movements have often side-lined the “women question” on the pretext that sovereignty trumps all other concerns (see e.g. Kim Anderson 2010).

Today, however, Indigenous women are at the forefront of the struggle for territory at a time of unprecedented crisis. They are organizing in the face of this crisis for the “nested sovereignty” of Indigenous peoples within the Brazilian nation –to borrow a term from Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson (2014). Territory is their primary concern because land is body, land is home, and land is care, as Ana Manoela Soares and the Indigenous women’s march stress. In other words, it is with territory that it is possible to live, to make bodies, and to care for children. Interestingly, in Brazil today, the question of territory is feminized, and women are intervening diplomatically, as was also the case in the context analyzed by Bravo Díaz in Ecuador. This begs the question: what kinds of female collectively and conviviality lie behind this encounter in Brasilia of women from 172 Indigenous groups? There is still so much to understand about the Indigenous women’s movements happening now in Brazil.

And yet, “I am not a feminist”, is something that many Indigenous women participating in these movements affirm, as the as Native Canadian feminist Kim Anderson (2010: 81) reflects. Thus, though she is wary of the term “feminism”, Ana Manoela Primo dos Santos Soares identifies with a project of female mutual aid, dialogue, collectivity, and support, and she draws inspiration from the larger Indigenous women’s movement in Brazil. Indigenous women may say this for many reasons; because they understand feminism to be negative, to be individualistic, to seek sameness with men, to exclude men from a struggle that should rather be a collective struggle for peoples, or because Western feminism focuses unduly on rights at the expense of responsibilities (Anderson, 2010).

As Santos Soares’ articles shows, the right to territory is often absent from non-Indigenous women’s movements. These are just some of the ways of formulating a reticence on the part of Indigenous women in Amazonia to be folded into something that looks big, ugly, and foreign. And yet, as we can see, the same women are inventing new forms of female solidarity to respond to the new challenges they face as women, and they are cherishing (perhaps with the reflexivity that comes with loss, cf. Braulina Aurora [2019] on missionary attacks on Baniwa women’s embodiment,) ancestral forms of female pedagogy and power that gain new importance when gender binaries harden, or when women find themselves marginalized within Indigenous political organizations that are supposed to represent them, but that are dominated by men.

⁵ This refers to a Brazilian Supreme Court ruling that would make the right to Indigenous territory, including those already demarcated, contingent upon the occupation of those lands on the 5 October 1988, the day the Brazilian Constitution was enacted. This effectively opens Indigenous lands for mining and other exploitation.

So, with all this ambivalence surrounding feminism, and simultaneously all this energy galvanizing Indigenous women to gather and discuss their common experiences, we suggest Ireland's article is a good place to start thinking about what women might be joining together to fight for and against in Amazonia, and some of the ways of generalizing what they may be discovering and inventing as they do so. Ireland suggests that Wauja women have lost more than they have gained over the precisely 40 years since she began visiting them in 1981. During Ireland's doctoral fieldwork, women controlled what they produced, their agricultural labor was highly valued, and they had access to lifelong training in specialist knowledge because uxorilocal residence allowed fathers to teach daughters for longer than they did their sons.

Women also had sexual freedom and Ireland argues that despite the focus of a moralizing and masculinist anthropological literature on Central Brazil (on this see Cohn 2019) on women's exclusion from certain spaces – notably, the public center and men's house – women occupied more diverse spaces and moved more freely between these spaces than did men, whose affairs were highly monitored in the central “fish-bowls” of the arena and men's house. Behind the scenes, women could influence public opinion. They were the main conduits for flows of information. The mile-long walk to fetch water from the river was a prime opportunity for such influence and so women were in this way busy backstage, enacting complex stratagems out of earshot of others.

Forty years later and access to education – Brazilian schooling, in the village and, at higher levels, in town – has disfavored girls, and men access salaries, bank accounts, and mobile phones much more than women do. Women's leverage over their husbands was formerly assured by the importance of their labor (the husband of a displeased wife risked being offered sour porridge) whereas today men can buy what they need (a man may just enjoy coffee and biscuits for breakfast instead). It is also common for husbands to prefer not to live with their in-laws as they used to, although they may still collaborate and share the benefits of one another's salaries. A husband may even, in some circumstances, appropriate the products of his wife's labor. In short, women's marginalization is inevitable in a cash-based economy that they access unequally. There are also ideological aspects to the ways women experience restriction and curtailment of their lives. For instance, Wauja people are increasingly swayed by both Christian and male-chauvinist ideologies that would deny women extra conjugal relations while condoning them for men and which exhorts men to control and limit their wives' sexuality.

Ireland tells us about some of the ways that Wauja women seem to be resisting what she glosses as their incipient but incomplete “domestication”, and these seem to hinge on new forms of female solidarity, like Wauja women's collective apprenticeship of ritual songs and the women's center mentioned above. Clearly, here, and elsewhere in Amazonia, a woman's movement is emerging, does it matter if women hesitate to call it feminism? Is it not the

responsibility of other women to build bridges with Amazonian women, and share what they have learned?

Conclusions

This dialogue about the experiences of persons who self-describe as women has explored multiple strands of feminism and has aimed to highlight common agendas and strategies. Even as non-Indigenous feminist movements ignore some questions that are of burning importance to Indigenous women, it is nonetheless the case that their tools of struggle, organization, and political positioning are serving Amerindian women today. Many Amazonian groups are egalitarian and have fluid gender codes; they emphasize personal autonomy in social relations; and ascribe equal value to masculine and feminine creativity and productivity (the latter are impossible to separate when women sing to their manioc in the gardens and then dance as they grate and crush their tubers). And yet, it is possible to establish some partial connections between characteristically “Western” problems and the local ideologies of certain Amazonian groups. For instance, between domestic violence in societies where feminicide is currently on the rise; and the application of sanctions to the body, or even the body’s violation, that may be justified by local cosmologies (such as the sanction of rape for a woman who sees the sacred flutes in the Upper Xingu); or the constraints entailed by marriage in Amazonian communities that valorize a masculinity rooted in warfare. As all the papers show, the constant transformation of Amazonian groups through their relations with nation states and with the world capitalist economy also impose new ways of arranging gender relations.

Thus, Amerindian women can today be marginalized in ways that were formerly impossible, but which are omnipresent throughout the world; for instance, in the ways their communities engage with non-Indigenous outsiders, via leadership and political organizations, in respect of access to state education, employment or wealth transfers, or in relation to health services and biomedicine. Analyses that focus on female same-sex relations are rare in the Amazonianist literature, but the texts presented here suggest that questions of complementarity and hierarchy may take second place to questions of female creativity and strength. In all collectives there are questions that primarily concern women and are addressed by them, with or without male involvement. As we have seen, points of dialogue emerge whenever people share their experiences and strategies. One implication is that when feminists of all kinds meet with Indigenous women, they find causes that implicate them mutually and that spill over the borders that connect and divide them. Some of these in Amazonia today are the strengthening of female collective practices, the creation and transmission of feminine pedagogy, the nurture of networks across space and between generations, the invention of novel responses to emerging threats to wellbeing, and restriction of gender codes. We have much to learn with Amazonian Indigenous women about ways to struggle and resist.

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about the authors

Aline Regitano

PhD candidate in anthropology at the University São Paulo, and researcher at the Centre for Amerindian Studies. She holds a master’s in social anthropology from Campinas State

University, where she spent a period studying at the St Andrews University, UK.

Chloe Nahum-Claudel

Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, in the United Kingdom. Between 2006 and 2013, during her PhD at the University of Cambridge, she conducted 18 months fieldwork with the Enawenê-nawê in Brazil's Mato Grosso state at a time when several hydropower dams were being constructed in their fishing waters. *Vital Diplomacy: the ritual everyday on a dammed river in Amazonia* (Berghahn, 2018) is about the community's ritualized response to the rupture implied by resource capture, conceptualized in terms of diplomacy. In addition to her work on the political potential of ritual activity, and on Indigenous diplomacy, she has worked on human relationships with the environment, gender and kinship, and structuralism and semiotics. Since 2015 she has been researching witch-hunts in the central highlands of Papua New Guinea, which has led to her adopt a more explicitly feminist epistemology, opening new perspectives for her work in Amazonia.

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