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Amazonian Exchanges: Txema's Lessons With Outboard Engines, Mosquito Nets and Images

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Abstract: This article provides an ethnographic analysis of lessons given by an Amazonian Indian elder called Txema concerning transactions of objects and images. Txema has lived until 1978 in the Amazon as a hunter and farmer in very small communities spread in the forest mainly avoiding conflict with non-indigenous people. The Matis established contact with the Brazilians in 1978 and now Txema deals with British TV crews and researchers. This paper brings detailed information on how Txema transacts many objects like outboard engines and mosquito nets for images and care. Values are discussed in those transactions. Drawing an ethnographic description as the way to achieve reflection, this paper tries to show a close approach to what kind of transformation a lot of industrialized objects provoke in an indigenous community. Material culture exchanges are closely related to values and Txema teaches us what is valuable for this elder Amazonian man.

Keywords: *value, economy, transaction, Amazon, Pano, Matis.*

> *'The outboard motor you brought us won't last long but the images you take will last for ever', said the tribal chief [Txema Matis] knowingly to Parry, while also making it clear that he and his people were underwhelmed by film crews asking them to go native for the camera.' (Flett 2007, The Guardian newspaper)*

The Matis indigenous people live in the Terra Indigena Vale do Javari, located in the Amazon forest, the second biggest indigenous land in Brazil with 8.5 million hectares, close to Brazil, Peru and Colombia triple border. The Matis had had sporadic relations with non-Indigenous outsiders until they made contact with the Brazilian government in 1978. Men and women who told me their memories from when they use to live as 'isolated Indians' - as the media

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and the Brazilian government use to call them (Arisi, 2007) - are the same who in 2009 negotiated to perform monkey hunting and animal parties with a South Korean and a North American TV crew.

The Matis work hard in the economy of their culture and the exchange of goods, technology and knowledge with foreigners. This is not new for them as while hunting, farming, gathering, and living their lives in the forest, they have always been participating in global networks of trade. The Matis have always been exchanging with forest dwellers such as animals, different indigenous groups, loggers, rubber tappers and the tsussin (vital forces, disencorporated potencies that for the Matis circulate in the many layers of the cosmos) (Arisi, 2011). This article focus on two lessons given by Txema, the elder, concerning mosquito nets and outboard engines.

In order to introduce the Matis community recent history in summary, it is enough to mention that, in less than 30 years; the Matis made their official contact with the Brazilians and entered in full speed in the whirlpool that comes with all the usual transformations brought by this sort of event. They faced sickness and death. They got some access to new medicines and different food. Industrialized objects such as machetes, axes and pans were obtained in a larger scale, on a smaller scale they got other technological items like 16 mm rifles, outboard engines, generators, solar panels, converters and more recently mobile phones and digital cameras. Soon, film makers disembarked to shoot them in the forest. Many documentaries were made starring the Matis, spreading their images in the world.

One of the recent films with the Matis people was part of BBC's series Tribe, made by the famous UK journalist Bruce Parry. The epigraph of this paper is a comment written by the journalist Kathryn Flett (2007) on Parry's work that was published in The Guardian, an English newspaper. Flett reproduces a dialogue recorded in the documentary, where Txema, a Matis elder, confronts Parry with the differences in values he attributes to the images captured by him versus the outboard engine, the counterpart, one of the payments agreed with the Matis to let the cameras document their lives. This brief Txema's discourse shows how much the Matis worry about the economy that they are involved in, exchanging with foreigners their beauty, their knowledge and their images. What kind of stuff and quality of relationships can pay for that? 'Stuff' is understood here in Miller's (2010) broad sense, objects that make us, small things that can encompass 'intimate relationships', 'material objects are viewed as an integral part and inseparable aspect of all relationships' (Miller, 2008: 286). What do the Matis want from foreigners? What kind of stuff are they interested in from the world that exists outside their villages and the huge forest? What is Txema teaching us when stressing the impossibility of paying back things for social relations?

Figure 1. *Map of the Amazon biome. Map: Frank Koopman*

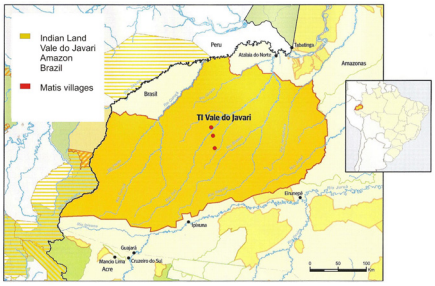

Figure 2. *ISA/CTI map of the area studied. Source: adapted from Arisi, Cesarino and Francisco (2011: 7).*

Industrialized goods and other Indigenous people in Brazil

After 1978 contact, together with the tragic demographic debacle and the arrival of a few foreign film makers, journalists and Brazilian workers, the biggest novelties and transformations that occurred in the Matis economy were due to the huge amount of industrialized stuff that came to play an important role in their lives in the last thirty years. Almost all of the artifacts the Matis had before 1978 were made by themselves, such as their weapons (four meter long blowpipes, arrows and bows), household objects (ceramic pots and water containers, palm tree bags to carry fruits or fishes, hammocks), adornments (bracelets, earrings, collars, nose pendant), tools (paddles), communication instruments (calling/ hunting ceramic wooden horns), etc. The men used to dress with a natural fiber string holding the prepuce and sometimes body painting. The few industrialized tools they had were metal axes and knives, probably traded with or stolen from neighboring Indian groups, loggers or rubber tappers.

Of course, this autonomous life was partly a result of choices the Matis had made. Decisions not only about their life style, but also about their staying away from the many new people that entered their territories. Invasions increased by the rubber booms during the First and Second World Wars and later on by the logging activities. I suspect that in many aspects the Matis are similar to other Amazonian groups like, for example, the Huaorani. They are indigenous people that live in Ecuador and choose trekking as their way of living, according to Rival (2002). She sheds light on the 'correspondences between Huaorani´s particular mode of subsistence and use of the forest and their system of social alliances based on a strict closure of the Huaorani social world onto itself, as well as on the partial isolation' (Rival, 2002: 178).

So, to continue following the changes that a lot of industrialized stuff brought to the lives of the Matis, I would like to point out that a debate about 'primitiveness' should take into account that nomadic trekkers living in small groups 'may represent cultural and political choices already present in preconquest values and social forms', as Rival suggests. That is important to stress because the majority of the

people are strongly prejudiced against Indigenous people, based on a very old fashioned evolutionary mindset that considers that people living with less are also 'less'; so maybe a lot of people would erroneously consider that people living the way the Matis used (or use) to live were primitive. I shall digress just to make this point more clear, because ideas about 'primitive' societies have been changing lately due to the ecological movement activists' discourse. Many environmentalists now consider that humanity is very close to an enormous environmental crisis, so they now call 'primitive' people living in industrialized cities that go on consuming without considering the scarcity of our planet´s resources. It also became common to consider that the way some Amazonians live is intelligent and sophisticated and the industrialized societies are what we should call 'primitive'. Evo Morales, current president of Bolivia, became a sort of spokesman of people that claim importance for the indigenous knowledge and the Aymara concept of *buen vivir* (living well). This concept guides the new Bolivian Constitution, approved in 2008 (Gonçalves, 2011). I do not want to enter this debate, so let's consider there is not such a thing as 'primitive' nowadays. This debate is related to this paper and it can be seen as a background for all topics discussed here.

After this digression, I hope we can decide not to judge either type of collective or society as primitive, but as people that have made their own choices. So, let's focus now on the Matis. Based on almost a year of fieldwork living experience, I hope to show not only what kind of difficulties and worries but also pleasures these sort of fast track historical events and the arrival of industrialized objects have brought to them.

Gordon (2006) studied the spreading of industrialized goods among Amazonian indigenous communities in a new approach, different from the theoretical perspective common in the studies carried out in the 70's and 80's that considered indigenous transformations as acculturation. Many academic books published in the last decade in Brazil present ethnographies that tried to follow the indigenous associations and to understand indigenous theories about their contact with the non-indigenous collectives from an indigenous perspective (Gordon, 2006; Andrello, 2006). One pioneer publication is *Pacificando o branco: cosmologias do contato no Norte Amazonico* ('Pacifying the White: cosmologies of contact in North Amazon'), edited by Albert and Ramos (2002). In this book, different Amazonianists showed how 'white people' objects were resignified and how their incorporation sometimes stresses the differences between the Indians and their Others.

In the same collection, Lucia Van Velthem affirms: 'the penetration of industrialized objects constituted a fundamental link in the interethnic contact since the first encounters' (2002: 61, my translation). She shows how the Wayana people would first hold those industrialized new belongings captive in order to domesticate them. They would try to keep those 'captured white people objects' under their control by embedding them in their native aesthetics, decoration and functionality (Van Velthem, 2002: 73).

By doing it, the Wayana were trying to neutralize and to tame the 'white people', those 'cannibal enemies' and to incorporate them into the wayana humanity conviviality rules. Catherine Howard discusses the diversity of ways Indigenous people resist western hegemony focusing on how the Wai Wai indigenous people also intent to control the arrival of 'white peoples' industrialized goods, trying to assimilate and *waiwai-ing* the relations and the alliances with foreigners and also those exchange-objects in order to 'channel them towards their own goals, that are, to increase the vitality of their own society' (Howard, 2002: 51, my translation).

In a thesis devoted to a detailed ethnography of the economy of Kayapo Xikrin-Mebengokre, Cesar Gordon (2006) comes to almost the same conclusion. Gordon shows how the Kayapo were experiencing an inflation of money circulation due to mining contracts with the company Vale do Rio Doce and an increasing flow of industrialized goods that followed it. These mining contracts aimed 'assistance' and compensation to the Indians for the impacts of the Vale do Rio Doce's operations in the Conservation Unit Floresta Nacional de Carajas that borders their Indian territory (Gordon, 2006: 36). The Mebêngôkre use the word *kukràdjà* as a translation for 'culture' – 'the *kukràdjà*[1] is what distinguishes them from the animals and savages (*kube*)' (Gordon, 2006: 377). The word is related to the start of using domesticated fire to cook, the agriculture, names, songs, feathers use, ceremonies, adornments, goods, money and *nêkrêjx* (beautiful names, ornaments, songs and objects stolen or captured from outsiders, to offer a quick translation). All those items belonged previously only to foreigners, animals and *kube*, until they were 'captured, taken and appropriated' by the Mebêngôkre. Gordon also calls attention to the high risks implied in such a rapid and wild economy because the Mebêngôkre get afraid of becoming white by transforming themselves too much or too quickly. He concludes that the Xikrin were able to produce more and more beauty, beautiful names and beautiful people, vitalizing their sociality. In dialogue with the ideas of Gordon, Diana Rosas Riaño (2008) has followed the circulation of goods and money among indigenous communities living by the Miriti-Paraná river in the Colombian Amazon. She has also concluded that such circulation increases the flow of travels and transformations that occur; so the end result is a more active community life (Rosas Riaño, 2008).

Also studying the Kayapó, Terence Turner concludes that the real products of these societies are 'social persons'.

> The production of social persons, for the Kayapó and other Amazonian peoples, is culturally defined as a process of imbuing them with symbolically mediated qualities of beauty and power. The social relations through which this process is organized enable the appropriation of surplus increments of these qualities by those in control of the key means of production (the segmentary matri-uxorilocal household and its junior female members). The values thus acquired are "realized" not at the point of production in the internal relations of the extended family household itself, but in contexts of public circulation through

> symbolic media of performances that function as claims to status and personal value, where they are 'consumed' by the witnesses (spectators) of the performances (Turner, 2003: 25).

I will come back to his paper in the conclusions.

Matis and their lives full of industrialized stuff

In 2009, when I carried out most of my fieldwork experience, most of the Matis men and women were very excited about their access to industrialized goods that they had started recently to consume in bigger scale. They had just begun to circulate more at ease and comfortably in the city of Atalaia do Norte (AM). In 2003 and 2006, when for the first time I was in Atalaia do Norte, the only few Matis in the city were the ones living as students in a house that belonged to the Civaja (Conselho Indígena do Vale do Javari, an interethnic organization). The house where the students could live for free was very old and badly maintained. In 2008, the Matis bought their first communitarian house with the money one of their villages won as a government prize (Premio Culturas Indigenas - Xikao Xukuru). In 2009, they bought a second house with the savings of three families that wanted to have a better place for their children to live and a base for them to sleep and to cook while being in the city. Finally a third house was bought with the money they charged a South Korean TV crew. The Matis were happy with this third house because it was not a wooden one, but made of bricks, so they considered it stronger and better, good enough to become the headquarters of the AIMA – Associação Indígena Matis Tsasibon Wintê. In 2011, the Matis owned three houses in Atalaia do Norte. Some of them live there; others sleep, cook and hang around there during their city visits and shopping trips. They were also planning to build up their own hostel.

The Matis consisted, in 2009, a population of 331 persons living along the Ituí and the Coari (Itui's tributary) rivers in three communities located in the center of the Vale do Javari Indian Land. Eighteen of them were permanently living in Atalaia do Norte, the nearest city by boat from the Matis villages. A boat trip from Atalaia do Norte (circa 15,000 inhabitants) to their communities by dugout canoe sped up by a 8HP or 13HP outboard engines takes three or two days, depending on the season (rain or dry). Before they had access to outboard engines the Matis travelled paddling; so, as they were people living in the river heads and in small creeks, they didn't use to travel by canoe covering big distances. Now, the Matis are always traveling from their communities to Atalaia do Norte, located in the Javari river, on the water border with Peru, and sometimes to Tabatinga, in the Brazil, Colombia and Peru triple border. They go to those cities mainly to deal with bureaucracies imposed by the Brazilian government, to do shopping and to seek health assistance.

Many Matis have money from the few salaries available for those that work for the Brazilian government as teachers, Indigenous health assistants (*Agente Indígena de Saúde*),or as an agent responsible for sanitation (*Agente Indígena Sanitário*). Two or

three men also get paid to work three months shifts as a FUNAI (Indian Affairs Federal Government office) assistant in the control office located at the confluence of Ituí and Itacoaí rivers. Some revenue also comes from social benefits that the government pays such as pensions (in Brazil there is a minimum salary for rural workers aged above 60 for men and 55 for women), maternity leave benefit or family benefit. Sometimes, the Matis work with tourists or journalists to make extra cash and some of the young ones also get minimum wages for services as forest guides or jungle lodges personnel. They also make money selling bananas and other food, bracelets and other stuff they produce. With this money they go shopping. I joined them in many of those shopping expeditions.

A mosquito net gift: Txema's teaching children how to behave

The first time I went shopping with a Matis was in 2006. I was trying to please Txema, the same elder man who said to Parry his outboard engine would not last. In the Amazonian fashion of incorporating anthropologists via kinship terms, Txema adopted me and called me *nukun txampi* (that means 'my girl' or 'my daughter'). He wanted me to get a mosquito net for his first wife Kaná Ëxkó who was sleeping in the Casai (Casa do Índio – a special infirmary for indigenous people) with their pregnant daughter, expecting their grandchild baby to be born in the city. Txema was caring for his wife and was teaching me how a daughter should behave. We bought the nicest mosquito net available in town.

Figure 3. *Txema.*
Photo: Barbara Arisi

In 2011, I was back in Atalaia do Norte working for an anthropological health research to be delivered to the Brazilian Health Ministry (Arisi, Cesarino and Francisco, 2011). I got a new gift request from Txema. He took one of his *murumuru* seed collars that he wears like a *bandolera* crossed on his chest and put it around my neck asking: 'Could you please buy me a mosquito net so I can bring it to your "mother" in the village? I will tell her that you were here worried about her health and that you will look after her so she doesn´t get malaria again'. It was the second time that Txema tried to teach me how I should behave to be his wife's good daughter. At the same time, he also gave me a gift, one of his very beautiful collars. I felt myself

immersed in a tiny Kula ring where our relationships were then clearly objectified in the transactional stuff. I also understood that Txema and I were participating and involved in a 'value transformation' act that was offered by him to me as an opportunity that I should take to make it become a 'positive productive possibility'. Both terms were proposed by Munn (1986). When studying, for example, acts of giving food or the Kula speech, Munn examines that Gawans bring the:

> intersubjective conversions or outcomes implicated in these actions, thus bringing the intersubjective dimension into the analysis from this action-oriented perspective: For instance, I discussed the way in which Gawans may attempt to influence others to remember them over time so that a given type of act performed by one actor may project the possibility of future hoped-for acts by another into the immediate present, and eventually yield a desire objective outcome. (Munn, 1986: 270, emphasis added)

As an elder, Txema invests his time in teaching and guiding all his children in the community or in the city. I noticed him doing so with Tëpi Wassá, his older son, and with his other children; never he did so by lecturing them but by acting. Txema would wake up early in the morning to start working alone in Tëpi's new house construction, for example. His reprimand or comments of his children came more as demonstrations 'action-oriented', in the sense explained by Munn (1986). I understand that when Txema requested me to buy the mosquito nets – in 2006 and again in 2009 – for his wife Kana Ëxkó he was doing the same, he was acting in order to teach me how I should behave. It was an example of 'action-oriented' demonstration.

In his dialogue with Bruce Parry, the one I have reproduced as an epigraph to this paper, Txema called the Englishman's attention to the perishable nature of his gift, or the limited lifespan of the outboard engine, versus the images he was allowing Parry to take from the Matis. Txema stressed that he considered their images would last forever. To further present the issue of values, needs and desires and what perishes and what lasts in this fast transformational ground that is the Matis way of life nowadays, I present some descriptions of some other Matis shopping expeditions. At the end we´ll come back to the outboard engines and the images. I understand they are related to what I have tried to show above with the transaction of mosquito nets.

Shopping expeditions

The majority of the young Matis men enjoys shopping for tennis shoes, jeans, shorts, and T-shirts in bright colours. If they are interested in a girl they might also buy a necklace with a heart pendant, something for her hair, skirts or products like shampoo or creams. If married, always a priority is given to baby clothes and little plastic toys. If a man is older, he is likely to be already married, in that case, buying would take the direction of a gross sale market in order to spend almost the whole amount of money available in what is called *rancho* - gross buying of processed food big packages such as rice or items like soap, cooking oil, salt, sugar, juice

powder and some canned fish (good after unsuccessful hunting trips), matches or lighters, batteries for hand lamps. Some money is saved for some extra clothes, flip-flops or rubber boots.

Old men are also focused on industrialized equipment that is now also used along with the traditional ones in the activities of hunting and fishing. They will ask their sons and daughters to bring home ammunition (16mm bullets to shoot monkeys, peccaries, tapirs and birds), as well as fishnets, fish hooks and fish lines to catch fish. The fishing equipment changed their fish diet, nowadays they eat bigger fishes compared to times before the contact when they just used to catch smaller fish with *timbo* (a vine that smashed in the water helps to kill fish), used in the past mainly in small creeks and water holes. Rarely did they used the *pussá* (handmade net), arrows and bows as the water is too murky in the small creeks and headwaters. There are no big fishes in these smaller waters. To buy a rifle, one needs to save money equivalent to one and half minimum month salary; some save for a long time when they intent to replace their old guns.

Women have their priorities, differences of what to buy depends on their age, the amount of children they have, the access to money her family has and, of course, individual choices. So, the majority of young women would ask for stuff they want, like soap, shampoo, new clothes or flip-flops, although some of them receive social benefits from the government such as motherhood or family support, they would not buy the items themselves. A woman usually goes shopping with her partner or her brother or father; just once I went with two women alone. The majority of women prefer not to speak Portuguese, even though some of them understand and speak it; and that is one of the reasons why they rarely go as a group of women alone. Another reason why they prefer to go with the researcher or someone from their family as the intermediate person is that just a few girls know how to calculate.

The capability of making calculations is increasing rapidly. By 2006, just one Matis young woman had studied in a city school and some of them had indigenous schooling in their villages. As a result, some girls could make simple calculations – additions of numbers with two digits – and just one of them could add numbers that would sum more than three digits. In 2011, two girls aged eleven were in the school in Atalaia and their parents wanted them to go on studying so they can become proficient in big numbers and long texts in Portuguese. They said they made this decision to get more acquainted with the Brazilian world that is located in Atalaia do Norte and Tabatinga, the two cities where they travel the most to. They want their children to master mathematic calculation, as it is considered an important new skill to avoid being cheated by shopkeepers.

Young women, from thirteen to eighteen years old, like to buy colorful clothes, toilet products like shampoo and nail polishers; after they are a bit older, they will probably have babies and then the shopping items change. They start getting more focused on house and cooking utensils - a stove, gas bottle, big or tiny aluminum pans. Once, when I was coming back to the village carrying a heavy load of

manioc from the manioc fields, one of the three women said that now I could understand with my body why they liked stoves and metal pans. 'We are the ones who carry the heaviest items in the village, bringing logs to cook, manioc and water', she said. The small pans are specially favoured because their children can use them to distribute food around in other relatives' homes. This is not to affirm that the desire for industrialized stuff is driven just by practical reasons, but to call attention to the fact that the lightness of some materials plays an important role in their choices as well.

Those technologies have brought easiness to women's lives. All Matis women keep on using ceramic big pots to cook monkeys, for example, as they have a bigger mouth diameter and are lower, fitting perfectly well for this purpose, but consider that the ceramic ones are not so nice to bring water from the creeks, as they are too heavy and break more easily. The Marubo women keep on using their *tëtxu matsu* (pan with a neck, literally translated from Matis), but the Matis women and children prefer to use PVC bottles or alumiun pans for this task.

Sahlins called the attention for the role played by Hawaian women in the time of Capitain Cook's events. The women had a strong participation in transforming what were until then more stabilized structures (Sahlins, 1987). He also writes about the role of Capitain Cook in the European market expansion:

> For Hawaiians Cook had been a form of the god who makes the earth bear fruit for mankind: a seminal god, patron of the peaceful and agricultural arts. Yet on the European side, as "Adam Smith´s global agent", he was likewise the spirit incarnate of the peaceful "penetration" of the market place: of a commercial expansion promising to bring civilization to the benighted and riches to the entire earth. Cook was to chart the course: determine the routes, the resources, the markets. Harbringer thus of the Pax Brittanica, Cook was also a bourgeois Lono. (Sahlins, 1987: 131).

Intertribal exchange, women fashion

Among the Matis, women, specially the older ones, like also to buy cloth around 50 cm x 1,80 meter size. They hand made new skirts by folding the rectangular piece of cloth and stitching the short sides together. They then dress this basic design skirt later on by stepping inside the opening and wrapping it around the waist. They squeeze the skirt tight around the waist and the left over flap they fold back in front of their belly and tuck this slip in and roll a little bit the whole top part of the skirt a bit downwards making a nice termination. It is a fashion the Matis women learnt with the Marubo women. The Marubo live in the same Itui river and in the Curuçá river and they are also indigenous people that speak a Panoan language; they had had sporadic contact with Peruvians and Brazilians around 1900, and more established after the 1950s. Those mini skirts were a fashion in 2006 in the Matis villages, the right dress to have for parties.

In 2009, I observed that there was

more variety in Matis' women hair cuts. They got tired of Marubo fashion that had been the favorite hair cut in 2006. I believe the transformation happened because the women are following the advice of Tëpi, a current increasing-in-power-shaman. Tëpi has asked some young women to cut short their hair in the 'older fashion' (the fashion of the years before contact with Brazilian officials, before 1978). Just a few women maintained their long hair with a fringe (the Marubo style), the majority keep theirs just covering the ears. Also the Marubo fashion of 'one cloth basic skirts' is fading away a bit. More and more young Matis women start wearing mini shorts to replace the once super fashionable Marubo skirts. The Marubo keep on having their hair long with a fringe and keep on using their hand made skirts decorated with a belt of beads and little shells they carefully weave. The Matis women just dress those skirts in party occasions and not all of them have a bead belt to finish the decoration of the skirt. The shaman's political role calling women back to wear traditional fashion deserves attention.

The Matis women adopted Marubo's fashion in the first years after contact - as Erikson noted in his early fieldwork (1996), but after 30 years they are coming back to some of their more traditional style, but leaving behind still the noses trills piercing and ear lobe expansion. The Matis went back to some traditionalism, but not completely. Another difference worth noting between the two neighbouring people is one that concerns gender differences. The Marubo women keep on dressing with their bead ornaments and their handmade skirts but the Marubo men dress more like urban non-indigenous men, except from their collars and bracelets. With the Matis it is quite the opposite, the men keep on being pierced and wear almost all their wood and shell face ornaments and the Matis men are more likely to just wear collars across their nude chests. The Matis women dress more in the fashion of the non-indigenous' city girls. It seems that the Matis and the Marubo have an interesting reverse gender concerning their city wear when in their respective villages. In many other aspects, both of them – Marubo and Matis - keep on changing rapidly, specially while apprehending and learning how to domesticate and to use technology equipment.

In December 2009, Tëpi was also inviting Matis women and girls to start drinking tatxik (vine traditional drink) with the men (Arisi, 2011). Before, Erikson (1996) and I (Arisi, 2007) had noticed that just men use to drink it, women would get it once in their lifetime at the day they got their face tattoos. So, nowadays women are being called by the shaman to participate in the daily traditional and bittering beverage moment. I believe the shaman is trying to stop the women transformation, calling them into sharing with men the traditional beverage and back to their previous hair cuts' fashion. The Marubo were the ones that became the main intermediaries of the Matis relation with outsiders in the beginning of the interethnic relations. Getting industrialized clothes and the Marubo´s fashion influence are always remembered by the Matis as their first self transformation after contact.

Nakedness and clothes

Indigenous bodies are seen as 'index of authenticity' (Conklin, 1997: 712) as nakedness or 'traditional ritual clothes' are among some non-indigenous expectations when concerning Indigenous' images (see for other case studies, Albuquerque, 2011; Nugent, 2007). I find it incredible, but when it comes down to Amazonian Indians strong stereotypes persist through the media and 'common sense' – it lingers on in those imaginary images that the real Indians are those naked, with no clothes or dressed with feathers, penis string or body painting. It seems that many people cannot admit that Indians deal very well with technology and clothes. Conklin has written a text where she calls the attention to this matter by commenting on some famous cartoon made by North-American artist Gary Larson:

> Every connoisseur of anthropology department bulletin boards knows this *Far Side* cartoon (Larson 1984): A grass-skirted native man in a tall headdress stands at the window of a thatched hut. He has just spotted a couple of pith-helmeted, camera-toting creatures coming ashore and sounds the alarm: 'Anthropologists! Anthropologists!' His two companions, similarly attired with bones through their noses, rush to unplug their television, VCR, lamp, and telephone and stash them out of sight. The cartoon captures a persistent stereotype about native peoples and cultural authenticity. The first, obvious idea is that outsiders (anthropologists included) tend to see complex Western technology as a corrupting force that undermines traditional cultures. 'Real' natives don't use VCRs. A second, more subtle message in Gary Larson's sketch concerns the importance of exotic body images in defining cultural integrity. Hide the television, but keep the grass skirt, and the 'authenticity' of the natives goes unquestioned. (Conklin, 1997: 711)

Larson's cartoon sheds light on the tensions and the different expectations that surface in those (dis)encounter situations and the role stuff or material culture plays in such situations. I have recorded them taking place especially between tourists and the Matis. On one hand, I have observed the Matis 'going native' in front of camera lenses or stripping some pieces of clothes or taking away some metal necklaces, what Latour called 'purification' (Latour, 2005). On the other hand, I have also noticed the tourists asking the Matis to do so, to clean the scenario to be filmed of photographed, for example. I also witnessed a situation where the girls 'went native' by taking their bras off and the journalist didn´t like it, as he had watched Bruce Parry's film shot in the village where the women were always with their bras on.

It is important to remark that even if a lot of tourists and journalists ask or have asked the Matis in the past to 'go native' in front of the cameras, it doesn't mean that all of the camera-people do the same. I once saw one tour guide trying to strip them, asking the men to undress their T-shirts while they were hunting and paddling with the tourists. Another picture available in an internet page was taken in 2008. It shows six Matis men dressed the traditional way, with their penis strings and

adornments, and one woman dressed just with traditional collars and holding her baby whom she was breastfeeding. They stripped just to be photographed; those pictures were available on the internet and one FUNAI worker tried to forbid the images to be on the internet by denouncing it to the Public Ministry. He tried to stop this image to circulate as he considered that the guide had abused the Matis' naivety.

This picture explicits a controversy that we should consider from its many possible angles. One of the most tourist-experienced Matis man, who always is trying to organize camping-sites or day-trips with tourists explicitly, asked me to record and to write down his opinion on this particular matter. Binan Tuku, a Matis man in his forties, said to me: 'Barbara, this is my penis, I used to walk around with my penis tied upwards like in this picture until I was fifteen. Well, I believe I was fifteen by then… There were no workers from the Brazilian government, there were no tourists, no foreigners. So, that was and still is my penis and I am old enough to know to whom I want to show my penis or not'.

When I was together with the Matis and the tourists, if the guide would ask them to undress the T-shirt in order to get nicer pictures, most of the men would simply refuse; others undressed and said they did not care. Once, with North-American journalists, the opposite happened. We were staying in a Tikuna village in Colombia by the Amazon river for logistic reasons - to go around the many difficulties TV crews have to get authorization of the Brazilian government to enter Indian land, besides that it is very expensive to film in Matis communities. So, we went to the forest in Tikuna territory trying to spot some monkeys for the gringos to shoot with their cameras and the Matis to shoot with their blowpipes. As soon as we stepped outside the Tikuna village, the women took off their bras to the astonishment of the cameraman. He then came to me to ask me why the women did so, as he had seen the already mentioned Bruce Parry's film where they always had their T-shirts or bras on. I answered him that I believed the women took off their bras because they were probably asked to strip many times before requested by tourists or journalists.

The cameraman was frustrated, because he favoured more aesthetically realistic documentaries so he did not want to film them without their bras. I advised him to do whatever he wanted to do, he could talk to the women about it if it bothered him. Later on, the women laughed when I told them what happened. I said that the cameraman was intrigued about why they had taken their bras off to be filmed in the forest. The two women - around 25 and 20 years old – replied to me: 'We find ourselves more beautiful when we are walking in the forest without our bras'. They were also giggling and having fun because they had noticed that the cameraman was not expecting them to show their breasts. So, it was also a joking relationship they tried to provoke.

On the same day, the women had fun asking me which one of the film makers I found more good-looking. They teased me because my husband was accompanying us; they said I should also have undressed my bra because otherwise my husband would have just their breasts to look at as

mine were kept hidden. There was one Tikuna man they also considered good-looking, but they commented as well that Indian men don't pay so much attention to women naked breasts as the non-indigenous men do. So, seeing from the women's perspective, taking the bras was also a way of controlling and cheasing the film makers and the other non-Matis men.

In another occasion, when they posed for a community group picture during a big party held in October 2009 to celebrate the inauguration of a new longhouse which had been built in the Aurelio matis community, the majority of the women also took off their bras and showed their murumuru seed collars and their breasts to be photographed. They were dressed also with the basic skirts (without Marubo belts). The men were also dressed with collars crossed in their nude chests and shorts. That is the image they preferred to build up to for their own consumption in that particular situation.

So, this is an example of the tensions present in some encounters with tourists and journalists. Wearing or not 'traditional' clothes? What is considered to be more 'authentic'? Naked or dressed without industrialized clothes? How to know what the others consider to be more 'authentic'? The question of showing or not their naked bodies nowadays depends very much on each context and on each relationship that is established among the Matis and the outsiders. It is a negotiation that takes place whenever they meet tourists and journalists. Not only the negotiations rely on the expectations of the camera people (consumers of images), they depend also on the desires of the other party, the ones that will be filmed (providers of images). The Matis, the ones that will be filmed, prepare themselves to provide their images, like the women when taking their bras off for the US film makers or Matis men and women when revealing their breasts for the village group photo. The Matis try to meet image consumer's expectations but also they try to fulfill their own expectations and desires.

Conclusion: outboard engines for images

At last, let´s go back to the initial problem posed by Txema's comment on the differences between the values of an outboard engine and images. I understand Txema's comment as related to his investment in teaching white people how to behave properly towards the Matis. As reproduced above, Txema said to Bruce Parry, the UK film maker: 'The outboard motor you brought us won't last long but the images you take will last forever'. I understand that what Txema was stressing was that the outboard engine would perish, it would not last, but the images would last forever. But we can also consider that images may perish as well (even though probably BBC have better means to make the images last longer than the Matis have to keep an outboard engine running in the hardship conditions of the Amazon forest). Images also fade, old printed pictures change colours, even digital media images get old, formats are not longer supported by new technological devices and sometimes images can get lost or be erased. But that is not the main point.

For me, what is important is to understand that again Txema is trying to teach a white person about how we should behave towards him, his wife and his people. For Txema, images are more valuable than an outboard engine. Txema also taught me that for him beauty is one the greatest, more powerful and dangerous powers that exist. But, as I have shown above, the outboard engines serve as important means of transport and they are crucial for the transformation that takes place now in the Matis communities, Txema have also taught me that. The outboard engines take the Matis to the city and they are valuable items as well, they are powerful agents of change. The engines enable people to move, to change and to transform themselves. The outboard engines open up new possibilities in the Matis' relations, connecting them in this new path that link city and village lives.

Devoted to study value and economy, Graeber (2005) concludes:

> Anthropologists, on the other hand, have tended to see their special expertise as lying in precisely the areas that economics abandoned. However, it appears that anthropologists have only tried to develop explicit theories of value when they find themselves in a crisis brought about by their inability to understand how flesh-and-blood individuals are motivated to maintain and re-create the abstract systems that anthropologists have always been so good at discerning. Since the failure of Kluckhohn's 'values project' in the 1950s, this has usually led anthropologists to work with some variation of economic models, or with linguistic models in the structuralist tradition of de Saussure. I have suggested that there are other possibilities, especially one that treats Marx's analysis of value as a symbolic analysis and looks at 'value' as a way people's own actions become meaningful to them, how they take on importance by becoming incorporated into some larger system of meaning. (Graber, 2005: 453)

Indeed, gifts, values, barter, exchange and shopping are very complex phenomena, they are immersed in 'larger systems of meaning' as Graeber points out. About barter, Humphrey and Hugh-Jones have written:

> Anthropology's earlier pre-occupation with 'societies' as bounded units has led to a disastrous undervaluation of the socioeconomic relations between groups which are actually essential to the reproduction of cultures. Bartered objects in such regional trade systems are not simply items of humble everyday use. In fact they were rarely such. Cultural distance itself and the exceptional significance attributed to objects from mysterious places, made these items pivotal in the legitimation of religious and political power internal to the receiving group (…). What is essential as far as barter is concerned is not so much the mystery as the fact of difference: the existence of a realm where there are objects of desire, that is, objects one has not and for which one is prepared to sacrifice what one has. (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones, 1992: 3-4)

Maybe we do not have to consider the barter situations as moments where one has to 'sacrifice' something he/

she has. Maybe the link between gift and sacrifice has been overvalued by anthropologists. I would like to call the attention to the fact that it might be felt and viewed as an opportunity for the Matis to enjoy different pleasures, to have fun like the women have taught me in the gringo's bras' affair and in the shopping expeditions. They also consider that the filming or 'image making' (the counter payment of Txema to Bruce Parry's outboard engine) can be moments of fun, not just tension. Not a sacrifice but a way to pleasure, fun and joy.

The items exchanged were not simply 'items of humble everyday use', to repeat the words of Humphrey and Hugh-Jones quoted above. Outboard engines are not such humble things, they are very powerful agents of change, transport and transformation. The Matis have also requested me to bring them in the future - as a gift - an outboard engine. Some of them said to me: 'you will give it to us, if and when you can afford it, Barbara'. They told me that Philippe Erikson – their previous anthropologist - has brought them one outboard engine already and that they have named it after him. They also listed me which TV crews gave them 5HPs or 8HPs engines and other valuable stuff. Of course, Txema also knows that the value of an engine is high (not talking about the price here, but again about the power of engine as object/ transformation agent). Outboard engines are good currency, as knowledge gained with the animals[2], because they teach us new ways of living and they enable people to transform and to create new social relations. James Leach comments on the value of creativity and of people creative powers:

> Humanity is not defined by the contingency of creative action (in thought/mental operation) but by the necessity of embodying and acting creatively. Relations established with others create those others and oneself in the work of differentiation. We come to this insight through the contrast with intellectual property rights, which make creativity into a specific resource, its presence contingent upon certain conditions of emergence. The notion of resource implies scarcity, and scarcity is a measure of value. But creativity is not scarce in Reite[3]. Resources for these people lie elsewhere. People themselves are valuable, not what they produce as objects. As Wagner points out, 'Westerners' value the objects, the outcomes of creativity: 'we keep the ideas, the quotations, the memoirs, the creations and let the people go. Our attics … [and] museums are full of this kind of culture' (Wagner 1975: 26). (Leach, 2004: 171, emphasis added)

What Txema is doing when bringing down Parry's gift in the moment of the exchange agreement is to increase the value of his/his people own image, the power of his elders and of his sons and daughters. Txema is trying to call the attention of Parry (the white man) to the fact that the Matis are so beautiful, so wonderful, so full of potential and capabilities that, of course, an outboard engine does not pay off their images and their time spent with the TV crew, but ok, they will do it for now. The Matis keep on trying to gain control over the bases on which their economy is developing (the exchange

of goods, technology and knowledge with outsiders). I believe that Txema is trying to teach us – in the mosquito net and the outboard engine situations analysed here – about values, very valuable values indeed. The values that Terence Turner was talking about in the article commented above. Txema is trying to teach me and Bruce Parry to give value to them, the people we want to build up relations with. If we want to learn, to film or to be with them, it can be done via exchanging valuable objects in 'action-oriented' situations, but just after Txema gives us his lessons about values, what is valuable for him and his people. That is the way Txema wants to create personal relations with us. Those relations can be built via the exchange of outboard engines or via mosquito nets, but only if together with Txema's values' lessons and 'action-oriented' lecturings. Lessons that stress the Matis' value.

Notes

[1] To understand widely the Xikrin terms *kukràdjà* and *nêkrêjx*, I suggest the reading of Gordon (2006: 371 – 397). *Kube* is a word used also as a term to refer to 'White people' and 'non-indigenous people'. For a in-depth explanation of the term *nêkrêjx*, see also Gordon (2006: 208).

[2] My PhD dissertation brings information on the economy carried out with the animals (Arisi 2011).

[3] *Reite* is the name of the place in Papua New Guinea where Leach carried most of his fieldwork experience.

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