

Yanomami narratives in the museum: from anthropological reports to self-representation in conflict situations

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ABSTRACT

Ethnological collections have a direct link to themes of sustainability, social justice, and museal ethical responsibilities. Yanomami artifacts from the Amazon rainforest are especially meaningful to both illustrate and discuss these issues. At the same time, it is important to contextualize collections by connecting them to present realities experienced by the communities from which the artifact originally came. Anthropological studies of the Yanomami have followed a torturous and controversial path. Current anthropological perspectives stress the need to give as much space as possible to Yanomami self-representation even through museums. Here, starting from the Yanomami collection of the Museum of Florence, we provide space to Yanomami voices showing that their ways of building narratives are diametrically different from non-Yanomami representations. It is important to have access and share stories and voices for building bridges between peoples and cultures. Such condision is the best practice for promoting understanding and communicating a museum's ethnological collections to the public.

Key words:

MUSEINTEGRATI project, museum decolonization, Amazon, indigenous researchers.

RIASSUNTO

Le narrazioni yanomami in museo: dai resoconti antropologici all'autorappresentazione in situazioni di conflitto

Le collezioni etnologiche hanno un legame diretto con i temi della sostenibilità, della giustizia sociale e delle responsabilità etiche di chi opera nei musei. Gli artefatti provenienti dalla foresta tropicale amazzonica sono particolarmente significativi per illustrare e per discutere tali argomenti. Allo stesso tempo, è importante contestualizzare le collezioni collegandole alle realtà attualmente vissute dalle comunità da cui il manufatto proviene. Gli studi antropologici sugli Yanomami hanno seguito un percorso tortuoso e controverso. Le attuali prospettive antropologiche evidenziano la necessità di dare il maggior spazio possibile alle autorappresentazioni yanomami anche attraverso i musei. In questo contributo, partendo dalla collezione di artefatti della cultura yanomami presente al Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia di Firenze, diamo spazio alle voci yanomami mostrando che i modi yanomami di costruire narrazioni sono diametralmente diversi dalle rappresentazioni elaborate da non Yanomami. È importante accedere a storie e voci e condividerle: costruire ponti tra popoli e culture è la pratica più efficace per promuovere la comprensione e comunicare al pubblico le collezioni etnologiche di un museo.

Parole chiave:

progetto MUSEINTEGRATI, decolonizzazione museale, Amazzonia, ricercatori indigeni.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the term sustainability has become a protagonist in museology. The Italian association of scientific museums (ANMS), has introduced and supported theoretic approaches and best practices about sustainability through publications and series of initiatives (Falchetti & Utzeri, 2013; ANMS, 2022). Recently, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnol-

ogy in Florence was one of thirty Italian museums participating in MUSEINTEGRATI (v. sito web 1): a national project proposed by ANMS and supported by the Ministry of Culture. This initiative was aimed to research and support best practices claiming that museums can and should be active in developing and disseminating knowledge about the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that form the core of the 2030 Agenda.

This perspective is congruent with the last ICOM definition "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability". Ethnological collections have a direct link to themes of sustainability, social justice, and environmental awareness. They also present delicate ethical problems regarding not only the management of sensitive objects, but also more generally on how the cultures from which they come are represented. This is a theme underlined by the ICOM Code of Ethics in point 4.2 dedicated to Interpretation of Exhibitions: "Museums should ensure that the information they present in displays and exhibitions is well-founded, accurate and gives appropriate consideration to represented groups or beliefs" (ICOM, 2017).

In recent years, the international scientific community has increasingly debated the need for new approaches in anthropological studies stressing the vital importance of collaborative ethnography between indigenous peoples, anthropologists and museums (Rappaport, 2008). Museums through relationships with communities represented in the museum must now institute radical changes in how collections are managed. These communities have amply shown that they are interested in European collections as vital parts of their heritage. One consequence is the highly discussed and visible question of restitutions (Franchi, 2021a, 2021b). However, the physical restitution of objects may not always be requested by the communities of origin. As is the case of the Yanomami collection in Florence, constructive dialogue can lead to other ways of virtual giving back. Communities can decide that museums provide a space to disseminate their perspectives and values; a tool to reclaim their identity and role in the contemporary world. In fact, new narratives and stories can emerge from museums. New dynamic relationships between art-science-activism can weave bonds with natives, which provide novel perspectives and eventually responsibility towards our ecologically degraded world (Haraway, 2016). Curators are increasingly seeking to rethink the museum as a "contact zone", a space in which the historical past is not removed and a new moral relationship is renegotiated (Bigoni et al., 2014; Bigoni, 2018). Collaborative anthropology is essential in this process.

A COLLECTION IN FLORENCE

There are a good number of Yanomami collections in Italian museums, in Europe and other continents. The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Florence houses a collection of artifacts from the Yanomami of the Catrimani region, state of Roraima, Brazil (fig. 1). This collection represents an opportu-

nity to provide more respectful representation of the Yanomami people by giving voice to their testimony and perspectives. The collection is remarkable for its completeness and precise relevance to every aspect of Yanomami life. It is a testimony to their traditional culture, its material, ritual and spiritual aspects. More than 140 objects represent the tools used daily for lighting fires, transporting and consuming food, hunting and fishing. It includes items of clothing, hammocks, ornaments, objects linked to ritual ceremonies, toys and finally tools and materials used for the production of the objects themselves and for the creation of body paintings.

These objects were collected in the early 1990s and donated to the Museum by Giovanni Saffirio and Guglielmo Damioli, missionaries of Turin's Institute of Consulate Missions, for a long time committed to the defence of the Yanomami (Bigoni & Saffirio, 2014). In a first phase of the research, started in 2009, Francesca Bigoni studied the collection and with help from the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh was able to contact the missionary and anthropologist Giovanni Saffirio. This first contact with one of the original collectors permitted a more precise reconstruction of the history of the collection, and of the communities that produced the objects. These objects were contextualized by examining and comparing them with information, photographs and films that Saffirio and his colleagues had collected in the same villages from the late 1960 to the early 1990s. The second phase of the research, in which collaborative anthropology with Yanomami became an indispensable principle and method, was carried out with Corrado Dalmonago, who has now lived among the same Yanomami communities in the Catrimani region for more than two decades.

In this project young Yanomami conducted research on the traditional material culture interviewing elders and discussing with them pictures of the objects preserved in Florence (Bigoni et al., 2014). This collaborative research produced several changes in the museum exhibition. Interestingly, the descendants of those who manufactured the objects expressed no interest in restitution, partly due to the fact that these objects are common, easily transferred from one Yanomami to another and as a result are difficult to be traced back to a manufacturer or "owner". Additionally, the artefacts were made explicitly to exchange with the missionaries.

This experience revealed the potentials and problems associated with various aspects of collaborative anthropology both in regards to research and as well as practices of exposition, dissemination and education. This experience shows how museum objects can become both a tool for reviving a heritage of memories linked to the emotional and spiritual aspects of these villages, but also a powerful reminder of the theme of the contemporaneity of this culture



Fig. 1. Catrimani river (photo by Corrado Dalmonego, 2016).

(Bigoni & Dalmonego, 2019). The research itself led to continual reflections on the ethical issues related to the use not only of artifacts but also of images and other intangible testimonies, which imply dialogue and conflicts between representation and self-representation (Bigoni et al., 2021).

As far back as 1895, the Smithsonian museum administrator George Brown Goode claimed that a finished museum is a dead museum (Lubar et al., 2017). The Florence collection may appear as already well known and studied because it has been the subject of many publications and is largely visible in the permanent exhibition. Despite all these activities, we need to underline here the importance of continually nourishing the relationship between the artifacts and their context of origin within ever evolving interpretations. In particular, the meanings that are created around museum objects can be established and maintained only if we interpret collections within suits of relationships. Curators should be involved in a dynamic process, always re-evaluating and rethinking their collections. Only in this context, collections can remain relevant as they travel through time (Jardine et al., 2019).

YANOMAMI OF THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON REGION

Yanomami symbolize the resilience of native Amazonian peoples, struggling to conserve their life, land and the rainforest biodiversity. In the last decades they represented a challenge to uncontrolled and violent processes of deforestation, mining exploitation, and mercury polluting resulting from gold extraction. These forces are causing an irreversible degradation of the Amazon rainforest environment and threaten Yanomami possibilities and way of life (Dalmonego, 2023).

Yanomami communities are found in the tropical forest of the west of the Guyana massif, occupying a territory of approximately 192,000 km², on both sides of the border between Brazil and Venezuela, and form a vast cultural and linguistic group. The most recent data released from the official web site of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, concerning the population of the Brazilian Yanomami Indigenous Land (9.6 million hectares), with about 30,500 Yanomami (SUS et al., 2023). However, data collected during the last census carried out by the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) may indicate a significantly lower population and other differences from data of Indigenous Sanitary District of Yanomami and Ye'kwana. These results could be due to the humanitarian crisis recently experienced by Yanomami, but also with the scarcity of information due to the lack of health care.

The term Yanomami itself is an encompassing designation used initially by non-indigenous society but later adopted by them as an analytically useful and politically effective category to contextualize relations with the national societies and with other indigenous peoples. This designation includes different groups distributed in about 360 communities speaking six different languages of the Yanomami linguistic family (Ferreira et al., 2019). In the past, literature on Yanomami has applied many different names to these people (Bigoni et al., 2011; Bigoni & Dalmonego, 2023). It is important to remember here that decisions about ethnonyms have consequences on several aspects, included the museal practice of cataloguing, displaying, and effective dissemination of knowledge.

YANOMAMI BETWEEN REPRESENTATIONS AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

It is helpful to briefly review the history of anthropological studies of Yanomami to illustrate the vital importance of self-representation. In the late 60's, the Yanomami "suddenly" became known to the outside world with the publication of Chagnon's book. Information about the Yanomami available before Chagnon, was already quite extensive (Bigoni & Dalmonego, 2023). Over time, views and perspectives on the Yanomami have undergone many transformations. Since 1968, the alleged fierceness of Yanomami portrayed by Chagnon divided anthropologists into two opposite camps, defenders and critics of his work. Unfortunately, the clash of opinions on the subject by anthropologists, media, and politicians, overshadowed the emergency of the situation and the Yanomami points of views.

New approaches tend to give a voice to the Yanomami. Davi Kopenawa, an influential Yanomami leader

and shaman, and Bruce Albert, anthropologist, inaugurated a new form of ethnographic practice and of writing tests, marking a significant step in rethinking of anthropological activity (2010). Above all it is important that a plurality of voices from different communities can emerge to promote a reverse anthropology. This multivocality and the related diversity of representations can also emerge from participatory-action research carried out with Yanomami. In the last 10 years the figure of the Yanomami researcher has gained space in villages and in the scene of "intercultural" activities.

These native "researchers" are frequently young people or adults who may have received training as teachers, health agents or communicators, with the support of projects implemented by indigenous associations or non-governmental organizations. Projects carried out by small "inter-ethnic and multidisciplinary" teams, composed of indigenous and non-indigenous researchers with different backgrounds (anthropologists, biologists, geographers, etc.), are generally aimed at recording traditional knowledge (as languages, ethno-sciences, history, shamanism, mythology) or investigating the current context of the communities. These projects produce various types of results (didactic and para-didactic materials, texts addressed to the public authorities for the defense of the rights of the indigenous people, publications of denunciation, video documentaries and films). These collaborations have resulted in the publication of "Saberes da Floresta Yanomami", a collection with now more than 17 titles (Ferreira et al., 2019).

In their narratives on the impact of the illegal mining, indigenous researchers provide a new and powerful perspective on the violence and aggression to which they have been subjected. These stories show the terrible role of the garimpeiros, gold miners, who have been harming the Yanomami and the forest around them for decades. The gold rush has generated a contact zone marked by violence, and has reached recently a dramatic escalation. It is a phenomenon provoked by local interests, but linked to the global economy. It is allowed by the omission of the former government authorities and instigated by the explicit support of politicians. The deactivation (2016) of the Bases of the Ethno-environmental Protection Front reduced supervision and the fight against criminal actions. The result was an escalation of illegal activities, leading to environmental abuses and a full blown humanitarian crisis.

In the "contact zone" imposed by hundreds of garimpos scattered throughout Yanomami territory, thousands of prospectors illegally extracted minerals, destroyed the environment. Meanwhile, indigenous men and women struggled, suffered and protested against the threats to their survival. The current situation repeats, with differences in the actors involved, in the international links and in technologies used,

the tragedy of the previous gold rushes in the 1980s and 1990s, which was marked by the Haximu massacre (1993), the first crime labeled as genocide, on Brazil Indigenous Land.

A shift of perspective in the contact zone

An analysis of contact representations requires a change of perspective that takes into account cognitive dynamics, the historical context and cultural productions (Albert, 1993). Contact representations can help reveal processes of "cultural incorporation" and "creative adaptation" through which self-representation and the representation of the other are elaborated. With the advancement of the frontier of the "World System", the acceleration of relations between groups considered "isolated" and the surrounding society leads to a historic clash, which imposes on these groups the restructuring of their own cultural system. During this process, minority groups may implement a strategy of cultural resistance. Rather than being described with the classic tones of "indigenous resistance" against colonization, the strategy of cultural resistance should be understood as creative adaptation in which Indigenous populations take an active role in the dynamics of contact relationships, defined as "whites appeasement" (Albert, 1993).

Albert (1988) focused his attention on the etiological theories of aggression/predation and on epidemics. The author identified these factors as the common thread of the intellectual elaboration built by Yanomami about the "otherness of whites" and their objects. Through the progressive phases of contact, Yanomami connected them respectively with etiological agents and pathogenic objects. The context of violence and political struggles coincided with the emergence of the indigenous movement in the 1970s, which created conditions for a shift of perspective on contact. Albert (1993) describes this change as the passage from "speculative resistance" (discourse on the others, for oneself) to "resistant adaptation" (discourse on oneself, for the others). Analyzing Davi Kopenawa's political action, Albert recognized its foundation in a double symbolic rooting: self-objectification through the Western categories of ethnification and cosmological elaboration of facts and effects of contact. One result is seen in the reversal of the Yanomami origins myth into a shamanic apocalypse: the collapse of the upper layer, which in principle gave rise to the earthly level on which we move, and the sinking of a lower level, could happen again, caused by the destruction brought by the white man. This vision evokes the subversion of the world order established by the creator/demiurge hero, and can be seen in global warming and desertification. In 2022, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the homologation of the Yanomami Indigenous Land, Kopenawa referred to the association of the death of Yanomami

shamans with the fall of the sky, the destruction of the earth and the end of humanity (not only of the Yanomami but also of "the white peoples").

The Yanomae term "napë" (plural: "napëpë"), a relative and referential notion, depending on the context, is used to indicate different people, foreigners, and enemies, those who do not belong to the Yanomami ethnic group. It is often translated today as "brancos" (meaning whites, but it is a term used without a reference to the color of the skin, simply to indicate the non-indigenous otherness). Liberal imperialism consider the indigenous land and the Amazon region as a neo-colonization frontier for the exploitation of resources and that they treat its inhabitants as an impediment to the supposed "development". Considering the theme of "representations and self-representations", the descriptions of the situations made visible by the mass media, reporting on the humanitarian and health crisis afflicting the Yanomami in recent months, may say less about the Yanomami and more about the napëpë. If the media provide us with elements to know the "whites attitudes", inversely – or complementary, in a dynamic of mutual representation – Yanomami narratives concerning the different groups of napëpë, certainly say a lot about Yanomami and their cosmopolitics.

Yanomami are involved in many initiatives aimed to self-representation such as art and film production that are shown in museums and international film festivals. For example the exhibit "Trees", including works by Yanomami artists Joseca, Ehuana Yaira Yanomami and Kalepi Sanõma, was shown in 2021 in Shanghai, China. Works by Yanomami artists were also included in a powerful and provocative exhibition at The Shed, New York (February-April 2023). The 2023 documentary film festival "It's All True", in Brazil, awarded the prize for best short movie to the documentary "Marihi - A Árvore do Sonho" directed by Morzaniel Iramari Yanomami which was also exhibited at the Venice Biennale, International Film Festival in 2023. As in textual publications the Yanomami strive to show the vitality and richness of "their culture" and a critique of the white world. They often choose everyday scenes such as activities around the domestic hearth, harvesting expeditions in the luxuriant forest, fishing in lakes and streams of clean water, or more eventful scenes such as shamanic performances and the presentation dances of the hosts during the ceremonies reahu. The Yanomami have already been defined as the "people of celebration" due to the central importance that the great intercommunity ceremonies (reahu) have in their society: occasions to forge alliances, celebrate funeral rites, update mythical memory, achieve shamanic cures and restore threatened balance (Dalmonego & Bigoni, 2013).

However, documents and documentaries denouncing the situation of invasion of the territory and the impacts of the garimpo or the omission of health

care use completely different tone and contents. For example, a Yanomami researcher reflects on his participation in research-action in the following terms: "I M.Y., a researcher, I am doing my research so that you napë [non-indigenous] friends can read my words. If people who have power among the napë also know my words, that will be a good thing. I thought that after describing the very bad things that are happening in K. [where I live], I want to spread my written word. [...] Well, you napë who support us and others who are far away, but who observe us who live in the forest, listen to my words!" (M. Yanomami, December 2022).

Practical and ontological conflicts

The field of practical, epistemological and ontological struggles requires a dialogue between different forms of knowledge. In Amerindian ontologies, relationships are placed at the center overcoming the dichotomies typical of Western dualistic ontology separating humans and non-humans, nature and culture, (Escobar, 2015; Descola, 2011). Misunderstandings are expressed in ontological conflicts (Blaser, 2013, 2016): entities that some consider resources, as "natural resources" like minerals, water, etc., are for others non-human-beings. These conflicts and misunderstandings are active in different contexts of societies: even objects kept in museums may become split, not just between sites and different kinds of collection, but between different ontologies.

Such practical and ontological conflicts clearly emerge from the reflections and narratives collected by Yanomami researchers regarding the impacts of the illegal garimpo in their territory and which provide interesting elements regarding self-representation. In the narratives of the Yanomami, the violence that affects them – such as physical assaults, rapes, distribution of alcoholic beverages, instigation of conflict, health crisis, impediment to the development of daily activities, destruction of the resources necessary to support the population – is not unrelated by the violence against the Urihi. The term Urihi, often translated as forest-earth, indicates all forms of life in the forest, including physical, biological, social and spiritual dimensions (Albert & Kopenawa, 2022). This concept is the base of a cosmology that integrates a multiplicity of human beings and non-human beings, whose lives are closely connected.

The violence against Urihi represents total violence as it affects environment, society, and all the diversity of beings living in the forest/cosmos. Davi Kopenawa exposes a cosmological vision that integrates a multiplicity of beings in cosmos and denounces the unsustainability of the predominant development model that threatens the life of every being: forest, water, animals, fish, human and non-human beings, Yanomami and non-Yanomami. In his words, spoken during a meeting in May 2022, in Yanomami land: "Urihi a raa-

kae, our forest is sick... and in the same way we cannot live in health!". This Urihi has a beating heart and a voice: it is the voice of the forest where Omama, the demiurge-creator of Yanomami, placed them, so that she "would take care of them" and that the Yanomami "would take care of her". It is only within this cosmological vision that the Yanomami self-representation can be understood. In Yanomami discourses, violence affects bodies, collectives and territories. Violence has the acrid smell of fuel, of combustion engines fumes and polluted water. A Yanomami woman from the Parima region says that "the water stinks" because gold seekers spread their excrement into the river, where the community bathes, fishes and collects water for drinking and cooking: "They defecate in the water and we get sick with diarrhea. [...] When there were no seekers, we were fine. We used to collect crabs and fish, we drank good water, but now it's polluted" (Bedinelli, 2022).

A female indigenous researcher, D.Y., speaking with other women, recorded their common concern and their perception of the threat that surrounds them: "That's right, we are very concerned about whether they actually pollute Urihi. The forest becomes infested with mosquitoes, reduced to a quagmire. I don't want us to die from gold miners destroying our Urihi. We don't want to die from the deadly diseases of gold miners. Due to the contaminated waters of the river we suffer from hearing problems. We do not want malaria to attack us with its lethality. That's why we don't want the miners anywhere near it. [...] In other regions, there are [Yanomami] who are already starving dramatically, but I don't want to go hungry. I don't want to starve. I just want to die of old age, with no other cause" (Hutukara Associação Yanomami & Associação Wanasseduume Ye'kwana, 2022: 108). Note that mosquitoes are vectors of malaria transmission, and that hearing loss, along with other neurological and physical problems are symptoms of mercury contamination, already identified among the Yanomami people.

YANOMAMI NARRATIVES OF INVASION AND DEVASTATION THROUGH TIME

In the context of conflicts originating from economic, geographical, political, epistemological and symbolic aspects of colonial power, new forms of resistant, interstitial and hybrid knowledge emerge (Walsh et al., 2006; Milanez Pereira, 2017). A Yanomami perspective on the history of the first garimpeiros invasion of their territory (between the second half of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s) can be extracted from ethno-historical narratives collected from leaders in the Paapiu region in a central area of the Yanomami Indigenous Land (Machado, 2015). In the indigenous

speeches, the scars of perforations by firearms in the bodies, the purakapë (holes) from the gold exploration that became lakes, the paraphernalia and aircraft carcasses that lie rusting on the forest floor, are "warëpë uno", the prospectors' (literally "peccaries") traces (fig. 2). This trace scars the forest bodies and, at the same time, the experience of Yanomami. The narrative recorded in Paapiu describes the arrival of the first garimpeiros in the region of the sources of the Hero U river (Couto Magalhães), in the 80s, and the beginning of a presence that marks, in the present, Yanomami relations with non-indigenous people. For the narrators, the prospectors are napëpë who explore their territory and have great resources at their disposal. They have the power to fly planes and helicopters, buy expensive machinery, install Internet connection systems in the middle of the forest and continuously obtain industrialized goods, food, alcoholic beverages and ammunitions to fill their warehouses. Yanomami storytellers – mobilizing different narrative registers – associate the first garimpeiros with the wide availability of goods and generous promises of a life free of toil, referring to historical accounts of the first contacts and mythological references to the origin and return of the napëpë (Wilbert & Simoneau, 1990).

The effects of this mismatch, however, soon showed that, through the napëpë, diseases before unknown



Fig. 2. Illegal mining in the Uraricoera river region (unidentified photographer, 2021).

afflicted the Yanomami. The consequences of the mining presence favored among the Yanomami the association of foreigners and their machinery with lethal epidemics, generating also the idea that the *garimpeiros* sought to “end” the life of indigenous people and “empty” their forest, in order to settle there. The words of a Yanomami researcher from Uraricoera river (north of Yanomami land, Brazil) communicate the distress for the devastation of the forest, for the death of all kinds of beings that inhabit it, for those who inhabit it today and who would inhabit it in the future: “In our land, we are already living surrounded by prospectors who devour the forest, so we say they will finish us off. [...] Worried about our children, we think in anguish that they are going to wipe out all of us Yanomami” (Report by J. Palimitheli, written on March 22, 2022).

In the analysis, although partial, of the testimonies (inherent to recent facts) and memories (from events more distant in time) it emerges that the past is reinterpreted in the light of the present: memory is a dynamical, always open process that not only includes narratives of past, but supports the construction of “past experiences” meaning.

The story of a Yanomami woman emphasized the association between the presence of miners and the increase in pathologies attacking the population, recalling the tragedy experienced during the first race of gold: “It has already happened [with the previous invasion] that our trees have rotted, that the firewood has run out. Therefore, we the elders are distressed. You, young people, perhaps are doubting, but we the elders think: we will suffer from hunger because food will be destroyed. [...] Urihi is contaminated. [...] We suffer diseases” (Testimony of Ni. Yanomami, collected by D. Yanomami, in the Kurukapitheri community, in November 2021).

Davi Kopenawa (2022), in a statement denouncing the current situation, brought back the memory of the tragedy experienced by its people during the first gold rush: “When for the first time prospectors invaded our land, they were 40,000 people. It was horrible! More than 1,000 of my people died! Malaria doesn’t go away, it’s there, the malaria came in with mining. It spread and thus caused us to die”. Regarding the question of testimony, reference should be made again to the massacre of Haximu, perpetrated by *garimpeiros*, in July 1993. When the news of this genocide still had not reached Brazilian society, information was already circulating along the forest paths, because the direct witnesses, survivors of the facts, while trying to hide, found other Yanomami. On August 15, 1993, Tuxawa Antonio alarmed the Sisters of the Xitei Mission, claiming to have found Simão, of the Hwaximëtheri, who was fleeing from an attack by prospectors with other survivors. The following day, the missionaries recorded in their diary that Antonio, frightened, had given more details

of the conversation with Simão, explaining that the attack had resulted in the death of many Yanomami and detailing that “people went killed stabbed, cut with the machete everywhere” (Missão Xitei, 1993: 172). Twelve people died in that attack. Among the survivors, Paulo Yanomami, hidden in the vegetation, could hear screams and shots (Maia, 2001). The group members who ran, found the bodies of the victims. The cremation of the bodies took place in a hurry, for fear of other attacks, and the survivors took flight. Human ashes carried in funerary gourds or found on the ground at the cremation site were the “living mark” of a massacre that left few direct witnesses, but this tragic event is still a vivid memory among Yanomami.

The narratives gathered during the investigation of the Haximu massacre show that the brutality of the violence perpetrated by the *garimpeiros* was the reason for the Yanomami to question the humanity of their attackers: in Yanomami representation, such ferocious acts cannot be associated with human beings. The survivors of Haximu gave up on revenge and, feeling helpless, fled. They feared new attacks by beings who did not share the same code of morality and sociability (Albert, 2001), which is a requirement of the statute of humanity. This same kind of reaction has been repeated recently (between May 2021 and May 2022), when attacks and violence were inflicted by *garimpeiros* and criminal groups hired by the owners of the *garimpos* against indigenous communities of Aracaça e Palimiu (northern region of Yanomami’s territories close to Uraricoera river). These groups may have understood that, when faced with a superior and invincible force, the only appropriate reaction is to flee and seek help, denouncing the attack and soliciting the intervention of an apparently equivalent force, this time at the service of the State, represented by the Police and the Army. Indigenous narratives exposing the brutality of the actions committed against Yanomami, bring out, by contrast, self-represented codes of morality and humanity that include caring for others. They highlight also the connection between past and present and the recurrent theme of the link between memory and testimony. Summarizing, different memories and narratives are intertwined and feed each other: they are based not only on personal experiences, but they recall the speeches of elders and also of people from other communities, whose voices are incorporated. The construction of discourse crosses times (past and present), spaces (various locations) and voices (subjects and witnesses).

A plurality of voices

The important question concerning who can be representative and “who detains the authority” to testify, in the case of indigenous narratives, assumes a particular relevance, because of the plurality of voices

involved (Clifford, 1988). Due to their constitutive elements, the Yanomami memories about the presence of garimpos, can be described as a “collectively constructed”, “subjected to transformations” and “inherited” social phenomenon (Pollak, 1992). New events can be communicated to other locations in the Yanomami territory, either by the movement of people, or by a network of radio equipment that allows direct and fast communication between groups, transmitting detailed information rich.

Although the constitutive facts and experiences are not necessarily experienced personally by all, a narrator or a researcher becomes a “witness” for being, expanding the scope of this concept, the person who “does not go away, who manages to listening to the unbearable narration of the other and who accepts that his words lead forward, as in a relay, the story of the other” (Gagnebin, 2006: 57). In this process, Yanomami narratives and memories contribute to the definition of collective identities. Such memories and identities are enhanced and strategically mobilized to revive struggles for political purposes in defense of territories and their inhabitants.

It is important to stress here that, very much in contrast with “individualistic” traditional anthropological reports, the narratives collected from the Yanomami, for their construction, use a plurality of voices: not just human voices from the past and present, from relatives and elders, but also “non-human” voices. This vocal plurality participates in (and builds the) spaces of conventional Yanomami discourses, such as nocturnal allocutions, ceremonial dialogues, sha-

manic narrations. During hereamu, a night speech by a leadership, the speaker builds a certain consensus by integrating the comments that arise from the circle of domestic fires, in the middle of which he positioned himself. During his performance, the shaman is in an altered state of consciousness through the use of the yākoana (psychotropic substance). Shamanic knowledge is not the simple result of individual research or conversation between humans, but includes a continuous dialogue (listening and answering) with the xapiripë, the auxiliary spirits. Despite the fact that during this process he “become another” incorporating the xapiripë (auxiliary spirits), gaining their perspective and position in the cosmos, he remains attentive to his surroundings and interacts discursively with people around him (fig. 3). Testimonies are built through the inclusion of relatives, other Yanomami, and of the xapiripë, the entities of which shamans are mediators. To denounce the impacts of mining on Urihi, Davi Kopenawa refers to a shamanic knowledge that was transmitted to him by his father-in-law who initiated him: “My father-in-law, who was a great shaman, taught me about these red marks on the Earth. He used to say: “This land that white people spoil, don’t think it’s red land as if it were urucum. Do not fool yourself! It’s your blood! It’s the blood of the earth dripping!” (Kopenawa, 2022).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The museumization of artifacts from different cultures poses a series of ethical problems and respon-



Fig. 3. Davi Kopenawa during the Leadership Forum on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the ratification of the Yanomami Indigenous Land (photo by Corrado Dalmonego, 2022, Xihopi community).

sibilities. In this article we wanted to stress the need to keep collections connected to the contemporary narratives of the communities where they originated. The attention to this aspect is the necessary ground to develop exhibits, events and dissemination. Today museums are recognized as institutions devoted to develop dialogue and awareness about important contemporary themes, such sustainability, social justice, and respect for our planet. While museums can unfortunately be still viewed as places of the past, the Yanomami collection is a perfect study case to claim that the time of memory is not the past but the present.

In this paper we reported different voices from Yanomami women and men. Coexistence and encounters with women and men Yanomami are a space to learn values, different ways of living in the world and establish relationships with other beings. Museal collections can also be powerful ambassadors from "traditional" or "different" cultures and their views of life to the world, but we have to be aware of misunderstanding and conflicts that are not just of practical nature, but rooted in different ontologies. Collected artifacts may also appear to become split and misunderstood when caught between different ontologies, but they can be invaluable tools for establishing pragmatic agreements respecting distinct assumptions.

Shamanic knowledge is considered "true knowledge": this is a crucial point to understand the potent cosmo-ecological discourse of Kopenawa, who brings together a multitude of entities, assuming the role of a spokesperson. The narrator's words are the words of his people, of great shamans, of shamanic entities. We also recognized that the Yanomami narrative is constructed with reference to memory as an open and unfinished progress: the construction of the "meaning of past" through the testimony of the previous generation. This heritage is updated taking in account present events and fears for the future. Collections are carriers of relationships and meanings that should be maintained around objects: they do not lose their meanings only if we keep alive the connection between past and present, memory and current narratives, artefacts and the people who created them or their descendants.

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