

Cultures in the market: cultures for sale?

Some words of hope and caution illustrated by Amazonian cases

André Vereta-Nahoum

There has been an increasing circulation of cultures via markets, reflecting a growing interest in what cultural elements of populations at the fringes of global capitalist fluxes can offer in a variety of areas from the promotion of biodiversity to healing services. Westerners have been approaching these populations to gather and consume their culture in various forms. The consumption of cultures is not new. Yet new cultural rights and protections require negotiation and compensation for the use of cultural elements and many colonized populations around the world are seizing the opportunities that arise from this interest to promote the circulation of such elements in a variety of ways, with different goals and varying degrees of success. They have actively promoted the commodification of cultural elements in order to generate income and use their exposure to formulate political and existential claims.

Since a general overview of these undertakings is impossible and, given their specificities, likely useless, this article presents a broad overview of contrasting experiences of commodification of cultural elements of Brazilian Amazonian natives, based on my own ethnography of one case, and secondary analysis of media articles and academic discussions of three other cases. There are important ethnological aspects that play a role in understanding the engagement of such groups in forms of monetary exchange involving cultural traits and practices. Their eagerness to enter

into relations with and introduce others and their things into the group is the most important aspect (Viveiros de Castro 1992) – although the production and exercise of political power in the region is equally connected to the promotion of exchange. These aspects clarify not only Indigenous agency, but also mediate the effects of exchange, as I have shown elsewhere (Vereta-Nahoum 2016; 2017). But I will not delve into such aspects in the present article. Here I focus on the entanglements of such groups – through and regarding culture – with global markets, analyzing them to explore questions at the core of economic sociology: the potential, dilemmas, tensions, and challenges of selling cultures.

This should be of broader interest, because it returns to classical questions about the effects of the monetary valuation of cultures and addresses the challenges faced by many minorities around the world that need to balance income generation and identity claims. I use the cases to highlight different forms of engagement, distinct tensions, and to dialogue with the recent literature dealing with the commodification of cultures. By comparing successful and failed engagements, I want to highlight some conditions under which selling cultures might actually increase the vitality of local cultures, achieve political goals, and secure material resources through the establishment of new alliances, the reproduction of cultural practices, and the promotion of internal social bonds. I intend to show these results are directly related to the internal

André Vereta-Nahoum is professor of sociology at the University of São Paulo (Brazil), and an associate researcher of the Center for Research on Culture and Economy (NUCEC), at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and of the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP). He is also director of the Real Economy Institute. He has conducted extensive research on identity negotiations amidst market exchange, investigating the relations between monetary value and self-worth in varied settings. His current research project traces the knowledge practices through which experts represent the Brazilian national economy. andre.nahoum@usp.br

control of the process by the communities whose culture is being circulated and, to some extent, to their ability to indigenize such endeavors, making them work for their own defined purposes. Defining such purposes is equally a common source of conflict, both internal and with their commercial partners.

What culture? What circulation?

Culture is an equivocal term with many analytical and vernacular connotations. Here and among the groups dealing in culture, it means objects and practices related to local forms of organizing all observable things – live and inanimate, natural and supernatural,

human and non-human – and creating symbolic associations to generate a coherent system in which each element has a place. Culture is also a set of traits (practices, relations, artifacts) held to be distinctive of an ethnic group. These are exactly the two uses of the term “culture” that fell out of grace as an analytical concept among social scientists at the same time as they were appropriated and mobilized by multiple groups across the globe (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Sahlin 2009; Strathern 1995). They now talk about the signs of what make them distinctive as their “culture”, their “customs” and their “traditions”. Many subjects of colonization are now committed to the reinvention of their cultures, just as Europeans turned to their traditions in exuberant and exaggerated forms to imagine national identities.

This realization was the result of their perception of foreign gazes into their realities, the protection of cultural rights, and the assetization of cultural elements by national governments and international organizations. These processes turned distinctive cultures within nation states into a ground for political battles, but also created opportunities to generate income, for persons and companies keen to explore what culture can offer – knowledge, artifacts and practices – and turn them into profitable goods and services. For those attracted to these cultures, they might offer a ticket to a lost past, the knowledge of how to cure illness and disease, the way into an alternative lifestyle or the environmental conservation associated with it.

Throughout the history of cultural encounters, cultural representations have circulated in several ways. There is a long history of European consumption of distant cultures and their knowledge through postcards, collections of artifacts, botanical gardens, cabinets of curiosities, museum displays of artifacts regarded as art from distant lands, travel writing, and anthropological accounts. Knowledge and the riches produced by cultures were appropriated and employed for European goals. Anthropology has provided authoritative accounts of other ways of life, based on the contribution of natives who are purported to possess sufficient authority to represent their culture (Clifford 1997). All those instruments of circulation contributed to the construction of the great divides that structured much of the social sciences, between modernity and tradition, history and myth. They promoted a play with mirrors, fed by the nostalgia for a lost past and the myth of a unidirectional pattern of modernity: looking into distant cultures was regarded as means of travelling in time and seeking the origins of modern populations. This circulation involved very limited native agency: the peoples whose cultures were circulated and consumed were silent others who gained life only through their representation.

At the same time, these representations by dominant cultures create a sense of cultural distinctiveness among those who are their subjects and make them attractive to consumers and commercial partners (Greene 2004). The forceful appropriation of cultural elements continues with the smuggling of cultural artifacts and biopiracy. Yet there are also products and services that involve the circulation of cultural elements of peoples with their consent and, in some cases, on their initiative. This is the form of cultural circulation analyzed here: with the active involvement of Indigenous populations and with a pecuniary compensation that might be locally framed in a number of ways, but can be analytically defined as commodity exchange. The tensions that arise from this form of circulation are related to expectations generated by commodity exchange, but also to conflicting views surrounding the assetization and protection of Indigenous cultures, their knowledge and practices. By focusing on these engagements, the findings dialogue with perennial debates about the effects of commodification on culture and provide a glimpse into the related tensions.

The challenges of Amazonian natives and the promises of selling cultures: between market and politics

The Brazilian Amazon has been the stage for many negotiations and exchanges of culture. Natives face the challenge of generating income and gathering support to protect their territorial rights and modes of existence. The representations of the region as the repository of a unique biodiversity and environmental practices known and promoted by their natives have also been attracting the attention of researchers, firms, and enthusiasts. Despite the constitutional protection of Indigenous populations and the recognition of their territorial and cultural rights, Amazonian populations find themselves in different situations of cultural and existential risk, which traditionally increased with their proximity to infrastructural projects and the expansion of cities. At the most basic level, their ability to sustain community life is dependent upon full implementation of their land rights. However, these land rights are not always granted and their recognition has been further hampered in recent years by the influence of agribusiness over the Federal government. There are populations living in three different situations: groups struggling for territorial rights associated with their special ethnic rights; populations living outside their community, in farms or towns; and

groups living in demarcated Indigenous lands. Without the implementation of such basic land rights, it is very difficult for these populations to promote forms of exchange based on culture.

The importance of such rights to the social and cultural reproduction of Indigenous groups cannot be overemphasized. Territorial rights ensure the unimpeded access to and use of areas where they develop cultural, sacred, social activities and secure their material means of living through extraction and production. However, keeping the community within their traditional territory and the reproduction of their cultural and social relations also requires material and symbolic resources. Along decades of interethnic relationships and internal change, these communities introduced an array of consumer goods and now rely on services provided by the state and private allies, mainly health and social services. Scarcity of income and the absence of basic services are common reasons for natives choosing to live outside their community. It should come as no surprise that all the engagements analyzed here involve populations with demarcated Indigenous territories. In this sense, market exchange and other alliances do not replace the implementation of basic rights.

It is against this background that some natives perceive the exchange of cultural elements as an opportunity to acquire much needed resources and, by increasing their visibility, gather external support to secure their cultural practices and other political claims. These activities are also understood by natives and their allies as an alternative to the predatory economic model that has been promoted in the region, at least since the policies of “occupation” and “development” devised by the authoritarian military regime in the 1970s, based on extractive industries (wood and minerals) and cattle raising.

Four concrete cultural elements that are traded can be distinguished for analytical purposes: knowledge about biodiversity, or more precisely about properties and uses of natural species that Western science can turn into resources for new applications; material artifacts produced as part of cultural practices, for functional or ritual uses; therapeutic techniques and the associated symbolic language; and the public display of games and rituals that provide a glimpse into their lifestyle and cosmogony, which can take place either in urban settings or in their villages, attracting tourism to regions often regarded as exotic. Indigenous groups in Brazil have long employed this strategy of using their image across several media, in displays that may or may not be marketized, and in order to attract public attention to their past and present challenges, gather external support, and secure material resources (Conklin 1997; Graham 2005).

It is important to notice that the Brazilian Constitution and a number of laws and international agreements support the self-determination of Indigenous populations and their free use of land resources. There is equally a legal framework dealing with collective rights involving material and, since the last decade, immaterial cultural goods, including knowledge, places and celebrations, and forms of expression, which has been analyzed elsewhere (Drummond 2017). Yet the appropriate protection regime for culture and the means to ensure fair compensation for its producers remains a legal imbroglio between traditional (individual) intellectual property and national heritage (Cunha 2009). These are common causes of conflicts and failure in the exchange of cultural elements. Albeit consciously employing Western categories such as intellectual property or cultural rights as part of their reproduction strategies, their engagements are not without conflicts and misunderstandings. Different expectations and conceptions of authorship and cultural creation frequently stand at the centre of exchange. The “resourcist” approach to the traditional knowledge, especially associated with therapeutic uses of biodiversity, is another reason for misunderstanding and failure. I now turn to two cases in which these conflicts surfaced.

Who owns a culture? What is culture good for?

The implementation of a legal framework to protect immaterial culture requires common understandings that are difficult to obtain in practical terms. Two cases involving Brazilian natives exemplify these difficulties: the controversial use, by Havaianas, a famous Brazilian plastic flip flop brand, of Yawalapiti graphisms, and the failed attempt by a leading team of psychobiology researchers to partner with Kraho shamans to research known uses of native plants with psychoactive properties that could be turned into patented pharmaceutical medicines.

The former highlights the challenges of defining the extent of collective property of cultural elements and who can sell culture. For the Euro-American culture, artifacts from others commonly fall under the category of art and their creators are conceived as artists. There is a specifically European and modernist conception of individual authorship (Elias 1993; Hauser 1999) that is associated with artists and is sometimes at odds with other regimes of production and inspiration for crafts and objects. In some cases, the transition from common expressions of culture that take place within the life of a community to artis-

tic objects for display and sale is successful in preserving the original meaning, securing the continuation of such practices within the community and preventing the desecration of the objects. A well-known example is the creation for a market for and multiple museum exhibitions featuring Australian Aboriginal dreamings, one of their sacred expressions. While still considered to be sacred messages, by retaining the keys to their interpretation and asking audiences to respect their sacred nature, the circulation of these paintings does not erase the original meanings or their social value for the community (Myers 2002).

In other cases, however, the ritual use and collective origin of cultural elements clashes with their individual expression by members of the group. In 2015, a large advertising company created a campaign for *Havaianas*, the world-famous Brazilian flip flops brand named *Tribes of Havaianas*, suggesting that all “tribes” wear the flip flops¹. They produced ten thousand pairs of flip flops incorporating a drawing made by a Yawalapiti², one of the many ethnic groups that inhabit the Xingu Indigenous Park. This special series was gifted to celebrities and commercial partners. They paid the author of the drawings for the right to use and reproduce these images. After the launch of the campaign, with a video featuring the flip flops, representatives of many groups that shared the territory complained publicly to the author of the drawings, in social networks, and to the press. They claimed that these patterns belonged to the Xinguan collectivity, they were not consulted, and the groups received no compensation for their use. The drawing used on the flip flops corresponds to patterns painted on burial poles and the bodies of mourning relatives in the context of large inter-village funerary ceremonies known as *Kwarup*. Yet the Yawalapiti claimed he was the sole author of the drawings on the flip flops and the company further claimed that it had negotiated with a legally capable representative of the group (Novaes 2015). The case was thoroughly covered in the press and widely debated, but the flip flops had already been gifted and no further action was taken.

The second case not only highlights problems of representative authority in the market for cultural elements but also draws attention to issues that derive from different expectations and understandings generated by the uses of cultural knowledge, and their translation into biomedical science. Since colonial times, it has been known that natives possess significant knowledge of the uses of plant species, many of which they employ in their healing and spiritual practices. In fact, these plant species, together with local nuts, constituted the main regional output until galvanization turned the rubber that is native to the region into a globally essential product.

The imagination that portrays the region as a unique repository of knowledge creates many opportunities for natives, attracting interest ranging from pharmaceutical companies to New-age, esoteric groups seeking alternative therapies to Western biomedicine. Among the former group, bioprospecting is an established practice in the region and multiple substances isolated from local species have had their medical uses patented, neither with recognition of the role of traditional knowledge nor compensation. To remedy this situation and as an attempt to frame this knowledge within the broader Western category of intellectual property, new international agreements on the protection of traditional knowledge, namely the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Nagoya Protocol, created a new legal framework, recognizing this knowledge as the collective property of its community and introducing the requirement for authorization by local communities and agreement on benefit-sharing prior to testing, extracting, exploiting, and publishing traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity³. The Council of Management of Genetic Patrimony (CGEN in the Brazilian acronym) was created by the federal government in 2001 to deliberate on conditions of access to traditional knowledge.

Yet even when earnestly observed along with all other legal precautions, this framework does not ensure a smooth exchange, as many questions and challenges remain unresolved. Research into therapeutic uses of plant and animal substances that are part of the cultural practices of a population always involves questions about who can negotiate and trade knowledge shared by many members of a community – in some cases multiple communities – for commercial exploitation, as well as the status of the local knowledge and its original therapeutic practices. These complexities are well illustrated by the failed attempt of a research team from one of the most prestigious universities in Brazil, the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), to partner with Kraho⁴ shamans to identify plant substances with actions in the central nervous system that could be used to develop pharmaceutical drugs. Although developed when the legal framework was being formulated, the project met all of its requirements, authorizations and criteria, but still could not avoid legal challenges and public outcry.

Following doctoral research conducted by one of its researchers, the Department of Psychobiology of UNIFESP decided to develop a R&D project with the financial assistance of the State of Sao Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) and a private pharmaceutical firm. The researcher had conducted her doctoral research in Kraho villages, working with local healers (named *wajaca*) to identify plants used in healing. These healers possess a wide knowledge of the uses of

medicines they produce using local plants, which they employ to cure patients with the aid of spiritual guides (*pahis*). She obtained authorization from chiefs and *wajacas* from three of the sixteen Kraho villages⁵. This research revealed a trove of knowledge: 286 recipes and 50 therapeutic indications with actions in the nervous central system. In the cases of species that had been the subject of previous pharmacological studies, the indications provided by the Kraho and by Western scientists corresponded (Rodrigues; Assimakopoulos & Carlini 2005).

Given the results, the institution decided to seek partners to continue the research on the indicated species to evaluate their pharmacological potential in 2001. Their scope reveals the priorities (and malaises) of contemporary urban societies: the aim was to research plants with positive effects on memory and learning, weight control, anxiety control, stress resilience, and pain relief. The *wajacas* would participate in identifying plants to be investigated. Negotiations were conducted with Vyty-Caty, an Indigenous association representing some Kraho and other neighboring native villages, resulting in a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The research was approved for funding by FAPESP, who stressed the innovativeness of the proposal, and by ethical bodies. UNIFESP also contacted the Brazilian Federal Government agency for the support of Indigenous Populations (FUNAI) and obtained authorization from CGEN. As part of this agreement, the Kraho were offered the construction of gardens in two villages for the cultivation of plants for research, equipment, training, and wages for gardeners to maintain these gardens. The *wajacas* would receive a wage for assisting the researcher in collecting plants and interviews. Three of them would also receive travel funds to allow them to follow tests of the substances in UNIFESP's laboratories in São Paulo, and financial compensation for all of the village teachers involved in the translation of terms from the local language and guidance on the correct spelling of these names. In several meetings, the UNIFESP researchers clarified the nature of the research and the unpredictability of its material results. The MOU signed with Vyty-Cati stated that should any patent be filed based on plants indicated by the Kraho, royalties would be paid (Rodrigues; Assimakopoulos & Carlini 2005).

Soon after the start of the project in 2002, however, a series of meetings in the Kraho indigenous territory with representatives of UNIFESP, villages and FUNAI brought the project to a standstill. Other Kraho representative associations complained about their exclusion and disputed the validity of the agreement. New meetings were held, now involving other two associations (Macrare and Kapey), in the attempt to reach a new agreement that recognized the rights of

all Kraho associations, which included the associated Apinaye and Gavião peoples, to the co-ownership of any patent and the corresponding distribution of royalties. The clashes between associations made further negotiations difficult (Rodrigues; Assimakopoulos & Carlini 2005).

In June of the same year, one of the national daily newspapers, *O Globo* (Carvalho 2002), featured a piece on the agreement and accused UNIFESP of involvement in the bio-piracy of traditional knowledge. The article suggested that the research team obtained authorization from a single Kraho representative entity, ignoring the others, giving away precious Kraho knowledge to pharmaceutical companies involved in the project. Other papers followed up on the story, stating that the opposing association (Kapey) was suing UNIFESP for damages (Rodrigues; Assimakopoulos & Carlini 2005). In reality, the pharmaceutical companies had acquired no knowledge and the research on pharmaceutical applications had not even begun. Only the research team itself possessed information about plant substances and their uses known to the Kraho. This information was shared only with the CGEN, after it summoned the team to provide all of the knowledge gathered from the work with the Kraho. Despite these inaccuracies, the articles generated public outcry. The pharmaceutical company abandoned the project, FUNAI cancelled the permission to access Indigenous land and a local agency officer took a more prominent and cautious intermediary role.

At that point, the conflict actually involved a power struggle between two associations claiming to represent the Kraho and, thus, have the final say on sharing their traditional knowledge. UNIFESP and five Kraho associations continued to negotiate, committed to solving the problems the latter perceived in the agreement. They recognized that the research could actually benefit their communities, generating knowledge on new applications of their plants, which could be employed by *wajacas* to heal "white people's" diseases that their traditional medicine was unable to solve. UNIFESP offered to provide biomedical health services in the area, an activity it had developed on other Indigenous lands. However, the claim was then formulated in different terms by the Kraho. Through the mediation of a FUNAI officer, the associations presented a project for the creation of a fund to finance research conducted by the *wajacas* in their land, to which they subordinated the continuation of any collaboration with UNIFESP. The *Kraho Mehcaric Fund* was intended to promote the traditional medical system based on their own conception of health, creating facilities to serve both natives and non-natives interested in their healing practices. These conditions could

not be met by UNIFESP, who asserted that it could not fund or assume liability for research and treatment practices that were not recognized as valid by Western biomedicine, leading to the demise of the project in 2004 (Rodrigues; Assimakopoulos & Carlini 2005).

In general, these conflicts are understood as the result of a heavily bureaucratic framework (see, for example, Rodrigues Jr. 2012). In this case, however, this misses the point: the essential cause of the failure of this project was the inability of a scientific organization to recognize the claims of native researchers to participate in the research project employing their own methods and language, and to define their own goals. This attempt to use and recognize traditional knowledge to develop new drugs collided with issues of representation and the difficult relationship between biomedical science and local therapeutic practices as two different regimes of knowledge. In the end, it showed that the knowledge of others is useful for our biomedical scientific practices, abstracted and taken out of its original practical context, to cure the malaises of our contemporary world, but it does not have the same worth and cannot be supported through scientific grants. Partnerships between locals and researchers for the economic exploitation of biopharmaceutical uses of native species remain a good opportunity to generate revenues for communities whose cultural practices have been generating fundamental knowledge incorporated in Western products for centuries. However, misunderstandings abound and visitors from outside continue to establish spurious relations with local healers to obtain valuable knowledge and generate new patents. Cases like the UNIFESP-Kraho show that when the commodification of culture is controlled by outside partners and oriented towards purely external goals, with limited agency and voice from the original practitioners, the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts increases.

Some words of hope: selling the “true selves”

The cases discussed hitherto raise some notes of caution involving disputes over who are the legitimate representatives to negotiate culture and, when these disputes are over, the challenges involving different expectations, purposes and values of culture. Yet there is also hope that comes from cases in which selling cultures increased the vitality of local cultures and attracted material and symbolic resources to Amazonian communities.

Among the factors attracting commercial partners to Amazonian villages is the strong association

that has been constructed between their populations and the knowledge and promotion of biodiversity. Satellite images of the region with superimposed boundaries of Indigenous lands suffice to show that this association indeed holds: more forest coverage is preserved in territories controlled by Indigenous groups. This association has been recognized by international organizations since the Brundtland Report (UN 1987), which first recognized the importance of implementing Indigenous land rights for conservation efforts. This association becomes an asset that adds value to products responsibly produced in the region, because their purchase can be framed as a means of supporting the populations who retain the forest. Some firms source natural ingredients in the region, offering above market prices as a means of supporting conservation and cultural survival efforts. In such cases, cultural expressions of their sourcing communities are often part of the product, together with tales of conservation and cultural survival, even if in diluted and very synthetic forms. The global circulation of their images and stories have, in some cases, helped Indigenous populations to protect cultural practices, attract attention to their toils, and create new alliances to promote their rights and secure resources.

Commercial partnerships of this type are not exempt from conflict and not all cases are successful. In the region, two partnerships involving the British cosmetic firm the Body Shop and indigenous populations in the production of Brazil nut oil are probably the most discussed examples. Turner (1995) and Ribeiro (2009) share a common view that such projects neglect cultural patterns of indigenous societies, fail to empower and to offer financial independence to populations, and reproduce the old forms of indigenous involvement with the extractive industries in the Amazon. They decry such partnerships for creating a wage labor relationship in which the product is actually the image of the natives.

These cases were indeed hindered by distributive conflicts and claims to image rights, but these views place too high demands on market exchange. As previously said, markets do not replace rights and special policies. Furthermore, another case, the focus of my research, provides a different picture: albeit plagued by distributive conflicts, trading *annatto* seeds and images of their use in body paintings did increase the vitality of the Yawanawa culture and brought them new international and regional allies⁶. Since 1992, different groups of the Yawanawa have partnered with Aveda, another firm of hair and skin care manufacturers, providing *annatto* seeds, from which a red pigment employed in lipsticks is extracted. They also provide images and licensed the use of some patterns they employ in these body paintings representing spirits of

nature. The Yawanawa traditionally employed the pigment to make body paintings they use for protection, as well as for aesthetic purposes during games and feasts. Some of the advertising material featured the past struggles of the Yawanawa to keep their rights to use land resources and practice their cultural rituals, especially against illegal land holders and Christian missionaries. Their role in the conservation of the Amazon forest is also mentioned (Vereta-Nahoum 2016).

In contrast to the cases discussed by Turner (1995) and Ribeiro (2009), image rights were recognized and represent the largest share of income from the project (Vereta-Nahoum 2016). Acknowledging the economic value placed on purchasing *annatto* from them and for obtaining the right to use the narrated version of their history and images of members of the population with painted bodies was essential to creating awareness among community leaders of the worth of their culture. Their cultural practices, including body paintings, games, and rituals, usually generated mockery or indifference from their non-indigenous neighbors. Through the demand for images featuring these practices from Aveda, they realized that they were appreciated and resumed such practices.

This activity took place after a long period of lack of income from their land and, thus, initially generated very high expectations of income, reuniting the previously scattered population in a single village. However, these expectations were not met. As a way of maintaining their role as an intermediary of material resources, their leader managed the project in ways that rewarded political loyalty. Many Yawanawa, likening the new project to the rubber tapping activities they had performed before, expected to receive amounts related to their actual output, but distribution followed different criteria and the overall income was not always sufficient due to difficulties in managing resources. This led to a clash of expectations and increasing disinterest among cultivators, indicating that indigenous populations do accept wage labor relations as long as they serve the purpose of obtaining income and goods. The project continues on smaller scale and under the management of a different leader.

The central conflict in this case was not due to neglect of the cultural pattern of the Yawanawa. On the contrary, it was caused by leaders attempting to replicate the traditional pattern in which they acted as intermediaries, as a bridge between the community and markets and state agencies, while the local workers had in mind the framework already developed over decades of extractive and agricultural activities for outsiders.

Multiple cases of the promotion of ritual and therapeutic services might also offer a word of hope

and indicate that selling cultures may actually increase the vitality of local cultures. Many Amazonian populations promote cultural festivals and other forms of commodified display of cultural practices. Here again, I will focus on the Yawanawa case. The praise for the beauty of their cultural practices inspired them to revive several of them and to dedicate more community efforts to researching their traditions and forms. They also revived an annual feast to celebrate the community unity and forge alliances with neighbors. At first, this seemed like an opportunity to gather together for a week to practice games and rituals, and teach the crafts used during them to younger generations. Soon they started to receive visitors to these feasts, which then turned into a major festival, receiving hundreds of tourists from all over the world. Although bringing limited monetary income, many benefits derive from these festivals. Knowing that they attract tourists to a remote area of the country and a poor state, the state government provides financial aid and uses the events to provide new facilities or services to the Yawanawa, to highlight their commitment to the indigenous population. The festivals are also used to forge new alliances: the Yawanawa showcase their practices, narrate their history of challenges, and invite visitors to support them, sometimes formulating specific claims to material resources. The vast network of allies thus created can then be called upon in case of need. Finally, the interest in and appreciation of external audiences for their ritual practices further fosters internal interest. The Yawanawa stop all work for a week to dedicate themselves to the games and rituals, dressed in head-dresses, palm skirts and with ornate body paintings. This is not “a commodified persona,” as described in other cases of commodified cultural performance, in which essential aspects of the ritual are hidden from the audiences (Bunten 2008). On the contrary, some of them told this researcher that it is during this week that they are the “true” Yawanawa, fully revealing themselves (Vereta-Nahoum 2016).

Their use of ayahuasca, a hallucinogenic concoction made from the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine and leaves of *Psychotria viridis*, both native to the region, is a fundamental aspect of their rituals that attracts audiences. This interest generates a further opportunity for the Yawanawa and other natives of the region who share the knowledge of how to prepare ayahuasca and employ it in healing practices and spiritual rituals to present these practices and offer healing services outside their villages. Many New-Age groups invite shamans from these groups to cities in Brazil, the United States and Europe. They have established multiple alliances with urban cults organized around the visions provided by the collective and ritual consumption of ayahuasca (Labate 2004). This renewed interest pro-

moted the shamanic career itself: knowing that it offers opportunities to circulate globally and bring income to the community, but also recognizing the need to ensure the survival of the knowledge of elderly shamans, many Yawanawa are engaging in the strenuous initiation process of becoming a shaman. There is once more research on native plants and therapeutic techniques and the population are not afraid to take part in spiritual rituals, which were once prohibited by Christian missionaries.

For the Yawanawa, selling their cultural rituals has been a positive example in which the commodification of culture led to its increased vitality. The allies forged through the commodified circulation of culture put them in a better position to secure their rights. They now devote more time and effort to recreating cultural traditions. Three aspects of their engagement seem to be fundamental for these results: they have been able to define the goals associated with the exchange of cultural elements, which is a cause of internal clashes with groups that prefer direct individual income over symbolic resources that can be translated into material benefits; with the commodified version of rituals and healing practices, they entirely control the process, even if the practices are shaped by the expectations and demands of their consumers; and finally, as an alternative to intellectual property rights, they have appropriated the notion of authenticity, associated with their rituals and the native uses of ayahuasca and healing practices. Normally understood as a requirement imposed by consumers (Wherry 2008), in this case it is the producers that employ the notion of authenticity to protect their cultural practices and secure their exclusivity. For the Yawanawa, as other local native groups that have engaged in the market for rituals and healing practices involving ayahuasca and other substances, offering the authentic native ritual is a means of creating an exclusive experience of healing that no urban healer, nor a patented drug can offer. In this unique conception, drugs and the ayahuasca employed in urban cults can also heal, but the spirits they use to cure inhabit their forest and can only be invoked through the right words of their own healers. Thus, they stress the uniqueness of the authentic and traditional services offered. Authenticity, rather than intellectual property, is employed to produce scarcity and, consequently, value.

Conclusion

Almost three decades ago, Appadurai opened an article by stating that “the central problem of global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (1990: 1). The

debate was pervasive in anthropology and sociology in those days, amid a convergence of political efforts oriented toward international integration and academic analyses emphasizing an increased global interdependence. At opposite extremes, some would describe trends of homogenization that would spread nothingness (Ritzer/Ryan 2002), whereas others emphasized the indigenization promoting *glocalization* (Miller 1998; Sahlins 2009). This debate concerned the effects of globalization on cultures.

The debate of culture and markets currently resurface in ways that resemble the romantic nationalist sentiments of the nineteenth century and the angst surrounding the destruction of local traditions. Economic nationalism and illiberal regimes are considered instrumental in the defense of national economies and traditions that many perceive as their culture. These views neglect an important point that was made by this literature in the 1990s: the global fluxes of capital might also give rise to the increased circulation of local cultures, their representations, forms of knowledge, and material elements. Moreover, in countries like Brazil, it is renewed defense of nationalist economic ideals, expressed in the promotion of the extraction of natural resources in the territories of native populations, that threatens their culture.

Faced with the challenges of generating income, the expansion of agribusiness, and the pressure to contribute to the regional economy, the colonized populations are actively promoting the circulation of their cultures in market forms. The global commodified circulation of cultures has been a way to raise awareness of their existence. It has been employed to secure resources, forge new alliances, claim rights, and promote interest in cultural practices among community members. The cases I analyzed here indicate that cultural diversity is not weakened through exchange, but they offer some notes of caution: negotiating who can deal in cultural elements on behalf of an entire group (or groups) and what constitutes fair compensation for their commercial use remains a delicate issue and a source of conflict. Moreover, retaining control over the process and the freedom to define their own goals are fundamental to making commodification work for the producers of culture. New rights generated a new attitude toward the commercial uses of their culture and the knowledge it produces in products from flip flops to drugs. They now demand fair compensation and participation in the transformation processes through which culture becomes a commodity. They are claiming control over commodification and recognition and support of their own research practices, even if this challenges Western concepts of science.

Endnotes

- 1 The campaign ad can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/njKL0ob1JYc>
- 2 For more ethnological information on the Yawalapiti, see their entry in the virtual Encyclopedia of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil. Available at: <https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Povo:Yawalapiti>.
- 3 Brazil has signed and ratified the CBD. National law (MP 2.186-16/2001) equally protects traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity.
- 4 For more information on the Kraho (self-denominated Mehin), see their entry in the virtual Encyclopedia of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil. Available at: <https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Povo:Krah%C3%B4>. Decades before, the Mehin (as the Kraho call themselves) became known to Brazilians with an action, in the 1980s, that involved the assertion of their cultural rights, namely the right of ownership over their cultural artifacts: they decided to demand the return of an axehead displayed at the Paulista Museum, which was granted.
- 5 The Kraho inhabit an Indigenous land covered by a savanna. Although not located in the Amazonian biome, it is included in the administrative area of the Amazon, justifying the inclusion of this case here.
- 6 More information and additional sources about the Yawanawa can be found in Vereta-Nahoum (2016).

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