

## **Different degrees of natural: New encounters and old discourses of Amazonian original peoples**

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### **Abstract**

This paper carries out a critical Ecolinguistics analysis of international mass-communication discourses, on contemporary sightings of original peoples and uncontacted groups in the Amazon forest. The linguistic selections used to describe the people, the ecology and the actions involved in the contact, are examined to underline the different ideologies that the sources promote, within the global discourse on ethno-biodiversity conservation and existence rights, under a holistic deep ecology research frame.

### **Introduction**

Within the Language, Ecology and Discourse research frame, an interesting point of connection between the two main “ecology of language” and “language of ecology” (Harré et al., 1999) analysis approaches can be found in researching contemporary communication on non-Western first nations in America. Global discourses on original peoples reflect both the necessity for ethno-ecological conservation and geo-linguistic planning, as well as the international community’s different ideological attitudes regarding their inter-dependence with the ecosystems they live in. Anytime the globalized and the non-globalized worlds meet, many of the historically Western ideological discourses and actions on identity and power are repeated, and new challenging perspectives are created.

It seems almost impossible that in the globalized world’s panorama there still is space for non-recorded groups of people, who often live in decentralized areas of the world like the vast tropical forests, and who have never had contact with what is culturally and often unconsciously considered to be the indispensable “real world”. In spite of the internet technology and satellites, of the still high rates of deforestation, of state and corporate aggression for land and resources appropriation, a few very small groups of people are still living in minute forest areas, particularly in Asia and Latin America. Although the “outer” world has not arrived yet, there are state and independent organizations that try to monitor and “preserve” them. Original ethno-linguistic groups, and mostly those still living in forests, are still often perceived as endangered populations, fossils of a distant time, space and form (Croizat, 1962). They are often discursively used by the environmental movements as positive symbols, whose ecological attitudes promote ecological

conservation and alternative solutions to mass society's utilitarian approach to resources use, and towards the planet. At the same time, they can also still be portrayed as more "natural", less "cultured" forms of life, and therefore ideologically assimilated to the (usually qualitatively negative) anthropocentric macro-categories of "other", "different", "less developed", "less human".

Noticeably, several of these issues had started with the arrival of Christopher Columbus at the Indies in 1492, and some of the semantic categories used by contemporary mass communication echo five hundred year old discourses of Eurocentric "discovery" and conquest of the American lands. After the nineteenth century "go west" imperative and the resulting long-scale habitats devastation, and the start of the modern conservationist movements with the human presence exclusion from the natural areas (Adams, 2001), the situation is far from recovering. The fast and often negative changes in the Latin American ecology are still going along with the global expansion and intensification of the neo-liberal mass production-consumption society values and discourses, in spite of the general "eco-awareness" and conservative actions at many levels. Today, many of the few remaining American areas that have not been modified by large scale anthropization, such as the Amazon forest ecosystem, are still being heavily deforested, and the territories, resources and people are still being heavily used for unsustainable purposes, and destroyed (Barrionuevo, 2008).

All the past and present constructive and destructive discourses have produced different perspectives, laws, policies and debates on the original peoples' rights, as well as contrasting actions. For example, Brazil is one of the few countries where previously unrecorded people are still living (a presence of 0.4% original peoples living in their own communities was recorded in the 2000 census, around 350,000 individuals – IBGE, 2005), and has one of the most advanced ethno-ecological legislations, that includes the original groups' rights under a perspective that is closer to deep ecology ideas. Regarding Brazilian original peoples, the 2000 census attests "the significant increase in the number of individuals who self-identify as indigenous, from 294 thousand in the 1991 census to 734 thousand in 2000 (a mean geometric annual growth rate of 10.8%)", (Ventura Santos & de Oliveira Martins Pereira, 2005).

Apart from the usual gap between innovative legislations and their actual application, debates with great historical bases have been raging worldwide on Latin American uncontacted populations and forest. This was due to recent reports of groups' movements from the Peruvian border to the Brazilian side of the Amazon, caused by illegal logging<sup>1</sup> and governmental mining activities<sup>2</sup>, as well as to the death of several people of an uncontacted group from a respiratory disease epidemic, after the March 2008 arrival of a British TV crew that was filming a documentary<sup>3</sup>, and of Parojnai Totobiegosode, one of the last Ayoreo-Totobiegosode people, who had his first forced contact with the outer world in 1998 because of the Paraguayan Chaco forest destruction, and whose life and recent death was "a symbol of the fate of indigenous people in the Americas since Columbus"<sup>4</sup> (Image 1).

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<sup>1</sup> 11 April 2008. See for example Survival International article, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3214>.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Survival International's latest news on Perupetro, 3 May 2008, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3292>.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Survival International's 26 March 2008 (<http://www.survival-international.org/news/3166>) and 27 March 2008 (<http://www.survival-international.org/news/3169>) reports.

<sup>4</sup> Survival International, 7 May 2008, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3287>.



Image 1 (Survival International): Parojnai Totobiegosode, in a significant combination of photos. Left, shortly after contact in 1998, still wearing his traditional clothes and holding a baby, and with trees in the foreground; right, before his death in 2008, with a bunnies-pattern jumper, polo shirt and jeans, standing on a sandy, uncultivated land, with fences and a path in the foreground. He was though to be around 50 years old when he died.

Moreover, at the end of May 2008, other news broke out of a first visual exchange between a previously uncontacted Amazonian indigenous group, and a plane expedition of the Brazilian National Foundation for Indios, FUNAI<sup>5</sup> (Images 2, 3, and 4 below).

These images immediately provoked international indignation against unlawful and violent acts in the Amazon, and urged the Peruvian government for action, with a great international echo<sup>6</sup>. The international communication and discourses on this event, issued by governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as the media, generally underline how the typically Western opposite concepts of “civilized” and “natural” (Bang & Døør, 1993) are still more or less consciously applied to refer to the socio-ecological life, and culturally transmitted. A critical analysis of how some organizations and media reported this news, and of their diverse vocabulary selections, can be a significant addition to contemporary transdisciplinary studies on identity, ethnicity, ecology, ideology and power discourses. Such investigations are necessary, not only to assess which voices are promoting disruptive or constructive ideas and actions, but also to highlight where the challenges lie, for a more sustainable and holistic change in the general discourse.

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<sup>5</sup> Created in 1967, FUNAI is the Brazilian government’s organ currently appointed to execute the Indigenous Policy established by the 1988 Constitution, and its competence is “to promote basic education to the indios, delimit, ensure and protect the lands that they traditionally occupy, stimulate the developing of studies and research on indigenous groups.” (<http://www.funai.gov.br/>)

<sup>6</sup> See for example *Uncontacted tribe pictures provoke public outrage*, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3371>, and *Uncontacted tribe photos spur government into action*, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3361>





Image 2



Image 3



Image 4 (images 2, 3 and 4 from Gleison Miranda, FUNAI.)

With diachronic references to historical discourses and literary narratives, this paper starts with a discussion of the terms and expressions used in the texts to describe and characterize the original people. It then goes on to examine the discourses on the ecological aspects in the descriptions, and the different ways the relationship between the people and their natural space is portrayed. Thirdly, it studies the use of the various agency expressions, and the significance of the diverse emphases in the variety of actions reported. Finally, it analyzes the ideological categories and power relations relating to the ecosystem that are being promoted by the diverse discourses.

The textual corpus examined in the following analysis is made of 9 online articles, of their titles and of their images' written descriptions, as issued by the governmental and non-governmental organizations' as well as the media's discourse, in Portuguese (FUNAI), English (Survival International NGO<sup>7</sup>, Reuters, The Times, The Guardian), Spanish (El País newspaper) and Italian (La Repubblica newspaper)<sup>8</sup>. The historic references to Christopher Columbus' first discourse on the Indios are based on Barry W. Ife's editions of the 1493 Letter to the Monarchs and Letter to Luís de Santángel. Apart from FUNAI's, all the analyzed texts will be referred to with their sources' initials (SI, R, T, G, EP and LR; LM and LS for Columbus' texts).

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<sup>7</sup> Survival International "is the only international organisation supporting tribal peoples worldwide. ... founded in 1969 after an article by Norman Lewis in the UK's Sunday Times ... work[ing] for tribal peoples' rights in three complementary ways: education, advocacy and campaigns. ... offer[ing] tribal people themselves a platform to address the world. ... work[ing] closely with local indigenous organisations, and focus[ing] on tribal peoples who have the most to lose, usually those most recently in contact with the outside world." (<http://www.survival-international.org/info>)

<sup>8</sup> All the publications in Spanish, Portuguese and Italian have been self translated.



## The people

On the 29 May 2008, members of the FUNAI, flying on a small plane over the Amazon forest near the Peruvian border, saw a small area of cleared forest with three main houses and recorded the first visual contact with a group of people, whose existence had been possibly known, but not documented before by any organization or media, and whom had never had any direct contact at all with non-original peoples. In FUNAI's expedition's photographs and videos, a small number of women and men can be seen reacting to the sight and noise of the plane. From their spot in the forest, these peoples' faces, bodies, houses and actions were exposed on the internet, and suddenly became visible to people around the world. After their immediate publication in Portuguese on the FUNAI website, the news was internationally reported, firstly by the Survival International NGO, and then by global news agencies (Reuters among the earliest), and other media.

The first elements to be hereby analyzed are the terms that are used in the different texts to identify the people encountered by the aerial expedition. First of all, the title of the 29 May 2008 online FUNAI statement, source of all the other analyzed communication, reports:

*“Funai photographs isolated ‘indios’ near the Brazil border with Peru”.*

Moreover, its incipit and first paragraph state:

*“During a 20 hours flight on a Cesna [sic] Skylane, the Etno-Environmental Protection Front Rio Envira of the National Foundation of the Indio collected images of isolated ‘indígena’ [“indigenous”, noun].... The **group**, of still undefined ethnicity, lives in six accommodations and have a large area of cleared space. The photographed **warriors** ....”*

The people are defined with the two almost equivalent Portuguese expressions of “*indio*” (“Indian”) and “*indígena*” (“indigenous”), as a “*group*”, and as “*warriors*” (only found once, and only in this text –see page 10). In the rest of the text, they are also referred to as “*povos indígenas*” [“indigenous peoples”]: “indigenous”, adjective].

Among all the other analyzed textual sources, only T uses the term “*Indian*” in its title, whereas all use it in their articles, also referring to FUNAI as the Brazilian “*Indian Affairs Department*” (G and R). “*Indian*” is also found twice in SI, 5 times in T, 6 times in R, also as “*Amazon Indians*”; “*indio*” and its plural “*indios*” are used 4 times in EP, and “*indiani*”, the Italian plural term, twice in LR. Similar to “*Indian*”, the Italian term is still often used both to indicate the people who live in the republic of India, and also for the ethnic groups of North America, the latter representing the continuation of an obsolete and unbalanced ideological discourse. The adjective “*indigenous*” is also used often in the English analyzed corpus: “*indigenous groups*” and “*indigenous people*” (2 in R), “*indigenous tribes*” and “*indigenous communities*” (2 in G), “*indigenous men*” (T). There are no uses of the equivalent adjective for “indigenous” in the Spanish or Italian texts; the plural noun “*indígenas*” is used 4 times by FUNAI, and it is not found in either EP (that noticeably only selects “*indio*” for its discourse), or in LR.

The Spanish and Portuguese term “*indio*”, and the Italian “*indiano*”, were first used in this context by Christopher Columbus, in his documents and letters on his four travels to the Indies (Zunino, 2008). They continued to be used as a general noun for both the pre-Colombian American populations and their contemporary descendants, even after Columbus' mistake became clear in 1507. In contemporary discourses, the use of “*indio*”, of its interesting compounds with the “*Amer-*” prefix (e.g. “*Amerindio*”, “*Amerindian*”), and of the term “indigenous” (even more “*indígena*” as a noun in Spanish), is often rejected by the post-colonial philosophical, anthropological and identity studies, also as they imply unreal, over-simplified and stereotypical identities. On the other hand, there currently are some empowered pan-American ethnic

movements, mostly urban-based, which re-claim the use of the originally more biased term “indio”, and reject the “indígena” definition (Carbó, 2001:269). Their discourses and ideologies, show similar reasons to those of positive reclaims of traditionally sexist and homophobic words such as “bitch” and “queer”, by contemporary feminist and pride grass-root groups.

Moreover, the mass noun “**group**” referred to the human presence, used once by FUNAI, is used once in SI and LR, 6 times in R, 3 in G, twice in EP, but not in T. The other general noun, “**people/peoples**” [“*povo/povos*”], used by FUNAI 4 times, is used once in SI, in R, in G and in T, twice in its Italian similar translations as “*popolazioni*” (“*populations*”, twice) and as “*persone*” (“*persons*”, 3 times) in LR, and it is not found in EP in its Spanish translations (“*gentes*”, “*pueblos*” or “*poblaciones*”). Another interesting and quite balanced term to define the group, “*community*”, is only used in the Guardian (3 times).

Interestingly, in all the secondary sources the most used term to describe the encountered people is “**tribe**”; that is not found in the FUNAI text. G uses “tribe” 10 times in its title and article, R 14 times, T 9, S I and E P 7, and L R 5 times. “Tribe” is a term that used to be rigorous and heavily used in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ studies, before the creation of the post-colonial critical outlook, and before the intercultural opening to the “peripheries” often stimulating perspectives. Particularly between 1800 and mid-1900, Western discourses on “tribe”, and especially on “tribal”, implied a morally lower qualifier category as “uncivilized”, “natural-wild”, “barbaric”, “irrational”, “anarchic”, as opposed to “civilized”, “progressed”, “technological”, “rational”, “cultivated”. Therefore, contemporary conscious and embedded uses of “tribe” can convey quite a few culturally-determined ideas, also following the most recent critical discourse studies on the direct relations between communication and social action, and on the repetition and expansion of power and ideology through language use. In the analyzed texts, SI specifically implies the idea of these “tribes” as endangered populations, in its expression “*Members of one of the world’s last ... tribes*”, while G selects the semantic universe of “tribes” as “fossils”, writing that there are “*few tribes...whose way of life has apparently changed little in thousands of years*”. Moreover, in LR there is also an opposition between the concepts of “tribe” and “society”, that again repeats cultural ideas of identity classification and power-related issues (see page 9).

Furthermore, the texts’ connotations and diverse descriptions of the “*Indians*”, “*group*”, “*people*” or “*tribe*” are also noticeable. In the FUNAI text, they are described as “**isolated**” (“*isolados*”, in its title and 9 times in total- noticeably, in all the examined languages the concept of isolation relates to negative connotations of loneliness and separation), which due to its widespread use seems to be a general accepted expression within the organization’s discourse, to define the populations which have not had any contact with the mass society and must be preserved. “*Isolated*” is also used in the Spanish text (“*aislados*”), and probably is the parallel term to the specific and politically balanced “**uncontacted**” English adjective of the NGO’s discourse (8 times in SI, one of which is the very first word of its title, and reported 3 times in R, 5 in G). Moreover, FUNAI’s use of “*isolados*” instead of a Portuguese equivalent for “*uncontacted*” seems to also underline the category of seclusion and inaccessibility, that the majority of the other texts seems to convey through their use of “*isolated*” (3 times in R, once in SI, four times in EP, and once in LR).

Other adjectives belonging to this category are “**remote**”, emphasized in G’s title, and used once in T; “**«lost»**” between inverted commas, used twice and with a critical intention towards Western-centred standpoints in R, in a direct quotation by the president of The Heinz Center in Washington (“*Rather than being ‘lost’, they have likely had plenty of contact with other indigenous groups over the years*”). Also, the underlying processes behind the adjective “lost” is “someone loses a possession”, quite as “uncontacted” implies “someone has contact with someone else”, and “isolated” implicates “from someone else”. This suggests that the agent of the material process of losing is the ‘civilised world’, making the original peoples a possession, while the two agencies of contact and isolation, also material processes, involve two sides of human identities, although there is a similar qualitative opposition between a centre and a periphery of the discourse.

Moreover, the concept of “**unknown**”, similar to “*uncontacted*” and “*isolated*” but regarding a mental process (to know) instead of material actions, is used once in T, in R, in G and in EP (“*until now unknown, and on whose whereabouts there had never been news*”), and implicates an agent (“people unknown to someone”, “with no visibility for someone”) who is again the discursive centre, the globalized world. A similar idea is expressed by FUNAI with the expression “*of still **undefined** ethnicity*”, a standpoint involving another mental process, “someone defining someone/something else”, that can imply a scientific classification of human cultures perceived as theoretical abstractions more than real existing subjects. Also G reports this idea (“*It is not known to which tribe they belonged, Funai said.*” G).

In addition, the “*previously **unfound***” expression, implying an act of “discovery” by another person/culture (see next paragraph) is used once in R, and the similar “**new**” adjective, echoing the Spanish Golden Age’s “New World” (new for one standpoint only), is used three times in EP, one of which is in its title. The adjective “**untouched**” (“*untouched by the outside world*”) is only found once in G. In LR, the “uncontacted” category is used with a more evident idea of separation between “civilization” and “nature”, and the agency of the contact is also expressed: “*tribe of people never contacted **by the industrialized man***” and “*people still never contacted **by the industrialized society***”. The “finder”, the “toucher”, and the “contacter” agents are again the centre of the discourse, and coincide with “*the outside world*”, “*the industrialized man*”. Interestingly, the “*outside world*” can be analyzed as a container metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), in which the original peoples are portrayed inside their container - the closed, shady forest -, separated from the positive, open, bright “outside”. This also implies that neither the people nor the forest (content and container) are part of reality, the “outside world”, but have to be opened and released into it, implicating a “nature” (people and forest) vs “civilization” (the outside world) opposition. Besides, the “industrialised man” expression also suggests a contrast: the term “man”, that should involve the whole species, implies a separation between different types of mankind, as it is combined with the XIX century concept of “industrialization”, adding a specific connotation to mankind’s identity (either belonging to a “**tribe**”, or to “**society**”), and oversimplifying the “industrialised” vs “unindustrialised” polarity. Generally, these semantic strategies are repeating a categorization of the non-globalized original populations, that forces them into an exclusive “other” (“us” vs “them”) category.

Another remarkable feature regarding the discourse on the encountered human presence is the men and women’s physical descriptions, based on the photographs that are published together with all the texts. FUNAI writes that the “*warriors have a **strong and good appearance***”: the positioning of the noun “warriors” along with the “strong” and “good” adjectives stresses the idea of independent and fierce individuals, who look good and healthy in their “environment”. This type of description, only found in the FUNAI text, clearly implies that their isolation is a positive trait that must be preserved, an idea shared by the international governmental and non-governmental organizations’ discourse.

For what concerns their aesthetic appearance, it is worthy to report what the first European who saw them wrote about his earliest sightings. In one of his only two remaining letters on his first travel to the Indies, the Letter to the Royal treasurer Luís de Santángel, Columbus wrote (Zunino, 2008) that

*“All the people on this island and all the others ... go naked, men and women alike, just as their mothers bear them, although some women **cover themselves in one place** with a leaf from a plant or a **cotton garment** which they make for the purpose”.*

Quite similarly, EP makes a reference to the people’s dressing habits writing of a “*group of more than 10 indios, dressed **only** with **loincloths***” (“*taparrabos*”). The Spanish noun, which literally means “tail” as well as “penis” (“*rabo*”), and “cover” (“*tapar*”), reiterates the idea of nakedness as a



more natural, less civilized habit, and Columbus' Catholic need to underline or even possibly invent that at least they are covered, both men and women, "*in one place*".

Interestingly, neither FUNAI nor Survival International describe the original people's appearance, that on the other hand is mentioned with detail in all the other texts, apart from EP. T's text starts with "**Red-painted Indians**", and the article reports of "*two indigenous men in red trousers*" and "*a third, far darker man... a white cloth tied around his waist.*" (similar to Columbus' "*cotton garment*"), of a "*woman...with a baby in her arms*", and that "*Some of the Indians appear to be wearing headdresses*". Moreover, G describes "*tribesmen, painted red from head to toe*", and LR writes of "*some young men completely painted in red*". Remarkably, there is at least one man painted in blue clearly visible in the photographs who is never mentioned, some other people are not painted at all, and the people's painting is obviously, but unreported, a purposeful cultural practice. In fact, only G reports that

*"It is understood that when the plane first overflew the village, the people scattered into the forest. When it returned a few hours later they had painted themselves red and fired arrows into the sky."* (see "The actions" paragraph).

Furthermore, LR again produces the most sensationalist description of all, basing its descriptive and ideological evaluation on the people's external appearance and colours, starting from the title's use of the "**tribe of the red men**" expression. This definition is a reminder of the verbal and visual stereotypes used in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century 'wild wild West' imagery, which is now still more present in the general discourse than, for instance, the parallel archetype of the African-American former slaves in the US Southern states, and the related words concerning racial discrimination which are now generally banned.

The fact that some of the individuals shown in the images have their bodies painted in red and blue only confirms the fact that a cultural-ritual specificity (comparable for example to wearing a suit and a tie around the neck, or a pink Mohican and some piercings among the various "urban tribes") is still used as a shallow metonymy, and becomes the only macro-categorizing aspect, purposely used to cause astonishment in the reader with a classic "infotainment" strategy. In 1493, Columbus wrote of the astonishment ("*maravilla*") that the Indies and the "indios" had produced in him, a sense of wonder that he also wishes to provoke in his readers. Additionally, he also used the colour category in his description of the "indios" he met, writing that "*...they are all people of very beautiful appearance and are not black as in Guinea but have long flowing hair...*" (LS).

Ultimately, a sort of ideological scale with different degrees of "civilization" can be created after this initial analysis, going from the "*remote*", to the "*isolated*", "*ethnically undefined*", "*uncontacted*", "*unknown*", "*untouched*", "*unfound*" and "*new*" human presence. The encountered people are first of all described as belonging to three macro-categories, from the more neutral grade of "*community-group-people/peoples*", to the very old-fashioned "*indio-indigenous-Indian*", to the equally passé "*tribe*".

## The ecology

It is now important to investigate another fundamental part of the discourse, its ecological aspects, or the different descriptions of the relationship between the human presence and its "natural surroundings". First of all, FUNAI writes that its mission's aim is "*vigilance and protection of the isolated indios and the lands they inhabit*", therefore stressing the people's and the forest's interdependency for their mutual life and survival. The verb "*inhabit*" underlines the magnitude of recognizing that these populations "*inhabit*" their lands, and are thus entitled to have their identity and possessions protected by the law, within the international ecological and ethno-biodiversity

conservation schemes and also like any other inhabitant of a territory. Also, in the other land description that FUNAI reports, its discourse again underlines the idea of the original people's "possession" of their "space", as it has also been already "cleared" and built on, and therefore anthropized: "*the group lives in six malocas, and possesses ["possuem"] a large area of cleared space*". The idea of private property rights over a "natural" land, after its rationalizing vegetation's removal, and the following erection of any type of edifice on it, alludes to the Roman-rooted *ius*, and its cultural definition of *dominium* and *proprietas* through the right of squatting and building on lands as *res nullius primis occupantis*, as well as to the Christian ideology of *dominium* as man's power of submitting nature to his necessity. Therefore, FUNAI's discourse appears to emphasize the original people's legitimate right over their lands through the application of this jurisprudential principle. FUNAI's purpose is to try and anticipate the outside world's "acts of aggression" (Chomsky et al., 1999), that in the name of a corporation or for settlement plans can have similar militarized cultural rituals and conventions to those used by Columbus in 1492:

*"I have taken possession ... and I have made a fortress, the building of which should by now be finished and I have left there sufficient men for the purpose, together with arms and artillery and supplies for more than a year..."*

Columbus also used the general XV century legal formula of appropriation, in both his 1493 letters' incipits, writing:

*"I found there very many islands inhabited by people without number, and I have taken possession of them all on behalf of Their Highnesses by proclamation and by unfurling the royal standard, and I was not contradicted."*

By overturning Columbus' discourse, and using these long-established Western principles in favour of the unprotected original peoples', FUNAI tries to provide them with a sort of official legal voice, in order to contradict land, resources and cultural appropriation by others.

Moreover, FUNAI's specific noun "*malocas*", a Brazilian term for the long communal houses of the forest regions' extended original families, are described as "*thatched roof huts*", and "*communal houses*" (a good translation for "*malocas*" -G), "*tent-shaped dwellings*"<sup>9</sup>, and "*their huts*" (T), "*their huts*" ("*cabañas*", EP), "*big huts*" ("*grosse capanne*", LR), a "*village*" (once in G), and a "*camp*" ("*accampamento*") described as "*permanently lived-in*" (LR).

Furthermore, the people's location within the global geo-ideological map is also described in different terms in the texts. In the FUNAI article, the "*isolated indios*" are quite specifically reported to be "*on the left bank of the Envira river, in Acre* [one of the Brazilian federal states], *close to the border with Perú*", and "*other malocas*" are reported to be situated "*near the bayou areas of the rainforest* [the Brazilian specific term "*igarapés*"] *on the right bank of the Envira river*". FUNAI's discourse also specifies that the flights were made

*"in the Indigenous Lands of Alto Tarauacá and Kampa and Isolados of the Envira river, that are already marked and catalogued, and in the Indigenous Land Riozinho do Alto Envira, which is under regularization process."*

SI locates them "*near the Brazil-Peru border... in Brazil's Acre state*", R in "*The Brazil-Peru border area*", and "*in Acre state near the Brazil-Peru border*", G "*not far from the border with Peru...in an area known as Terra Indigena Kampa e Isolados do Envira*", T "*in Acre State, near the country's border with Peru*", EP "*close to the border between Brazil and Peru...in the Amazon forest in the Brazilian territory near Peru*", and LR "*in the Western Amazon, near the border between Brazil and Peru*".

<sup>9</sup> The thatched roofs do not apparently seem to look like either "Indians" or modern tents in any of the images.

All of the texts seem to use once some geographical directions to locate the area of the world where the events took place, but the referential key words are generally “*Amazon*” and “*forest*”. The Amazon and forest terms are generally used in the space location expressions, almost as a double narrative metaphor. Historically, the name “Amazon” comes from the Greek mythology, and was probably given to some parts of what are now the Amazon basin regions by Francisco de Orellana’s 1542 expedition, when the Spanish conquistador envisioned to be fighting against armed female warriors, similar to the legendary virgins. Orellana’s Amazons could have possibly been actual men with long hair, just as in Columbus’ descriptions there is an island where there are only women who

*“do not behave like women but carry bows and cane arrows like those I have already described, and they arm and protect themselves with plates of copper, of which they have a great deal”* (LM), and another island where the people *“wear their hair long like women”* (LM).

In FUNAI’s geographical discourse, the “*groups of isolated indios*” are “*localized in the states of the **Legal Amazon**...*” (Brazil’s largest inter-federal region), also specifying that

*“six Fronts of Ethno-Environmental Protection exist in the **Legal Amazon**, situated in the states of Acre, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia, regions where the major number of references on indios without contact exists...in an area of approximately fifteen million hectares”*.

It is worthy to notice that apart from these accurate “*Legal Amazon*” and “*the state of Amazonas*” references, in the FUNAI report there are no mentions of the word “forest”, and that in SI there is only one mention of “*the Amazon rainforest*”.

On the other hand, the historical discourse on the “Amazon” can often be used as a catch, and with a certain vagueness, to evoke an indefinite and vast “natural”, “wild” area. In many expressions used by the other texts, and in several titles (R, T, G, EP, LR), the “Amazon” is used as trigger words similar to “forest”, alternatively combined with “jungle”, “basin”, “Western”, and often to specify “tribe”. “Jungle” is an ecological and biogeographical term derived from Hindi used to distinctively indicate the Indian tropical woodlands, and it is often inappropriately applied to non-Indian forests, just as the American “bison” is called “buffalo”, that in fact indicates two different species of African, Asian and European bovids. “Amazon” is found 4 times in R, to define “tribe”, “Indians”, an “expert” quoted in the text, and another “nomadic” tribe; as “*Amazon Indian tribe*”, “*Amazon jungle tribe*” (T), “*Amazon basin tribe*”, “*the Amazon jungle*”, “*in the Western Amazon*” (G), specifying with a sustainable discursive addition that “*on the Peruvian side of the border... The area is regularly full of smoke from the burning of recently-logged areas*” (G); in EP, “*the Amazon*” (twice) and “*the forest [“selva”] of the Amazon*” (once); “*in the Western Amazon*”, and “*a protected area from the ethnical and environmental standpoints*” (LR). Also, the location of the people’s forested area is described with specifications as “*dense jungle*” (T), “*deep in the Amazon*” (R, G), and “*in one of the remotest parts of the Amazon*” (SI). The use of the adjectives “dense”, “deep” and the superlative of “remote” convey an idea of chaos and obscurity, and reflect a discursive centre vs periphery polarization, similar to the previously analyzed agency issues regarding the “isolated” and “uncontacted” concepts: the forest is described as inaccessible and distant from the point of view of the people who don’t live in it, the “outside world”. The Amazon forest is generally utilized as mythical presence in the discourses, one of the *topoi* that help creating a sort of narrative and consensual metaphorical space. This sort of “literary Amazon”, that was first created by the sixteenth and seventeenth century explorers’, colonizers’ and friars’ narrations, still retains many traditional tales’ memories about the relationship between the “civilized hero”, and the

either positive or negative forest character, that greatly developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century Latin American novel, in the so-called “*books of the forest*” (“*libros de la selva*”).

Moreover, there is one use of the “Amazon forest” concept that is noticeable among the others. In LR’s title the concept of the forest’s remoteness, and distance in space and time, is quite dramatically stressed, literally translated as

“*In the heart of the Amazon, voilà [“ecco”] the red men*”.

The use of the adverb “*in*” (“*nel*”) instead of the grammatically correct “*from*” (“*da*”) does not give the “*red men*” any agency, portraying them as suddenly appearing on the scene, maybe even helped by the immediate display of their photographs in the media (“*ecco*”, of a very colloquial register, indicates the act of uncovering, showing, when a plate of food is presented on a table), from an entrenched and primordial core of the forest (the very heart of it).

## The actions

In all the analyzed texts, there are also quite striking differences of point of view in the way the sources report the actions that happened during the flight. For what concerns the expedition’s agency, FUNAI reports its own actions with the expressions “*FUNAI photographed*” and “*collected images*”, during the “*flights that were realized*” with the explicit aim of “*confirm[ing] the presence of diverse isolated peoples...*”. FUNAI also specifies that “*the work was coordinated by FUNAI, to collect data of localization, size of the malocas and estimate of the population growth*”, after another “*diagnostic elaborated by CGII [“General Coordination of the Isolated Indios”] in 2006...*”. The discourse is in this context quite balanced and ideologically neutral, trying to use a sort of scientific and almost bureaucratic narration. The object of FUNAI’s “*flight*” and “*work*” is “*to confirm the presence*” of “*diverse isolated peoples that [they] have been accompanying since 20 years ago*”, and its “*diagnostic*” “*results in the identification of the group’s existence*”. Regarding the purpose of FUNAI’s voluntary flight, which is really a first contact between the globalized and the forest worlds, it also adds that the general situation “*requires from FUNAI intensive actions to contain invasions, and also to allow a total autonomy of the isolated indigenous peoples*”; they are also specified as “*actions of localization, protection, surveillance and legalization*”.

R writes that the “*sightings of such tribes are not uncommon, occurring once every few years in the Brazil-Peru border area where there are estimated to be more than 50 out of the total global number of 100 uncontacted tribes*”, and also mentions that some “*ecologists looking for illegal loggers in Peru spotted...a tribe*”, using a discourse on the visual aspects of the contact that is similar to FUNAI’s, and is also used by the other texts. In fact, SI writes of “*uncontacted tribe have been spotted and photographed from the air*”, and that “*the photos were taken during several flights*”; it also reports FUNAI’s expedition member José Carlos Meirelles’ direct words that explain the actions’ purpose: “*«We did the overflight to show their houses, to show they are there, to show they exist», tribes expert ... «This is very important because there are some who doubt their existence.»*”.

T’s title reads “*Helicopter photos represent first contact*” (possibly mistaking the plane for a helicopter), and G opens with “*Aerial images prove existence*”, therefore reporting FUNAI’s purpose of “*localization*” of the groups, which has anyway lead to the dreaded “*first contact*”. G also writes that “*members of the tribe... are seen*”, “*the pictures show*”, “*the images reveal*”, and as it has been mentioned above, that “*it is understood that when the plane first overflew the village, the people scattered into the forest...*” This intentional agency focus on the bi-directional action of



“seeing”, whose descriptive point of view can be perceived as more neutral and politically correct, is obtained through a selection of verbs and nouns representing visual actions such as “photograph” and “collect images”, and with the explicit mention of the contact’s conservation purposes.

However, other verbs are also used, which portray a different ideological frame, another reminder of 500 years old discourses that are sometimes still dragged on by contemporary social voices. After more than sixty years of post-colonial cross-cultural philosophical, historical and socio-anthropological debates, and specially after the 1970s-onwards diffusion of socio-ecological sustainable perspectives, it is quite uncommon to find the use of unbalanced and heavily colonial terms like “discovery”. Even a commonly used online source like the interactive *Wikipedia* website dedicates at least one paragraph of its voice “discovery of America” to its terminological debate in its Spanish version - its English and Italian pages are under the label “*Age of discovery*” and “*European colonization of the Americas*”. However, R uses once the expression “*a ...tribe was discovered*”, T writes once of “*Brazilian officials [who] discovered the tribesmen*”, and the Spanish and Italian discourses present a heavier use of this point of view. EP’s title writes “*Discovered a new tribe...*”, and the same expression is used once in its text, and once in LR. EP and LR display a very similar discourse as they both also report the abstract term “*finding*” (“*hallazgo*” and “*ritrovamento*”), part of the “discovery” ideology. In EP, the “*hallazgo*” “*has been possible thanks to a photograph taken from the air by an expedition that was overflying the area*”, whereas in LR the “*ritrovamento*” “*was brought to light by the Brazilian governmental foundation FUNAI.*”

Nevertheless, since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the five hundred years old discourse on the celebrative “discovery” and “finding” of America and of its populations by Europe has been challenged by numerous inter-cultural post-colonial and modern studies. It is nowadays generally almost common sense to prefer a more politically correct use of less biased expressions, such as “encounter”, “arrival” (of Columbus, the Spanish, the Europeans), “collision”, or “creation” and “invention”, as Edmundo O’ Gorman (1961), Leopoldo Zea (1970), Arturo Andrés Roig (1991), Edgar Montiel (2005) and others have suggested, not to forget the great violence, death and destruction it caused.

On the other hand, as regards the original people’s agency, there is a descriptive part, common to the majority of the articles, that describes their usual activity as a small socio-cultural group. In the texts’ descriptions of the houses (see previous paragraph), the people are variously illustrated in relation with the forest area and its human manipulation: FUNAI’s “*large area of cleared space*” that the group “*possesses*”, becomes “*communal houses in a small clearing in the forest*” (G), “*tent-shaped dwellings that line the small clearing*” and the men are “*standing in a tiny clearing outside their huts*” (T). In LR, there is the longest narration of their living space and an insistence of the people’s “*construction*”, “*activity*” and “*work*” involving forest products: “*big huts constructed in an area of the forest, clean of plants...The camp, made of some huts obtained in a clearing of forest emptied of trees. The camp seems permanently lived-in, seen the activity that there is around it. Some men, for example, are standing near a plant that has recently been taken there to be worked on...*”. The latter sentence describes the original people during one of their usual activities, identifying their degree of technological knowledge, that again is related to the manipulation of natural resources (a plant). Also, the majority of the analyzed texts significantly uses similar expressions that emphasize the fact that the people’s living space has been “*cleared*” from vegetation. This again implicitly categorizes the group as not totally “natural” (as opposed to “civilized”), as they are seen as having rationalized the forest where they inhabit, and thus creating a “legitimate” socio-cultural space –that from a European standpoint is a positive trait.

In addition, for what concerns the original people’s reaction to the aerial and visual contact, FUNAI’s exclusive use of the expression “*photographed warriors*” (see page 3) may also wish to underline the peoples’ active role in this bi-directional contact action. “*Warrior*” seems to emphasize the group’s understanding of their potentially dangerous situation, and of their explicable reaction carried out by ritually painting themselves with “war colours”, and symbolically attacking the plane, therefore becoming “warriors”. It seems that FUNAI wishes to use a metaphor through

which conveying the idea that these people are really perfectly aware of what the threat is, of the fact that this is indeed a war for survival, and that they are legitimately reacting to an invasive attack on their land. Therefore, FUNAI's unique use of the term "warrior" for the group's identification counterbalances the above analyzed LR's opposite discourse on the tribal "red Indians".

The reaction of the people to the plane's expedition is also described in other sources. In parallel, EP reports that

*"in the images, a group of a little more than 10 indios...armed with bows, hurls and arrows are looking at the sky...In some of the images it can even be seen how members of the tribe that have got out of their huts aim at the expedition's flying apparatus".*

In LR,

*"In the Foundation's report can be literally read that people have been photographed from above...In reality, in an image can be seen young men throwing arrows with big bows towards the plane, while others are watching."*

R reports of "dramatic photographs" of "the bow-and-arrow wielding Indians". R also quotes one of FUNAI's expedition members' words, with an inverted perspective focusing the discourse on the arrows' target, reporting that

*"they should be left alone as much as possible. «While we are getting arrows in the face, it's fine», he told Brazil's Globo newspaper. «The day that they are well-behaved, they are finished.»"*

R also writes that the people

*"brandished bows and arrows as they were photographed from a passing helicopter. Two indigenous men..., their bows aloft, while a third, .. man stands watching", and that "In another photo, around a dozen Indians stand outside their huts, also preparing to fire arrows..."*

Moreover, G describes that

*"the pictures show tribesmen, ..., preparing to defend themselves with longbows against the aircraft carrying out the photography"*

It is also again worthy of note that only G reports that

*"It is understood that when the plane first overflew the village, the people scattered into the forest. When it returned a few hours later they had painted themselves red and fired arrows into the sky."*

The use of some verbs continues the war metaphor, promoting an idea of irremediable cultural and physical clash, where the original people are more ("brandished", "preparing to fire") or less ("preparing to defend themselves") aggressive at the expedition shooting, with cameras.

The first European discourse on the "Indians", written by Columbus, is often full of contrasting ideas, as he also wished to secure future royal funding for new expeditions. Regarding the "Indians'" actions at his arrival, the Italian sailor reports that they

*“...have no iron or steel or weapons, nor are they that way inclined, not because they are not well built and of fine bearing, but because they are **amazingly timid**. They have no other weapons than those made from canes cut when they are in seed, to the ends of which they fix a sharp stick; and they dare not use them”* (LSantangel).

He also underlines that there were *“small settlements with whose inhabitants I could not speak because **they all immediately fled**”*, and that *“as soon as they see the men coming **they run off, parents not even waiting for children**, and not because any harm has been done to any of them...”*. However, Columbus also writes, with probable self-sponsoring purposes, that

*“**they believed very firmly that I and these ships and crew came from heaven** and in this belief they received me everywhere, once they had overcome their fear”*.

In his other 1493 official letter, to the Spanish Monarchs, he also notes that

*“whenever we approach any town, the men and women and children run from house to house crying: «**Come and see the people from heaven**» In this way **they all flocked in**, men and women alike, great and small, once they were confident about us; none were left behind, and **they all brought something to eat and drink, which they gave with marvellous affection.**”*

## **A discovery of forest tribes, or a sighting of endangered groups? Folkloric portraits and ethical dilemmas**

After this first analysis on contemporary mass communication on living Amazonian original populations, two main discourses can be traced, that can be summarized in two macro-categories.

The first is a more neutral and anthropologically-specific communication, whose discourse promotes more “eco-friendly” ideas and actions towards the original people, their lands and the planet’s ecosystem. Nevertheless, the FUNAI text, and in a less extent also of SI, R, and G, in parallel with terms like “group” and “community” still use the term “tribe”, therefore promoting the exclusive “us” vs “them” opposition, and showing a less deep ecological frame than what they state.

Similarly, the “uncontacted” and “isolated” key words go along with a parallel use of “unknown” and “unfound” concepts, and their quite precise geographical location of the action is parallel to a more vague use of the “forest” and “jungle” terms, and of the related novelesque “deep” and “remote” adjectives. This first group of sources (FUNAI SI, R and G) is also quite similar in their descriptions of the different agency movements, all showing a preference for a selection of expressions that try to include the Indios’ existence in spite of the visual documents. All these texts use terms like “photographs” and “images” and verbs like “represent”, “show”, “reveal”, “prove the existence”; the “members of the tribe” are also “seen”, “spotted”, “photographed”; and the media world’s agency, explicitly recognized as the “first aerial contact” for legitimate conservation purposes, is also defined as a “sighting”, therefore implying a visual process that is less invasive than a “finding” or a “discovery”.

In parallel, a second macro-category can be drawn, represented by T, EP and LR’s discourses. In these sources, other types of expressions are used, with a repetition of more classic Western ideologies that shows a more superficial “greenwash”, or the eco-friendly green make-up of their linguistics and discourse.

These texts’ selection of terms is somewhat more subjective, and for various reasons, such as a more “infotainment”-centred and sensationalist communication. It can also be due to different contextual socio-political situations, which are possibly less sensitive and inclusive to these specifically Latin American, Asian and African issues, for example compared to contemporary

Brazilian, or the majority of the English-speaking, “greener” mass-communication. For what concerns this second group’s discourse on people, its strong use of nouns like “*indígena*”, “*indio*”, “*Indiano*”, a heavy presence of the mass term “*tribe*” and of specifications such as “*unknown*”, and particularly as “*new*” (in the Spanish EP, still focusing on the XVI century concept), illustrate more imprecise and vague semantic and metaphorical categories. Moreover, T, EP and LR also show a less accurate discourse in their more novelesque use of the “*forest*”, “*jungle*”, and “*Amazon*” related terms and expressions, as well as of descriptions like “*Red-painted Indians*” or “*some young men completely painted in red*”, and distinctive “*tribe of the red men*” and “*in the heart of the Amazon voilà...*” Italian expressions.

Nevertheless, this macro-categorization is not always so obvious. For example, the use of the five hundred years old “*discovery*” term and concept, that is used in T and more heavily in both EP and LR, is also present in G. On the other hand, T’s title uses the concept that the “*photos represent first contact*”, therefore selecting a more neutral expression for its eye-catching summary. T also expands this concept in the second half of its article, where it describes the populations’ risks of contact with the outer world and their right of protection inside their “*tribal lands*”. Moreover, some ethno-ecological conservation concerns, as well as direct quotations by SI and FUNAI members, are also found in both EP and LR, in spite of their selection of more unbalanced terms.

Also, in the second half of their texts, all the sources mention the ethical impasse that is usually raised by the first contact and its images, whenever non-urban original ethno-linguistic groups and their basic rights are involved. Ethical issues are generally still much less reported, and also easier to dismiss, when it is a matter of “non human” life, and the animal, and above all the vegetal existence is involved. On this respect, FUNAI and SI position is that a contact is inevitable, but also that their internationally released images and news on the isolated groups will give them a chance of survival. Regarding the other texts, R underlines the “*contact dilemma*” that the “*sighting raises*”, and that Western society still has to tackle, as well as the original peoples’ “*precariousness*” and “*dangers they face from the contact with outsiders*”. The linguistic device generally used by the secondary sources to mention these problems is to report quotations from the FUNAI and Survival International members, in their texts’ final paragraphs of different extensions. Therefore, all the secondary sources seem to open their discourses to some deeper degree of analysis, but they also reproduce parts of their sources’ ideas.

Member of the FUNAI expedition José Carlos dos Santos Meirelles, and SI director Stephen Corry, are the most reported outsiders’ and specialists’ voices. In SI, T and G, Meirelles’ quoted words refer FUNAI’s conservationist purpose and justification. FUNAI believes that groups’ sightings and visibility must be sought to grant a proof of existence, and consequently a sort of identity card against their anonymity, and probable unreported destruction:

*“We did the overflight to show their houses, to show they are there, to show they exist,” ...  
“This is very important because there are some who doubt their existence.”<sup>10</sup>*

In LR, Jose Carlos Mierelles [sic] is quoted, in order to provide the readers with general information on the groups:

*“In the area where the tribe has been seen there are at least 4 different groups of people that are completely isolated from the rest of the world, of whom we have been having knowledge since at least 20 years.”*

Other words by Meirelles, reported in T, G and EP, display an ironic and opposite use of the “we/civilization/rational”vs “they/nature/irrational” stereotypical separation:

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<sup>10</sup> See for example “*Company lawyers deny existence of uncontacted tribes*”, 3 July 2008, SI - <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3416>.



*"What is happening in this region is a **monumental crime** against the natural world, the tribes, the fauna, and is further testimony to the complete **irrationality** with which **we, the 'civilised' ones**, treat the world."*

This statement apparently shows a deeper ecological perspective, in which the “crime against humanity” expression, generally used by the civil rights movements’ discourse and semantically linked to ideological “mass-murders” and “war crimes”, is at its highest level (“*monumental*”) and extended to “*the natural world, the tribes and the fauna*” (plants, people and animals together).

Nevertheless, it also repeats the “natural” vs the “civilised” worlds clash, even if ironically – the reported inverted commas -, and its list of the natural world’s components, where “tribes” and “fauna” are linked, seems to underestimate and separate nature and what is natural (“them”), from the power to “*treat the world*” that “we” (still “*the outside world*” and “*the industrialised society*”) have.

In parallel, T and EP also quote SI Stephen Corry, with a discourse that is similar to SI, T and G’s first Meirelles extract, on the need for the group’s visibility, and the “world” ‘s “need” to protect” them and “*their territory*” against their “extinction”:

*“The world needs to wake up to this, and ensure that their territory **is protected** in accordance with international law”... “Otherwise **they will be made extinct.**”*

Interestingly, the use of the term “extinct” implies that they are of a different species from ours, and from man’s, as the extinction concept is generally used regarding species’ disappearance. LR also quotes Corry saying that

*“«Luckily, this last report tells us that populations that are still uncontacted by the industrialized civilization still do exist. The hope is that one part of Amazonia is surviving in spite **of the industrialized man’s interests.**»”*

Corry’s topic is similar to Meirelles’ second quoted subject, but it does not show the same ironic use of the “nature vs civilization” opposition; there is nevertheless a repetition of the “*industrialized*” concept to specify “*civilization*” and “*man*”, that may suggest a qualitative polarization between the “good savage” and the “evil industrial man” cliché in SI’s general discourse.

Finally, in R’s and G’s texts other specialists are also quoted, to expand the newspapers’ discourse on these ethical issues: a member of multinational-funded US organization (R), a former FUNAI official (R), and two other SI affiliates (R and G). R reports three quotes, one by Thomas Lovejoy, the previously mentioned “*Amazon expert who is president of the Heinz Center in Washington*”, who says

*“«...«I think there is **an ethical question** whether you can in the end keep them from any **contact and I think the answer to that is no**», ... «The right answer is to have the kind of contact and change that the tribes themselves manage the pace of it.»”*

R also quotes Sydney Possuelo, “*a former official with Brazil’s Indian protection agency [FUNAI] who founded its isolated tribes department*” (he is the former FUNAI director), who also uses a rather ironic discourse:

*“«In 508 years of history, out of the thousands of tribes that exist **none have adapted well to society in Brazil**», said Sydney Possuelo,...”*

Just as the ideas of America and both its pre-Hispanic and contemporary original people as “new”, “unfound”, “discovered” reveal their historical pre-conceptions, the idea of the “indigenous peoples” “adaptation” to Brazil’s society hides the general 1980s and 1990s Latin American states policy opposition to the original peoples’ definition as “first nations” (for example used in Canada), in order to avoid their land property rights official recognition. This has also been challenged by the recent turn towards more social and openly democratic policies in several South American countries, such as Paraguay (with the 2008 victory of former Catholic bishop and liberation theologian Fernando Lugo, who speaks fluent Guaraní, the other official language with Spanish), and Bolivia (with the 2006 victory of the former “cocalero” union leader Evo Morales, from the Uru ethnic group, who speaks Aymará – one of the four official languages with Spanish, Quechua and Guaraní -as his first language).

R finally also quotes SI’s affiliate David Hill, who mentions the ethical issue of creating the conditions to allow these groups to make the contact decision by themselves:

*“It’s not about making that decision for them. It’s about making time and space to make that decision themselves.” ... “There is a lot of logging going on over on the Peruvian side,” Hill said. “It’s had all kinds of effects on the groups living there, particularly on the uncontacted groups - it’s led to violent conflicts and deaths.”*

This is similar to what Lovejoy says, but the latter’s discourse focuses on a general and earlier “ethical question” concerning the real general possibility of preventing these groups “from any contact”, to which he immediately answers “no”.

Moreover, G is the only source that quotes a woman’s voice, SI’s Fiona Watson, whose statement reports that:

*“«They must have suffered some sort of **trauma** in the past and must know that contact is not a good thing». ... «All of them face a **common threat**. Their lands are increasingly being encroached upon by **loggers, oil companies and so on**. They are under **threat of violence**. We know of past cases where 50% of the community has been lost within 12 months of initial contact [with the outside world]», she told the BBC’s Today program. She welcomed the Brazilian policy of not contacting groups and attempting to demarcate lands to prevent unrestrained land-grabbing.”*

Among all these quoted specialists, Fiona Watson and David Hill from SI are the most explicit voices when they refer to the “contact dilemma” (R). She refers to the “trauma” these original groups and “their lands” usually suffer as a result of “a common threat”, that are the “loggers, oil companies and so on”. She then repeats the key-word “threat” with the specification “of violence”, therefore explicitly associating the “companies” to the general type of “contact” that the original people are used to, which “is not a good thing”, and is thus implicitly different from FUNAI’s “good” contact actions and ethics. David Hill’s term selection identifies the “logging...on the Peruvian side” as the cause whose effects on the “uncontacted groups” “led to violent conflicts and deaths” of the “uncontacted groups”. It definitely seems that the “contact” term, and therefore the “uncontacted” and “isolated” definition of these original people, is sometimes rather rhetorical, as the logging and mining actions in the Amazon are still going at a faster pace than mass ethno-environmental discourse. The other focus on ethical issues, the visibility and campaigning actions against the original groups’ extinction, seems to be more effective, at least for what concerns the immediate socio-political outcomes of the news.

A recent update on these linguistic, discursive and ethical issues is the controversy that was initiated on the 22 June 2008 by the Observer British Sunday newspaper<sup>11</sup>, associated to the Guardian, on the definitions of “lost”, “undiscovered” and “unknown”, used for the original group

<sup>11</sup> Secret of the 'lost' tribe that wasn't, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/21/amazon>.

by FUNAI and Survival International. The Observer wrote that the “*story...told and sold*” and the pictures released about an “*undiscovered tribe*” by José Carlos Meirelles were in fact a fraud, a campaigning hoax, as “*the tribe's existence has been noted since 1910 and the mission to photograph them was undertaken in order to prove that 'uncontacted' tribes still existed in an area endangered by the menace of the logging industry*”. The Observer also claimed that questions would rise on “*why a decision was made to try to photograph them – a form of contact in itself – in order to make a political point.*” Nevertheless, as it has been hereby previously analyzed, there is no use of the terms or concepts of “*lost*”, “*undiscovered*” or “*unknown*” in SI’s text, that specifically selects the more neutral and correct “*uncontacted*” expression.

The evidence of the international campaign strategy’s effectiveness is already tangible in Peruvian national oil company Petroperu’s and the government’s recent decision of assessing whether to invade some areas of the Amazon where groups have been spotted, that may also reflect on other company’s policies<sup>12</sup>. It is even more ethically understandable after Peruvian president Alan García’s publication of his controversial ideas on how to use the Amazonian region, in October and November 2007, and on the 2 March 2008 on the Peruvian newspaper El Comercio<sup>13</sup>, where he derogatively defines the Peruvian people, and mostly those who live in the Andean, Amazonian and coastal regions, as “*dogs of the market gardener*” (“*perros del hortelano*”, a Peruvian Spanish idiomatic expression), who don’t eat and don’t let others either –for their campaigns and international support -; he also names other people who help these “*dogs*”, the “*anti-miners*” (“*anti-mineros*”), “*pluri-culturalists*” (“*pluriculturalistas*”), “*patrioters*” instead of the usual “*patriots*” (“*patrioteros*”, with the derogative “-ero” suffix), and “*aggressive and street activists*” (“*activistas agresivos y callejeros*”). In these articles, Alan García also wrote that ethno-ecological groups “*created the figure of the wild unconnected native [sic] against oil*”<sup>14</sup>.

On the 24 June 2008, Survival International released a long article-statement, where Stephen Corry explains how “*The Observer article claims to ‘reveal’ that the tribe photographed was neither ‘lost’ nor ‘unknown’. The reality is that neither Survival nor the Brazilian government claimed they were... These Indians are in a reserve expressly set aside for the protection of uncontacted tribes: they were hardly ‘unknown’! A glance at Survival’s publications would also ‘reveal’ that we have been campaigning for the protection of the uncontacted Indians of this region for more than twenty years....*” Corry also writes that “*What is, and remains, true, is that so far as is known these Indians have **no peaceful contact** with outsiders.... This latest controversy reveals more about media attitudes than it does about isolated tribal peoples.... there are in fact many uncontacted tribes around the world – we estimate about 100 – which, whilst not ‘lost’, simply reject contact with the outside world. **Given the massacres and atrocities** so many of them have experienced, it’s a perfectly sensible attitude.*”<sup>15</sup>

These linguistic controversies reveal a deeper and very old polarization of ideological stances, that SI summarizes with the “*peace*” and “*war*” metaphors (“*peaceful contact*” vs “*massacres and atrocities*”), reclaiming its use of “*uncontacted*” and therefore its alternative discourse, as opposed to “*lost*”, “*undiscovered*”, “*unknown*”, “*new*”, etc., that could potentially lead to a further propagation of destructive actions. Nevertheless, the pro-uncontacted original groups organizations still show a rather anthropocentric frame, as the real centre of their discourse is still

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<sup>12</sup> See also Amazon Watch’s website, for example *Amazon Watch letter to Hunt Oil Regarding New Oil Block on Achuar Territory* [http://www.amazonwatch.org/newsroom/view\\_news.php?id=1423](http://www.amazonwatch.org/newsroom/view_news.php?id=1423) (31 July 2007), and *ConocoPhillips Warned Amazon Operations Could Kill Off Isolated Indigenous Communities. Shareholder Meeting Told Houston Oil Major’s Rainforest Plans Would Also Lead to Deforestation and Exacerbate Global Warming*, [http://www.amazonwatch.org/newsroom/view\\_news.php?id=1578](http://www.amazonwatch.org/newsroom/view_news.php?id=1578)

<sup>13</sup> Alan García: *Vender la Amazonía y todo el Perú para no ser ‘perros del hortelano’*, Indymedia Argentina, 4 March 2008, <http://argentina.indymedia.org/news/2008/03/586319.php>

<sup>14</sup> See previous note. Also mentioned by Meirelles in the Observer’s article: “*Alan García declared recently that the isolated Indians were a creation in the imagination of environmentalists and anthropologists –now we have the pictures.*”

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3400>

man, and not man within his ecology, as on the other hand it is for other ethno-ecological organizations, such as American IEN (Indigenous Environmental Network), the Latin American-Indonesian Vía Campesina international peasant movement, or the Global Justice Ecology Project.

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