

GIS

TRACES AND MARKS BEYOND HUMAN

DOI
10.11606/issn.2525-3123
gis.2021.174260

ORCID
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2605-3093>

JAQUELINE GOMES¹

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil,
31270-901 – antro_pos@fafich.ufmg.br


For people living on the shores of Lake Amanã, the creation of a place involves a considerable practical aspect of action on a certain portion of the forest. One should be active, *diligent*, but first of all, a good negotiator. For a young man to start a *roça* (small plantation/small farmland) is required the consent of his parents, relatives or elders. It is, first of all, a sign of maturity, that adult life has come and with it the possibility of forming a family. I speak of this need for negotiation also glimpsing a temporal character. Rarely a piece of land is *raw forest*, like *capoeira*²; there are marks of other people and other times. It is also a negotiation with the past, about what must be told about the marks that can be seen, who are their producers and owners. Part of this negotiation at some point can take place in the cosmopolitical field, when in addition to animals and plants, people meet curupiras, mother of the forest, father of the animals, caboclinho, mapinguari and so many other beings that transit between ontological statutes.

This active dimension of places production, involving the establishment of a *roça* and subsequent implementation of a *sítio*,³ articulates in at least two dimensions: the social life of the communities, which are updated

¹ Article developed during the term of a scholarship granted by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG).

² Translator's note: secondary vegetation mainly composed by grass and scattered bushes

³ The dynamics of cultivation in the region involves a migratory system of farmsteads of short-cycle species aimed at subsistence and small-scale commercialization, and prolonged management of areas called *sítios* (small farmlands) that constitute themselves as agroforestry.



through marriages, births of children, and the rearrangement of alliances and kinship networks. In addition, the past of those places which are often effectively the product of personal journeys, involves the desires and actions of individuals, but it is always limited to a time-specific as well: the times of the old ones and *ancestors*, the rubber boom time, *the bosses*, or even the *reserve time*. The clarity of this relationship between the formation of places and their historical framework was visible to me when I received the invitation to visit the *sítio* of Erinei Tavares known as “Careta”, son of my main hosts in the community Bom Jesus do Baré.

On a Thursday morning, with three days left for my departure and the closure of another stage of the field, I left with Careta and his son Gabriel, of only 4 years, known as Gabigol in allusion to the Flamengo player, a football team that is almost unanimous in the community. Just the three of us in a good canoe, with a *rabeta* (pulp engine) and 10 liters of gasoline. A Colombian smoke, a shotgun and a *terçado* (a type of machete), accompanied us, we also carried a backpack with some gear such as knife, spoons, a pack of stuffed wafer and a cloth diaper to clean the child, a bottle with cold water and our lunch: mandioca flour with fried sausage. In my bag, I carried the camera, my smartphone that fulfilled the function of GPS and a notebook with a pen. It was about 7 o'clock in the morning when we went out, without having a clear objective other than “walking” through the creek, stopping at places that had a name and getting to know them. Despite the fact that in my terms “knowing” would mean a lot more than just two basic elements: geo-reference or “mark a point”. As Careta was referring to and to register the information that I found relevant - such as the plants, if it had been a farmstead, who cleaned the area, if there was a “*chupador*”⁴, or a story or a curiosity about the past. In addition, it was an opportunity to check out the presence of potsherd.

Obviously, every 10 minutes or less, Careta would tell me a new name on both riversides of the creek. There was a gunk, then another trail, or where the people open their gardens and cottages, further ahead a “*sítio*”, on the left, chestnuts and rubber tree roads. How terrible! It would be impossible to stop at all the pieces of land; after all, they were all “places”. How disappointing! Plan a walk to return on the same day, with a child, without much food and the feeling that it would take days to travel just a few kilometers. Everything was going wrong, but I was excited! The creek that had some monotone in its green, so meandering that at every glance deceived me with a hangover, made up of so many possible places

⁴ They are marshy places that in the specialized bibliography relates to the areas that animals seek to obtain minerals. It is hunting points used on the territory, which among the people of Amanã can be called *barreiro*, *chupador* and *canamã*, classified according to the criteria of implantation, seasonality, frequency and diversity of animals.



that I reassessed whether it was even necessary to proceed with that said mapping of significant places.

In fact, mapping them didn't make me know them. My Amanã companions always kindly informed me of this. The trip of little Gabriel made me think about how that child among so many incursions, like the time we've spent on the canoe that makes us look at every shade of green and forms of foliage. He was building his map, not exactly a mental one but a map incorporated through expeditions from an early age and many years of going back and forth.

Of being.

Stopping and taking a shower.

Of making a roast.

Focusing and going for a hunt.

Events like the one narrated by his father, which had occurred a week before our "tour": he and two of his cousins went to São Sebastião river; one of them was not a good hunter. Without enough experience to walk in that creek no longer too full and with many fallen trees, suddenly a broken helix.


They came back 40 km down the creek on the rowing.

The four-hour journey turned into twenty.

A relative time which without the noise of the engine allowed a detailed observation of the nuances and shadows of the banks, the sounds of giant otters and birds, the marks of people and animals.

Already aware at that beginning of the day that it would take a lifetime to understand and know those places, I continued to write down, and especially, to photograph. We stopped at those places that Careta chose as the most interesting, choosing the easiest places to walk and what to talk about them, as well as what he considered relevant to my goals: recording stories and finding "material traces".

The first place visited was the *sítio* of his brother. We did not reach the cassava cultivation, which they had worked the previous year, but on the banks full of traces of giant otters. Therefore, we took advantage of the visibility of the terrain to find some *shards* of pottery. The next stop would be the *sítio* of Careta himself, and paraphrasing him: "*think about a beautiful*




place”. A not very high edge, with a smooth slope leading to a very clean water bank. We are greet by a structure of *paxiúba* and thatched roof of *ubim*, surrounded by diverse palm trees such as *açaí* and *bacaba* (different types of palm tree). This house called *tapiri*, was raise from the ground; it had no walls, only the pillars that are supports for the sleep nets. The only two objects present were a *cooker*⁵ and a jar for water made of clay, probably acquired with the women of the Nova Olinda community. In front of the house facing the creek, Careta was observing the surface of the land looking for fragments. Although he had not found archaeological remains before, he justified to me that looking was important because he did not know if they really did not exist there, as he had never looked, and *had not yet walked to see* those things. We access the farmstead going through a trail between an old capoeira and fruit trees, the clearing invaded by a strong light, implanted at the back of the *tapiri* of the *sítio*, with cassava, yam and banana. It was eye-catching and caused the gradient between the rough forest and the cultivation of the young family.

With each new stop or place sighted, narratives were unleashed on experiences of the most diverse ones. Phenomena such as thunders that opened a clearing in the forest. Unusual creatures like the *janauí* that are attract by the smoke of roasted fish on the banks of the creek, and so the simple act of roasting a fish away from communities (social place by excellence) hung some tension between the prohibition among the elderly and transgression of the younger. The concentration of marajá palms that became device for narratives of sensory experiences, as the story of the disastrous encounter of a man with the owner of the animals, when the hunter became aware he was among prickly palms and quite wounded. Even a specific point on the surface of the creek referred to *a enchant*, whose name Cantagalo indicated that there in the river an enchanted rooster continues to sing. The sisters chestnut trees that give name to the place, whose crowns give clues to the mosaics sewn between the forest and human management, but are only seen through a continuous exercise of observation. Stories such as the death of a former owner of a place that, after buried there, gave its name to Ponta do Felipe, today used as a hunting camp and which refers us to *supernatural visions* experiences.

At the *Ponta do Felipe* there was an ephemeral structure for hunting, and my guide when talking about it smiled in a jocular tone, venturing connections between him and the ancient Indians who might have lived on the lake. Like today’s communities, Careta thinks that the villages should be on the shore of Lake Amanã, the creeks would be the “*streets*” through which they passed to go in the “*forest market*”. His metaphor

5 A ceramic object quite typical of the Middle Solimões region, a kind of mobile “barbecue pit” for baking fish.




evoked approximations of his rural universe with mine from the city, so that I could understand the dynamics that today the inhabitants of Amanã print in the use of their territory. For me, his explanation would meet the archaeological models that we are slowly building according to the identification of settlements and concentrations of useful plants.

On that day, our destination was São Sebastião creek, where the great-grandfather of Careta, a northeastern married to a *Peruvian indigenous* still in the nineteenth century, began to work on the rubber tree boom. The only place we walked for about an hour inside the woods, going through tracks not so marked on the ground. A serpentine course full of thorns, populated by rubber trees, some identified as daughters of others, by *tauaris* that *curupiras* like and *sapopemas* that are abodes of the entity known as the mother of the woods. On the trail, Gabriel followed his father. I, in turn, followed the boy. He thought of his perspective seeing the greatness of the forest, whose rubber trees and brazilian nuts trees made up part of the networks that intertwined the child to his previous generations. In the photograph, the movement through a blur lapse, with the thought that I archaeologist and mother, longing for my children, saw Gabriel's walk. Surely, that day affected me because the ceramic fragments, which we once found in our first stop, were now just a few more traces in the complex tangle of marks that I was being gifted to every place we passed.

In the last twenty years, the research agenda of Amazonian archaeology has reconfigured, focusing less on the exploratory character of the mapping of sites and typologies of material culture, to deepen in intensive regional studies, more holistic and with diversification of analyses on micro and macro traces, with a closer relationship with historical ecology. With this focus shift, archaeologists have been able to make an archaeology without artifacts, but rather about landscapes (Neves 2015, 15). This is an increment with a politically engaged aspect with the defense of the biome, where archaeological information supports the scaling of the human impact on the forest. This aspect makes archaeology an area of knowledge extremely current, socially responsible and concerned with urgent issues that reverberate in the guarantee of rights and the existence of indigenous and traditional peoples, facing deforestation and expansion of the agricultural border.

However, my incursions through the places of Amanã led by diverse people, young and old, leave me two lessons. The first part of a recurring phrase in which these guides told me was “*we do not find more shards because we do not walk around looking for them*”. In other words, the human traces that researchers elect as primary are not fundamental indices for the experience of these people with their world. We can broaden our scope,



to think the stories through the landscapes, but the visible landscape changes would not be unique to humans.

Faced with our archaeological insistence to relate concentrations of useful plants close to archaeological sites to an ancient indigenous heritage, it is extremely common for residents to express themselves in apparent agreement “*it seems even sown*”. But it is mistaken who thinks that these connections are easily made by the people of Amanã. There is such a deep ecological knowledge that chestnut trees are not noted as a result of human management over the years, but are seen and called forest or plantation fields or small farms of *cutia*. The same occurs with the toucan and *açaí* palms, while *tambaquis* spread seeds of rubber trees, *mungubas* and *jauari* palms. Despite this, these plants can be equally attributed to human labor. At the same time that it is a plant of tambaqui, jauari is a sign of old settlements because new specimens can be born after people consume the fish, clean them and discard the seeds that they carried in their belly.

Phrases such as “*it seems even sown*” are so common that can refer us to senses of correspondence between a “native” view and the archaeological one of the forest as a resource. But first I have been thinking what they could indicate, more an equivalence between the beings that populate the worlds and possibilities of entering in relation with each other (Gonçalves 2001, 355), than necessarily a logic that confers “continuities” [between all the quotation marks] of management about the forest or that humanizes the actions of beings in the cosmos.

Here lies the disjunction between our historical goals and traditional or indigenous knowledge. Thus, the second lesson starts from this disjunction. The worlds we research are and have always been populated by many more beings than just humans. Invariably these groups, in the past and present, have always engaged in relation with diverse beings, some cosmological who can be owners and exercise mastery and zeal over certain features and other beings. For the matter seeking human marks as we do is, before everything, an objective determined by a naturalistic ontology.

If before I intended to expand my analysis to landscapes focusing on human marks, in this research path they unfolded also considering *other* marks, with greater interest in the *enchanted* that populate the waters and forests, seen by the people with whom I work.

In this essay, I gathered twelve photographs considering as fragments of that experience, signs and marks of the various beings and times that can connect the places of the Baré creek. I invite those who read to try to recognize in them something other than the apparent uniformity of

TRANSLATION

Diogo Trade
Oliveira Gomes

the forest, even if initially such images can be regarded as simple and little technical. Raise attention to the tones, the shapes of the foliage, the presence of father and son, plants and their growers like fish and rodents, the perspective of human smallness in the face of forest life. It is an exercise in connecting to these places informed by my account, not as a narrative that explains the images, but as a clue to a horizon of forest transformations. A provocation to incite fluid senses such as the waters that are confused with the forest, from the plants of people that are also fish, animals and enchants, the gradients of the plantation fields, small farmlands and raw forest, the movement between these categories like our movement in the canoe and by the rails of the mainland. The landscapes there are nothing close to being monotonous.

REFERENCES

Gonçalves, Marco Antônio. 2001. *O Mundo Inacabado. Ação e Criação em uma Cosmologia Amazônica*. Rio de Janeiro: publisher of UFRJ. 424 pp.

Neves, Eduardo Goes. 2015. *Existe algo que se possa chamar de "arqueologia brasileira"?* *Advanced Studies*, 29 (83), 07-17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-40142015000100002>

ABSTRACT

This essay took place through an incursion to the Igarapé do Baré, a watercourse of black waters that flows into the headwaters of Lake Amanã, which gives name to a Sustainable Development Reserve, in the lower Japurá River, State of Amazonas. The research I have been developing has an ethnographic character and comes from archaeological questions about construction and transformation of places, connecting them to the process of anthropization of the biome. It seeks to understand how contemporary riverside collectives are inserted and relate to the ancient history of Amazon and landscapes where archaeological sites are. The images are like vestiges of my own research path in archaeology as a practice of meaning. These photographs are indices of an expansion of a view- previously directed at human marks about the places – now filled with signs and traces of animals, plants and cosmological beings that populate the waters and forests of Amanã.

KEYWORDS

Archaeology;
Amazon; Riverside
population;
Landscapes;
Traditional
knowledge.

Jaqueline Gomes is an archeologist at the University of São Paulo. Linked to the research group Archeology and Management of the Cultural Heritage of the Amazon (CNPq-Instituto Mamirauá). Since 2010, she has been conducting research on Lake Amanã. In her publications, she seeks to reflect on different forms of relationship that riverside collectives establish with the vestiges of the past. This essay addresses part of the questions Jaqueline has been developing during her current doctoral research. Email: jaquelinegomes06@gmail.com

Use license. This article is licensed under the Creative Commons CC-BY License. With this license you can share, adapt, create for any purpose as long as you assign the work

Received: 09/28/2020

Accepted: 06/10/2020



Photo 1
Title: "To Walk":
Overview of the
"Estirão da Beleza".
Gabigol remains
on the bow of the
canoe in silence.



Photo 2
Title: *"think about a beautiful place".*
Careta in search of Indian shards on the water's banks.

Photo 3
Title: "house of the
sítio".
Structure used
during planting and
management peri-
ods of the Careta's
sítio.





Photo 4
Title: "Roça"/
"Farmstead".
Typical plantation
of cassava suited
for the production
of flour. It has plan-
tations of yam and
bananas.

Photo 5
Title: *"where's the
rail?"*
During a walk in São
Sebastião, Gabriel
and I followed
Careta. While I was
photographing, I
was thinking about
the perspective of
that child.





Photo 6
Title: "Jauari".
Concentration of palm trees enjoyed by tambaqui fishes. Plant that is index of fish dwellings and at the same time can be indicative of old settlements or areas of use by people.

Photo 7
Title: "Two sisters".
Pair of Brazil nut
trees that mark the
place that has var-
ious meanings and
uses. Old rubber
tree placement.





Photo 8
Title: "Smallness".
A Brazil nut tree
"daughter" of other
trees in the place
called Cajubim,
complex of cultiva-
tion areas between
roças, *capoeiras* and
sítios.

Photo 9
Title: "*the caboclo
woke up inside the
marajá*"
Concentration of
prickly palms that
during our incur-
sion it became an
device of narratives
about encounters
of hunters with the
father of the ani-
mals, the curupira
and mother of the
woods.

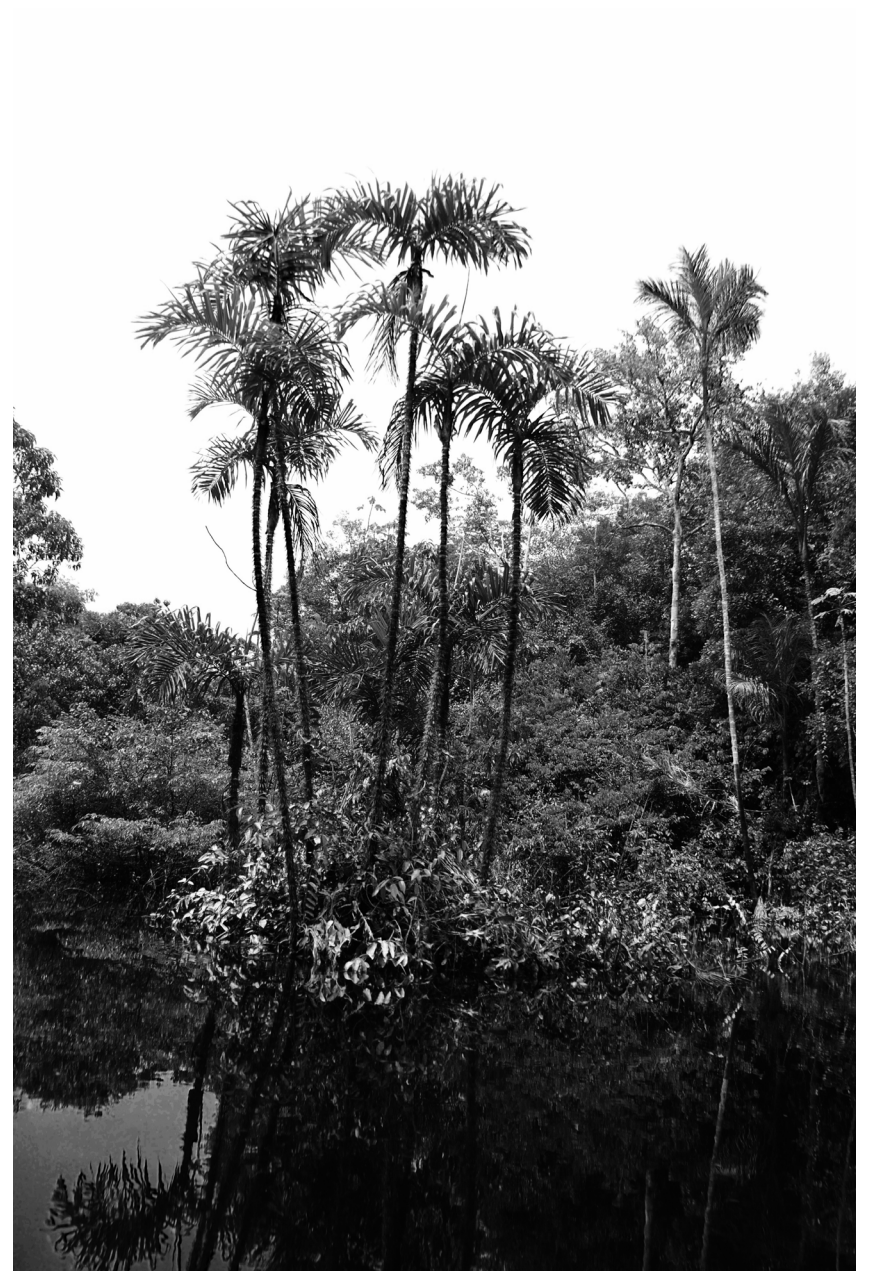




Photo 10
Title: "looks like an
Indigenous thing".
Temporary struc-
ture of hunting
camp in Ponta do
Filipe. Careta jok-
ingly referred that
the hunting camp
was something
common to the
Indians who lived
at the time of the
archaeological sites.



Photo 11:
Title: "rubber tree
milk".
Demonstration of
rubber tree bleed-
ing, so common
*in the time of the
ancients* during the
cycles of rubber
exploration.



Photo 12
Title: "End of the day".
Last stop already returning to the community of Bom Jesus do Baré, area of intense agroforestry management. It was an ancient laying in the early twentieth century.