

ARTIGO

**THE SOCIOCULTURAL FORMATION OF BOA VISTA –
RORAIMA AND THE MACUSHI AND WAPISHANA PEOPLE
IN THE CITY: HISTORICAL PROCESS AND SENSE OF
BELONGING**

Abstract

This article has as main theme the presence of the indigenous peoples Macushi and Wapishana at the Capital of Roraima, Brazil, and it is based on the critical reading of historiography produced from the eighteenth century about the occupation of the State. This historiographical return aims to understand the socio-political relations, conflicts and other factors that underlie the absence of such indigenous peoples in the formation history of the city, and the construction of socio-cultural demands of Macushi and Wapishana residing in the urban area of Boa Vista.

Keywords: Indigenous people; Culture; City.

Resumo

O presente artigo possui como eixo temático a presença das populações indígenas Macuxi e Wapichana na capital de Roraima e está fundamentado na leitura crítica da historiografia produzida sobre a ocupação do território atualmente delimitado como Estado e de seu entorno, a partir do século XVIII. Este recuo visa compreender as relações sociopolíticas, conflitos e demais aspectos que permeiam a ausência dos referidos povos indígenas na história vigente acerca da formação da cidade, assim como na construção de demandas socioculturais dos Macuxi e Wapichana que residem no perímetro urbano de Boa Vista.

Palavras-Chave: Povos indígenas; Cultura; Cidade.

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Introduction

The presence of indigenous peoples in the urban sector is not configured as a recent phenomenon¹. In Boa Vista, for example, there was, at first, two parameters for understanding their presence in the city: the one that we were firstly presented to, or the official version of the territorial occupation of the capital of Roraima and another, less known, rooted in the oral tradition of the Macushi and Wapishana people and that has not had any support in the canonical and military version in books and official documents. However, from the intellectual approval by the indigenous groups, the existing production concerning the socio-historical processes that culminated to the social invisibility to which they are nowadays exposed, so it was marked out an organization which has as a target the Indians, as well as to define claims to the government.

In this perspective, we propose a brief reflective path in the main historiographical sources that this article mentions about, so that we can see the way in which conflicts were generated within the new social scene built from the eighteenth century.

1.1. Indigenous ancestors in the city: between what was said and what was written

It is essential to understand what Macushis and Wapishanas from Boa Vista recognized as territory. Starting from their understandings about territorial occupation, the argument of ancestry is notorious. This understanding is supported by the transmitted reports from one generation to another and, lately, in scientific research within the framework of archeology and anthropology. It is worth noticing that this understanding has gained strength and was more widespread from the land struggles that had their turning point with the approval of the Indigenous Land Raposa Serra do Sol. In the region that comprises Boa Vista, the argument remains and is reaffirmed by the leaders of the Organization of Indigenous from the City (ODIC) and indigenous scholars from the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR).

In this direction, the archaeologist Pedro Mentz Ribeiro (1986) has found, through excavations, urns, lithic, bones, arrowheads, baskets, burials in urns, cave paintings and petro glyphs. The author estimates that such materials dating from

¹ “Master’s thesis on the crop “Cultural Flows and the Peoples of the city: The Macuxi and Wapishana group of Boa Vista,” of my own, presented to the Professional Master’s Program of the Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage in 2012.”

approximately 3,000 to 4,000 years BP² and, based on the historiography, suggests the possibility that the people who inhabited this area during that period were the Macushi, Wapishana and Taulipang peoples. This research was conducted in Roraima in the 1980s, also covering the region comprising the Roraima capital.

Similarly, Oliveira & Souza (2010), through the actions of the Organization of Indigenous in the Town, the *Organização dos Indígenas da Cidade*, and the Project *Kumai Kári*, utilize oral memory in an attempt to rebuild the relationship between the historical background of occupation of the city and the natives that dwelt and lived there. On the same line of thought, Oliveira & Souza (2010) say, based on documents collected through workshops with indigenous groups from Boa Vista, that the city was put up on a named set of huts called *Kumai Kári*,³ where the most skilled prayers were, and, therefore, it attracted other indigenous communities, who traveled in order to find the cure for some diseases. Such reports, however, have no support in official historiography about the region, which is why the organized indigenous from Boa Vista claim the recognition of the presence and participation of the Macushi and Wapishana people in the formation of the city. In this way, the researchers point to the need to revisit the genesis of the town, which relies substantially on huts that were found in the region, originating the old Boa Vista farm.

It is analyzed that with the increase of the indigenous community in Colleges and appropriation of academic knowledge production tools, the Macushi and Wapishana people who live in the urban area have constituted a reinterpretation about the indigenous presence in the city's configuration and thus, revealing the view that it is a recent influx motivated by purely economic purpose, which is a prioritized aspect in academic arguments that take as an approach the theme of indigenous people in the city. Therefore, based on the understanding widespread by the tradition of Macushis and Wapishanas, we can point out that even before the contemporary movements performed by the Indians in the city seeking better living conditions, there already were the presence and movements of these and other native groups.

In this context, it is also necessary that we become aware of what the main historiographical and anthropological references have produced about the Macushi and Wapishana, taking as guidance the contact situation as the major sociopolitical conflicts between those people and the surrounding society.

² T/n.: Before the Present: it is understood that the "present" dates back to 1950 of the twentieth century.

³ T/n.: What the Macushi language means stiff of buritizais (regional tree) and streams. (OLIVEIRA & SOUZA, 2010).

1.1.1. *Macushi and Wapishana origins and trajectories, brief history of contact and cross-border relations*

In the decade of 70s, administrative measures aimed at the regularization of indigenous lands culminated in “uma drástica pulverização do território de ocupação tradicional Macuxi”⁴ (SANTILLI, 1997. P. 53), contemplating “uma parcela diminuta do território tradicional Macuxi”⁵ (*idem*). Once displaced from the traditional occupations and living in the border region, the Macushi people inhabit Brazil (in Roraima), Venezuela and Guyana. Most communities are in Brazilian area in the Rio Branco Valley (SANTILLI, 2001).

Attempts to make the trajectory that the Macushi did towards the establishment in the region comprising Roraima back to a migration process “(...) da bacia do Orinoco, em etapas progressivas, até se fixarem, definitivamente, nas regiões ao norte do Rio Branco”⁶. Some authors affirm these people are from the Caribbean Islands (IM THURN, 1883 *apud* CIDR, 1987. p. 46). There is another version about the Macushi people origins, the mythological one. This is strongly linked to the tradition of this ethnic group, whose narrative talks about the children of the Sun, Makunaima and Insikiran that have shaped the territory traditionally inhabited by this and another people.

From Karib linguistic family, the Macushi, in the late twentieth century were more than 3000 individuals (COUDREAU, 1887 *apud* CIDR, 1987). Currently, they represent the majority of indigenous in Roraima, totaling approximately 20,000 individuals (FUNASA, 2010 *apud* CAMPOS, 2011)⁷. Contrarily to Wapishana, the Macushis are described by the travelers of the eighteenth century as an insubordinate people, insolent, and aloof warriors who did not teach the language to the white people (CIDR, 1987):

Os Macuxis vivenciaram forçosamente um aprendizado das relações sociais constituintes da sociedade nacional brasileira, do modo particularizado como se estabeleceram em Roraima. Foram compungidos a submeter-se à força às regras impiedosas da propriedade privada, e da acumulação de riquezas às expropriação de suas terras. Ainda assim, conseguiram preservar sua língua, seus costumes, sua organização social própria e, sobretudo, a liberdade e a autonomia pessoal como valores fundamentais de sua sociedade. (SANTILLI, 1997, p. 63)⁸

⁴ “A drastic spraying of the territory traditionally occupied by Macushi people.”

⁵ “A small part of the traditional Macushi territory”.

⁶ “(...) The Orinoco basin, in progressive steps, to settle, definitely in the regions North of Rio Branco.”

⁷ “The indigenous population of Roraima is 49,637 (IBGE, 2010).”

⁸ “The Macushis experienced an apprenticeship of the constituent social relations of Brazilian national society,

Thus, it should be stressed that from the 1950s the Macushi language came under intense attack by the non-indigenous population and the government, and then came to be known as “slang” (CIDR, 1987), in an attempt to place the official language over the indigenous language:

“Falar gíria não presta” pode ser considerado o slogan deste ataque que envolveu o governo local, através da Secretaria de Educação. [...] Nas malocas do lavrado, de modo particular, a língua Macuxi encontrou crise, enquanto nas da serra, tendo menos contato com os brancos, foi conseguido manter intacto o seu uso. Hoje, todavia, assistimos um processo de recuperação lingüística, fruto das lutas que esse povo está travando para ser reconhecido o próprio direito de existir como tal. (CIDR, 1987, p.46)⁹.

In this sense, despite the heavy investment by the surrounding society in dismantling the social and cultural Macushi expressions, that ethnicity did not give in to the local pressures and maintained their identity differences across the different varieties that social integration actions have had over the years in Roraima. Though we may see the adoption by the Macushi of alien customs to the indigenous culture, their self-identification as people is important, so that they can keep their otherness in the most diverse media and inter-ethnic spaces, including in the urban area of Boa Vista.

With a considerable population in Boa Vista, Wapishana became massively present in spaces dedicated to the indigenous from the city, sharing different environments with the Macushi. The coexistence of both ethnic groups, however, has not always been peaceful and friendly. Although Wapishana are represented in literature and in the eighteenth and nineteenth century¹⁰ documentation as docile individuals and easy to deal with, the first contacts date back to the mid-eighteenth century, with registered data of disputes with Macushi over territory (CIDR, 1987), during the period in which the Portuguese also settled in tents in the far north of Brazil. In addition to the conflict, over the years, the two ethnic groups eventually established a pleasant relationship and, nowadays, you can find many mixed communities, inhabi-

an individualized way that was settled in Roraima. They were forced to submit to the rules of private property and the accumulation of wealth to the expropriation of their lands. Still, they managed to preserve their language, their customs, their own social organization and, above all, freedom and personal autonomy as fundamental values of their society.”

⁹ “Speaking slang is not worth it” can be considered the slogan of this attack which involved the local government, through the Department of Education. [...] In the huts issued, in particular, the Macushi language got in crisis, while in the mountains, having less contact with the whites, has managed to keep intact its use (“slang”). Today, however, we have witnessed a process of linguistic recovery as a result of the struggles that people are fighting to be recognized. (CIDR, 1987, p.46)”

¹⁰ COUDREAU, 18877 *apud* CIDR 1987.

ted by both peoples. They have also adjoined in Boa Vista, around the sociocultural demands they built as a group, as the experiences obtained in the city are similar with regard to dialogue with the public institutions.

From Arawak linguistic family, in 1887 were accounted for less than 1,000 Wapishana people along the Branco River, a number that becomes even more impressive when added to the fact that the Wapishana had been the most numerous people in the region (CIDR, 1989). Fortunately, today we can see an increase of that population, particularly in Roraima. Currently, there are 7,832 people¹¹ who self-declare Wapishana in the state, excluding those ones that live in the urban area of Boa Vista, as well as in Guyana and Venezuela, where these people are also present.

Ainda dentro da economia Wapixana, é preciso revelar a forte migração de índios da Guiana para o Brasil. Tratam-se, geralmente, de jovens que são hospedados nas malocas, onde oferecem o próprio trabalho em troca da hospedagem: Acontece que, às vezes, são os únicos que trabalham, criando uma forma de exploração interna. Em todo caso, ficar um ou dois anos numa maloca Wapixana no Brasil é, para a maioria desses jovens, uma etapa intermediária de um processo que se conclui em Boa Vista. Na cidade, conseguem fazer documentos e procuram novo emprego, fugindo não só da Guiana, onde a situação hoje é precária, mas também do próprio povo e da própria identidade étnica. Nos últimos anos este fenômeno está incluindo também as moças. Esta migração é diferente no que se refere a famílias inteiras: chegando d Guiana, procuram inserir-se numa maloca Wapixana, onde fixam estavelmente (CIDR, 1987, p.73).¹²

Therefore, Orlando and Silva (2007) say:

Registre-se, ainda, que a migração de índios Wapixana, em escala considerável, da República da Guiana para Roraima, introduz, neste contexto, um outro fator importante para a compreensão sistema. Os índios provenientes da Guiana são originários de diferentes contextos sociais. Há os que vêm de aldeias Wapixana, ou mistas deste índios em convívio com os Makuxi; alguns provêm de casas isoladas, e outros saíram de situações interétnicas em vilas rurais ou em cidades. Aquele país não tem uma política indigenista claramente definida e institucionalizada, mas, na prática, as ações governamentais e da sociedade se orientam em um processo de integração dos índios à sociedade envolvente. (SILVA, 2007, p.66).¹³

¹¹ FUNASA, 2010 *apud* CAMPOS, 2011.

¹² "Still within the Wapishana economy, we need to reveal the strong migration of Guyanese Indians to Brazil. These are usually young people who are staying in huts, where they offer their own work in exchange for hosting: It turns out that sometimes are the only ones working, creating a form of inner exploration. In any case, staying one or two years in a Wapishana hut in Brazil is, for the most of these young people, an intermediate step in a process that is concluded in Boa Vista. In the city, they manage to make documents and seek for new employment, fleeing not only from Guyana, where the situation is precarious, but also the people themselves and their own ethnic identity. In recent years this phenomenon is also including the girls. This migration is different when it comes to whole families: coming from Guyana, seeking to enter into a Wapishana longhouse where they stay permanently (CIDR, 1987, p.73)."

¹³ "It is registered also the Wapishana Indians migration to a considerable extent, from the Republic of Guyana

Regarding the Wapishana presence in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, we observed the delicate situation in which the indigenous people are in this country, since the indigenous policy is recent and is not yet clearly set. According to Stephen Baines (2012), only at the end of 1999 some of the main indigenous rights were recognized in the Constitution of Guyana, such as the protection, conservation and dissemination of languages, cultural heritage and ways of life, which are rights approved by the National Assembly based on the recommendations of the Constitution Reform Commission (CRC).

On Brazilian lands, migration and permanent expulsion of Wapishana from their traditional territories have generated a demand around the demarcation of Indigenous lands, an action that has been presented as full of conflicts in Brazil's indigenous policy, colliding with the interests endorsed by municipal spheres and the state. Thus, despite the State Decree number 779 of May 16, 1906, quoted by some publications¹⁴, which deals with the giving of lands to Wapishana that were in the Rio Branco region to the Maracá island (today it is an ecological station), we observed that such action is more characterized by a political maneuver to ward off the natives from the region of Boa Vista, which grew in a bulky way in that period.

Similarly, for the anthropologist Nadia Farage (1997), the studies produced mainly in the 40s on the Wapishana in Brazilian and Guyanese region, supported by the theory of acculturation, were the basis for the official process of demarcation of Wapishana territory, which is considerably diminished since such demarcations were guided in the degree of "lost" culture. It would not lightly affirm, therefore, that the demarcations were performed in order to broadly favor the landowner, while the indigenous people was restricted to small islands spread over Roraima. This scenario began to change when the Yanomami, Macushi, among others, began to demand the demarcation of indigenous lands in continuous area, as an example indigenous land is Raposa Serra do Sol and Yanomami. Thus, Wapishana, are mostly located nowadays in the northeast of Roraima, in the Serra da Lua region, located between the Branco and Takutu rivers as well as in mixed communities on the Uraricoera, Surumu and Amajari river banks (FARAGE, 1998).

to Roraima, introduces in this context another important factor for an understanding system. Indians from Guyana come from different social contexts. There are those who come from Wapishana villages or mixed this Indians in contact with the Macushi; some come from isolated houses, and others left interethnic situation in rural villages or towns. That country does not have a clearly defined and institutionalized indigenous policy, but in practice, government actions and society are oriented in a process of integration of the Indians into the surrounding society. (SILVA, 2007, p.66)."

¹⁴ CIDR. Índios de Roraima. Boa Vista. Graphics Editor Coronário, 1987. CARNEIRO CUNHA, M, História dos Índios no Brasil. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2006.

Regarding the relationship established between the city of Boa Vista and some Wapishana malocas – their communities – one could observe the commerce activities, where the excess from indigenous production is sent to the city so that it is sold. This practice is still also followed in Macushi communities, facilitated by the existence of roads nearby the communities.

For this reason, we see constant movement of indigenous groups who, due to the trade, remain temporarily in Boa Vista, invariably hosted at other Indians' homes, who have settled their residence in the capital. The results identified in the socio-cultural impacts of the relationship between the community and the city can be best understood from the studies of Orlando Silva (2007) in the Wapishana Community:

[...] há grupos locais que, em seu conjunto, não se sentem inseridos em uma situação de fricção interétnica e se consideram em convergência pacífica e respeitosa no que se refere aos seus interesses sociais e aos do “mundo dos brancos”, com o qual procuram se identificar socialmente cada vez mais. Outros, embora buscando esta identificação, têm consciência da situação de opressão a que estão submetidos e, por isso, buscam reforçar a própria identidade étnica indígena, Wapixána [sic], que é contrastiva em relação ao espectro identitário da sociedade dominante, e assumem esta atitude como uma forma de enfrentar confrontos e os avanços dos dominadores sobre suas sociedades e suas terras (SILVA, 2007, p.60)¹⁵.

Thus, we consider imperative to stress another dimension of cultural form of Wapishana, this time subjective, understanding its uniqueness as a fundamental principle in the continuity of this group as a community. It is the understanding of articulate speech as a repository of reflective capacity, or condition of being a human (FARAGE, 1997). This understanding and the close relationship with orality are aspects that surround the participation of Wapishana in trading and sociability spaces.

Before, however, specifically address the current urban core of Boa Vista, we would like to briefly discuss the waters that bathe the right edge of the capital of Roraima, since the Branco River stands out as the key element in the developments that followed the Portuguese navigations.

¹⁵ “[...] There are local groups, as a whole, do not feel inserted into an interethnic friction situation and consider themselves in peaceful and respectful convergence with regard to their social interests and those of the “white world”, with which they seek to identify increasingly socially. Others, while seeking this identification, are aware of the situation of oppression they face and therefore seek to strengthen its indigenous ethnic identity, Wapishana, which is contrastive in relation to the identity spectrum of mainstream society, and take this attitude as a way to deal with confrontations and advances of the rulers of their societies and their lands (SILVA, 2007, p.60).”

1.2. *The Saint Joaquim's Fort*

The regions of the Branco River banks were the target of Portuguese¹⁶ military advances on the seventeenth century, however, it was in the eighteenth century that the period has extensive knowledge about the history of the contact between whites and Indians, as a result of expeditions undertaken by the Portuguese crown in Amazonian territory, characterized as a military strategy to expel the Dutch, English and Spanish who were in the same region. According to Ribeiro de Sampaio (NOVA DA COSTA *apud* CIDR, 1989, p. 186), the objectives of the Portuguese roads in that region were clear: subjection of Indians to the Portuguese slave trade, as well as acquisition of fisheries and the drugs of the backlands, the *drogas do sertão*¹⁷. However, we can see that the real objectives go further, such as the prevention of possible invasions in the far-northern region of the Amazon (SANTILLI, 2004). It is important to highlight the role of the military geopolitical action at this early stage, since its features notoriously demarcate the social formation of the later city of Boa Vista, sprawling heavily to the present day, being present in the socio-political space of indigenous peoples from Roraima and in conflicts involving the demarcation of Indigenous Lands.

Santilli (2004) claims that the first contacts with the Macushi people dates from this same period, the eighteenth century, during the aforementioned Portuguese military occupation of Rio Branco Valley. Accordingly, they sought to settle the Macushi people in reason of the Saint Joaquim's Fort¹⁸, lifted in 1775, located in the current municipality of Bonfim, about 30 km from Boa Vista.

Similarly, Nadia Farage and Paul Santilli (2006) claim that Wapishana were submitted to the Portuguese settlements in the same time stream, so they were also taken prisoner and subjected to slave labor in the San Joaquin Fort.

Para o vale do rio Branco, pode-se igualmente dizer que, apesar desta primeira fase de escravização e aldeamento no século XVIII, o contato se intensifica com a ocupação fundiária, que se inicia com a chegada de colonos civis na segunda metade do século XIX. Com efeito, a colonização civil, que consolida a economia pecuária da região, inaugura a espoliação de territórios indígenas. A ocupação de terras nesta região fez-se acompanhar de mecanismos de arregimentação da população indígena para as camadas mais baixas da sociedade regional que então se formava. (FARAGE e SANTILLI, 2006, P. 267).¹⁹

¹⁶ CAMPOS, 2011.

¹⁷ T/n: Products obtained by extractive activities in the colonial Brazil period (cocoa, cinnamon, nuts, cloves, pepper etc.)

¹⁸ Today the Fort is in ruins, listed provisionally by IPHAN in 2011.

¹⁹ "For the Branco River valley, one can also say that despite this first phase of slavery in the eighteenth

The indigenous presence in this fortification was primarily due to the use of workforce for the Fort's own construction and maintenance. It was during this same time that the settlements have been intensified as part of the colonization process. It counted on significant number of Indians in five settlements of the region, including the settlement of *Nossa Senhora do Carmo* (Our Lady of Mount Carmel) (CIDR, 1989), which, later, came to be city of Boa Vista.

As we know from other regions' history of contact between indigenous peoples and colonizers, the process of Portuguese incursion on the banks of the Branco River proved to be rather violent. Just because it is a border region, colonizing actions had military-strategic approach, since the intention was to hold the Portuguese in the Amazon area. As a result, they were built in addition to the Saint Joaquim's Fort, boarding schools and churches, spaces that served as the stage for the suspension of indigenous cultural identities, a clear inclusion imposed to the indigenous in the local and national market (PEREIRA, 2010).

1.3. *The evangelizing missions*

Before, however, that the fortification was lifted up, the evangelizing missions were already in full swing. In 1725, Carmelite friars founded various missions, such as the Carmo Mission, later elevated to Freguesia Nossa Senhora do Carmo do Rio Branco and, some time later, the city of Boa Vista²⁰ (CIDR, 2007). The evangelizing missions were also in charge of the Benedictine order and later the Consolata Order, the *Ordem da Consolata* (SANTILLI *apud* BAINES, 2012).

Data provided by the Roraima Diocese Information Centre (CIDR), based on the yearbooks of the Benedictine missionaries who began to work in the region from 1909 until the Rio Branco eighteenth century was inhabited almost entirely by Indians. With the Portuguese groups coming and the consequent use of the regional landscape for grazing, indigenous groups began to provide labor in exchange for small items, clothing, food, tool work, among others.

century, the contact is intensified with the land occupation, which begins with the arrival of civilian settlers in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the civil settlement, which consolidates the livestock economy of the region, inaugurated the plundering of indigenous territories. The occupation of the land in the region was accompanied regimentation mechanisms of the indigenous population into the lower layers of the regional society which then was being formed."

²⁰ "The set of homes from Fazenda Boa Vista was elevated to municipality of Boa Vista do Rio Branco by the State Decree number 49 of 9 of July of 1890 9CIDR, 2007)."

1.4. *The demographic decline*

Other factors should be highlighted as a substantial quantitative reduction of indigenous groups on the riverbanks of the Branco River. The military chronicler Lobo D'Almada, during his trip to northern extremes, stimulated livestock and recommended in their reports that the Indians were "civilized" by the Portuguese, which included dress them up and encourage marriage among soldiers and indians, a clear attempt to fully integrate the indigenous society. A similar movement can be observed in the early twentieth century, where the surrounding society seeks to transform indigenous in workers (SANTILLI *apud* BAINES, 2012).

According to Farage and Santilli (*apud* PEREIRA, 2010), in the eighteenth century there were approximately 28 ethnicities around Branco river. From that number, only 8 survived the impact of contact between white and Indians: Macushi, Wapishana, Taurepang, Ingarikó, Wai-Wai, Yanomami, Ye'kuana and Waimiri-Atroari, currently scattered in 32 lands demarcated by the Federal Government, representing 46.3% of the territory of Roraima, adding the protected areas (CAMPOS, 2011). In addition to the conflict, other factors are considered for the wiping out of these people, such as epidemics and intense slavery labor.

In that same flow of the eighteenth century, says Farage (1997), colonization was undertaken in the current city of Boa Vista through Branco River. In this period, the traveler Henri Coudreau (*apud* FARAGE, 1997) notes that the population consisted of "Branços, Mamelucos e de índios, que servem como domésticos para os brancos"²¹ (*idem*, p.33). Based on the reports of missionaries and travelers we see the same membership during this period, in which the relationship between the populations 'white' and indigenous evidently shows submission by the latter group, where indigenous, particularly Wapishana, played the physical labor on farms that grew up in a bulky way (CIDR, 1989).

At the end of sixties, we are moved by Ramos' (*apud* BAINES, 2012) observations on the subject to which the Macushi were immersed in Boa Vista:

Eram humildes varredores das ruas de Boa Vista, que mal ousavam levantar os olhos do chão e pareciam querer fazer-se invisíveis para aquele mundo hostil, que os rechaçava ostensivamente. Viviam então o lado mais sombrio da fricção interétnica, relegados à absoluta marginalidade social, cultural e econômica (ramos 2011 *apud* BAINES, 2012, p. 34)²².

²¹ "White, Mamluks and Indians, serving as housewifely to the whites"

²² "They were humble street sweepers of Boa Vista, who dared to put their face up but their eyes were on the ground and seemed to want to make themselves invisible to that hostile world, which ostensibly kicked them out. They lived then the darker side of interethnic friction, relegated to the absolute social, cultural and economic marginalization."

From this portrait, little things have changed by today. Although there is a small indigenous group that has achieved some social advancement in Boa Vista, I emphasize that the vast majority survived in conditions of extreme social vulnerability in the outskirts of the capital. Indigenous women remain working with domestic services and men still serve in low-cost physical labor in the construction industry.

In 1929, the North American traveler and mineral explorer, Hamilton Rice, also pointed to the natives of Rio Branco. He reports that the Indians can already be considered civilized and peasants, since then they already wear clothes and work in the field as shepherds, stating that these Indians were about to be fully integrated into national society (CIDR, 1987). It is interesting to notice that this view also has effects and propagation, it is a flag raised by groups of people who see the Indian city devoid of ethnic identity.

1.5. *Migration and the formation of a multi-faceted city*

Already in the late nineteenth century, it is recorded in the northeastern of Brazil a major migratory movement as a way to escape the intense drought. In this context, we note that the migration flows directly to the southern region, but pointed especially to the Amazon because of the rubber extraction, accounting for about 300,000²³ the number of Northeastern migrants, whose presence was also registered in Rio Branco (LOUREIRO *apud* FARAGE, 1997), where they have settled and, although they did not have financial resources, they eventually set up a regional elite endowed with political influence, which is why they were able to pressure the local government in order to legalize the economic and land heritage that began to rise since then²⁴:

Uma vez decorrido o momento inicial do contato, não tardou a eclosão de conflitos entre os Macuxi e os pecuaristas, garimpeiros e demais colonos brancos. Entre outros motivos, pelo término dos presentes ofertados a princípio pelos forasteiros recém chegados aos índios; pela devastação das roças indígenas progressivamente invadida pelo gado; pelo cerceamento da modalidade dos índios, da pesca com o timbó, do acesso às fontes perenes de água, pelo escasseamento da caça pelos campos naturais desde então pretensamente convertidos em pastagens exclusivas para o gado; ou ainda, pelas violências cometidas nas relações de trabalho e abusos sexuais contra as mulheres (SANTILLI, 1997, p. 63).²⁵

²³ TEÓFILO *apud* FACÓ, 1983

²⁴ FARAGE, 1997.

²⁵ "Once past the initial moment of contact, did not delay the outbreak of conflicts between Macushi and ranchers, miners and other white settlers. Among other reasons, by the end of the gifts offered at first by outsiders newcomers to the Indians; the devastation of indigenous gardens progressively invaded by cattle; the restriction

According to the CIDR (1987), in the early twentieth century, Boa Vista, which was previously the only town of the territory, there were approximately ten thousand inhabitants, among which were counted 3-4 thousand of white and mixed-race people, mostly of them were farmers or traders. Already in the sixties:

Devido ao tratamento recebido dos brasileiros, os índios tendiam, nesses anos, a emigrar rumo à Guiana. Porém, com a revolução naquele país e a saída dos ingleses (1968), a situação nas áreas indígenas guianenses (região do Essequibo) piorou consideravelmente e, assim, o processo migratório se inverteu. São os índios Macuxi e Wapixana da Guiana, falantes também da língua inglesa, que vêm para o Brasil. (CIDR, 1987, p.36).²⁶

Later, in the 1970s, Roraima was the attraction of migrants because of the opening of roads and settlements, increasing the population by up to five times until 1991²⁷. The gold-digging also represented another factor of attraction, particularly in the 80s, period that it changes from Federal Territory and becomes State²⁸, concentrating the activities in Indigenous Territories: “A notícia da abundância de ouro e diamantes atraiu aventureiros de várias partes do país. A maior parte do trabalho manual, sobretudo o de carregar mercadorias a partir do centro de Surumu, era feito por índios” (CIDR, 1987. p. 32)²⁹.

Despite the mining activity to secure their share in the forest region, it was in the city of Boa Vista that the great mass of migrants settled, causing an urban growth of 43% in the 70s to 65% in 1991 (CAMPOS, 2011). This migratory portion, the majority quantity of people that came to live in the city are from Maranhão, which currently represents 20% of the local population (idem).

In relation to indigenous families that are currently living in the city, we look at the fact that they offer their homes to those who, for various reasons, need to leave their communities and settle temporarily in Boa Vista. There are some institutions and organizations dedicated to the defense of indigenous whose bases are in the

of the Indians to move around, fishing with timbó (Common aspect of some or sapindaceae leguminous plants whose roots and / or husks may be used to manufacture the tingui, widely used in fishing), access to the perennial water sources, by hunting scarcity by natural fields since allegedly converted into exclusive pasture for cattle; or by the violence occurred in the labor relations and sexual abuse against women.”

²⁶ “Due to the treatment received from the Brazilians part, the Indians had the intention in those years to emigrate toward Guyana. But with the revolution in that country and the departure of the English (1968), the situation in Guyanese indigenous areas (Essequibo region) worsened considerably and thus the migration process was reversed. They are the Macushi and Wapishana Indians of Guyana, also speakers of English who come to Brazil.”

²⁷ CAMPOS, 2011.

²⁸ Approved by the 1988 Federal Constitution

²⁹ “The news of the abundance of gold and diamonds has attracted adventurers from all over the country. Most of the handwork labor, especially to carry goods from the center of Surumu, was done by Indians.”

capital, also show up as a factor for constant displacement between the community and the city.

This displacement, as well as the existence of roads nearby communities and the constant crossing of cars, showed a serious problem that is presented to the families. This is the trafficking of indigenous women and girls for prostitution in the city, which is already configured as an ominous reality for families who have definitely or temporarily settled in the capital:

Essa [estrada] facilita a transferência, mais ou menos definitiva, dos Wapixana para a cidade, onde bairros inteiros são formados por gerações sucessivas de índios destribalizados. Este último fato favorece outro fenômeno: a possibilidade dos Wapixana que continuam morando nas malocas, terem uma base de apoio em Boa Vista na casa dos parentes que moram definitivamente na cidade, Podem, assim, ir e voltar com facilidade para a maloca, onde continuam trabalhando. Este processo quase sempre acaba, porém, com a decisão de fixarem-se, definitivamente em Boa Vista. A cidade oferece aos jovens a possibilidade de trabalho que, além de resolver os próprios problemas econômicos, são uma solução para superar desacordos com os pais, não mais resolvidos em termos rituais (ritos de iniciação ou de passagem), como ainda acontece com as moças. O trabalho que os jovens Wapixana encontram na cidade, nas serrarias, na construção civil ou nos comércios, são pouco remunerados e os empregadores quase nunca respeitam as leis trabalhistas vigentes. Ainda mais delicada é a situação das moças Wapixana que, cada vez mais empregam-se em lojas ou como empregadas domésticas. É normal encontrar casos de senhoras brancas que pedem as meninas a seus pais para “estudarem na cidade”, ajuda-las nos trabalhos de casa, cuidarem das crianças, etc. Quando isso acontece, mesmo quando os pais recusam tais propostas, as moças em seu estado de insegurança cultural, vêem uma possibilidade de fugir na primeira ocasião, certas de poderem encontrar um emprego. Em sua maioria, porém, estas moças acabam sendo exploradas pelas famílias citadinas, não estudam e não são poucos os casos que terminam na prostituição (CIDR, 1989, p. 74).³⁰

³⁰ “This (road) facilitates the transfer, more or less definitive, Wapishana of the city, where entire neighborhoods are formed by successive generations of detribalized Indians. This last fact favors another phenomenon: the possibility of Wapishana who still live in longhouses, have a support base in Boa Vista in their relatives who live permanently in the city, so they are able to go back and forth to the village, where they continue working. This process usually ends, however, with the decision to settle definitively in Boa Vista. The city offers to young people the opportunity to work and solve their own economic problems. This helps them to find solutions to overcome disagreements with their parents, not solved in rituals terms (rites of initiation or passage), as still happens with the girls. The work that Wapishana young people find in the city, in sawmills, in construction or in trades, are little remunerated and employers rarely respect the existing labor laws. Even more delicate is the situation of girls who Wapishana increasingly employed in shops or as domestic servants. It is normal to find cases of white ladies who ask girls to their parents to “study in the city”, so they help them with homework, take care of the children, etc. When this happens, even when parents refuse such proposals, the girls in his state of cultural insecurity see a chance to escape at the first opportunity and certainly find a job. For the most part, however, these girls end up being exploited by urbanite families, do not study and some of them end up in prostitution.”
³² “The non-indigenous urban society as a whole, in Boa Vista and other cities and towns - where families and single or isolated indigenous people are diluted in the general population - press the societies and indigenous people, directly and indirectly, in the form generate change in behavior, customs and values, as well as emerging needs not felt before.”

Thus, life in the city ends up boosting those who were used to an essentially rural way of life, a typical consumer urban centers logic. The need for travelling, food, clothing, housing, among others, is substantially different in the city, since the access and the property in the communities is not necessarily tied to the consumer market. Thus:

A sociedade urbanizada não indígena como um todo, em Boa Vista e em outras cidades e vilas – onde famílias e pessoas solteiras ou isoladas indígenas se encontram diluídas em meio às populações –, pressiona as sociedades e indivíduos indígenas, direta e indiretamente, de forma a gerar mudança nos comportamentos, usos e costumes e nos valores, bem como fazendo aflorar necessidades antes não sentidas. (SILVA, 2007, p. 62).³¹

Boa Vista also represents the major urban center of Roraima, attracting not only the population of the other cities, but also Venezuelans and Guyanese, because of the border location the state has. It is in this displacement that migration deeply marks the socio-cultural feature of the city, which happens to be characterized as a multicultural space. The capital is presented in a heterogeneous way, comprising in its space people originating from various locations in Brazil: They are *Roraimenses*, from Roraima, *maranhenses*, from Maranhão, *cearenses*, from Ceará, *gaúchos*, from Rio Grande do Sul, *cariocas*, from Rio de Janeiro, *paulistas*, from São Paulo, among others. They have spread their culture around the state and began to express it through some festivals such as: *Gaúchos* organize their culture in CTG (Centro de Tradições Gaúchas, a place where people from Rio Grande do Sul show their culture), *quadri-lhas juninas* (festival made by the northeastern people. It usually happens in June), *bois-bumbás* (a festival organized by the people from the north of Brazil - this festival has a principal character two bulls) and so on.

From this perspective, David Harvey (2006) provides a contribution that can be applied to this observation. According to him, “a aparência de uma cidade e o modo como seus espaços se organizam formam uma base material a partir da qual é possível pensar, avaliar e realizar uma gama de possíveis sensações e práticas sociais (idem, p. 69).³²” Following this line of thought, it is projected in the same space of timeless senses and meetings of the multicultural aspects found in cities. In Boa Vista, for example, considering it from its organization and social setting, it can perform a

³¹ “The non-indigenous urban society as a whole, in Boa Vista and other cities and towns - where families and single or isolated indigenous people are diluted in the general population - press the societies and indigenous people, directly and indirectly, in the form generate change in behavior, customs and values, as well as emerging needs not felt before.”

³² “The appearance of a city and how its organized the spaces form a material which we can think, evaluate and carry out a range of possible sensations and social practices (*ibid*, p. 69).”

threaded reading over its multicultural conformation. The capital of Roraima is the stage where multiple cultural meanings, the presence of indigenous peoples, placed in the outskirts area and arranged mostly in wooden houses without fences or walls³³, that represents a large scale in the city marked by difference.

1.6. *The overall picture of the indigenous people of Boa Vista: imprecise indicators*

The story produced by researchers and travelers, as we saw earlier, allows us to understand how the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous population was built and reproduced throughout the subsequent generations in the eighteenth century. In line with the historical reading that excludes the indigenous presence, observed in contemporary dynamics, economic and social politics are unfavorable to the Macushi and Wapishana in Boa Vista, a scenario raised by the surrounding society who settled in the territories traditionally occupied by indigenous.

From this perspective, we see as one of the unfavorable factors to this population is the quantitative inaccuracy with which the indigenous are represented. According to CIDR (1987), in the early twentieth century, Boa Vista, which was previously the only municipality in the territory, had approximately ten thousand inhabitants, among whom were counted 3-4 thousand white and mix race people, being mostly farmers or traders. In the last census³⁴, it was recorded in Boa Vista a total of 284.313 inhabitants. Of this amount, only 6.072³⁵ people identify themselves as indigenous in the urban core of Boa Vista (IBGE, 2010). According to information from the city hall of Boa Vista and ODIC (2010), there are approximately 31,000 indigenous people, or 4,600 families³⁶ from various ethnic groups living in the Roraima capital. We have thus a significant divergence in the data submitted by institutions, making it impossible to have a real numerical size of indigenous presence in Boa Vista.

In seeking a quantitative of those urban areas in urban areas of the municipal administrative structure, specifically the *Superintendência de Assuntos Indígenas* (SAI) linked to the *Secretaria Municipal de Gestão Ambiental e Assuntos Indígenas* (SMGA) offer

³³ It is exposed in the community.

³⁴ IBGE, 2010.

³⁵ "Altogether, in Boa Vista (rural and urban area), 8,500 is the total population that identifies itself as indigenous. As for the urban indigenous amount, Boa Vista occupies the fifth position in the ranking of cities with more indigenous population (IBGE, 2010)"

³⁶ CAMPOS, 2011

only information about the indigenous people settled in the demarcated indigenous land areas.

The inaccuracy of demographic data also reveals the weakness and ineffectiveness in quantifying socio-cultural data about indigenous peoples, because of the inadequacy of the tools that are currently used. This troubled accounting on people belonging to certain ethnic groups, such as the Macushi and Wapishana, due to the incidence of mixed communities in Brazil is also included in this problematic issue.

Commonly, during the census application, Boa Vista indigenous have difficulties in self-identification concerning “color” or “race”, based on the categories used by the IBGE. Hence, as issues involving the category “identity” are factors that are presented in a very complex way in social indicators, we corroborate with Melatti (2007) taking into account the perspective of what makes it necessary to prepare the statistician who deals directly with indigenous, taking a longer time in the interview, asking the questions more clearly, which are often strange questions to the indigenous, as well as prepare the interviewer to deal more efficiently with language barriers. Otherwise, the Indians will continue to be ineffectively quantified, where the ethnic specificities that make the difference will remain obscured by inefficient quantitative indicators.

Thus, bearing in mind the day-to-day obstacles that involve going over basic necessities, we realize that the same difficulty is present in the cultural demands made by the Macushi and the Wapishana in Boa Vista. These demands point out that the preservation, support and spur to the Macushi and Wapishana cultures are already settled as fundamental claim issues between those that live in the urban area, despite the lack of specific sectors in the State and Municipality public competence to deal with the question.

Bearing in mind the socio-historical factors in which the capital of Roraima was built, largely correlated factors to indigenous peoples and the universal cultural meanings assigned by these groups to the city, I come across to question the place given to this and other cultural understandings in the administrative structure of Boa Vista.

At the local level, the lack of a *Secretaria da Cultura* makes the guidelines that would be directed to it end up forwarded to the structures that deal with education or tourism. In this way, we see that the political and administrative understanding of culture as well as actions aimed at this point are exponentially divergent from the perspective defended and claimed by many present social groups in Boa Vista.

We have a government that operates in incentives for large spectacles, or anything that can generate large events in the city, in this example, the promotion of cultural actions are the great concerts with national artists that attract a large amount of people. This way, they are in a short range of the development actions that are able to visualize the inherent understanding of indigenous culture in Boa Vista, this understanding is associated to the sense of legitimacy as belonging of their culture in the city.

Undoubtedly, it would not be possible to put in this article all the arguments depicting the actions of the government that prioritize certain understanding of promotion of culture over others; however, it is worth a brief analysis.

Designing Boa Vista as a stage full of differences, considering that there are multi identities in this place and these identities “talk” to each other, we found certain social sectors that use their cultural references as a self-affirmation tool, while delimiting the symbolic boundaries between belonging strategies of other social groups, including indigenous people, in a movement similar to that one LEITE (2009) called *abstenção social do encontro*:

A cidade abriga em sua complexa demarcação espacial urbana as fissuras do sujeito na forma dispersiva dos lugares na vida pública. (...) Entendo por lugares as demarcações físicas e simbólicas do espaço, cujos usos os qualificam e lhes atribuem sentidos de pertencimento, orientando ações e sendo por estas delimitadas reflexivamente. De modo complementar, podemos falar numa espécie de abstenção social do encontro. Abstenções são atitudes deliberadas de recusa ao encontro com o outro (estranho). São recusas racionais que formatam ações defensivas, seja pelo medo, xenofobia ou pelo desejo explícito de se diferenciar e de não se envolver com outros matizes culturais da vida social. Obviamente que essas abstenções se manifestem de modo muito distinto, a depender de classe e grupo social. (LEITE, 2009, p.198)³⁷

In addition to this fact, it should be stressed that the popular sectors linked to culture in Roraima state significantly grew up with a lot of immigrants, it has been tacking an understanding of what happens to be the local cultural identity. However, there is a strong conflict between dominant social groups who have built, since its inception, the profile of “anti-Indian”, by which it is still known. This profile is built

³⁷ “The city homes, in its complex urban spatial demarcation, cracks of the subject in a dispersible form of places in public life. (...) I understand the physical and symbolic boundaries of space, whose uses qualify them and assign them as belonging senses, guiding actions and being reflexively bounded. In a complementary way, we can talk in a kind of social encounter abstention. Abstentions are deliberated attitudes of refusal to meet with the other (consider as a strange). There are rational denials that format defensive actions, either by fear, xenophobia or by the explicit desire to make it different and not engaging with other cultural nuances of social life. Obviously these abstentions manifest themselves very differently, depending on the class and social group.”

according to the memories that will be changing day after day, blurring or destroying others. In Boa Vista such actions produce effects that lie in the deliberate condition of social invisibility to which the people of the city are subjected.

We have thus a municipal political-administrative structure that shows difficulties in contemplating the indigenous population layer of the urban period. Despite all of it, Macushi and Wapishana of Boa Vista have been building a narrative of belonging that interrelates social and cultural aspects that were swallowed by the official history and, later, the company held by the government. Such narrative has backed up on the Organization of Indigenous from the City (ODIC) and Federal University of Roraima, through actions for valuation of cultural expressions of the people that live in the capital of Roraima.

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