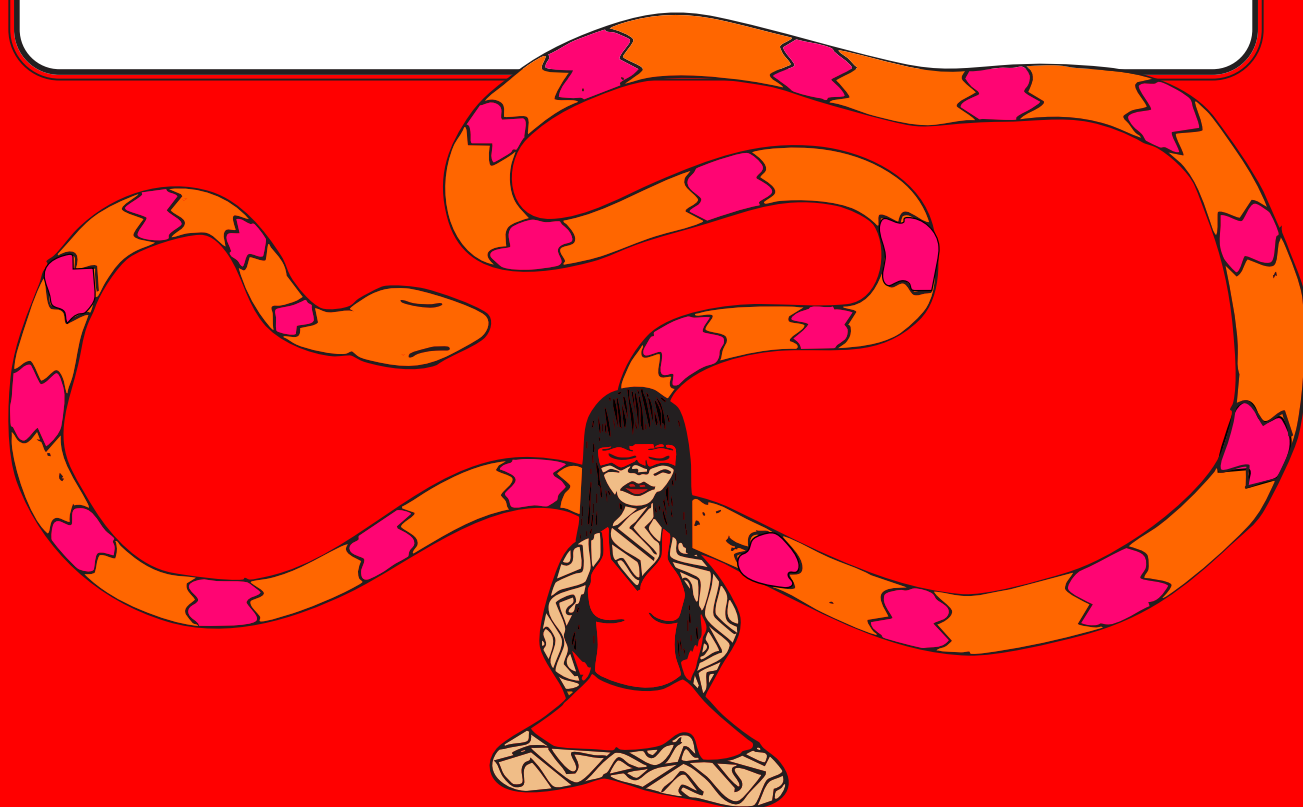
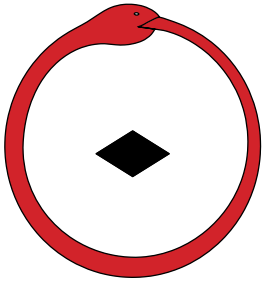


YUBE NAWA AĪBU
DAUGHTERS OF THE BOA PEOPLE
Rita Huni Kuĩ and Emilia Sanabria



notebooks
SELVAGEM



YUBE NAWA AÏBU

Interviews with *Huní Kuĩ* women of the Upper Jordão River (Amazonian state of Acre, Brazil) conducted by Rita *Huní Kuĩ* (*Danĩ*) in cooperation with Emilia Sanabria and the Healing Encounters project.

INTRODUCTION

Emilia Sanabria

YUBE
Boa constrictor
NAWA
People
AÏBU
Woman

Rita was five months pregnant when she landed in Spain after a long, delayed flight. She was travelling with her father, *lbã* Sales, and had been invited by our project, Healing Encounters¹, to take part in the autonomous Indigenous delegation of the III World Ayahuasca Conference². That evening, after the long trip, Rita felt pains. After breakfast the following day we decided to go to a hospital for a quick check-up. After filling in some forms, we were taken to an ultrasound room, where we heard the baby's heartbeats and discovered, with much emotion, that a girl floated serenely in her womb. "All is well, there is nothing to worry about", the doctor told Rita. We all sighed in relief. This tender moment shaped our relationship and placed questions such as pregnancy, maternity, being a daughter, and being a mother, femininity or the budding womanhood of our daughters at the heart of our collaboration.

Rita and I had met in the Jordão region a year earlier, in October 2018. At the time, I was starting the Healing Encounters project. It

1. **Encontros de Cura (Healing Encounters)** was a research project carried out between 2018 and 2024, which examined the ways ayahuasca is being used in non-Indigenous therapeutic contexts. The project aimed to develop spaces for collective reflection with Indigenous collaborators to think of the impact such uses have for contemporary Indigenous ayahuasca practices. The research presented in this notebook was conducted by Rita in the context of this collaborative project.

2. After Indigenous representatives had expressed their resistance at the 2016 World Ayahuasca Conference in Rio Branco [Acre/Brazil], ICEERS [International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Service], decided to organize the 2019 World Ayahuasca Conference in Girona (Catalonia). It dedicated an autonomous, self-regulated space for Indigenous participants. *lbã* and Rita formed part of this delegation with members of the Healing Encounters project. In addition, we organised a panel on the main stage of the event entitled "Translating and transmitting the spirit of the forest: *Huní Kuĩ* survival lessons in the Anthropocene."

NAWA
Non-Indigenous person
and simultaneously also
people. For example:
KAXINAWA
Bat people

NIXI PAE
Strong vine

KUPIXAWA
A large hut

was a hot afternoon, and we were sitting with her sister, Yaka, in her brother Bane's house. While the fan hummed away in the background, we had a lengthy chat about the **Nawa** who arrive in waves to drink **Nixi Pae** (ayahuasca) and about the challenges faced by **Huni Kuĩ** youth as they transit between the town and the upriver communities. Our first chat rapidly moved to the topics of machismo, the transformation in gender relations and the relationship between maternity, embodiment and femininity in relation to **Nixi Pae** in the **Huni Kuĩ** context. I had just spent several weeks in Chico Kurumin [Aldeia Chico Kurumin] – Rita's village – living alongside Rita's and Yaka's older sisters and sisters-in-law. This first visit to Jordão took place during the presidential election that led Bolsonaro to power in 2018. During this time in Chico Kurumin, we travelled to Boa Vista in order for everybody to vote. A ceremony was held in the **kupixawa** the evening prior to the election, "to give Haddad strength", as a woman told me. I did not participate in the ceremony that night, but I was sleeping in a house right in front of the **kupixawa**, and recall seeing dozens of beautifully adorned women walk through the village up to the **kupixawa**. I also recall hearing powerful female voices sounding through the night, echoing and being echoed by the men's chants.

On the days following the election, the boats that came up the river and passed by Chico Kurumin brought uncertain and contradictory information in answer to our anguished queries on the election results. There was no internet in Jordão at the time, and we only discovered the election results once we returned to town. Checking the news with Yaka and Rita that afternoon in Bane's house we discussed the results, ploughing through posts from Indigenous women's networks. In doing this, we realized that gender was at the heart of the unfolding events. There had been a reaction to the #EleNão [#NotHim] movement led by Brazilian feminist movements, with a rash of memes that portrayed feminists as crazy and dangerous. This regrettable episode marked the scene of our first encounter and of the wider context in which we began our collaboration. It influenced the ways we came to reflect together on

questions pertaining to women and ayahuasca in general, and Huní Kuĩ women and Nixi Pae in particular.

Before my visit to Jordão, I had read many ethnographic studies on ayahuasca ritual practice among the Huní Kuĩ. What struck me the most was that many of these studies defined ayahuasca as a male domain. However, it was clear that this was changing along the Jordão River. Therefore, it seemed important to document these changing relations and experiences that Huní Kuĩ women were developing with the worlds of ayahuasca. Both Yaka and Rita knew of older women who had had long experiences drinking ayahuasca. They were also familiar with the idea that, in the past, this practice was more reserved to the male world.

During the III World Ayahuasca Conference, in Girona (2019), which Rita attended, a panel on Indigenous women's experiences with ayahuasca was held in the autonomous Indigenous space. There, we heard testimonies of women from different Indigenous peoples expressing a diversity of perspective stands on this issue. To some, including an Inga woman from Colombia, menstrual blood is a direct challenge to women's participation in any dimension of the ritualistic use of ayahuasca, from preparation to consumption. Such was not the case with other women. Interconnected issues surrounding maternity and the embodied experience of menstruation seemed to be at the root of these perceptions, while it was also obvious there were many different opinions regarding Indigenous women's experiences with ayahuasca. One day, while discussing this with Rita, we looked at each other and exclaimed: "Let's research this!"

Together, we prepared a list of possible topics to address and established parameters for our collaboration. This notebook contains interviews conducted by Rita in Hãtxa Kuĩ with Huní Kuĩ women from the Jordão. Rita recorded the interviews in Hãtxa Kuĩ, and chose to transcribe them directly from spoken Hãtxa Kuĩ to written Portuguese. The voices of the Huní Kuĩ women gathered in this notebook resonate with some of prevailing topics in the literature on gender, shamanism

HÃTXA KUĨ
The language spoken by
the Huní Kuĩ people.

and embodiment in the Amazon. This literature, particularly the beautiful ethnographic works of Luisa Elvira Belaunde (2005; 2018; 2019; Matos, Santos, and Belaunde 2019), Cecilia McCallum (2001; 2009) and Els Lagrou (2018; 2007), has shown us that knowledge in the Amazon – especially among the *Huṃí Kuĩ* – is made, transmitted and expressed through bodies. Western approaches to so-called “visionary” plants such as ayahuasca tend to locate their action in the mind – as implied by the biomedical term “psychedelic” (mind manifesting). According to Lagrou and McCallum, the *Huṃí Kuĩ* place knowledge first and foremost in bodies. It is the body (not the mind) that knows. Thinking or knowing is something done by the heart, not the mind (Belaunde 2005:43). Thinking is an action done in another person’s interest. In this sense, knowledge is embodied and deeply relational.

This has profound implications for the so-called “psychedelic renaissance”. What would things look like if it did not just partially, incompletely and selectively appropriate Indigenous wisdom but actually learnt the deeper lessons that come with doing the work of being transformed with a medicine like *Nixí Pae*? The *Huṃí Kuĩ* understand knowledge to be alive, accrued through the practices of feeding, nurturing, painting, making, and other embodied skills (Lagrou, 2007; McCallum 2001). Knowledge lives and grows in bodies. As Lagrou (2007) argues, (*Huṃí Kuĩ*) persons are living thinking bodies. *Yuxin* (spirit) made matter.

McCallum (2001:53) showed how for the *Huṃí Kuĩ*, the smell of menstrual blood draws the attention of spirits: “it makes the separation between the human domain and the spirit domain begin to break down. Its smell ‘makes a path’ from one domain to the other and makes normally invisible humans visible to the spirits”. In this sense, women are understood to be more visible to the spirits because of menstrual blood, and it is therefore more dangerous for them to drink *Nixí Pae*. Luisa Elvira Belaunde proposes that blood is the vehicle for knowledge to permeate the body. Crucially – and this is important to contextualize the importance of the *Huṃí Kuĩ* women’s narratives gathered here –

YUXIN
A spirit of the forest.

Belaunde proposes understanding *Dietas*³ as practices that make and modulate this thinking-knowing-body-in-becoming. *Dietas*, which deeply modulate the blood and bring about important sensorial shifts, are the means whereby knowledge is embodied and persons are remade. Belaunde's work reveals how the management of the flow of blood in the life cycle is constitutive of sociability, fertility, health, work, creativity, wellbeing, spirituality and identity. *Dietas* are fundamental aspects of this gendered making of personhood inasmuch as they transform people through management of blood. As Belaunde notes:

Shed blood has a similar effect to psychoactive plants used in shamanism: it causes a bodily change and opens the veil between different perspectives. In this book, I state that Amazonian shamanism should be correctly characterized as a shamanic-reproductive complex that involves both men and women... Existing studies focus on (...) male shamanism as if it existed outside this context of shamanic practice and female blood management. Both genders are active in the shamanic-reproductive complex: women manage their blood flow in a coordinated manner with their partners, and this management has implications in the couple's birth control. (Belaunde 2005:48-9, our translation)⁴

The narratives gathered in this notebook dialogue with the insights brought forth by Lagrou, McCallum and Belaunde, who reveal how the dynamics of making humans in perspectival relations to nonhumans is traversed by another relation of difference: that between genders (see also Matos, Santos and Belaunde, 2019). As argued by McCallum

3. The *dieta* is a practice that involves mental, physical and spiritual preparation, and it holds a fundamental role in traditional rituals of body purification; therefore, this is not a common diet as we know it. It's important to highlight that this practice demands intention and respect from those who perform it. Considering the importance and sacred nature of the *dietas* for the *Huní Kuĩ* culture, we decided to keep the term as it is written in Portuguese. (T.N.)

4. Original: La sangre derramada tiene un efecto similar al de las plantas psicoactivas utilizadas en el chamanismo, logra un cambio de cuerpo y abre las cortinas de la visibilidad, entre diferentes perspectivas. En este libro sostengo que el chamanismo amazonico debe ser correctamente caracterizado como un complejo chamánico-reproductivo que involucra conjuntamente a los hombres y las mujeres....los estudios anteriores enfocan ... el chamanismo masculino como se existiese fuera del contexto de las practicas chamánicas y de manejo de la sangre femenina. Ambos géneros son activos en el complejo chamánico-reproductivo porque aun en los casos en que las mujeres no participan en las sesiones chamánicas, las mujeres manejan el flujo de su sangre de manera coordinada con sus esposos y este manejo tiene implicancias en el control de la natalidad de la pareja. (Belaunde 2005:48-9)

(2001) and Matos, Santos and Belaunde (2019), gender is a central axis of differentiation in Amazonian sociocosmologies. This way of being in the world has been sidelined in discussions on Amerindian perspectivism in favour of predation-centred approaches. The narratives gathered here reveal the ways in which plants (be they those of herbalists or the “legumes” (cultivars) that women propagate, cultivate and prepare – and increasingly “power” plants such as *Nixi Pae* and their associated practices) – are as important to Indigenous cosmopolitics as animals, which have garnered most of the analytic attention up to now (see Rival 2007; Rival and McKey 2008; Matos, Santos, and Belaunde 2019).

The “entry” of some *Huní Kuĩ* women in the sphere of *Nixi Pae*, which was previously mostly male, reflects and intersects with wider social transformations in gender relations, such as the changing roles for men and women in provisioning food, raising children or in the organisation of social life, between the city and the Indigenous villages. It is important to state that the revival of *Nixi Pae* taking place on the Tarauacá, Humaitá and Jordão Rivers does not occur in the same manner in other *Huní Kuĩ* communities, such as those along the Purus River (see Lagrou 2018b and McCallum, personal communication). In regions where Evangelical churches are thriving, shifts in gender relations are taking another direction and form. The narratives brought together here reflect a process that is described from the Jordão region and the network of women that make up Rita’s social world.

Rita is a uniquely empowered Indigenous woman. She has been moving between Chico Kurumim – where she attended the school of the forest – and the town of Jordão – where she was schooled in Western pedagogy – from a young age, thus learning the ways of both worlds. She navigates with ease and grace between these worlds, in service to her community, with a special focus on women, youth and a commitment to exploring new ways to maintain traditional knowledge alive. She was the youngest woman candidate to the city council elections of 2016 and the first *Huní Kuĩ* woman candidate in the state of Acre. She was cofounder of the Grupo *Kayatibu*, a collective of *Huní Kuĩ* youth

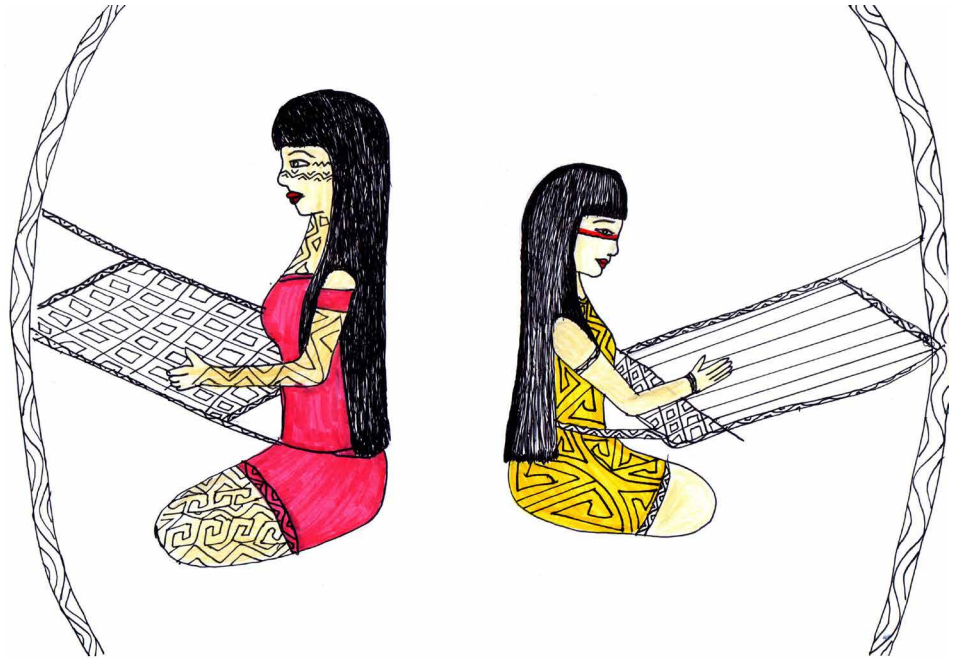
cultural producers and is the Secretary of the *Ainbu Daya* Association of *Huní Kuĩ* Women. Rita is a very talented communicator. I have seen her captivate audiences with her clear expression and powerful advocacy that touches people far and wide. She is incredibly creative, bringing her own deeply embodied experience and self-understanding into the work she does. She is a talented painter and loves losing herself in the work of bringing the stories of her people to life in image form. It is not easy to occupy these positions and roles, they are *encruzilhadas*⁵ that come with a burden that she carries lightly, and with a sense of purpose that I deeply admire.

On a personal level, it has been an honour and a joy to learn alongside her over the years and be witness to her development as a young woman, a mother and a leader. The Healing Encounters project was very blessed to have the good fortune of collaborating with her. Rita's work enriched the project in profound ways. She was able to develop a question and approach and collect the words of wisdom that the *Huní Kuĩ* women of the Jordão hold. May the wisdom of the *Huní Kuĩ* women whose voices are gathered here resonate far and wide. May their message of embodied heart-centred knowledge, anchored in the respect for the cycles of life and their processes of planting, birthing, nurturing, harvesting, protecting and defending touch all those who read this Notebook. May this glimpse into ways of exchanging perspectives and learning with nonhuman others inspire us all in these times of radical transformation. And above all else, may this work serve the generations of *Huní Kuĩ* women to come, starting with Rita's own daughter *Yanaí*.

5. *Encruzilhada* [crossroads] is more than the point where paths intersect, it is a living territory of encounter, transformation, and possibility. In Afro-Brazilian thought, it is the domain of Exu, the orixá and principle of communication, movement, and transformation, who opens paths and mediates encounters between worlds. (T.N.)

IBATSEI

I am an artisan woman. I am 65 years old.



Nixi Pae

Many years ago, when I was still a child and lived with my parents, I used to see men drinking *Nixi Pae*. It was only older men, those who had experience with the medicine, not everyone, who drank *Nixi Pae* in the silent night. When there were ceremonies in the village, we would go to our hammocks early and our mothers would paint our faces with *Mashê*⁶. They said it was to protect us from negative visions. I remember that there were few women who participated in the ceremony, many did not drink *Nixi Pae* but just sat by their husbands so that they could help them and sing for them in case they needed it while they were under the force.

They knew of the songs as they had heard their husbands singing. They knew how to smudge them with herbs and wash their faces with water. Often, when the force was too strong and the person felt sick,

MASHÊ
Urucum.
[Bixa orellana]

6. Also known as achiote, it is a native plant in tropical America that is widely used as a natural red dye. Considered a sacred plant, it is used by Indigenous peoples to paint their skin red, which is believed to provide spiritual protection. (T.N.)

they would bathe them. Many women could not participate in the ceremony because they had small children, so female participation was limited at that time and they went mostly for company.

I did not participate. I just heard about it, because children were not allowed. I am saying that older men could participate. I did not witness my father's rituals because he died when I was a baby, so this somehow hindered me, as my father was not present. And my mother herself never took *Nixi Pae*.

Nowadays, however, I see that everything is different. People already have advanced knowledge. Men have this knowledge they get from learning from new things, and this somehow awakens an interest in many youngsters who want to continue, as do many women, especially the younger ones – both men and women. Nowadays, for example, I see and hear the different songs played on a guitar. People are creating their own music with instruments – something we did not experience in our time. I am happy to experience this even though I am already old. I have never drunk *Nixi Pae*.

Boa Constrictor

When I was still a teenager, I was walking on a path and saw a boa constrictor crossing the path. It wasn't too large. I was astonished to see it, felt no fear and got closer to see better. My mother always told me that we should look at the *Kene* when we meet a boa constrictor. She taught us the first *Kene*, so I always remember her when I am working and making boa constrictor patterns. I like the boa constrictor's *Kene*, but I make them all, especially the *Txêre Bêru*, the first patterns we women learn to make, which are also connected to the boa constrictor. This is why I make this *Kene* a lot.

KENE

Sacred geometrical pattern taught to the Huni Kuĩ by the boa constrictor.

TXÊRE BÊRU

The eye of the orange-winged parrot [Amazona amazonica].

SAMAKEI

A set of dietary rules.

MUKÁ

A very strong and bitter plant; a medicine that implies dieting.

Samakei

I have never done the *Muká Samakei*. I do not have this experience with this plant. I have heard a lot about it, the reports from other people who do the *Muká Samakei*. Some people bathe in or put the plant in their eyes while dieting. I have heard that *Muká* is very strong – it is a plant that one cannot compare with any other medicinal plant in the

forest in terms of strength. I would not consider dieting now, because even though I do not have young children anymore, I have a lot of grandchildren. My grandchildren are small and curious, and if I did it now, they would wish to be near me. Nowadays, it cannot be done in the village. One has to go to an isolated place, a place for people who are going on a *dieta* only. We, the adults, can do a food-restriction *dieta* for at least one month. However, I no longer have a husband who can do it with me, and nobody else will want to go with me to an isolated part of the forest for several days. People have their work within the village. This is why all of this has to be thought of, it is not that simple. If my grandchildren go with me, they will not endure the food restrictions we adults endure. So, people have to be focused on their purpose of learning how to do lots of work during the *dieta* period.

The right age to do the *dieta* is when the person is an adult and has mature thoughts, in order to really decide that they will do this. A *dieta* is not a joke, it is very serious indeed, and we decide to change our entire life for the better from the moment we decide to do it. [This is why] many young people cannot do it yet – at least it was so in my days!

It was always the elders who did the *dieta*, or accompanied someone who did it because of their experience, as the person helping the one doing the *dieta* also follows the same *dieta*. At my age, I can do it. I used to hear the elders saying that they did it to heal from illnesses or the pains they were feeling, or to protect their families with the strength of this plant. Men used to do it to be more skillful in their work, hunting, fishing and to strengthen their words. Women used to do it to learn more of our work, such as cotton weaving, clay ceramics, basketry...to be faster in our work, as we have a lot of domestic chores. This is why we cannot have it easy, we have to complete all our work, and this is a reason for our mothers to be proud and an example for other people. During the *dieta*, the food consumed is baked green banana with toasted peanuts. One cannot drink water, which is replaced by a manioc porridge, one cannot bathe on the first day, and the medicinal herbal baths start on the following day; one cannot eat sweet fruits, must avoid meat and eat no salt. All of this must be avoided during this month-long diet.

Before starting to eat normal food again, one has to bathe in a water spring and wash one's hair with white clay, then get a burning ember from a strong tree and put it inside a glass of water, and then drink it. The meat must come from a large animal, such as a deer or a tapir – from large strong animals. This is the rule for men. For women, they must eat large birds which do not have much blood: given that we women menstruate, we should avoid that, or use what helps us not to bleed too much.

A message to the new generations

Today I have already passed on my life and work experience to my children and grandchildren. I hope that the future generation, like you [Rita] and other youngsters, can bring more new visions, that the youngsters can have opportunities to access things of present time that benefit us, because today the work is very different to what I experienced. In the past, the work was heavy, and it is different today. At my age, I see myself having the opportunity to tell other people about my work, and I am happy because of this.

TAMANI

I am Tamani Huni Kuĩ.

I am 43 years old and I live in Chico Kurumim village.

I am a crafts teacher in the village, teaching weaving, ceramics and basketry developed by us, the women.



Nixi Pae

I started early, at age 10. My ayahuasca experience was together with my father. You know that children are curious to know things, so I would ask my father to go with him. He never prevented me and always took me with him. At that time, he travelled outside the village quite a lot. Once he travelled and left us two litres of Nixi Pae. Then, the preparations were quite different from today. To feel the force, one had to drink a larger dose, as it wasn't as strong as today's preparations. So I took it many times to be able to feel the force. I started feeling a strong force, such a strong force that I felt the Sky connecting to the Earth and I started having a vision of my future as a leader. It showed me the work I would develop, as I am doing now. So, I am now living all the visions I had... When the ayahuasca vision showed me I had a strong desire to be a strong leader like the men, I thought it would be difficult, and today all of it is learning *Mênikiraní*. Nixi Pae was my best life teacher. Today I can do all the work I thought was difficult, and I can make real what I wished for. So, my greatest motivation, *Habiaskabirãki*, for this was learning through Nixi Pae.

Women did not participate at that time. They were afraid and went home early when the men did the Nixi Pae ceremony. They would paint

MÊNIKIRANÍ

Learning

HABIASKABIRÃKI

My greatest motivation.

themselves with urucum so that the men would not see them during their ayahuasca visions. The few women who participated only sat and listened. I was the only woman who participated in drinking ayahuasca, and nobody supported me. I sought it out on my own. It was good that my father never prevented me from participating – he was a leader. I saw men staring at me, surprised by my courage to participate with them. Even if somebody had been against it, it was father who decided and so it was okay for me. I started at age 10, but only felt the force at age 13. My father always gave me a small dose, and I guess that when he realized I was ready he started giving me a larger dose, which was when I felt a really strong force.

Boa constrictor

I have already seen the boa constrictor in my house twice. When I first saw it, I was not afraid: I faced it closely to see the designs on her body. She is very beautiful. I saw her closely and her eyes and nose really enchanted me. Then you have to go on a *dieta*. Even if you had no physical contact with her, you have to go on a *dieta*, because you saw her and were really close to her. She has a lot of strength that is transmitted even when you are far from her. Of course, the *dieta* doesn't have to be too rigorous, but one should follow it for at least some weeks. She has been in my dreams a few times. In my experience, when I dream of her, I learn a different *Kene*, so it represents new learning for me, or else I meet somebody, another female weaving master. The boa constrictor is one of the most sacred animals in our *Huní Kuĩ* culture. People go on *dietas* with her, but I have never done so – except when I found her in my house. I like making *Kene Kuĩ*, our true patterns. These are the large patterns that facilitate our work, and have the meaning of the plants. I like to work with weaving, and I learn every time I do it. It is my work and my duty as a woman to pass this along. Now I have a daughter and I want to teach her all I know about our culture. Women go on a *dieta* with the boa constrictor to learn the *Kene*. In our history, it was the boa constrictor who brought and taught the patterns to the *Huní Kuĩ* women, so this is the main objective of a woman who goes on a boa constrictor

dieta. In addition to learning the *kene*, she learns how to be more skilled and faster in her work, while men do the *dieta* to have more skills in their work and in their hunting in the forest. So we also know the boa constrictor as the owner of the work, *Dayá Ibú*.

The swiddens and the trips

In my view, some men who travel outside have a different view. For example, many of those who travel nowadays no longer have swiddens, which is easier for them. They no longer plant the fruit and many of the legumes that were planted alongside the manioc before. Often, those who can afford it pay others to plant for them because they no longer have the time for this or because their access to the outside world makes it easier to buy food in town. This did not happen before, so men did not have much choice. Thus, they used to think more about their food and there was more production. In my opinion, this is what is happening. If people plan well, they can use this in their favour, like producing more food to sell in town. We have already done our part by producing our arts, and most of our income comes from our work.

Weapons scare animals

There is no longer as much hunting as before. With the increasing number of people, the villages have become larger and access to weapons has scared the animals away. Before, people did not need to go far to hunt, whereas today it is difficult: men often have to sleep in the forest to find an animal. Before, even the young boys killed large game. Today it is difficult to see an animal in the forest. And unfortunately it will become ever more difficult.

When one path is opened, others are closed

Many changes have happened over time. This varies a lot depending on our age. I lived in times that were different from my parents' times. I can say that because I did not know then what I know today, I thought everything was good, but I missed some things. Everything was good, but today I see that things are easy on the one hand but difficult on the

other. When one path is opened, others are closed. What we do have to know is that nothing is forever.

I lived quite happily with my family, but I did not have the things that exist nowadays, and had no idea of them. Now I know of many new things for my children and grandchildren. But I miss much from the past, as today the world is very scary, lots of bad things are happening, unknown diseases are appearing, and we live each day not knowing what the future will bring. But there are still a lot of good things: for example, people can now travel to different places. I had never imagined that I would leave here to know beautiful places other than my village.

Nowadays, children are very intelligent. They study to learn how to speak other languages, find it easy to use technology, instruments and other things I still don't know. I have not lived or experienced this.

For example, girls: in my days, no mother would let her daughter go out alone – they really looked after them. Today they are free to learn and travel by themselves. Our mothers made us scared of men, they taught us that only men had the right to go out, but today we are in contact with non-Indigenous people, who also bring us the inspiration to travel alone. We can do other work without being afraid of men. We can learn about our rights, although there is a long way to go. I am happy to see women having this power, being leaders, participating in meetings, being invited to take part in gatherings.

You already are with this spirit for ever

I have already gone on a *dieta*. It was a very unique experience. I did it with my husband. It wasn't easy, but it is an experience that taught us in our lives. Usually, when a person goes on a *dieta*, someone has to accompany them to prepare the food, but there was no one to do this so I myself prepared our foods. The *dieta* lasted 15 days, half a month. When one decides to go on a *dieta*, there must be a purpose, a vision of a personal change, and one must know that this is a great challenge that is not easy at all. Everything has a challenging aspect, so this affects our change of life. One has to be accompanied by experienced people.

My husband is not an elder, but he is experienced – with my own experience, I felt this strongly because we receive strength from nature. This remains in our dreams to remind us. I felt this strength in my heart and in my mind, the force stays there like your guide, to correct you: from the moment you go on the *dieta* you are with this spirit forever, as one has to be very careful from the beginning to the end of the *dieta*. [This is] your strength to change until the end of your life.

A message to the new generations

Today, I hope that children from the next generation can enjoy the opportunity offered by the good side of life, using the tools in our favour, for our people and our villages.

DARÊ

My name is Darê. I am 51 years old and I live in Chico Kurumim village.



Nixi Pae and the force of the vision

MEKA
Corpus of chants.

When I was a child, I saw my grandparents drinking Nixi Pae and my grandmother participating in a ceremony with my grandfather. She always sang the Meka with him. One of my grandfathers was a shaman in the village. I was already married and had two children the first time I participated in a ceremony. It was when my uncle, my father's brother, came from another land and brought a Nixi Pae preparation. They were getting ready to drink the preparation in our village in the evening, so my husband told me to drink Nixi Pae. He said there was no mystery, that it was good because Nixi Pae corrects our mistakes and teaches us to learn and have a new vision, but I was afraid because I had seen him being sick twice. He said that was his thing, not mine, so I participated with them. As I had no experience, I took it and laid in a hammock with my husband and slept. When I woke up, I felt something different in my body, I felt like vomiting and everybody was looking at me. I got out of the hammock and went to cleanse myself. In my vision, I saw everything different. I had a vision of my mom's house: she had a very beautiful backyard but in my vision it was no longer there. I only saw bushes where her house should have been, and since I was having these different visions I thought and felt, and learnt

what the force of the vision is. I had many visions: I saw myself on a plane, and I have now travelled by plane, so the visions are real. When I was young, I was never interested in participating in the ayahuasca ceremony, so this was my first experience, with my husband's support. It was after this support that I started participating once in a while. The medicine has helped me as I got to understand her, I matured *Tanaki*, *Hanukāi ê xinā tanapêwabirāki*.

TANAKI

Maturation

HANUKĀI Ê XINĀ

TANAPÊWABIRĀKI

My thoughts

The knowledge of the medicines

Time went by, my children grew up and I became a grandmother to several grandchildren, and the force of the vision showed me that I had to have deeper knowledge of the medicines. [Here], there is no pharmacy like in town, but we have our sacred plants, which we have always used. There are all types of [plant] medicines for all diseases, and I, as a grandmother, was requested by the force – after all, I am my family's *Īkā Yushā Mêtsitsipa* matriarch. I have to be ready when my relatives, children and grandchildren need me. When anyone in the village gets sick, people seek those who know the prayers and the medicines, as children need to be protected by our plants from the womb. This was my mission, shown and brought to me by ayahuasca, so that I could have greater willingness to seek even the most difficult plant species. One must have the courage to seek this learning, because the ayahuasca vision only gives us direction and facilitates our learning if we seek it and are determined to do so. This is how I learnt. My father also taught me some plant species, some people in my family taught me, but it was through my own dedication that I improved my knowledge of the medicines. This is my mission and one of my professions. In the old days, people did not teach about the plants, as it was a secret. Nobody wanted to pass the valuable knowledge on, because this is not studied: this learning is practiced orally, so it is not easy to record this with our eyes and keep it in our memories, and still look for them in the forest, as they are native plants. They can be confused sometimes. So, this is why they are called sacred [plants] and are being passed on through the ayahuasca vision.

ĪKĀ YUSHĀ MÊTSISIPA

An older person

Menstruation

Menstruation is part of our *dieta* and we have to respect it. This is not new: when girls have their first menstruation, the mothers go on *dieta* the first time only but just like all other times we always have to follow this *dieta*. Even though this is not as important to some [women], we have to respect our body and the force of nature, as we did not choose this, it exists in women. Today, it is rare to see someone having a bath, avoiding some things. This teaching from our grandmothers in our culture should be passed on and practiced by our daughters and granddaughters more frequently. I recall my grandmother taking my sisters, cousins and myself to the *feitio*⁷ [preparation], where my grandfather prepared [Nixi Pae]. When he removed the chacrona⁸ leaves and Nixi Pae from the fire, my grandmother would make us stamp on them and inhale the vapours – she said it helped us in our growth phase, granting us protection and strengthening our physical body. I know because she did this with me.

Boa Constrictor

I saw the boa constrictor when I was walking in the forest with my husband. I met her when she was across the path: she was large. I did not get close to see, I was afraid because she was very large. Another time I was at home: I was organising my kitchen when I saw her, a small boa constrictor. When she saw me, she left, and I remembered older women saying that when we meet a boa constrictor, we have to ask her for her strength to make the Kene. I always weave the boa constrictor patterns, although she teaches several Kenes. The ones I like doing the most are the *Sêpi* drawings, and the first Kene I learnt was Txêre Bêru, which means the eye of the orange-winged parrot.

SÊPI
Boa constrictor kene.

7. *Feitio* – The *feitio* is the ritual for preparing ayahuasca, a psychoactive brew used in religious and spiritual contexts. This process reflects the connection between spiritual principles and technical knowledge. (T.N.)

8. A plant whose leaves are used to prepare ayahuasca, which contains its active entheogenic principle (DMT). (T.N.)

NIXPU PIMÁ

Huni Kuĩ rite of passage.
Tooth baptism, when the
teeth are dyed with the
Nixpu plant

I have never done any *dietas* with any of these. The only *dietas* I did were for my first menstruation, the Nixpu Pimá baptism and my first pregnancy, when I had to avoid certain foods every woman should always avoid in her first pregnancy. But I never did these two other *dietas*. It is a very sacred and strong *dieta* to do. I never asked anyone about this, but I am curious to ask my aunt, an elderly person, and women who are experienced in this matter, whom we should ask in order to know the correct rules and how they did it, what is the secret of this force. I have always heard about and also know people who did the *dieta*. I never had the desire to know or do it, but recently I have felt a wish to do it, but not here. I have to do it with my uncle, who lives in another Indigenous territory. I know he is experienced in this and has already done the *dieta*. To start off with, the person should have a purpose to do it. The elders say that we do it to learn, to bring what will benefit us spiritually into our lives. Think about it: if I do it now, I won't know how to do it correctly, so I'd rather not run the risk. So, one day, when Yuxibu allows me to, I will do it with my uncle, I will listen to my grandfather's stories, and what he did to other people. He used to be away from the village during the *dieta*, but before leaving he would instruct those who stayed at home on the correct manner to use the words. This is crucial – all power comes from our mouth, so the greatest care was taken with words. When someone in the family goes on a *dieta*, the other family members also feel it, and should be the staunchest supporters, who help in the process of strength. I heard my grandfather tell me this story, but he never told me about the Muká.

YUXIBU

The owner of everything.
The one who made the
Sun, the stars, the wind,
the forest and the beings

Inside and outside the village

In my view, I see that the older people who travel outside the village return as they were, go on with their lives and their work without changing. I see that this can often help in a good way, but the youngsters don't have as much experience as the elders; those with a vision of leadership can use this moment of new experiences in favour of our people, the families and to inspire other youngsters. Those with this

vision can bring a very good alliance, and this bridge can take our culture and bring a *Nawa* knowledge to be shared with the community.

An inverted manner

In my childhood, things were both very easy and very difficult things at the same time. I do not see much difference today: things are almost the same in an inverted manner – things that were difficult are now easy and what was easy is now difficult. Hunting, for example: there was abundance, which is no longer true. What I grew up seeing is not seen today by my children and grandchildren. There are many new things for me, like makeup. I never had lipsticks, shampoo, or perfume. I never had this. My makeup was *mashê* and *nawê*⁹. We produced our pots ourselves, while today everything is bought. As for food and all of this new technology, we have to work and earn money because there are no freebies, right? I never saw money in my childhood. My father worked tapping rubber trees to produce rubber and would make exchanges with his boss for things that were needed. He exchanged kerosene, a type of oil we use to burn in a homemade lamp for the house. This no longer exists, because times have changed and are still changing more and more. People receive aid from the government, not much, but it helps a little. Today things are very expensive in town and unfortunately we are in this world and do not follow-up the city lifestyle. We live in the forest and most of it is still natural.

NANÊ
Genipap

A message to the new generations

I hope that the children of today, my grandchildren and other children, can do more than what is already being done today. May they have a lot of opportunities to improve more and more, use technology tools, and enjoy the best way possible inside and outside the village. In the old days, our people were much more collective, whereas today we need to teach the youngsters the importance of being closer together.

DANÍ

My name is Daní. I am 45 years old and live in Chico Kurumim village.



An even more beautiful Nixi Pae

I started drinking ayahuasca when I was 18 years old and already married. My husband's brother-in-law is a shaman and they often drank ayahuasca. One day, they were preparing for a night-long event when I became curious and asked my husband to participate. He told me it was very strong and I would not stand the force, but still I said I wanted to try it. So he informed the shaman, who said I would have no problems as I would learn from the ayahuasca medicine. I saw that other women were participating, usually accompanied by their husbands. At the time, nobody had musical instruments like today – people sang with their voices only. It was from that experience that I started participating more frequently. Today I take part in every ceremony. There are no restrictions as there used to be, when only men took ayahuasca while women and youngsters did not really participate. Today I am happy to see my children making contact with the medicines from an early age. This makes them learn more from a young age. The existence of the instruments makes it all easier both for the young boys and the women. Using this modernity, this mix of cultures, makes it even more beautiful. Oh, there are the smart young people who compose their own songs. In my view, this is a very positive evolution that was not available in my time.

Boa constrictor

I saw a large boa constrictor in front of me. I was in the swidden harvesting manioc when I saw her in a hole. I had already heard that we should speak to the boa constrictor when we saw one, to ask for force, to learn the *Kene*, to learn her wisdom, like the patterns of our history were taught to women. In order for her to continue giving us this teaching, we should go on a short *dieta* after seeing a boa constrictor, and we should also wash our heads with white clay. I dreamed of her – older people say that when we dream of a boa constrictor, it represents a new learning of the *Kene*, or it means that we will meet a person knowledgeable in *Kene*. I like the *Sêpi Kene*, and the various boa constrictor patterns. The boa constrictor *Kene* are known by the name *Shuku Kene*, as we make them very quickly. That is why it is also known by this name.

Samakei

I have never gone on a *dieta*, but I have worked for someone who was doing the *dieta*. It is almost as if I were doing it as well. Somehow, I was present there although there was no communication, but the force of the *Muká* is very strong. During this process, we also have to do the *dieta*, even when you are not doing it – it does not matter who it is, someone in your village does it so we have to do the *dieta* with them. This is because the force is around this place. I still wish to do the *dieta* and am waiting for my legume crops to be ready. We have to do the *dieta* while the crops are at their best, because they will be the basis of our food during the dietary period. More than ever we must prepare ourselves, particularly with regard to our food. We feel like eating meat when we are hungry, so the secret for the *dieta* is not to be hungry. Always try to eat some specific food for the *dieta*. Oh, and do not forget the food must be varied so that we do not get tired of only one type of food, such as sweet corn and dry corn, peanuts, banana, manioc, all the foods we consume in various ways. When all are eaten, there is no hunger for meat, as our objective with the *dieta* is to strengthen our spirit. We will eat other food again later! There are strict rules, that's

why it is called *Samakeí*. One cannot bathe in normal water, we must only bathe with medicines; one cannot drink water either, it is replaced by another liquid for some days. These are the few experiences I have with the *Muká dieta*. Despite not having done it, we must always learn about our culture. These are our studies, the degree the forest school offers us, and there is nobody to certify that we are who we are except for nature, which trains us.

Life exchanges

I see that many of those who leave the village to travel bring a new vision to the communities, because those who go to other towns will certainly return with a new vision. We are all like this [in] this life exchange: we leave and always want to return with the best of the life we have experienced. Even if it is only in our memory, it is a new vision nonetheless. Before this, they produced more. Today the production is no longer what it was, because men valued food more then. Today, I see that many people depend on other people's crops to feed their own families, and our *Huní Kuî* families are large. Swiddens will not maintain many families for too long, and here there is only one crop at a time. I think that somehow this makes it easy for those who have money, because they can buy food in town, but our traditional foods are still the staple in the village. Although this doesn't happen in my village, I see it happening in some places. Somehow, people who leave their place will never be the same, either positively or negatively, but most of the people who I go out always go in search of improvements for our people.

I see changes. [I also see] that back then we used to value our culture more. People were more collective: when there was a traditional festivity in the village, it was more beautiful, there was a large *kupixawa*, people cooperated more, food and prey were more abundant, there was excess food and everybody was satisfied. Today this is no longer like before, as it still exists in a reduced form. In my point of view, this is happening because today's leaders are committed to the *Nawa* works, such as representing our people, talking about our rights together with the *Nawa*, so they have other commitments. This is why the youngsters are leading this work. I think there is twice as much work – while

before the concern was with our culture alone, today there are double responsibilities. In the old days, nobody ate at home only, everybody did things collectively, while today I see that we are mixing the *Nawa* culture [with ours] [and] many times we don't invite our relatives to eat with us. Of course, it is there, but everything is different. Our union was stronger, as were our foods. It wasn't "make believe", maybe this is why we have to understand that the times are not the same. We should live and enjoy, as things are undone and redone at the same time. I thought that only men, not women, had the right to take on leadership roles outside, and I am happy to see *Huní Kuī* women teachers and leaders. Not to mention the fact that we feel better represented by women like us. We feel more freedom talking to them. If they were men, our husbands would not let us talk to them. So, these are the differences I see between the times.

I see that we are being a source of transfer of our own culture to other places. Even if many people come to help us, there will always be those who take advantage of the moment. I don't know much about this, but what I see regarding *Nixi Pae*, for example, [is that] when a relative uses it, they are in search of something for the community, while when a *Nawa* uses it, they are doing it for themselves, maybe often in our name but without our knowledge.

A message to the new generations

I hope that today's youngsters, particularly the women, may have many other work opportunities inside and outside the village, such as being teachers, health agents, dentists – all that I see is lacking. In my opinion, women today have more responsibilities, so they should be ahead of all this. This is all that I dream for us from now onward.

BATANI

My name is Batani. I am 40 years old.



Nixi Pae

My first ayahuasca experience was at age 7, with my uncle. Women already participated with *Nixi Pae* then and I, like every child, wanted to participate in adult works and asked my mother if I could participate. She accompanied me and we drank *Nixi Pae* together. When I took the first dose, a very small dose, I did not feel the force, only a small change in my body. A feeling like I was twirling, but I enjoyed feeling it then. Mother was still alive and accompanied me. I was her youngest, a girl, and she taught me and accompanied me in all that I wanted to learn.

It was at this time that my uncle offered to be our teacher of knowledge. He was training to become a shaman, so he opened a school where we enrolled to start drinking *Nixi Pae* weekly. He was challenging himself, for his self-knowledge, and gave us this opportunity of being initiated and of becoming young apprentices of the forest knowledge.

It was only at age 15 that I started feeling a stronger force. The first vision I had was with my uncle. I felt a really strong force, stood up and started describing what the vision was showing me. I saw many *Nawa*

coming to our village through his work, and the people who were by my side put me in a hammock and told me that was the force of the vision. I had many strong visions, the force herself showed me things about the *Kene*. I still did not weave then, and the force told me to weave the *Txêre Bêru*. After having had this vision, I put all that our teacher had taught me into practice. At that time, my mother had already passed on. I was 11 years old when she went and left me. I remember that in the force I told the other women to teach me what I was learning in the vision. They told me that it was the force and asked me to calm down and sit down.

This is my experience. At that time, women already knew about *Nixi Pae*. I have heard reports from long ago, when women could not participate in the ayahuasca ceremony. The men forbade them and said that they would not be the same once they took ayahuasca, and they would not respect and obey their husbands, scaring them so that they would not be interested in knowing *Nixi Pae*. In my opinion, I think they feared that we women could dominate the force, because we are very intelligent. We do not need men for everything, but they do depend a lot on us, women. I say that from my point of view today.

My learning

I always heard the wiser people saying that pregnant women cannot be in the men's *feitio*. It was usually only the men who made all the preparations for the *feitio*. They said that people had to be painted with urucum in order to participate and be protected from the visions other people had of you. During pregnancy, our women's spirit is very sensitive and it would not be good to be exposed in the middle of the force.

Unfortunately, my mother was not present to teach me about the rituals and the stories that corresponded to the phases of my development. Such teachings are given to the woman-child by her mother; she is our first life teacher. I missed these teachings a lot, but I learnt by listening to what other people told their daughters. I often witnessed a mother teaching her daughter, who did not listen to her. This served as an important teaching for me: it became part of my own life curriculum

for my life and my knowledge acquisition – if her daughter doesn't want to learn, I do! I am a person who still enjoys learning new things, anywhere; if I hear people teaching things I don't know, I keep it for myself like a treasure box to use it in the right moment in my life, and to pass it on to my children. This is how I learnt, doing a jigsaw puzzle from other mothers' teachings. Good and beautiful words should be acquired and passed on, as there will always be someone who needs to hear it to build their [own puzzle].

Boa constrictor

I was in the swidden with other women when I saw a boa constrictor for the first time. I called them to see her, but was advised not to get close, and they told me that when we women meet her, we ask for the force of the knowledge of *Kene*. When we get too close, she feels it and begins her chant: *sirin, sirin, sirin*. So, I asked her to give me the strength of the knowledge of the *Kene Txêre Bêru*, this pattern, the first pattern girls learn.

The boa constrictor dream is very specific for us, *Huní Kuĩ* women, because when we dream of her, it represents the knowledge of the *Kene*, so it means that I am learning a new pattern. If a pregnant woman dreams of the boa constrictor, it may mean that she is expecting a girl. These reports come from the older women.

I really enjoy working making *Txêre Bêru*. There are many different patterns, and I have learnt several *Kene* from the *Txêre Bêru* in my weaving work.

Samakei

I have never done the *Muká dieta*. The reports I heard from other people who have done the *dieta*, which we call *Samakei*, say that there must be a purpose for change. One does not play with the *Muká* plant. It is the most powerful plant in the forest, and its power of transformation requires one to be accompanied by somebody who has already done the *dieta*, which lasts from one to three months. Just like a person in the city wants to achieve their objectives to get good studies and work in

life, so it is for an Indigenous person. Through ancestral knowledge and teachings, the men focus on their work, on how to make a crop, hunt and plant, while the women must focus on our work, such as weaving, basketry, clay ceramics, prayers and even heavier work like the slashing of crops. It is a way to acquire more knowledge.

I can report on the changes I witnessed in my sister who has done the *Muka dieta*. People really do become different, in the sense of having a renewed force and commitment to their word. My sister is a very skillful person in her weaving work now. Her words often make deep sense because they are followed by action. It is the transformation of our body and thought, all is renewed.

Our knowledge

A very significant change I see is that men and women did not have the knowledge we have today. There were no schools for them to study and learn to read and write. This is why our people were enslaved. The knowledge they had of the forest was different from the knowledge studied today. They did not have the knowledge of the *Nawa*, but had the wealth and knowledge of the ancestral culture, knowledge that was passed on orally to other people. And we have kept alive this knowledge, which is passed on through our parents since time immemorial. Today, access to other knowledges and other cultures is facilitated mainly through schooling, a very important tool for us.

Modernity has brought us the opening to a new life and vision for us. Nowadays, this is related to everything, from the food that nurtures us to modern technology. Today we have an opening to the whole world, the same way we have also opened paths of entrance to our culture. For example, we have a lot of non-Indigenous families here, who don't need to have blood ties to be part of us. Many *Nawa* come to help us in some way. Today, I can say that a large portion of our culture is becoming lost – we no longer practice what our parents used to. I have witnessed and lived through many things in childhood that do not exist anymore. All that is left are memories to tell my grandchildren. I always tell my children what I went through in my childhood. Women

used to weave to make hammocks for the entire family, so there were plenty of cotton crops for this. Those who did not have [cotton], used banana leaves to sleep on. The houses were made from a tree called walking palm [*Socratea exorrhiza*] and straws. This still exists today, but in a more modern manner. Today anyone can sleep in a bed or in a larger hammock bought at a store. I grew up eating many different foods made by my mother, such as mushroom soup with mushrooms she herself collected in the forest. Today, my daughters will not want to eat such food if I offer it. This is a summary of my childhood compared to today. I am very happy to see and live this historical moment when we women have a space to talk and work, as we are doing right now, being interviewed by another *Huwi Ku'i* woman, and having this great opportunity to bring these two reports of different times.

From the mother's womb to menopause

When a woman is pregnant, the first step is to avoid eating too much prey and fish. Animals that make houses by digging holes and live underground or in a hole, such as armadillos, should be avoided by first-time mothers because it is difficult to hunt them in deep holes. Fish like the Amazon sailfin catfish [*Pterygoplichthys pardalis*], which lives in hollow underwater trunks, are also difficult to be pulled out. Avoiding such foods prevents the baby from taking too long to be born when the time comes. Crabs and *mandim* [*Pimelodella gracilis*] should also be avoided.

During her pregnancy, the mother will take baths and drink medicinal plants. After the baby is born, the mother is bathed with specific herbal medicines, which enables the new mother to eat certain foods that are forbidden for the baby, so that if the mother eats them the baby will be protected. The child's first baptism uses *genipap*, which is a way for the child to grow up healthy and protected from diseases. At adolescence, the second baptism, *Nixpu Pimá* or tooth baptism, is not only for protection but also to make the teeth stronger. The young ones who are going through the baptism process are secluded, avoiding contact for a few days, while their parents have fun with other parents. This is a baptism for both men and women.

When a girl first menstruates, she must go on a *dieta* during the first days she bleeds. This is a *dieta* for the first menstruation only. She cannot go out, to avoid any vultures that may fly by from seeing her head. In Huví Kuĩ science, this will prevent hair loss when she is older. She cannot eat manioc because cooked manioc is soft and eating it would speed tooth loss before she reaches an advanced age. Instead, she can eat cooked green bananas, which become just as soft as manioc.

Marriage happens when parents feel help is needed for household chores, for preparing a swidden, hunting and doing other male tasks in the village. The father starts to feel overwhelmed and alone, and the mother, upon seeing her husband unable to do all the work, starts looking for a good match to marry her daughter. All of this will depend on the parents, not on their daughter. It does not matter whether or not she likes it: the point is for somebody to come join and strengthen the family.

When a woman gets married, she starts having lots of children, and she will always think that each child comes to help. Not every woman wants to have lots of children, but unfortunately there is no avoiding it. There are forest medicines that prevent children, forever or for a long time, but these medicines require a *dieta* and not having intercourse. Some women can do it, others cannot. All the husbands are in the village, pregnancy cannot be avoided, and [women] only stop having children once their menopause begins. I have heard many women saying that their menopause was early because they had many children, while others went through it later. I saw some women who I lived close to having herbal baths or drinking infusions because they were feeling ill because of menopause, and these baths help them not to feel the discomfort.

A message to the new generations

I hope this new generation brings the change we are trying [to make]. May they have more opportunities to study and learn, and may they continue doing what is best for our Huví Kuĩ people. I still have to learn, I still want to look for new dreams and accomplishments as long as life allows it.

BATANI

I am called Batani.
I am 30 years old.



Nixi Pae

My first contact with *Nixi Pae* was at age 11. My father was a teacher in the village and always held ceremonies. I was curious to participate and feel [the force]. He called me to the next ceremony and I felt nothing that first time, as he gave me a much smaller dose. He used to give me smaller doses. As I started participating I received larger doses of ayahuasca, and I started to have experiences and to understand more about the visions. My mother always scared me. We normally went to bed early on ceremony nights. However, women already participated in the circle when I started participating, and so did young people my age. Some men taught their wives the chants and prayers. Much, much earlier, ceremonies were secret and not done under the open sky, but things were already changing when I started: everybody was mixed together, the elders, the youngsters and the children.

Weakness, nausea, malaise, illness

NISŪ

Weakness, nausea,
malaise, illness

The older, wiser women say that ayahuasca cannot be consecrated during pregnancy, as she can pass the debilitating Nisū force of ayahuasca to the baby. If we do not follow our cultural rule, the child may have complications in their growth, such as disease caused by the mother's lack of *dieta*. And visions are also shown; one can have a good vision, but also a bad one. My own report: I was pregnant and started having many visions, and I do not wish this on anyone, especially a first-time mother. According to our Huní Kuĩ culture, this should be avoided. Many people say there is no harm in consecrating ayahuasca during pregnancy, and of course, there is no harm to the mother, but the child will feel all of it. Concerning menstruation, I haven't looked for reports, but some people say it should not be taken, that it should be avoided, because this is our people's culture and we should really respect it. We are very young before this ancient knowledge, which must be heard and respected for its ancestry. We have a lot of teachings to learn in order to pass it on to our children.

Boa constrictor

I have seen her through other people a few times. The first time I saw her was when my father found one on the roof of our home. Everybody came to see her. I was a child, and I was curious; I wanted to know, and my mother told me not to get close. Women say that when we see a boa constrictor in front of us, we have to ask for the knowledge of the Kene so we can learn. Our old stories say that it was the boa constrictor who brought the women the patterns. I like to make the Txêre Bêru, Kapê Hina, Maê Musha, but Txêre Bêru is the first Kene mothers teach their daughters, as a way for them to start understanding the other patterns.

KAPÊ HINA

Caiman tail Kene

MAÊ MUSA

Cat's claw thorn Kene

Changes

I have witnessed a lot of changes from my childhood to date. I am giving you some examples, such as changes in the village festivals for the traditional festivities. Today people meet to welcome outsiders. This is what is different: hunting and fishing is reduced due to the lack

of animals caused by the growing population in the villages. This also happens to the fish – our river is small and there aren't many large fish to support the number of people we are today. A long time ago there was abundance. This is no longer true. There has been a very significant change for us, women. I grew up hearing that women's work was to look after the home, there was no other knowledge available to us. Only work like weaving, basketry and clay pots. Today, this has changed. We are no longer led by men only. We, women, are gaining space and have an important role to play. We are many, as teachers, leaders, chiefs, midwives. We occupy many of these spaces. Men travel to other places, and so do women. We travel the world taking our knowledge, female representation, and so some women do not have to be beside men to do their work, like it used to be. This is the difference between the past and the vision of today.

Marriage

I got married at 17. My parents wanted to marry me off. At that age, I knew that in *Nawa* culture they [first] date to get married later, so it is a way to get to know your partner before your marriage. It was different for me. I was getting to know my partner, we were starting to talk in order to get to know each other, and my parents noticed this and gave me to him. This has always been so in our culture: nobody dates to know the other before [marriage]. There is only marriage. Because they are from a time different from mine, they did not understand me, so I had to get married very young. Although this is considered normal, in my opinion, with the vision that I have today, I consider it too early. I have three children, two girls and a boy. I think a different future for them, as we live in times where there are laws for everything. I dream of an even better future for each of them, to enjoy this opportunity to study. Since I did not have this, I would never do unto them what my parents did unto me. I want them to have a different future, to help our family and our people.

HIMI DATXUKITĪ
Protection for the baby
in a new world

From birth to adulthood and menopause

A newborn baby has to be bathed in medicines for them, Himi DatxukitĪ. This helps the child not to become sick during the growth stages. It helps to protect and allows the mother to eat some foods – before this bath, the mother is limited to a few food choices. Only after this bath can she eat everything without restrictions.

Baptism [with] a genipap bath comes first. This helps the child to be protected from the evil eye, to deflect many illnesses. Spiritually, this baptism protects the child from insects as well.

Girls must follow a specific *dieta* during their first menstruation. This is one of the main *dietas* in a woman's life: I went through this ritual in my first menstruation. The first time we discover it, we must tell our fathers, as it helps prevent bleeding, because men do not menstruate. According to what the elders, the wiser people say, in Huni Kuĩ culture when a girl tells her mother, she is placed on a hammock as if she were going through the teeth baptism, Nixpu Pimá. In the first menstruation *dieta*, our mothers teach us to weave, to spin cotton, to adapt to our routines. The teeth baptism, Nixpu Pimá, serves to strengthen our teeth. In the ritual, we dye our teeth with a plant called Nixpu. Everybody must go through this. All the rituals we go through are for protection during our lives, so it is essential to do them right, with people who understand the appropriate chants and prayers for each festivity and ritual.

A message to the new generations

I hope they get to make the change to what the previous generation did and we are still doing today. May these youngsters use the newest learning tools for the benefit of our people.

YEKÊ

My name is Yekê, and I am 49 years old.
I am an artisan and teach the arts of our knowledge.



Nixi Pae

My first contact with Nixi Pae was at age 20. At the time, I did not have much knowledge of our own culture and relationship with ayahuasca. One day, a cousin of mine came from another Indigenous territory, [where] he used to hold ceremonies among men. I talked to my husband about participating and he explained what a vision was like. The vision can vary depending on the amount the person drinks, and I started consecrating it little by little. As the amount I took grew, I started feeling it and having visions. At that time, [only] a few women participated, [and] almost none had experience with Nixi Pae. Even though it was from our culture, it was deeply hidden. This cousin of mine did not sing the *Humi Meka* chants, he sang the songs/hymns of the hymnals [*hinários*]¹⁰ he had copied in his notebook. Since he had come from another Indigenous territory, it was not possible to know how he got those hymnals. Possibly, they came from a village that had contact with larger towns. He must have had contact with non-Indigenous people and got all those hymnals.

HUMI MEKA
Nixi Pae chants,
taught by Yube,
the boa constrictor

10. Hymnals: This likely refers to the hymnals of Santo Daime, the oldest modern religion centred on ayahuasca, whose doctrine is entirely transmitted through hymnals. (T.N.)

TXANA

The name of a bird that reproduces the singing of other birds. Also used to refer to those who have a gift for song and know the traditional ceremonial songs.

I started listening to our chants with my father-in-law. He was a great Txana wiseman. This is what Huni Kuĩ singing shamans are called in the ceremonies. He had much knowledge of the Huni Kuĩ culture. From that point I started acquiring and improving my knowledge, until now. Things changed every year, and I can say that I have followed a large portion of our culture's development with ayahuasca to date. I learnt a lot from my husband's family.

Menstruation

Women did not drink [ayahuasca] while menstruating, even if some people said they could. We must respect our culture. Many things are passed on to us through older women, and we must respect our culture. I participated in the *feitio* many times, but I was neither pregnant nor menstruating. I went to the *feitio* to help my cousin, as there is lots of work in a *feitio*. The people involved are putting their energy there anyway, so it is always good to have good thoughts. Painting oneself with urucum is a way of protecting oneself from the visions other people have of us; having prayers and saying them during the *feitio* brings harmony and induces good visions when consecrating [ayahuasca].

Boa constrictor

In our history, the boa constrictor was the one who gave and taught us the knowledge of the *Kene*. I have never met a boa constrictor, but my mother used to say that we should run when we see one before she sees us, to avoid having to go on a *dieta*. Otherwise, if we are in front of the boa constrictor, we should ask her for the skill to learn the *Kene*. If this is not done, she can take our knowledge back. Some women would kill to obtain the boa constrictor's force, and put her knowledge into practice. There are several boa constrictor patterns: the part of the head, the tail, the belly and the body. Men do the same for their work and hunts. I am always on the lookout to learn the many knowledges of our culture. I do not know all the *Kene*. I only know about ten out of the several patterns that exist, which come from Professor Ibã Sales' research. Our patterns are split into the two clans that make the Huni Kuĩ people: *Dua* and *Banu*

YUSHĀ KURU
The woman who
witnessed the
transformation of people
from the Dua-Banu
and Inu-Inani clans
into medicinal plants in
ancient times.

(represented by the red jaguar), Inu and Inani (represented by the spotted jaguar). There are different patterns for each clan and for the types of medicine. History says that the two clans transformed to heal their people, the story of *Yushā Kuru*. People who know about these stories are able to explain it better. I was still learning from my mother when she died, so I was not able to learn many important things from her. The little I know I learnt from listening to other people. I did not try to learn from my father, although I spent a lot of time with him. This is why it is so important for young people to try to learn while there are still people who know how to tell these stories, as they are among us. This is the key for future knowledge. Traditional studies that were passed on orally are now recorded and, for that reason, easier to learn. It was more difficult in the old days, and only those who were really interested did learn. Today, it can be recorded and heard later.

Very different times

Times are very different, and I see and experience a major difference today. Before, we lived in the times of “captivity”, when knowledge and studies were forbidden. We made our living from rubber-tapping. Today, we live in the “time of rights”. For example, our work was all traditional, whereas today it is easier to do things that were complicated, such as planting and harvesting cotton to make our clothes and hammocks to sleep in. When I was a child, I never knew what it was to have a warm blanket to sleep in. Nowadays, it is easier to find and buy things. We buy threads from a shop and use different colors. This gives us more time for the household chores.

Use of the medicines in the world

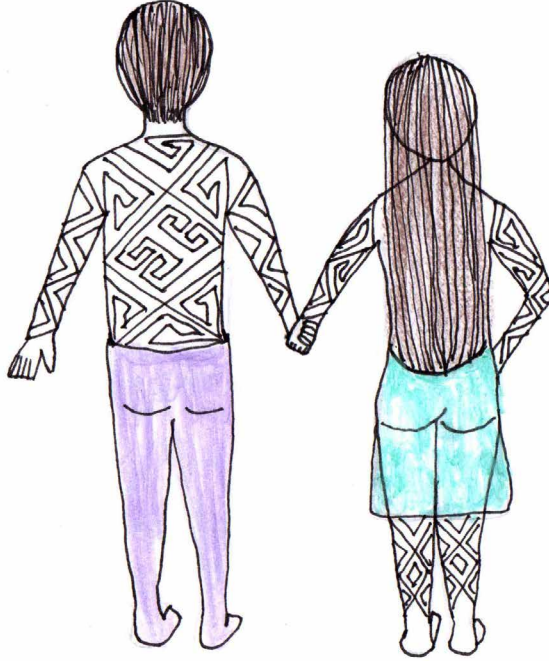
I see there isn't much to do with regard to hiding our medicines. The positive side is seeing the partnerships with the *Nawa* who come with good intentions, to help. And the negative side? I think: what happens, what interest do people from other places have in our culture? I would like to know how to have a dialogue to better understand these relationships.

A message to the new generations

My message is for them to enjoy this major opportunity to study, and that they may make a difference for an even better future. I have not had or lived this moment I am now witnessing. I am still hopeful that my Hui Kuī people can occupy the spaces that are rightfully ours, which were taken from us a long time ago and are still denied us.

SAMÊ

I am Samê. I am 53 years old.
I am an artisan.



Nixi Pae

I was 16 when I got to know Nixi Pae. I saw my older sisters consecrating Nixi Pae, was curious to participate and asked them to take me with them to the ceremony. I did not feel anything the first times, but slowly discovered the force. The vision shows *Ikukãishani*; the work I did showed me this. In the beginning, when I started taking the medicine, some women participated, but only to witness and support their husbands when they needed care. Those with more courage to feel the force did participate.

IKUKÃISHANI

The ayahuasca vision
shows the foresight
of the future.

Boa constrictor

I was in the swidden harvesting maize with my mother and inadvertently touched the boa constrictor's head. She was atop a tree stump and was very large. My mother told me I was going to learn the *Kene*, asking her for the force of the patterns. I still weave what I learnt to this day.

Samakei

I went on a *dieta* when I was 45 years old. I was in seclusion and my mother helped me do it. I had many children, and this was a way of not having any more children. During my seclusion, I would follow this *dieta* and would not have intercourse with my partner. There is a purpose to every *Muká dieta*, and this was my purpose. It really depends a lot on each one who does it, *Habiari Baiwaki*. I did not follow it the way I should have done. It was not the right time to do it. It was my mother's idea because of her concern for me. I still got pregnant three times after trying the *dieta*. The *dieta* must have a specific food, and I had to eat to sustain my newborn children, so I do not advise anyone to do it the way they did to me.

HABIARI BAIWAKI
Positive intention

Changes

The main changes I see were the times of abundance we had in our lands, like hunting, fishing, traditional festivities and abundant legumes. It is not the same when compared with today. Despite all the changes, these were very good times, there weren't as many diseases as the ones appearing, there are no fish in the river, there are more and more of our relatives, while the hunting is further and further away. We used to live in different houses, and men's work was to look after the family and the crops. They were just the farmers of their families. Or else, they extracted rubber to sell to the *Nawa* bosses in exchange for a few objects. Nobody had work like today. I did not know what a city was, my parents never took me to one. Today, people come to town to get their documents. Before, women had many children with no income; today, it is easier. With the help from the Bolsa Família Program¹¹, mothers are entitled to a maternity wage, which we did not have in the past, because it was another time. What we have today did not exist then. [Now] older people have documents and the right to retirement, and there are teachers to teach other youngsters in the village. I am living through many changes, and this is but a random summary.

11. Bolsa Família - a social income transfer program of the Brazilian Federal Government, internationally recognized for having contributed to removing Brazil from the UN Hunger Map by 2025. (T.N.)

Marriage

We, the parents, make our daughter's marriages when we feel that our husbands cannot deal with the workload. When a man gets married, he comes to live in his wife's house. This means there is a new family member to help out, as sons-in-law owe their in-laws a lot of respect.

There is no consensus, the daughter must simply accept. When she does not want to get married, the whole family gets together to talk [to her] and make her understand why she must do it. It varies according to each family's needs. She may get married really young, and this depends on the father and mother. I myself was given to my husband when I was 15 years old. I got married legally, with one registration for the both of us. A priest came to baptize children and was marrying people, so we took the opportunity to get married as well. I did not know him, had not dated him. My mother came and told me she wanted to marry me off, and I did not have much choice. She always said that I was of an age to get married, so I accepted but I was not happy. I was afraid of him. We are still together today, we have children and many grandchildren together.

A message to the new generations

This is the message I want to leave to you, the youngsters, who are our future: may you fight better and better, as the present is not easy for us, Indigenous peoples. We live in the middle of a war with the government that wants to eliminate us. Study to have the power to fight for all Indigenous peoples.

BUNI INANI

My name is Buni Inani. I am 61 years old.
I am an artisan and a healer.



Rubber Plantation

I was born and grew up on a rubber plantation. There were no villages at the time, only the *Nawa* plantations. So, I lived on a rubber plantation, where I spent most of my childhood. It was only after anthropologist Terri de Aquino and the Indigenous leaders managed to transform those plantations into Indigenous territories that we came to the Jordão Region, to the village. It was not a village yet; those were the early days.

Nixi Pae

I was 20 years old the first time I drank *Nixi Pae*. I felt the force right in the first ceremony. I felt my body was different. I was a mother of four and had my youngest in my arms. I couldn't move well, *Kêreshwaki*. I had always heard but had never had the chance to drink *Nixi Pae*. My husband always did so, but did not support my participation. At some point in time I wanted to know *Nixi Pae*. It is very difficult when we have no knowledge or explanation of something we want to know, as happened to me in the force of the *Nixi Pae*.

KÊRESHWAKI

The force
strengthened and
held me.

At that time, women did not participate; it was only me and another person who lived in the same village. After these difficulties, I started participating more often and wanted to drink *Nixi Pae* every week to have visions. I used to ask people when the next ceremony would be. It was in the force of ayahuasca that I found everything I had to learn. I grew up apart from my mother and was raised by my uncle. That is why I found my teacher in *Nixi Pae*.

There was a new lesson every time I drank her. This depends on each person. I found and improved all my knowledge of life through this great teacher, and I passed this knowledge down to my children. I was the only woman participating in the ceremonies and I missed sharing experiences with other women. Men would not share those with me as I was a woman – they themselves did not have much experience.

Nobody sang or spoke. I really wanted to sing, dance, talk – it was the moment to do all of this, but we only learnt over time. I had no idea of what it was like to dance, but I wanted to do it. People had started dancing while in the force in other villages, and I really wanted to join them and be together with them. Unfortunately, it was just a dream that did not evolve. It is very different when one has a dream that is not accomplished, and does not grab the chance when it arises. Today, I am older and can no longer realize all the desires I had before. I am letting my daughters continue this dream: they are living it and practicing this dream I had to leave behind.

Boa constrictor

I saw a boa constrictor when I was a child. It wasn't in the village. I still lived in the rubber plantation with my uncle when I first saw her, at the age of 13. My aunt and I were going to the swidden when I saw her while crossing the *igarapé*¹². She came in the waters. Another time, she was on the ground and was larger, trying to catch prey. At that time, I had no knowledge of the *dieta*. We had always lived in the rubber plantation where nobody practiced our culture, as it was non-Indigenous territory.

12. *Igarapé*: A small, shallow, navigable waterway or channel commonly found in the Amazon rainforest. (T.N.)

There are several different *Kene*, with the meanings of the plants, the animals, and the forest. There are several boa constrictor patterns. I make some of them as protection, shaped like boa constrictor patterns.

Muká

I have done the *Muká dieta*. It is a delicate process, so all the physical and spiritual preparations must be followed as we will receive the strength from a forest plant. My ex-husband's grandmother guided me and two other women. She took us to the *igarapé* and spread *Muká* in our eyes. She asked us to commit to following the *dieta*. I did not know how to follow such a strong *dieta* and had a two-month old baby. In the early hours of an afternoon, I put my baby to sleep and also fell asleep, which is not allowed. As I wasn't aware of this, the *Yuxibu* forgave me. If we sleep on the first day of the *dieta*, we can have a bad dream, which is a warning. Sleeping should be avoided. That very afternoon, I had a vision and unfortunately a few months later I received news of what I had dreamed. This is real, and the first test starts there. There is a good side to it and there is the side that tests our capacity. People who do this *dieta* must have a purpose to change their lives, strengthen their spirit and words, and the purpose of protecting the forest. The person who guides the others in the *dieta* must also follow the *dieta* themselves every time they do so. As I was unaware of all these explanations, I followed this *dieta*, and ate some of the foods for a short while. Some people say negative things to reach our spirit. I was told I would have many children, particularly girls, and I did. In my experience, the *Muká* spirit is in the center of our head to guide us. It shows us what will happen in dreams, it tells us how to deviate from other people's negative words. Maybe no one talks about this, but I have lived through all of this.

Changes

The different times of my life. During my childhood, I grew up on a rubber plantation. I always wanted to study. Our teachers were *Nawa*. When we went to school, our teacher made us work in her home, and we often went back home wanting to study in order to have our own

things. We did heavy work, like cleaning a large field under the hot sun or rain in exchange for makeup or pieces of fabric to make our clothes. The good side was the abundance of hunting and fishing. In summer, my uncle caught large fish, which we dried in the sun for winter, when there was no fishing. We ate the fish we preserved in the summer. I lived many good adventures that no longer exist. Nowadays, things have changed. Technology controls everything. I saw and lived the changes in the villages, the evolution of culture, the *Huwi Kuĩ* gaining spaces, the women having a voice and rights – all the transformation up to now. Today, women like my daughters have gained rights. I did not have the opportunity to study like they do now, but my dreams are fulfilled just by seeing them evolve. This is a short summary of the difference between the old times and the modern times we live in, with regard to our life, our culture, our ways, and the passing of time.

Knowledges spread around the world

In my view, I see that our knowledge and wisdom is being spread around the world. This has both a good and a bad side. There was a time when people only wanted to know. Today, they come with more interests than just knowing our cultures. This is why people who make these kinds of bridges must check with everybody before making any decisions. The good side is that these bridges serve as a new pathway to those who fight for improvements on our behalf.

A girl from birth to menopause

Before, people always followed a *dieta* in their first menstruation, while today it is quite rare to see this happening. Adolescents do not want to be secluded for a few days. There wasn't much choice before, but today they have more freedom to decide. I had my first period at age 13. I did not tell anyone as my mother had given me to my uncle. Usually, girls trust their mothers and since mine was not around, I hid it. I was scared and did not know what to do. I thought I was pregnant, because I had heard women saying that one can get pregnant

after the first menstruation, but I had no idea this applied to married women. Since nobody had talked to me about this, I could only think of pregnancy. After birth, a child undergoes several processes: prayers, baths, and *dietas* to have physical and spiritual protection for her entire life. Yuxíbu had already prepared me, as I was an abandoned child and always endeavoured to have knowledge. If there is one thing I learnt in life is that we must be honest. The only thing in life you can steal is advice, and you must learn from it even when it is not for you.

Huní Kuĩ Marriage

In villages, a marriage happens when the husband is no longer able to do the household chores by himself, so we start looking for a boy for our daughter. It cannot be just anyone. He should be a worker, a fisherman, a hunter, as he will join the family to replace his father-in-law when he is absent, doing the man's tasks at home.

A message to the new generations

My message is for them to make the change and unite forces to continue seeking the best for all the Huní Kuĩ peoples and other peoples in the world.

TXANANI

I am Txanani, and I am 38 years old.
I am a women's coordinator in my village.



Nixi Pae

I first met ayahuasca at the age of 22. My father used to say that in our culture the *Nixi Pae* medicines were consecrated only by the older people and the shaman. *Nixi Pae* was consecrated for healing work, so my father did not allow me to participate. There was nobody else to back me up, so I became interested in knowing the medicine and started taking part little by little. Back then, women did not participate alongside men.

I was afraid the first time, as I had no idea what it felt like to experience an ayahuasca vision. Then I started enjoying it, because ayahuasca opened up visions for me and I started to learn and understand the teachings. Time went on and this evolved, then I came to a central village where a major assembly meeting was taking place. There was an all-night ceremony where I saw many women participating and felt happy. There were no instruments like the guitar or drums then – these are novelties. This is a little of my ayahuasca experience.

Boa constrictor

When I saw the boa constrictor for the first time in my life, I felt happy. It wasn't me who found her; it was the men who were working that found her. In the forest, this serpent does not show up very often. When we see her, it signals something new, so this is the time when we ask for the force of the *Kene* knowledge.

Of the many reports I have heard, dreaming with a boa constrictor means learning a new *Kene*, because in our history, it was the boa constrictor that brought us the patterns we use today.

All the knowledge is passed on from mother to daughter. That is how we have been keeping our ancestral wisdom. When I saw the women weaving, I wanted to do it, so my sister, who has already departed this life, taught me. She learnt it from grandma and started teaching me the process of spinning and weaving the cotton, step by step. This way, she taught me the first *Kene*. I did not have many lessons with her – she only showed me three times, but because I really wanted to learn, those three classes were enough for me to keep going till now, just as you see me doing: I am weaving and talking to you, telling you my story. These habits are part of our lives as *Huwi Kuĩ* women. They are a legacy, a way of honoring my sister who departed too soon, leaving me just this memory, and an inheritance from the first steps of my learning to now.

Muká

Yes, I have already done the *Muká dieta*. The main purpose of doing the *dieta* is to search for a change and solidify our thinking, deepening our knowledge. It is a long, step-by-step process, and one needs to be ready to face this challenge, as this is the main *dieta* in our lives. It gives us power in our speech, enables us to escape from negative energies, and protects against disease – even if a person falls sick, it won't be the same as for someone who does not have the protection of the *dieta*.

Climate change

I have seen many changes from my childhood to the present day in our food, for example. Before, our whole diet was based on what came from our parents' garden, whereas today I see it is easy to buy food in town. Our houses were traditional, while today people live in a different kind of construction. I first had the chance of going to town when I was 13 years old. I used to hear of the city, but I never imagined what it was like. One day, my parents took me there. Back then, there was no transportation like today, when everybody has their boats and motors to move along the river. We did not have those. Also, there was nothing for us to do in the cities back then. So, many people did not know what a city was, like me. When I arrived in the town of Jordão and saw the aluminum roofs in houses, I thought there were two towns together, Taruacá and Jordão. We stayed at a *Nawa*'s house and it was great to stay in a different kind of building. Today, most changes, like climate change, bring us a life threat. Before, the forest was better protected; now it is being destroyed little by little. We no longer know what season of the year we are in, and nature has been surprising us with her reactions. I don't know what the future will be like – the world is changing more and more due to white men's greed and obligations.

Cuidados

I see that our cultures and medicines are already being spread around and appropriated by other people. This of course brings some kind of benefit, but we must be careful regarding the way they are being taken, the reason why and for what. In the old days, all our knowledge was kept secret and was only passed on to those who were interested in learning, and had good intentions. Today, anyone can use our culture, just like many *Nawa* are doing, for their own benefit. At the same time, I see that our wisdom cannot be kept only in [our] memories, but also in video and audio. Much knowledge has been passed down orally by the elders who have already passed on. So, the good side of all of it is leaving a legacy for our grandchildren to see, which might serve as an inspiration in the future.

Today, we women are ahead of much important work. Before, in Huní Kuĩ culture, there was no law to support women or the Indigenous peoples. It was the men who started our struggle back then, fighting for our rights. Along this process, we have been quite submissive to the men, and today an Indigenous woman can hold the position she wants, in the villages or anywhere else. Today, it is easier to study, to learn, which creates new and better opportunities.

A message to the new generations

My message is: may they have the opportunities we did not have. May they be able to embrace and make good use of the knowledge they are receiving in this new time.

TXANA PAY

I am Txana Pay and I am 28 years old.
I am an artisan and an apprentice of the forest.



Nixi Pae

I started drinking ayahuasca at 12 years old. I had always heard my mother saying that we could not drink ayahuasca. She spoke of *Nixi Pae* as something negative. On ceremony days in the village, she would put us to bed early. One day, my cousin held a *feitio* and I went and participated with them for the first time. He gave me a large, full glass. According to him, that ayahuasca was not strong. After this, I started feeling my body was different, and I started seeing the ayahuasca vision in a different way. At that moment, I thought and said to myself: I will never stop drinking *Nixi Pae* from now on, for I have seen it open a vision and a teaching I had never received from anyone before.

Boa constrictor

I saw a boa constrictor in front of me. I was never afraid of her, but nobody ever told me what to do if I met her, for example. But I am a curious person who likes watching and learning, even when the teaching is not different, so I heard some reports that when we meet the

owner of the *Kene*, that is, the boa constrictor, we women should ask her to bring the force of the wisdom and the knowledge of the *Kene*, so that we continue improving our skills.

Cultural knowledge studies

I first started studying at school with Indigenous teachers, where I have been learning a little. In school we also learn to study our culture. The teachers apply this as an additional subject or practical class, such as chants, prayers, stories, even practices such as weaving, basketry, clay pots, all of which gives rise to practical assessments. Since all students like to be complimented and want to be the knowledgeable one in the class, we try to do our best even though *Nawa* subjects, such as Portuguese and others, are not as studied as our culture is. In my opinion, practical classes are the best way to learn.

Having a female voice

Given my age, all I have seen is evolving changes, from my birth till now. Until one is old enough to really understand things, the world was already like this. The elder women of today are not like the elder knowledgeable women of the other times, in terms of the passing on of knowledge. Today, they occupy places as leaders, or accompany their husbands, who are leaders, teachers, shamans, or hold other positions of standing in the village. This is why today, learning is on us. We have to look for learning, like you are doing now, collecting testimonies from many people and recording it so it does not end. It is knowing that the times we are living now are different times. From my point of view, having a greater representation of women, not fearing talking to men when necessary, and having a female voice in all places is very important for us.

Marriage

I was married at 11 years old. My mother always told me to study and learn so that I could marry somebody whom I could work with when I grew up. And I wanted to be like that, but she went back on her word and made me get married when I was still a child. One day, she

came in and told me we were going to our neighbours'. I wanted to go but she did not take me and told me nothing of the marriage. Then they arrived at dawn, bringing the young man who was to be my future husband, and gave me to him. I did not want to accept this, of course. I did not sleep with him for a few days. I was scared. My mother said he would be more than my husband and would help me take care of my siblings when she and my father went to do some work far from home. I cried for days, and spent sleepless nights, but she said she would hit me if I did not accept him. Of course I obeyed her – I was just a child. She explained that I was a married woman from that moment on, that I would have my duties as a housewife, like cooking, spending time with married people who could teach me, and not having girlfriends anymore. That was a painful time, but I had no idea what else to do, so I had to accept it and that was it. I have grown up since then, and I started to understand. Today I have five children with him, and we still live together. It is important to bring this narrative so that people know that this still happens today, although not as often as before. I will never do to my daughters what was done to me.

A message to the new generations

I hope these children are our future voices. I think that I want my children to have what I did not have: opportunities – particularly to study, to work, to become a leader and help people in need.

MAWAPAY

My name is Mawapay. I am 48 years old.
I am an artisan.



Nixi Pae

I started drinking Nixi Pae at the age of 15. My sister-in-law encouraged me to start drinking ayahuasca – she said it was good. At that time, *feitios* were different from today, when we take doses according to the concentration level. We used to drink large glasses, filled to the top as if with water, to feel the strength. I don't drink ayahuasca anymore, because once I had a preparation that tasted like it was burnt. This totally blocked my interest in the medicine and I have not drunk ayahuasca ever since.

Different times

There have been many changes over time, but the main changes I witnessed were during my childhood. I saw many things, such as abundant food and fields, hunting... I saw my mother and aunts happy while harvesting. What I have experienced doesn't exist any longer. We are living in different times, when things are exchanged for money.

People would hold large gatherings. Today people meet in the villages when they are invited, only to comply with a meeting agenda. Everything is changing, we cannot stop time, the positives and negatives of life and all, the leaders belong to another time. In my father's days, the leaders suffered much more than today. There have been countless changes to life and the times.

Women

In my days, women had no space other than their families. Of course, it still remains like that. Our work was harvesting and chores, or just accompanying our husbands while they worked. Today, the changes are visible. We live in times of women leaders, when women have a huge responsibility to work. Besides being great artisans, they are teachers, health agents, shamans, chiefs, leaders, and hold many other functions while caring for their children and homes. Our crafts, for example, used to be made for our use only, while today it has become a source of income. In addition to producing, we manage our own finances as a result of our work. Today, we have a women-led association. In my view, these are the main changes.

Differences

In my childhood, things were very different from today. Studies, for example: I really wanted to study and enrolled with my brother, who was a teacher. However, my father did not let me study. He said women could not study.

I spent only one week in school. He had heard other people telling him that women were studying to learn how to read and write, and then they left for Rio Branco, capital city of the State of Acre. I did not know what Rio Branco was, nor did I know who invented this story, as nobody had ever been there. I missed the only opportunity I had to study because of a lie somebody invented.

I saw other people reading in school and I cried a lot because I wanted to study. Today children have the chance to study. I am very sorry for not having been born nowadays so that I could have this chance. My story is

now funny, but I suffered a lot in those days. I only learnt how to write my name. These are the major changes I see for women: it is rare to see someone preventing their children from studying today.

Huni Kuĩ Marriage

My parents got me married when I was just 15 years old. In our culture, marriage really depends on our parents, and regardless of the daughter's age, they think that she must be married when a man is needed for the household tasks. This is what happened to me. They always looked for a man for me, but nobody wanted me. I had already seen him a few times, but had never thought of dating him. He was a hunter, a worker, and this attracted my parents, not me. When they fetched him for me, I said nothing... We went on living, had our children and are together until today.

A message to the new generations

I hope that the young people of today can study a lot and enjoy the opportunity of having everything much more easily than it was for me, and for the future I used to foresee in the past. Unfortunately, I cannot be young again and enjoy today as it is. May these youngsters become our future leaders.

MUKANI

I am Mukani. I am 82 years old. I used to be an artisan, but today my poor eyesight prevents me from working.



My name

My name comes from the *Muká*, a sacred plant we use in our *dietas*. Our traditional names have many meanings, like plants, animals and enchanted beings. Actually, these are our real names that we have never lost – even after the invasion – and are passed on from mother to daughter or to close families. It was only later on that we were given the Portuguese names we have now.

Nixi Pae

I heard of *Nixi Pae* when I was young. I never took it. When I was a child, it was difficult to even know about our culture. We lived in a rubber plantation and it was rare to see anyone drinking *Nixi Pae*. It was only prepared when they found the plants in the forest while cutting the rubber trees. This is why I never saw or touched *Nixi Pae*. It was only when I was older that I began to understand the story better.

XINÃ IBU
Owner of thoughts

People didn't drink ayahuasca as frequently as today. People did the ceremony as a way to reinforce their visions for work. People called them *Xinã Ibu*, because it was through our thoughts that we connected with the force of the ayahuasca visions. Everybody would spread urucum over their faces on ceremony days, as a means of protecting themselves from other people's visions, but this is not done today.

Pregnancy

Despite not having participated frequently in discussions about our medicines, I know that a pregnant woman cannot drink ayahuasca. One cannot eat or sleep after the ceremony without first washing and cleansing one's head with clay or eating something cooked. Not doing this can bring *Nisũ*. If a pregnant woman does not follow the rules, she is exposing her baby to all of this.

NISÛ DAU
Medicinal plants
to treat *Nisũ*

Nixi Pae is very strong and brings us knowledge. At the same time it brings these symptoms. This is why the herbal baths (*Nisũ Dau*) should be taken at sunrise, after drinking ayahuasca. A mother who drinks ayahuasca can make her child sick, so this must be respected. One cannot drink ayahuasca during the menstrual period, because the body is very strong at that time. This is why we cannot catch fruit from trees when we are on our period, for example. In the force of ayahuasca too, the force shows us our body – which may be negative or positive – and that which we see is a path that is being shown us. It is good to avoid any visions during this period.

Boa constrictor

Yes, I have seen her many times. My late husband showed me a lot of them, which he found while working, or else I saw them when I went to the swidden for legumes. Boa constrictors generally like to be in our gardens. Older people would say that they want to be seen by women for us to ask them for the strength to learn the *kené*. Whenever I saw her, I would bathe in specific herbs (*Sará Dau*), the medicines that help one not need to go on a *dieta* after seeing her. She is powerful even when contact with her is distant.

Huní Kuĩ Marriage

My parents married me off when I was still a child. I was only 10 years old and had no idea what marriage was. At that time, children did not understand things as they do today. It was my parents' wish. My husband was a good worker who hunted a lot, produced a lot of rubber to sell the *Nawa*, who were called bosses then. These were the reasons my parents did not wait for me to be older to give me to him.

My aunt, my father's sister, told me not to marry him, as he was a grown man who understood things while I was a child. He came from another Indigenous territory, located in the Santa Rosa by the Purus River, on the border with Peru. Her husband had also come from there and used to hit her, so she did not want me to go through this and advised me not to want him.

I accepted him at the beginning. I had no clear idea of what being married was. It was only after talking to my aunt that I changed my mind and told him to leave as I did not want to sleep with him. My mother noticed my behaviour, talked to my father and they called the community from the village, who gathered to advise me not to do that. They convinced me once again, talking about the benefits I would have being the wife of a person who the community and my parents perceived as a worker. And I accepted him happily, and actually had a lot of benefits, such as having a large house, never lacking anything for my family, which was good for me. He really came to add to what my father was unable to upkeep alone. We had 10 children together.

Difference between the old times and today

One of the major differences I have seen was that there were many *Nawa* who lived in the rubber plantations, which are our villages today. The only land we, *Huní Kuĩ*, had, was the Fortaleza rubber plantation, where I was born, grew up, got married, and had my two oldest children.

After the other rubber plantations became villages, we left and went to a village higher up the river, where I formed a family. After these long years, I returned to Fortaleza village [Aldeia Fortaleza], where

some people had settled. The village was abandoned for a while, until we returned to reopen it – it is now called Nova Fortaleza [Aldeia Nova Fortaleza]. It is very different these days as it has undergone significant changes: an example is that I am sitting here telling you my story.

We have been through a lot of processes to get here. The opportunities are different. The house I now live in is different from all the houses I lived in when I was a child. These are the most significant changes I have lived through. The difference between the times I lived in and today? If it were the old days and I lived the way I live now, I would be considered a rich person: today I eat the food I saw the *Nawa* eating, like sugar, oil and other store-bought food. We had abundant food and gardens. There is no longer as much abundance as before, when my husband was alive and planted for me.

The changes

One of the major changes started when the anthropologists came to work for our people, and the old leaders worked together. Even the anthropologist *Nawa Txai* Terri is always around witnessing our experiences. After these conquests, opportunities have been increasing for us, *Huni Kuĩ*. These changes are mostly for young women, as I keep telling my daughter. When I was young, I had a lot of work harvesting cotton to weave it. Today, it is much easier to buy threads to work, it is easier for women to learn our *Kene*; the clay pots that we made and used in the old days have been replaced by those we buy in shops, with the money from our work.

In the beginning, when we first got in touch with the *Nawa*, we exchanged pots for rubber that our husbands produced, and that we, women, often produced ourselves as well. I am happy to see my daughters and granddaughters having the opportunity to represent our village as leaders, as this village was initially led by only men. Women now have these rights.

About taking medicines and cultures to other places

I see that today our knowledges do not have the kind of mastery that they had before. While my grandparents preserved a great deal, today

TXAI
Friend, partner,
brother-in-law

the young ones are spreading it, often in exchange for something that does not benefit their own community. This brings about a situation in which only we, Indigenous people, are handing over everything that was ours into the hands of many *Nawa*, for them to use as they wish, as they are already doing with our ancient knowledges.

Pregnancy and birth

During one's first pregnancy, one always avoids certain foods. We must always listen attentively and try to know what should be avoided, like not eating some prey in order to not have a long labour, not to suffer too much with labour pains. Bathing with specific herbal medicines helps one to have a calm pregnancy. Taking a bath with medicinal plants can help ease labour. Mixing plants in water and drinking them helps during labour. These are the knowledges I have, which I learnt from the stories told by older relatives. After these processes during pregnancy, – after the birth of the child and the mother – come the cares that are required for a postpartum woman: baths to reduce body swelling, to bring about plentiful milk. The child also has a specific herbal bath that helps remove the remainder of the birth blood, so that the child will grow protected, and the mother can have the freedom to eat foods that help the baby not have colic. These are the basic cares that this great forest gives us, through the knowledge of our ancestors. Then comes the baby's first bath in the dark dye of the genipap fruit which serves to protect the child in their first months of life, helps with their growth, just as the genipap plant itself grows fast and strong. The *Nixpu Pima* baptism is during adolescence, when the child is a pre-adolescent. Once their baby teeth have fallen, this ritual is done to strengthen the new, permanent teeth, so that they do not lose their teeth too early. This is why we paint the teeth black in this baptism, to firm them.

Women's ritual

During her first menstruation, a girl must go through a reclusive *dieta* for some days, which helps her to protect herself. If she goes to bathe in the river, she must cover her head, so that she is not seen by

birds such as vultures, which have bald heads and fly everywhere. One should not be seen by them.

When we marry off a daughter

The logic is that the husband adds to the family, doing the work our husbands can no longer do alone. We call this a shortage, so a new man comes in to replace our husbands in some of his tasks, so that we grow stronger together.

Wishes for grandchildren and other children

I wish that my grandchildren can continue studying better. I wish a future of more achievements for all of them. Today, I am happy to be with them all, we *Hunī Kuī* never live alone, we always live in family. Even after they get married, there come the children, grand and great grandchildren. Thus, we add everything up, like food and shared labour, and we are always happy. My granddaughters look after me by cooking, my grandsons hunt and fish, so there is always a bit of everything in a family where things are exchanged for money.

TXIRÁ

My name is Txirá. I am 22 years old.
I am a young artisan and an apprentice of my culture.



Nixi Pae

I had the privilege of being born when women already participated in many movements, including ayahuasca ceremonies. It wasn't as often as today, but they already participated. Over time, I have been accompanying the evolution and the changes in the ayahuasca movement, which is now well developed.

Boa constrictor

I have never met her, but saw her closely when other people met her. I was not afraid, although people tried to scare me by telling me stories. But we learn as we are taught. Some of the stories we are told are really scary, even if there is no reason to be scared. We should actually be happy. After I saw her, I thought, now I can make her *Kene*. This is what we are taught. I am still learning about the *Kene*; my mother is teaching me because there are several different *Kene*.

Changes

I see more and more changes. What I did not learn from my parents, I am learning more and more now. My daughters will do better and live better than today, and each generation will see its own changes. For example, today we, the women, are dominating our own spaces a little more each day, we are playing instruments like the guitar, flutes, drums and others, we are composing our own songs, we are living in a time with opportunities our matriarchs did not have, and this is a privilege.

Knowledge exchanges

I see a positive side to it. In my opinion, we are forming working partnerships with other non-Indigenous people, and even with other peoples. These are knowledge exchange schools, which depend a lot on who manages them, how and what they are being used for. These reasons must be scrutinized. It is always necessary to know how exactly our culture is being taken out into the world as not all youngsters are right.

Huni Kuĩ Marriage

I was married at age 12. I was not given away by my parents but was fetched by my mother-in-law for her son. Since I was still a child, I had no idea what it was like to be married. I had always heard people saying that the parents would fetch the person we liked to marry us. However, this was not my experience. I only thought that I would be married. Today we already have two daughters together.

A message to the new generations

I hope that today's children who are the future head chiefs and leaders, can always do the best for all our people, as is being done today.

YAKA

My name is Yaka, I am 26 years old.
I am a multiartist and do a bit of everything.



Nixi Pae

To talk of Nixi Pae! Since I was a child I was curious to know what it was like. My mother never let us participate because in Huví Kuĩ culture everyone in the village who did not participate in the ceremony, regardless of age, went home early and painted their faces with urucum as protection.

In those days, it was not common to have young men or women participating. Only the older people, that is, men, consecrated Nixi Pae to align their visions to their works. Since my mother comes from this lineage, she did not allow us to be in ceremonies, much less to participate.

During the ritual when Nixi Pae is consecrated, our spirits and our visions become quite connected and even those who are not participating can be accessed through the visions. Our spirits were much stronger because the Huví Kuĩ did not have contact with today's technologies in those times. This is why the spiritual connections were also strong. After

contact with the *Nawa*, and getting to know other cultures, some aspects of our culture were no longer practiced, just as certain ceremonies were lost. So, I grew up listening to these stories, told by my mother, and this is why she did not let us participate.

We came to live in another village, where there were ayahuasca ceremonies. I used to stand in line and run away when it was my turn. Time went by and I finally first consecrated *Nixi Pae* for the first time at age 13. I had already heard my friends' reports. When one drinks ayahuasca, one has a different vision, learns a new thought and new visions. Even when people are very young they receive an orientation, learn to see the world and life with new eyes. I had these ideas etched into my mind through other people's sharing even if this was not told to me directly. I also learnt by listening from a distance.

I went to participate in one of the first festivals in the Lago Lindo village [Aldeia Lago Lindo]. We went uninvited. I took the first dose, offered by a person, and I wanted to have a vision to feel what this force of vision was like. People usually consecrate at night, but I took it in the morning and started seeing the forest twirl around me. My friends came to joke around but I told them I was under the force of *Nixi Pae*. I started having a beautiful vision, but after the cleansing I thought: is this what the force of ayahuasca feels like?

At the time, women's participation was already strong, as female advancement started in 2000. Since then, the movements of the *Huwi Kuĩ* female force have only grown. At that time, they already sang, danced, and were getting to know the instruments. The *maracá* has existed since the beginning of time in our culture and has never stopped being part of our cultural expression. In the past, we did not have as much contact with the instruments as we have today – only a few teachers travelled for their teacher training courses and would bring instruments back from the city with them, and those who were interested started learning and practicing. All that women have come to master today was initially in the hands of men. A long time ago, I would hear stories about the *Nixi Pae* rituals. One of the moments in which this brew was consecrated

was when someone was sick. Women's participation to help the *pajé* was important, but not any woman would do so: it was the *pajé*'s own wife.

Pregnant or menstruating women

I have heard two reports. The first is from our Huní Kuĩ culture and says that a pregnant woman cannot drink *Nixi Pae* because she passes (*Nisũ*) weakness diseases to the baby. After birth, there may be various consequences that affect not only the physical but the spiritual body as well, so people cannot drink *Nixi Pae*. Another report I heard is that contemporary people, particularly non-Indigenous people, are inventing and changing the way we use our own medicines, such as drinking ayahuasca during pregnancy or labour. This does not exist in Huní Kuĩ culture and never did. This is a change brought about by this new generation, for it is clear that our culture advances with the changing times, but it does not abandon its original form. A woman becomes stronger during menstruation due to her blood, so she does not participate in the *feitio* or in the ceremony during this period. She cannot pick fruits from trees as any plant can wilt. People say that women become dangerous and untouchable for many things during their period.

The feitio

When *Nixi Pae* is prepared, people are concentrated and focus on that work only, transmitting their energies. Nobody makes noise, they chant and pray in low voices, because all the responsibilities are on the person who conducts the *feitio*, in order for the people who take the medicine during the ceremony to have positive visions, a positive focus to their visions. This is why the presence of children and pregnant women is not allowed, as it can change the focus and deviate attention to them and away from the work or the planned purpose of the work.

Baa constrictor

We, Indigenous peoples, have our own diverse cultures in the world. Each people has their own spirituality, a power animal to represent them, their sacred plants, medicines and chants and prayers. In our Huní

Kuĩ culture, we have the boa constrictor, an animal that represents the force of knowledge, especially for us women, with regard to knowledge of geometrical patterns. When a person has physical contact with a boa constrictor, she may go on a *dieta*, a seclusion to strengthen her spirit. If a person takes a boa constrictor in their hands or if they swallow a piece of the boa's tongue, they draw strength from her. It makes it easier for them to learn chants more quickly.

This whole culture was very much alive in the old days. Today, after contact with the *Nawa*, our culture and our spirituality and all that was practiced by our elders has lost its focus and potency. This contact with the modern world has made the spirits hide because of greed and interests. In the past, when such contact did not exist, the spirits were more present, nature was stronger, people communicated more with the spirits, the real shamans. This does not exist anymore, the forces have weakened and exist in a few people only. But those who know this don't want to let it end, and will preserve it until someone is ready to continue.

I have already seen the boa constrictor in front of me. I saw a very big one, and a few smaller ones. I never touched them, but I have stared at them when they were wrapped around somebody's hand. I never took them in my own hands out of respect for the science of my people, the culture and the *Huwi Kuĩ* culture. But whenever I came close to her, on my way home, I would always respect her by doing my art, singing the chants, doing a small *dieta*, following the instructions that I had heard about. This has strengthened me a lot. This is the science and the culture that I honor and belong to.

I always make the boa constrictor *Kene* in my crafts, and they are the most beautiful I have ever done. The first piece I ever wove was the boa constrictor *Kene*.

Samakei

I have never done the boa constrictor or the *Muká dietas*, but I am preparing myself to go through this moment. In the stories of our elders, if a person wants to do the *dieta* they must prepare beforehand, especially with regard to their language and the speech they adopt in their day-to-

day lives, using positive words only – the Hātxa Kuĩ grammars.

I have always studied with the elders, asking them about their individual experiences, as they have lived many experiences and each one has their own particular experiences in this knowledge. While growing up we, Huví Kuĩ, go through many processes, such as the baptisms that are done from birth to adulthood, the knowledge and the learning of medicinal species, the chants for each occasion. All of this counts as traditional study levels, like in schools in town.

In our culture, this knowledge is passed on orally, and the *Muká dieta* is considered the last learning process, like a doctorate in traditional Huví Kuĩ knowledge, guided by the force of nature in the school of the forest. Building on these lived transformations, one begins to put into practice what was sought and grounded during the *dieta*. The *Muká* plant has many roots, so the person doing the *dieta* must always be accompanied by wise people. This plant must be harvested very carefully, for each one of the long roots represents the big dream with the purpose that each one is seeking. When removing the roots, one must ask for their strength, to open a door for work, studies, knowledge, and, most importantly, one of the roots represents our own lives.

The elders say that when we follow and execute the *dieta* correctly, we live healthily for a long time because we are protected by the force of this sacred plant. I have kept my mother's account in my memory. She would always tell me that when we fulfill the *dieta* correctly its strength remains in the center of our head, a spiritual guide that guides us and explains things through dreams, teaches us to deviate from negative words and bad paths, and teaches us the right words to say. A spirit we will carry to the last day of our lives, as stated by Fyáwí, a matriarch who died recently. When we do not follow it correctly, our life path is shortened. She was an example, a person who lived to be 110 years old. This is why each root means a season in the life of the person who is doing the *dieta*. Nowadays, many people who go on the *dieta* do not follow all the protocols. They do it for the sake of doing it, just to say that they did it. People who carry the forces of the *Muká* do not say this, they show it in their attitudes and spiritualities.

The changes

In the times we live now, the world faces constantly renewed changes. Before, our ancestors lived differently, with more protection from our forest, our foods. There weren't as many bad things as now, there was no contact with other peoples. They ate healthy foods, planted and cultivated by them to preserve their life and health. It was very rare for people to die from illnesses, because they were protected.

Today, our generation is living in other times, a different century, with ever greater changes. After contact with the *Nawa*, there has been an evolution in our habits and diets, which are not as healthy as before: we eat processed foods that contain too much fat, sugar, foods that contain hormones, and this affects the whole world, not just humans, but animals as well.

Many medicines are now in medication form. We live in a time when pollution is visible, there are microplastics in our bodies, and various diseases, like cancer, are affecting my people. This did not exist before contact and was unknown to the *Huní Kuĩ* people. Today this disease is already observed in some relatives. A variety of diseases is affecting the world, especially the most vulnerable people. The river fish that had always fed us are now contaminated by mercury.

The forest dies little by little and so do we

The reports we used to hear from other places are now unfortunately true for Acre [as well]. All of this has affected humankind. Even if we try to change this, we are too few people trying to effect a major change. There isn't much to be done, and this has been happening due to the *Nawa* man's greed. All because of the money they created, pieces of paper with significant value.

The forest is slowly dying and so are we. We are living in a time when they destroy twice as much when they try to correct an error. These are the thoughts of the *Nawa* who call themselves powerful and use one deceitful thing to finish several others. We are few and our forest is becoming smaller with population growth. Today these governments are creating new laws to violate us.

During the first invasions, which people call the first contact, our massacre consisted of slavery, with lots of struggle. Now this war is starting again. The most dangerous violations exist today: a silent war that uses a very powerful weapon for these times – the tip of a pen. A simple pen can declare the extinction of an entire people.

I imagine what it will be like 10 or 20 years from now. This is just around the corner and it won't take long. I think of the future of the children, my nephews, the children who are being born now. I am sure it will be a different time and they will have to fight tremendously to live in such an evil world, where destruction only grows, and our lands are being opened to the *Nawa*.

There are days when I feel sad when I think of the lives of the future generation. How much longer are we going to live? We don't know what can happen. The future is uncertain. We know that greedy people have no soul. We see what is happening with other Indigenous peoples, who are being massacred by miners in their own lands; ranchers killing them to occupy space. We are eyewitnesses to all of this.

In our culture, we have always had a strong spirit. We can endure up to a certain point with medicines and prayers; we never let negative forces reach us. Today even many *Nawa*, who have a different vision of how to preserve, are suffering from psychological illnesses that affect thousands of people, because they also worry about what may happen.

In other regions of Brazil, ranchers grab Indigenous lands and kill Indigenous people, so the suicide rates among Indigenous peoples have increased, as they do not want to live in suffering and end up taking their own lives.

I was deeply touched the first time I visited a village different from ours in Acre. I saw people who were suffering while being strong warriors, not abandoning their cultures and spiritualities, which is what keeps them protected.

As if all of this were not enough, there is a new law called historic cut-off point [Marco Temporal]¹³, a law of death, genocide, and violation of the originary peoples. The great artist Jaider Esbell wrote the

following: “Everybody is in the same leaky boat.” Although they do it all for money, the right to life is for everybody, and in the end, everything is going to finish sooner or later. They themselves are destroying the nature that protects them. This is a summary of my view on the difference between the old times and today.

Sacred medicines and Indigenous cultures being spread around the world

First, the positive part I see is the visibility our people are receiving worldwide through the contact with our medicines and arts, as a means of communication through knowledge that also brings income to our artisans.

The negative part I see is that our medicines are often not being used correctly. We teach the *Nawa* and they want to be the owners. Before, I used to think it was important for *Nixi Pae* and other medicines to get out into the world, but the *Nawa* only think of themselves and do not see them as sacred medicines. They see them as a source of income, and use them incorrectly. Many of them come to the forest, get to know the medicines and go back to the cities, serving the medicines incorrectly, under the pretence that it is connected to the spirit of the forest itself. They exaggerate in everything they do. For example, they drink ayahuasca every day, do not have a herbal bath afterwards and end up catching *Nisũ*, and then they blame it on the medicine itself.

I have already seen *Nawa* taking the forest medicines saying they will help the people, but in the end they are getting them for their own benefit. Many make projects in the name of the Indigenous peoples and medicines. Some people indeed do good work, but most do it for their own benefit.

13. The *historic cut-off point* is a legal argument according to which only lands occupied by Indigenous peoples on 5 October 1988, when the Constitution was promulgated, can be demarcated. This means that only the peoples who were on their land on that date would have a right to it. However, this interpretation does not consider that many Indigenous peoples and entire villages were expelled from their territories. Source: MARTINS, Rafael Moro. *How the marco temporal (historic cut-off point) affects Indigenous land demarcation*. 06 June 2023. Sumaúma. Journalism from the center of the world. Available at: <https://sumauma.com/como-o-marco-temporal-afeta-as-terras-indigenas-em-10-perguntas/>. Accessed on: 28 October 2025. (T.N.)

Today, I see that the spirit leaves when the medicine leaves the village and is taken abroad to be used incorrectly. One must first know the origin of any medicine to work with it. I think the *Nawa* want to take everything from us, because I have already seen some *Nawa* put on necklaces, paint themselves and self-declare Indigenous. However, they do not talk about the village or the ethnicity they belong to, they just say “Indigenous village”. They have culturally appropriated not only our medicines but our *Kene* as well. The elders used to say never show all our culture to the *Nawa*, as they like to take everything over, and they are taking this from us. These were not lies, they were right and we are proof of this as we speak of it here.

Women in the old days and nowadays

In the old days, women only took care of the children and the chores. They had no knowledge or studies. When I was a child, I realized that women felt incapable and thought that they were good for nothing. In their view, only men were able to do everything. They only recognized physical strength. When a few women began to show interest in something, their husbands prevented them from doing it, saying it was meant for men. Whenever a young woman showed interest in something, even her parents prevented her from pursuing it because, according to them, women should obey and stay at home.

The difference today is that women are travelling, making their crafts and selling it to have their own income. They are becoming more and more interested. They are fully capable of doing much more than men have ever done. Today, most women work as teachers or health agents in their villages. There are women representing us even in politics. These are the main changes. Women are autonomous, work better than many men and have the freedom and the will to fight.

Teaching from mother to daughter in Huni Kuĩ culture

When we women are growing up, a mother’s role is to pass on all her knowledge, ranging from domestic chores to married life. We learn

to have responsibilities from a very young age. There is something good about learning very young, we do not have this culture of childplay. Life starts early, it is a matter of survival.

If the child is a girl, she starts going to the swidden with her mother, and starts cooking and serving food. If we start playing, we are asked why we are playing instead of helping our mother. The difference between an 8-year-old child who lives in the city and one who lives in a village is incomparable, because the cultures are different. Unfortunately we do not have this privilege and freedom. People start complaining, and one doesn't eat if one doesn't work. This is not seen as bad in the village but as a form of teaching.

We have already been queried by people who come from the city, who say that children should play. This is correct, but the reality in a village is different, the culture is different. Indigenous children in villages are in search of their own knowledge, to survive. They are not beaten by life, they learn from a young age that there are thorns and venomous animals in the forest paths, so they are taught to be good warriors from an early age. This is our school of life with teachings from the forest.

A message to the new generations

I wish that today's new generations may live and conquer much better things than we did. May they overcome all obstacles. The new generations are our future head chiefs, who will lead. We are living in this world of silent war so I hope that the new generations come to have the opportunity to study as doctors, lawyers, judges, to defend our peoples and occupy places of power.

Today I see our rights being violated on a daily basis. We need greater representation among the peoples. We live in a world full of prejudice, so the youngsters must study and understand. If we don't fight, nobody else will fight for our rights. On the contrary, they are just trying to eliminate us.

ĨKA BURU

I am Īka Buru. I am 45 years old.
I am a midwife, artisan and teacher.



Nixi Pae

According to my grandfather, years ago people did not have the habit of drinking ayahuasca. Only the older men and the shamans used to participate in ayahuasca rituals. *Nixi Pae* started spreading now, in these modern times, through the young people who are living in a different time.

I first met *Nixi Pae* when I was 11 years old. I was already eager to participate, and I had a chance to start participating. I felt nothing the first time, as I was given a small dose and slept. As I grew up, I started feeling the force. My father always told me that when I took *Nixi Pae* I should do it with people who knew how to sing the *Nixi Pae* chants to control or lower the force. I started feeling the ayahuasca force more strongly. Because my parents were not with me at times, I called them to chant for me.

Boa constrictor

Yes, I have seen her many times in the forest. I always thought she was beautiful given her colors and patterns. When we touch her, we must do a reclusion and *dieta*. We, women, ask for the knowledge of the Kene, which she taught us in old stories. Today I hold the knowledge of these patterns.

Cultural changes: from old times to today

One of the main changes I see from old times, the “[rubber] bosses’ times” as it was known, when people were enslaved... We had no rights as citizens like we do today. Men worked a lot in exchange for nothing, and we, women, depended on the men. Today, in modern times, there is this great difference, where [culture] does not exist as it did then. However, it exists in a new form. Regarding our culture nowadays, I see that people do not practice it as before; they are transforming it into a different way of living, as we are in a time when the young ones rule.

Katxanawa

The *Katxanawa* festivity is celebrated to call the spirits of the foods, cultivars and prey. In the past, the festivities were more frequent. Today it is harder. In addition to the prayers, the festivities are collective.

Women's work in the past and in modern days

Compared to our parents’ and grandparents’ times, one of the changes that has surprised me is that today women have a better chance with regard to work, studies and the opportunity to gain knowledge. There were no women fighting for our causes, it was only the men, and there was no study to take us beyond what was found in traditional knowledge.

Changes to chants and Kene

I think we live in a time when anything may happen. What I see negatively is people misusing our knowledge. When knowledge like our medicines, the Kene, the chants and other knowledge, leaves our village,

we know it will be altered. We are giving too much to people who may, in the future, take possession of rights on these knowledges.

Today, technology makes everything easier. People are changing our chants, our sacred geometries, and other things, which may already be used incorrectly out there. But there are some people who have a vision of the collective, like we do. Sometimes we receive people who want to be close to us, and fight for our causes.

Indigenous sciences

During first menstruation, a girl passes through a *dieta* and period of reclusion during her bleed. This prevents her from suffering illness in the future. We always go through baptisms or *dietas* growing up in our villages, especially women, as we will be mothers in the future and must always look after ourselves, particularly in our first pregnancy. There are many Indigenous sciences, knowledge of our Huni Kuĩ people.

A message to the new generations

This is my message: may all the youngsters further their knowledge to continue searching for improvements for our people, like studying and occupying the various spaces that are ours to occupy.

AKUANI

My name is Akuani. I am 21 years old. I am an artisan and work with weaving, beads, basketry and clay ceramics.



Nixi Pae

I started drinking *Nixi Pae* when I was 8 years old. My first time was with my grandfather, in our village, when we welcomed non-Indigenous people and held an ayahuasca ceremony at night. I did not feel any force then. It is normal for us not to have a vision with the first doses, as we drink a small quantity. I was an 8-year-old child the first time, and only had my first visions after the third time I took part in ceremonies.

My grandfather always says that ayahuasca is our teacher, who guides us in the direction of our vision for the future. Our great teacher that connects us with the forest. A long time ago, people took ayahuasca less frequently, with the purpose of collective work in the village. I grew up in the village hearing this story about the collective purpose of these rituals. The first visions I had were very nice. I saw many colours mixing up at the same time, like the paintings I see. As I grew, I gained more knowledge each time, inspiring my craft, which has helped me a lot.

When I started drinking ayahuasca, women did not participate much. The advance of the feminine force is recent. I have heard reports from people in my family that women accompanied their husbands in ceremonies to look after them while they were in the force. Then, there were no instruments as today. Participation is greater nowadays. It was rare to see somebody playing a guitar as only a few people played.

Boa constrictor

I found her inside my cotton basket; I wasn't afraid but respectful when I met her. There are stories linking *Huni Kuĩ* women to the *Kene*, the sacred patterns that bring all this knowledge to women. In older people's experiences, it was said that we women can talk to the boa constrictor when we meet her, and ask her to bring us her knowledge of the *Kene*. There are many stories that connect us, women, with her, the boa constrictor.

Samakei

Doing the *Muká dieta* is very serious and sacred. Maybe I will be able to do it someday in my life. I have heard many stories. Actually, my great grandmother had a lot of experience with *dietas* and told me of her experience. She would say that one must have a specific purpose to bring about change in our life during a *dieta*: a spiritual and physical life transformation of the person who does the *dieta*, a preparation to become a great leader of oneself to help others, a way of prolonging life through the *dieta*. This is why it cannot be done anyhow, as it implies a very serious purpose.

A very important lesson I learnt from my great grandmother was the following: our head receives the strength of healing and learning; the foods that are consumed during a *dieta* must be correct; if the food is wrong, the effect of the *dieta* is lost. Today, people diet differently from the old days.

Huní Kuĩ women in the two time periods

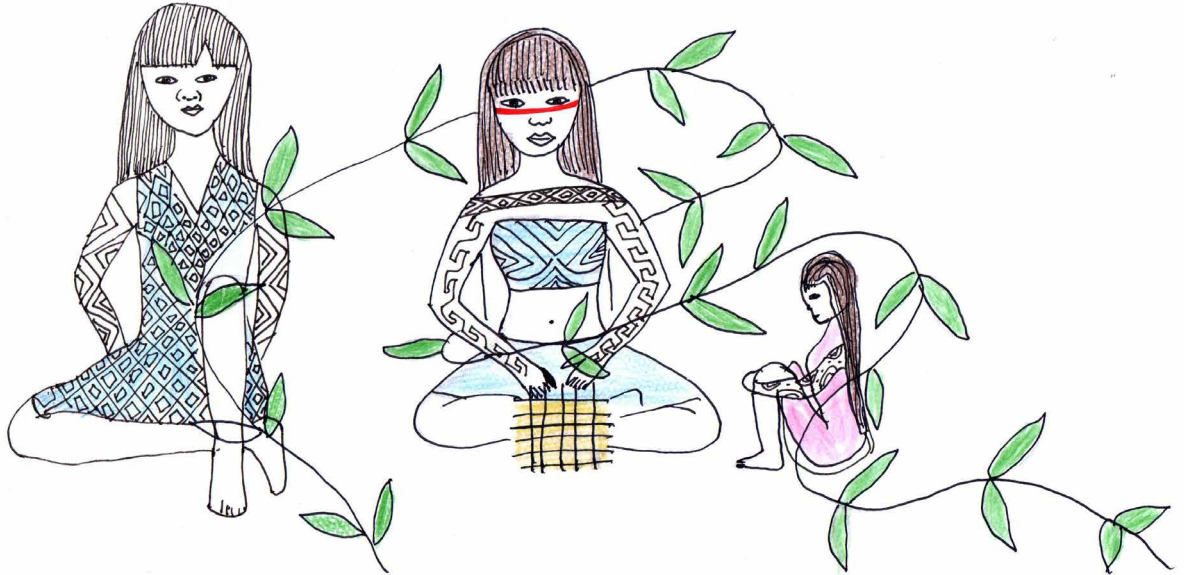
There is a huge difference between the past and the present in terms of our work. Today, there are things that make it easier for us, very different from the old days, such as having a voice, rights and power in some spaces. All of this is part of this change. Now women make the things they didn't know that existed in the past happen.

A message to the new generations

I hope that the future brings us the right conditions to continue our mission, for the children of today to grow big in the future in order to sustain our people.

NĀKE KARYANÍ

My Indigenous name is Kêna Kuĩ Nāke Karyaní.
I am 30 years old, I have two children, a boy and a girl, and am
now six months pregnant with my third child.



My name

My name is Antonieta. I was named after an anthropologist called Nieta, who fought with our grandparents for our rights, and after my father, Antonio. He wanted to honour her by mixing his own name with the anthropologist's name.

I come from the Praia do Carapaná Indigenous Territory, in the municipality of Tarauacá. I moved to Rio Branco, the state capital of Acre, where I have lived since 2018.

I am an artisan and work with our Huni Kuĩ jewels, as many Nawa call it – our craft. Here I share a view on the importance of Indigenous artisans in a large city. I work here, where I exhibit my work in fairs and accept custom orders. Here I see the different work by many Indigenous women and learn about the struggles of these warriors in the urban context.

In the past, we did not have so many opportunities to acquire knowledge. Today our work has a new manner of seeing, a new way of working in collaboration with non-Indigenous women. Such opportunities did not exist in the past. Older women suffered a great

deal. To sum up our story, it was as if we had not seen ourselves despite all the knowledge we have.

Nixi Pae

Nixi Pae is a truly sacred medicine that we should consecrate with tremendous respect. I started drinking *Nixi Pae* at age 13, with my father. He prepared the tea and gave it to me. I had no idea of what it was like to have the sensation of a vision, so I did not drink *Nixi Pae* again until I was 25.

Then I took *Nixi Pae* again and began to understand the meaning of the vision. *Nixi Pae* made me understand that we cannot control our thoughts or our bodies – it is an unexplainable force that we cannot dominate. This was major learning that life gave me. It's like the sensation of climbing every step of a ladder.

This is what the ayahuasca vision brings us: deep teaching. It's like a teacher in a classroom, teaching their students – a real life school. It is as if we were children in preschool, primary school, secondary school and on to college and a master's – this is the *Nixi Pae* knowledge for us.

Personally, the way I see it is that everybody has their own way of thinking and seeing things, and over time I have been having contact with other young Txanas. My main goal, through my knowledge, through sharing my story, is to live by what I have learnt from this teaching, showing me the correct directions amongst various paths of knowledge.

This teaching brings duties: being a good person, seeing our mistakes, where and how we can improve, how to live united with our people and family, the importance of being united with our relatives. There is a set of teachings in this school of medicine that led me to understand these things within this study. There are many *Yuxibu* in *Huní Kuĩ* culture. Like *Nixi Pae*, there are *Shuru Dumê* and *Dume Deshke*. I have been learning a little of each in my studies.

Just like the shamans used *Nixi Pae* for healings, they also used *rapé*, bringing these two medicinal forces together to blow on sick people, removing the spirits of diseases. Nowadays, times have changed. Women,

SHURU DUMÊ
Cannabis

DUME DESHKE
Rapé

for example, are much more knowledgeable than men, in every sense. With all the respect and consideration they have for the force of ayahuasca, women have visions and learn their strengths. Women are in important roles, as shamans, and bring the security and sensitivity of women's power, showing their skills to other people.

The pregnant woman

According to what I have been researching, a pregnant person cannot drink *Nixi Pae* for many reasons. One of the reasons much emphasized by women with more knowledge is that the mother passes all the absorbed energies, which we call *Nisū* – the negative spirits as known by non-Indigenous people – that remain in her body and spirit to the baby.

When we participate in an ayahuasca ceremony, we go to a spiritual healing work, for us and for other people, and along with that come all the *Yuxibu* – the forces of the forest. Our body receives this energy, we are made sensitive by this, and this affects the baby that is inside the belly. I myself took ayahuasca at the beginning of my pregnancy, up to the third month, and I started to notice that my baby was stronger than I could control. We, mothers, feel this. Some mothers are stronger, and doing a *dieta* is even more crucial after the baby is born. This is not only for the mother, but for the father as well, in order to give due respect to this moment, to give consideration to these sacred medicines.

Thus, avoiding it is the best choice in order to have this protection. Just as the *Nawa* culture has its rules and restrictions, we have ours. In traditional culture, drinking ayahuasca during pregnancy can be dangerous and we want to maintain the best *Yuxibu* protection. I have never experienced problems during menstruation, but if I have a vision about menstruation while in the force, it is an important teaching that shows the correct manner to avoid or continue something. It is our teacher, like a parent who teaches a child what is right or wrong in life. The medicine is like this knowledgeable parent who is connected to all of nature, to the Sun, the Moon, the Sea, the rivers and the air. They are our *Yuxibu*, guardians of the forest who connect us to nature. This is my view on drinking *Nixi Pae* while menstruating.

Menstruation

Before, my grandmother told me there was a ritual of having a haircut or painting our bodies with genipap during menstruation. It is a way of having more protection. In the *Nawa* culture, the girl is becoming a woman. In that first moment, a girl's body is getting ready and becomes sensitive; it is a way to cleanse our bodies as well, so our mother or grandmother always wants to protect us from future illness, caring for and protecting us in a cultural way that has been used for many generations.

This is not so today. Most people do not find this knowledge relevant. Sometimes a mother knows about her daughter but does not know how and when she menstruated – this moment has become irrelevant compared to our ancestors' times. Today nobody wants to tell their mothers, while before the girls told their mothers and received *dietas* and protective baths. I have seen some cultures similar to ours, of the *Madja* people, other Indigenous peoples. I witnessed a girl being cared for by her grandmother while in seclusion for some days, hidden at home, protected by a mosquito net during her bleeding period, and guarded by her grandmother. Our culture was like this. Unfortunately, this is no longer done today. It could be restarted. Our culture has become modified, we are following the culture within this diverse society.

Overall changes

I will discuss what I have been learning from my own research. First of all, our ancestors have always lived here, and some *Nawa* say what we know as well: Brazil was inhabited by our ancestors.

They always lived peacefully, without conflict and without the mess we have been facing nowadays. Today, after the invasion, we are living like them, in this culture our ancestors were forced to change in the past. Today we wear clothes, and all the fabric comes from *Nawa* inventions. Today we follow their laws, and occupy work places. We did not have all the bureaucracy we face today – we did not need all of this, all these governance systems we now have to face.

Today, it is mandatory to follow all the political demands. For example: when an Indigenous child is born and not legally registered

or registered late, there is a law that sets a fine for the late registration. Our lives are full of bureaucracy: we live by policies that force us to alter our relation to time, in order to guarantee our right to be part of this modern world, where we all need this circular system to guarantee our rights. Being a citizen, particularly an Indigenous citizen, means facing many challenges. These are the differences in times and cultures: the laws of *Nawa* society are not our laws.

In the past, our ancestors lived happily and did not face any of this. We are originary peoples, we have our own culture and just like the catholic and evangelical churches in town we have our *Yuxibu* that protect us, and medicines like *Muká*, *Daré*, *Jiboia*, *Nixi Pae*, *Dumê Deshke*, which we use to connect. It is our religion, the same thing that allows us to connect with God. Just as you, in the stories, say that God comes from Greek culture, and we also adore God.

Women today and in the past

In the past, *Huní Kuĩ* women basically lived to serve men. A woman's role was to be a mother and care for the children, care for the home, harvest vegetables, and cook. The houses were not like today. A *Shubuã* was built, without walls and covered by straws. It had no flooring, and the ground was swept.

SHUBUÃ
Maloca [Indigenous hut]

Unfortunately, due to lack of access and knowledge, this is still a reality in some communities. Men make women believe they are incapable of building something because they are women, and then the women will be trapped in this teaching method from their husbands, which will make this knowledge go on to their daughters, who are growing up.

For many men, we, women, are just a kind of breeder. In the past, our female ancestors did not participate or have the knowledge for this, only the men, but times are different now. There are many women with knowledge and skills, who know about empowerment and have been taking on these roles.

We are the young women of our generations. There are very strong women in the struggle today – they are teachers, health agents, or have other occupations that are being filled by us. Today, we have an

Indigenous woman at the highest level of power. Although she is not a *Huní Kuĩ*, she is a relative who defends the rights of the originary peoples. We are many peoples all over Brazil. We have a *Huní Kuĩ* woman representing the Women's Secretariat in the public sector of our State of Acre. Several functions are filled by us Indigenous women: association presidents, women who defend our territorial rights, designers, and artists in the art world, like you, who are active in many areas. Artisans with the knowledge of arts!

Men don't really like all these jobs, they feel bothered by our strength – laughter.

About the medicines being spread all over the world

First positive point: I see a good side to it, as it brings recognition of our culture through its medicines and arts.

For example, nowadays, when necessary, we work with the medicines to heal an ill person.

And the people who take this out of our communities should show our strengths, who we are, where we live. We are a people that thinks the opposite of destruction. We want to show the beauty behind so much violence, to show our union. We are a united people, a collective people; we work collectively. So, this is what we want to show the world. We are not greedy nor do we think of destroying everything, wanting to be individualistic. We preserve things for our unity and collectivity; we do not live to fight over pieces of land with our relatives. We live to plant, preserve and live happily together.

Now for the negative point: I see that all of this is new, and this is why I see that it has stepped out of line, because this is what happens. Let's see: many *Nawa* who come over here to learn about our culture inside our villages leave taking all our knowledge, using our medicines in ways that they should not be used. I have heard several reports of the misuse of our medicines: for example, a person who does not know how to perform an ayahuasca work: "Ah, in such a place, there was this event, some youth left the village and allowed a *Nawa* to do conduct a

work, or a *Nawa* who visited a village, was baptized with a name and is now calling themselves *Huwi Kuĩ*.

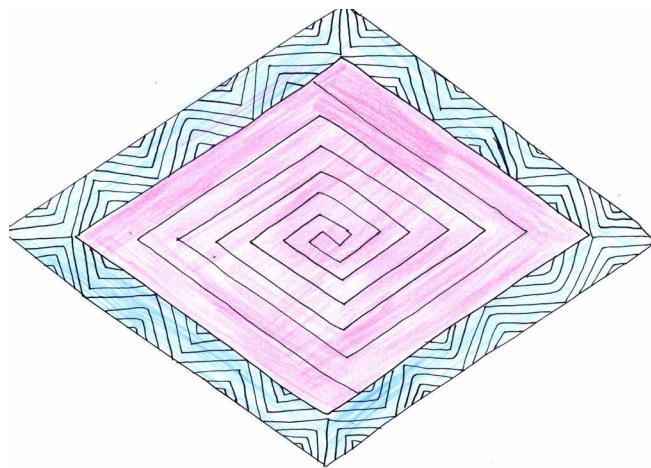
All these stories end up harming our cultural image, being passed on by people without a minimum of knowledge who play at being shaman and play with the medicines. This is why so many people know the medicines incorrectly, from the wrong people. This is quite serious. Respect before any decision.

A message to the new generations

I leave the following messages: more sincerity and responsibility to continue with our Indigenous works and struggles; do not speak idly; be true to continue the real struggle and the legacy of the work they will assume.

We are not kidding about all the struggles today. We must unite forces to be stronger and help one another, care for our studies, and value time now. Time facilitates the arrival of knowledge through study. We must value our culture and must not forget our people's cultural practices.

Another message: in my concerns, I imagine that we may no longer exist in 100 years. There are many mixtures in the new generations, and they might continue – may this not affect our culture, and may our culture, our languages, our knowledges always be honored. Never let these end because our ancestors died so that we could be here talking about the importance of our being who we are: an originary people who have inhabited this Earth since long before colonization. HAUX HAUX!



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RITA Huní Kuĩ is an artist, activist and mother whose work supports women's empowerment. Through art, painting, and the power of words, she gives life to the Huní Kuĩ people's rich patrimony and shares her spirituality with the world. Through talks, she breaks stubborn stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. Her work is inspired by her people's mythology and songs, which she transforms into artistic creations with the aim of preserving and sharing the cultural health of the Huní Kuĩ. Rita is the cofounder of the *Kayatibu* artists collective, which brings together young Indigenous artists living in the town of Jordão to deepen the study of their culture as a means of empowerment and of keeping live memory alive. She is also a member of the *Mahku* collective, founded by her father, Ibã Sales Huní Kuĩ. Her work has been presented in exhibitions in Brazil and abroad.

EMILIA GABRIELLA SANABRIA is a French-Colombian anthropologist who graduated in the United Kingdom and is the current Director of Research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris. She is currently working on a book with the provisional title *Ayahuasca is Not a Psychedelic: Caring for Encounters in the Wake of Ethno-Humanism*, based on a decade of ethnographic field work focused on the claims of ayahuasca healing practices in the so-called psychedelic rebirth context. Her first book, *Bodies: Sex Hormones and Menstrual Suppression*, published in 2016, proposed an ethnography of menstruation and the use of hormonal contraceptives in Salvador, capital of the Brazilian state of Bahia. *Plastic Bodies* explored the stratified control mechanisms cyclic female bodies are subject to under biopolitical regimes of medicalization and proposed that the body should be read as predominantly plastic. Emilia is presently experimenting with speculative research design models in a series of participative research collectives keen on promoting healing justice, radical care, and alternative futures.

The typeface used for words in Indigenous languages or for Huni Kuĩ names was created for *Una Isĩ Kayawa: Livro da Cura do Povo Huni Kuĩ do Rio Jordão* [Book of Healing of the Huni Kuĩ People of the Jordan River] (Dantes Editora and JBRJ, 2014). The font was developed from handwritten letters by the 23 authors of the book.

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The Selvagem Notebooks are produced by the Selvagem team, under the editorial coordination of Anna Dantes. English translations are coordinated by Marina Matheus. This notebook, along with many others, is available on the Selvagem website in Portuguese and several other languages. For more information, visit selvagemciclo.org.br

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Thank you!

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