

# Arikapú

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## Introdução

The Arikapú represent an indigenous tribe that traditionally lived in the south of Rondônia. The language of the Arikapú and their neighbours the Djeoromitxí are closely related, and probably form a branch of the wider Macro-Jê language family. First contact between the Arikapú peoples and Westerners probably occurred at the beginning of the 20th century. According to their own oral history, the Arikapú lived on the uppermost headwaters of the Rio Branco. In addition to the Djeoromitxí their traditional neighbours were the Tupí-speaking Makuráp, Wayurú and Aruá. The neighbouring Tuparí used to represent enemies. Like most groups of southern Rondônia, they may each have numbered several thousand individuals. After contact with Westerners, the Arikapú were decimated and displaced. Nowadays, the remaining members of the tribe live mainly in the Terra Indígena Rio Branco and the Terra Indígena Rio Guaporé.

## Name

The autodenomination of the tribe is Arikapú. The name Arikapú is also used by neighbouring peoples and by Westerners. Its origin is not clear. One possible explanation is that it originates from the neighbouring Makuráp (Tuparí) language, where *arikapu* refers to the japó bird (genus *Gymnostinops*).

The name Burukäyo refers to an extinct tribe known to the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí. It has been claimed by some that their language was very similar to Arikapú, so they may have represented a different clan. It may be this group which Snethlage refers to as *Jabutixitxi* or *Bakurönjatixitxi* and whose language is supposed to be similar to Djeoromitxí. The suffix *ixitxi* means 'big' in both Arikapú and Djeoromitxí.

Another name encountered in the literature is Maxubí or Mashubi, referring to an ethnic group that probably spoke Arikapú. This name was recorded only once, during the expedition of the English explorer Fawcett in 1914 (B. Fawcett 1953). The name is not recognised by any present ethnic group of the region, and its etymology is unknown.

The Djeoromitxí are traditionally known to Westerners by the name Jabutí. The name Jabutí or Yabuti is found in some linguistic sources to refer to the language family that includes the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí languages (for example Greenberg 1987). Since it is useful to have a denomination to cover both languages, it may be a good idea to reserve the name Jabutí for this.

## Language

Until recently, the native languages of the Arikapú and the Djeoromitxí were practically undocumented. Nevertheless, on the basis of the existing short word lists, they were regarded as early as the 1930s as forming a language family, here called the Jabutí language family. Some linguistic sources also mention a third, extinct Jabutí language, called Maxubí. The word list taken from the Maxubí in 1914 by Fawcett suggests, however, that the language was very similar to Arikapú. This was first noticed by Caspar in 1955, and on the basis of linguistic and additional cultural considerations he concluded that Fawcett's Maxubi must represent the same tribe as the Arikapú.

The Jabutí languages are very different from the other languages of the Guaporé region, and are not members of the neighbouring Tupí, Nambikwara or Txapakura language families. The Jabutí languages are often considered as a small isolated family that has no affiliation with any other known language family. However, as early as in 1935 Curt Nimuendajú (2000) noticed that the word lists of Arikapú and Djeoromitxí collected by Snethlage show similarities with certain Jê

languages of eastern Brazil, such as Xerente, Kayapó, Kaingáng and Timbira. Recent research by Ribeiro and van der Voort (2005, in prep.) has provided additional lexical and grammatical evidence that confirms Nimuendajú's hypothesis. Hence, the Jabutí language family probably represents a branch of the Macro-Jê linguistic stock. The basic characteristics of the ancestral Proto-Jabutí language were reconstructed in a comparative article by van der Voort (2007).

The Jabutí languages are very similar to each other but not identical. Since the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí are close neighbours, it is likely that their languages have diversified from a common ancestor in the same region. It is less likely that they diversified somewhere outside of the region and later migrated together. This implies that the time depth between the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí languages indicates the minimal length of time that they have existed in the Guaporé region. A close comparison of the Jabutí languages suggests that it must have taken about two thousand years to grow as far apart as they are today. Therefore, the ancestors of the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí must have migrated into the Guaporé region at least two thousand years ago, and they possibly came from the east, because they spoke a Macro-Jê language.

Although the Arikapú tribe must have had thousands of members before contact with Westerners, their language is now on the verge of extinction with only two elderly speakers. The total number of individuals that identify ethnically with Arikapú is slightly larger. The Arikapú language is not used any more, since one of its two remaining speakers lives in the T.I. Rio Branco and the other one in the T.I. Guaporé. When these two individuals pass away, the Arikapú language will be extinct, because it was not passed on to the younger generations.

Most of the ethnic Arikapú in the T.I. Rio Branco speak Tuparí, in addition to Portuguese, and in the T.I. Guaporé they speak Makuráp. One of the remaining speakers of Arikapú also speaks Djeoromitxí, Makuráp and Portuguese, while the other speaks mainly Tuparí and some Portuguese.

Most of the loanwords in Arikapú are from Makuráp, which functioned as an intertribal contact language in the Rio Branco region, especially during the rubber era.

## Contact history

Apart from possible encounters with occasional explorers from the 17th to the 19th centuries, the peoples of the right bank of the Guaporé river came in regular contact with Western civilisation only around the turn of the 20th century. In the early decades of the 20th century, rubber entrepreneurs established "barracões" on the Branco, Mekens, Colorado and Corumbiara rivers. These were trading posts where products extracted from the surrounding rainforest were stored, and from where cargo boats left for Guajará-Mirim. At these posts Westerners attracted local indigenous groups with metal axes and other goods, and employed them through debt peonage for the extraction of rubber, Brazil-nuts and ipecac (*Cephaelis ipecacuanha*). They furthermore introduced infectious diseases to which the indigenous groups had no immunological resistance.

In the early 1930s, the S.P.I. began to transfer indigenous groups from the southeast of Rondônia to the "colonies" in the west, such as Ricardo Franco, nowadays called the T.I. Guaporé, which is located on the river Guaporé just above the confluence with the river Mamoré. The Indians were required to live and work under deplorable circumstances, and many tried to escape to return to their homelands on the Rio Branco, the Rio Corumbiara and the Rio Pimenta Bueno. Ultimately, the contact with Westerners led to the decimation and acculturation of most groups of southern Rondônia, often before serious cultural and linguistic documentation could be undertaken. Between 1930 and 1980, the remnants of many indigenous tribes were moved onto reserves that continue up to the present day to be threatened by illegal invasions, logging and mining.

The last representatives of the generation that was born in traditional times remember that they lived on the upper headwaters of the Rio Branco. After contact with Westerners, the indigenous societies of southern Rondônia have disintegrated and their members have become displaced. Around 1920 many Arikapú and Djeoromitxí went downriver to work at the rubber settlement of Paulo Saldanha, where many Tuparí joined them in 1927.

Between 1930 and 1960 people had to move further downstream, to the rubber settlement of São Luis, where many Makuráp, Aruá and Wayurú were concentrated as well. During this time, many people were also sent to Ricardo Franco on the river Guaporé. Furthermore, many people fled from debt bondage to Guajará-Mirim, which was in those days the capital of the district, and were transferred from there to Ricardo Franco or to other reserves along the Guaporé. Nowadays, the remaining Arikapú and Djeoromitxí live mainly in the Terra Indígena Rio Branco and the Terra Indígena Guaporé.

## The Marico cultural complex

It is not clear where the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí came from, and their own oral traditions do not contain any information that clearly indicates a time prior to their arrival in the Guaporé region. The close linguistic relationship between Arikapú and Djeoromitxí suggests that they have lived in proximity to one another from the time they came to the region. The traditional habitat of the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí is tropical rainforest. According to their own accounts they have always lived on the

headwaters of the Rio Branco. Their languages do not have words for the bigger fish that live downstream and in the river Guaporé, such as surubim (genus *Platyostomatichthys*).

Until 1955 they were reported by Franz Caspar (1975) to live on the left bank and the left headwaters of the Rio Branco, upriver from where the town of Alta Floresta d'Oeste is located today. The Djeoromitxí used to live downriver from the Arikapú. Their traditional neighbours were the Tupí-speaking (Tuparí family) Makuráp and Wayurú, who lived downriver on the left bank of the Rio Branco. On the right bank lived the Tuparí, who used to be enemies with the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí. Further downstream the Tupí-speaking Aruá (Mondé family) lived.

Before contact with Westerners, the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí may have numbered a few thousand individuals each. They lived in big beehive-shaped communal houses and their subsistence was based on fishing, hunting, gathering of fruits and insects, and slash-and-burn agriculture. They planted maize, manioc, peanuts, yams, bananas, calabash and they bred edible larvae from various species of insects. They buried their dead inside the house, in sitting position in large ceramic funerary urns that were sealed off with a lid. On top of the grave a fire was kept alive for days to aid preservation of the remains. When the family moved, the urns would sometimes be moved as well and buried again in the new house.

Culturally, the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí were to a large extent related to the other ethnic groups of southeastern Rondônia and shared certain specific traits, such as the use by shamans of rapé (or paricá), a hallucinogenic powder based on angico (*Anadenanthera peregrina*) seeds, to communicate with the spirits. The marico, a crochet bag hand tied by the women, made of yarn spun out of fibres from tucuma or buriti leaves, is also characteristic of the southern Rondônian peoples. Ethno-historian Denise Maldi (1991) defines the "Marico Cultural Complex" by these characteristics. The cultural area includes several Tupí speaking groups, both Jabutí speaking groups, and also the Kanoê, Aikanã and Kwazá, who speak isolated languages that do not belong to any known language family.

Other cultural traits of the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí are shared with the Guaporé region in general, such as territorial subgroups, ceremonial use of fermented chicha, and the absence of bitter manioc and manioc flour. The Djeoromitxí are reported to have lived in territorial subgroups bearing the names of different palm tree and ant species. Arikapú society was probably organised in the same manner, but not enough is known about their history. Additional important aspects of traditional culture that show similarities to neighbouring peoples include body ornaments and painting, music, and traditional mythology.

## Contemporary aspects

### T. I. Rio Branco

The T.I. Rio Branco has almost 400 inhabitants, divided among a number of settlements along the middle course of the Rio Branco. It became an official indigenous reserve in 1986. The majority of the population is Tuparí, and there are minor groups of Makuráp, Aruá, Kanoê, Djeoromitxí and Arikapú. The main settlement, São Luis, can be reached by car from Alta Floresta d'Oeste. The other settlements, such as Trinitário, Colorado, Cajuí and others can only be reached via the river, and because of their isolated situation, the indigenous languages and aspects of the traditional cultures are better preserved. People there still fish with bow and arrow, there are still shamans who use paricá to heal, and there are chicha parties where people paint themselves with annatto and genipap, and sing and dance in the traditional way. Traditionally, Arikapú shamans were regarded as the most powerful in the region. Even today, the most respected shaman of the reserve is an Arikapú. The southern part of the T.I. Rio Branco is adjacent to the Reserva Biológica do Guaporé. This is a protected nature reserve, inhabited by non-contacted groups that avoid all contact with outsiders. Their language and ethnicity are unknown.

In spite of having the status of a protected reserve that forms part of the federal territory, the T.I. Rio Branco and its inhabitants are threatened in many ways by their local Western neighbours and by state politicians. Due to the continuing deforestation around it, the reserve is becoming more and more like an island where game is starting to become scarce, thereby increasing dependence on fishing. Meanwhile, poachers enter the reserve for illegal large-scale commercial fishing, and pesticides used on the Western-style cultivated lands on the headwaters outside the reserve end up in the main river and endanger the health of the Indians in various ways. Grave damage to the fluvial ecosystems is also done by irregular hydroelectric dam projects in the region, some of which are owned by family members of the present governor of Rondônia, Cassol. Finally, illegal logging inside the reserve causes further ecological damage. The destruction of traditional culture has recently accelerated as a result of the establishment of a fundamentalist Protestant church, which discourages shamanism and traditional-style festivities and which has divided the community internally. Destruction of historical archaeological sites has been reported in relation to the construction of buildings at Paulo Saldanha on the upper Rio Branco. On some occasions, traditional funerary urns were dug up and wilfully destroyed in an attempt to hide juridical evidence. This kind of practice jeopardizes future possibilities for the Arikapú and Djeoromitxí and other groups to reclaim their traditional lands, to which they are entitled by the Brazilian constitution. For the elderly Indians, who have survived virtual genocide, it has also a strong emotional impact. One of the speakers of Arikapú buried her mother and her five year old daughter in the traditional manner on the headwaters of the Rio Branco, and she was devastated to hear of the possible destruction of their graves.

## T. I. Guaporé

The T.I. Guaporé has nearly 500 inhabitants, divided among several settlements in different bays and lagoons off the great Guaporé river. This place became an official indigenous reserve in 1996. The population here consists of mixed families of Aruá, Wayurú, Makuráp, Tuparí, Kanoê, Aikanã, Djeoromitxí, Arikapú, Wari' and Kuyubí. The majority of the people live in the overpopulated settlement Ricardo Franco (which is the old name for the reserve) on the river Guaporé itself. There is a Funai post, a clinic and a school. Similar to São Luis, the influence of Western culture in Ricardo Franco is strong. However, many young people have few opportunities here, which is causing grave social problems. Life in the other settlements of Baía das Onças, Baía da Coca and Baía Rica is better as regards the possibilities for hunting, fishing and swidden horticulture. Also, the indigenous languages and aspects of traditional culture manage to survive better here. The region surrounding the T.I. Guaporé is not fully explored, and may form the habitat of non-contacted groups. On several occasions inhabitants of the T.I. Guaporé have reported encounters with unidentified Indians.

Like the T.I. Rio Branco, the T.I. Guaporé is affected by illegal fishing, but not so much by logging or agro-toxins, since it is very remote and cannot be reached by road. The fact that it is located on the border with Bolivia, on the other side of the 300 metre-wide river Guaporé, creates its own specific problems. During the last four years there has been illegal dredging of gravel on a regular basis from the Brazilian side of the river at Baía das Onças. The gravel is claimed to serve the production of cement, but the activities also have the appearance of ore mining. Whatever the purpose, it is dangerous to the ecology of the reserve since it destroys the river bank and may alter the current of the river. This activity has been reported to the authorities several times in vain, since it is so easy to move the equipment to the Bolivian side before the Federal Police arrive from distant Guajará-Mirim.

## Notes on sources

The first ever record of the Arikapú and a sample of their language was made by colonel Percy Harrison Fawcett, an Englishman hired in the early 20th century by the Bolivian government to survey the Bolivian-Brazilian frontier. Fawcett met a group of Indians he called Maxubí on one of the eastern tributaries of the upper Rio Branco (Fawcett 1915, B. Fawcett 1953). After Fawcett, the Maxubí were never encountered or heard of again. The major part of the word list recorded by Fawcett is identical to Arikapú, so they probably represent the same tribe. At that time they apparently had not had any previous contact with Westerners.

Twenty years later, the German ethnographer Emil Heinrich Snethlage visited the Guaporé region on behalf of the Museum for Ethnology in Berlin (Snethlage 1937). Snethlage met many peoples of the Rio Branco, including the Arikapú, and returned to Berlin with a collection of objects, photographs, film and music recordings on wax rolls (Snethlage 1939). At this time, the peoples of the region had already suffered several devastating epidemics of measles, influenza, and other contagious diseases that spread rapidly throughout the region. The Arikapú had been especially affected by the diseases and when Snethlage met them in 1934, they formed only a small group, divided between two settlements.

Between 1948 and 1955 the Swiss ethnographer Franz Caspar lived in the Rio Branco region, and he became well known for his impressive work on traditional Tuparí culture (1958, 1975). Caspar also collected extensive word lists of all the languages he encountered, including Arikapú. Moreover, he had access to Snethlage's diaries and cited them in his doctoral dissertation (Caspar 1953). Caspar is still remembered by the elderly people.

In early 1954, the Indians of the Rio Branco suffered another terrible measles epidemic. The Arikapú were apparently hit very hard again and when Caspar returned in 1954 they had been reduced to one small group.

In 1968 missionary linguists Willem Bontkes and Robert Campbell surveyed the south of Rondônia for the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Bontkes noted down a short Arikapú wordlist at Rio Branco and mentions the existence of 14 speakers of the language.

In the 1980s several anthropologists and linguists visited the region and met speakers of Arikapú. The ethno-historian Denise Maldonado undertook anthropological research during which she interviewed many elderly people and collected traditional myths for her survey of what she called the Marico cultural complex (Maldonado 1991). Anthropologist Betty Mindlin also travelled extensively in the region, and collected and published various popular volumes of traditional tales of indigenous peoples (Mindlin 1993, 1998, 1999). In addition, the linguist Denny Moore of the Museu Goeldi collected comparative word lists in the Guaporé reserve. Between 2001 and 2004, Hein van der Voort conducted linguistic fieldwork with the two known remaining speakers of Arikapú.

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