Buscando um lar para as *Ritxoko:* a ecologia política de sua patrimonialização e possível repatriamento

Finding a home for the Ritxoko: the political ecology of heritagisation and potential repatriation

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Resumo: Ao traçar a biografia de uma coleção de *Ritxoko*, nome dado àsbonecas de cerâmica feitas pelo povo *Iny Karajá* no interior do Brasil, este artigo reflete sobre os potenciais desdobramentos de seu repatriamento. As transformações no fazer das *Ritxoko* são inseparáveis de uma história mais ampla de contato, de imbróglios político ecológicos em torno dos recursos que permitem esse fazer, e dos efeitos do processo de patrimonialização. As relações nesta rede natural cultural estão inseridas em uma economia moral que produz tanto patrimônio quanto mercadoria. Esta análise argumenta que repatriamento como método pode contribuir no esforço de descolonização de museus e ressignificação do patrimônio, incluindo o patrimônio natural que permite o fazer das Ritxoko. Com base em iniciativas já implementadas em colaboração com os *Iny Karajá*, um proposto repatriamento pode resultar em formas de curadoria mais inclusivas com as ceramistas de *Ritxoko* como protagonistas; um esforço necessário para abordar o passado colonial de forma mais crítica e repensar futuros ecológicos possíveis.

Palavras-chave: *Ritxoko.* Patrimônio natural. Patrimonialização. Repatriamento. Economia moral.

Abstract: By tracing the biography of a collection of Ritxoko, the name given to ceramic dolls made by the *Iny Karajá* people in the interior of Brazil, this paper reflects on the potential ramifications of repatriation. Changes in the making of the Ritxoko are inseparable from a broader history of contact, the political-ecological entanglements surrounding the resources that enable that making, and the effects of its heritagisation process. The relations in this natural-cultural assemblage are embedded in a moral economy that produces heritage and commodity. The analysis argues for repatriation as a method in the endeavour to decolonise museums and re-signify heritage, including the natural heritage that enables the making of the *Ritxoko.* Drawing on the learning of initiatives developed in collaboration with the *Iny Karajá*, the proposed repatriation could bring about more inclusive forms of curatorship with *Ritxoko* makers as protagonists, a necessary effort to address colonial pasts more critically and rethink possible ecological futures.

Key words: *Ritxoko.* Natural heritage. Heritagisation. Repatriation. Moral economy.

> **The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work – the rural, the maritime and the urban- is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were, it does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to ring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. (WALTER BENJAMIN, 1968 [1936], p. 91-92)**

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Introdução

This paper investigates heritage through political-ecological lenses by tracing the biography of a collection of *Ritxoko*, the name given to the ceramic dolls made by the *Iny Karajá* people in the states of Mato Grosso, Goiás, Tocantins and Pará, in the interior of Brazil. It reflects on the potential ramifications of repatriating the collection, inviting further resignifications of heritagisation, here understood as a framing that sees heritage as a social process that changes over time (HARVEY, 2001, p. 320). Changes in the making of the *Ritxoko* are inseparable from a broader history of contact, the political-ecological entanglements surrounding the resources that enable that making, and the effects of its more recent heritagisation process.

Over the last few decades, there have been increasing efforts to examine heritagisation processes in order to deconstruct museum strategies that often reinforce the subalternity[1] of certain forms of knowledge and ways of life (SMITH, 2006; HARVEY, 2001; LIMA FILHO AND ANDRADE, 2021). More recently, this critique of museum practices has readdressed the past through a 'recognition of ontological plurality' (HARRISON, 2015, p. 24) based on an active blurring of natural and cultural heritage practices. In line with Harrison et al.'s (2020) concern with natural and cultural heritage conservation and management, this present analysis is situated at the interface between museums and the commons, paving the way for a political-ecological analysis of heritage past, present, and alternative futures. This interdisciplinary conversation 'that makes up the terrain of heritage studies' (HARVEY, 2001, p. 320) is an intrinsic and necessary part of the process.

1 - Drawing on the work by Antonio Gramsci (1998), Fernando Coronil (1997), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), the term subalternity refers to the condition of subordination resulting from cultural, economic, political and other forms of domination, in particular those brought about by colonization.

The analysis starts with a biography of things (DUARTE CÂNDIDO, 2021), specifically speaking, a set of eighteen *Ritxoko* presumably collected in Mato Grosso. I will proceed by narrating the biography of these dolls through those who granted them agency before turning to how they are featured in academic works. I will then explore their role in bringing to the fore the lives and culture of Karajá women. The brief exploration of the relations in this natural-cultural assemblage shows how the *Ritxoko* are embedded in a moral economy that produces both heritage and commodity. Finally, I will argue for a 'methodological repatriation' to reveal the heritage's implications and biopolitics (FOUCAULT, 2008), including its management and ownership. I place the making of the *Ritxoko* in the context of heritage futures as envisaged by Harrison et al. (2020) and suggest repatriation as a method to reveal the complexities and vulnerabilities of the natural and cultural heritage associated with the making of the dolls. By promoting a discussion on how heritage futures could be imagined through collaborative practices, I argue for repatriation as a method in the endeavour to decolonise museums and re-signify heritage. In the process, new forms of curatorship that address colonial pasts and ecological futures could be co-designed by a range of social actors, with *Ritxoko* makers as protagonists.

Methodology and positionality

This analysis builds on my research interests in adaptive livelihood strategies in human-disturbed environments and the concept of commoning here understood as practices on public land based on horizontal forms of organisation (LINEBAUGH, 2009). Methodologically speaking, I draw on secondary sources, namely the written accounts by scholars who studied the dolls and spent

time with the makers, and unobtrusive research as I observed the displays of other collections, such as the one at the Anthropological Museum of the Federal University of Goiás and the digital collection at the National Ethnology Museum in Lisbon. I also engaged with specialists from different fields with profound knowledge of the *Iny Karajá*, Manuelina Duarte, Chang Whan, Rosani Moreira Leitão, and Manuel Lima Filho, who helped me situate this particular set of *Ritxoko* within the broader discussion on heritage and repatriation. In addition, this piece of armchair anthropology greatly benefited from the digital recordings of a seminar held in early 2021 which presented the findings of a project carried out between 2017 to 2020 (*Projeto Presença Karajá*) [2].

The distance between myself and the cultural and natural landscapes that helped forge the *Ritxoko* was an obvious limitation; a distance by necessity rather than by design. That said, the dolls presented to me in England, six thousand miles from where they were once made, served as a bridge, albeit an elusive one. As I tried to trace the dolls both temporally and spatially, they went from "souvenirs" or "gifts" from Brazil in the 1950s to a re-signified "collection" in England in 2019.

My positionality in the 'field' was directly informed by my experience as a potter thirty years ago. Not only I have an enhanced appreciation of the skill and technique involved in the making of the *Ritxoko*, but my trajectory also prompted me to explore the aura (BENJAMIN, 2008 [1935]) of the dolls. As someone who has worked with clay, I can clearly identify the traces on pots made by my late husband, who was my potter companion. The identifiable lines, sketched on the leathery clay before it was fired, means that the aesthetic appreciation of a pot is bound up in the emotions it

2 - The Projeto Presença Karajá launched in 2017 with the purpose of 'mapping, identifying and analyzing' collections of Karajá dolls (Ritxoko) in Brazilian and foreign museum collections (https://presencakaraja.tainacan.org/).

incites. It is as if the high temperatures could somehow trap part of the essence of the potter, not unlike the lines by Walter Benjamin that open this paper. Those musings made me wonder whether any of the *Iny Karajá* master ceramicists could identify the ancestor that, over sixty years ago, made the dolls that were now on the other side of the Atlantic.

My positionality informed the questions posed to some of the consultants I engaged with, as did other issues pertaining to the political ecology of heritagisation and repatriation, and the economic potential of the *Ritxoko*. Below are some of the questions that were part of my conversation with professionals in the field:

· What do you think we should do with these dolls?

. How may the heritagisation process affect the making of the dolls?

. Are younger generations more motivated to learn the technique?

. How may the heritagisation process change perceptions about the dolls (as cultural heritage)?

. How may the heritagisation process change the dolls' value?

While the crucial question is the one that relates to the title of this paper, namely what the best home for the *Ritxoko* is, potential ramifications resulting from the heritagisation process were also discussed. For example, with makers becoming more active in disseminating their work and more empowered, would that affect the dynamics of households, intergenerational relations, or the local politics? I have included quotes by respondents in this article to give an idea of the wide-ranging views that reflect the heterogeneous assemblage of relations explored here. I have kept those quotes anonymous for confidentiality reasons.

The story: the biography of things and people

As the article explores alternative framings to the study of heritage, of the *Ritxoko* in particular, it poses an additional question: if the dolls, who are the protagonists here, could tell us their story, what would that be? The story of these particular dolls spans over seven decades. It started in the 1940s when they were made and allegedly gifted to Raphael Landau, a photographer of Hungarian Jewish origin who spent time amongst the *Karajá*. Unfortunately, very little is known about Landau, except for what Toni, another protagonist in this story, was able to tell. Toni approached Landau in the 1970s because she became interested in photography and wanted to know more about his work. She started collaborating with him on photographic experiments and they developed some techniques together. She talks about that time with evident excitement, remarking that "you can now do it with Photoshop, but back then, we were experimenting with film". Below, Toni features as a model in an article Landau wrote for the British Journal of Photography in 1977:


NEGATIVE / POSITIVE COMBINATION PRINTING

R. LANDAU

Figure 1: *British Journal of Photography in 1977. Article by Raphael Landau.*

Figure 2: *British Journal of Photography in 1977. Article by Raphael Landau.*

Toni describes Raphael as a 'scientist, artist, inventor' who supposedly had relatives living in Brazil. She remembers he was an eccentric man who became increasingly isolated whilst living in a house in the Epping Forest, north of London. He only ate three things, but this restricted selection was constantly changing for testing purposes. Landau aimed to erase the black dots that interfered with his eyesight as part of his experiments with different ways of seeing.

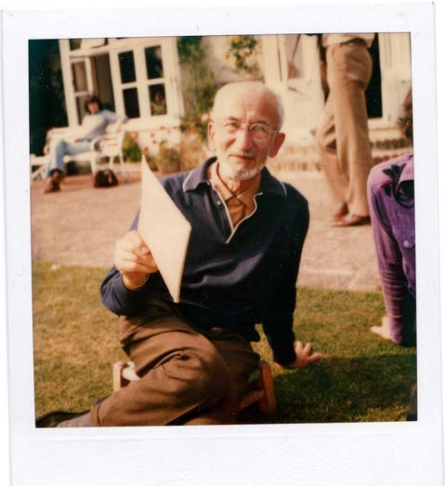


Figure 3: *The only photograph available of Raphael Landau, at Toni's wedding in the 1980s.*

In the late 1980s, Toni received a phone call from a distant relative of Landau announcing his death. Hers was the only contact number found amongst Landau's possessions. As Toni and her husband arrived at Landau's house in Epping Forest, they encountered the grounds covered in bin liners full of stuff. In one of these bags, they found eighteen ceramic dolls, five feather headdresses and eight spears.

Figure 4: *Four* ***Ritxoko*** *from the collection held by Toni Tye. Photograph by Toni Tye.*

Figure 5: *Four* ***Ritxoko*** *from the collection held by Toni Tye. Photograph by Toni Tye.*

The dolls were familiar to Toni, not least because in the 1970s Raphael had gifted her a *Ritxoko* that was not from the same set, as can be seen from the writing on the back of the photo that reads 'My original personal gift from Raphael; only one in this style':

Figure 6: *The only doll of a different style gifted to Toni in the 1970s.*

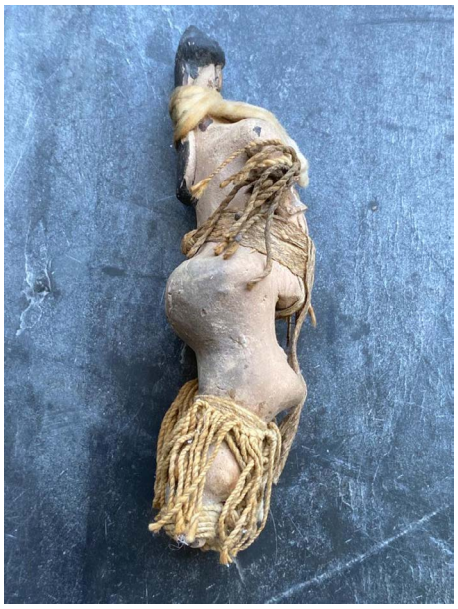


Figure 7: *Detail of* ***Ritxoko*** *gifted to Toni in the 1970s.*

Apart from the brief episode of being dumped into a bin liner following Landau's death, the dolls and other objects collected were very well looked after over six decades, firstly by Landau then Toni, who carefully wrapped the dolls in protective material and stored the feather headdresses in her home freezer. She could not

tell when Landau had travelled to Brazil, but a label found in one of the bags and a piece of writing about art, suggests that Landau was back in England by 1962.

Figure 8: *The label found with the photomontage by Rafael from photographs taken in Brazil (one of them published in the British Journal of Photography – see Figure 2)*

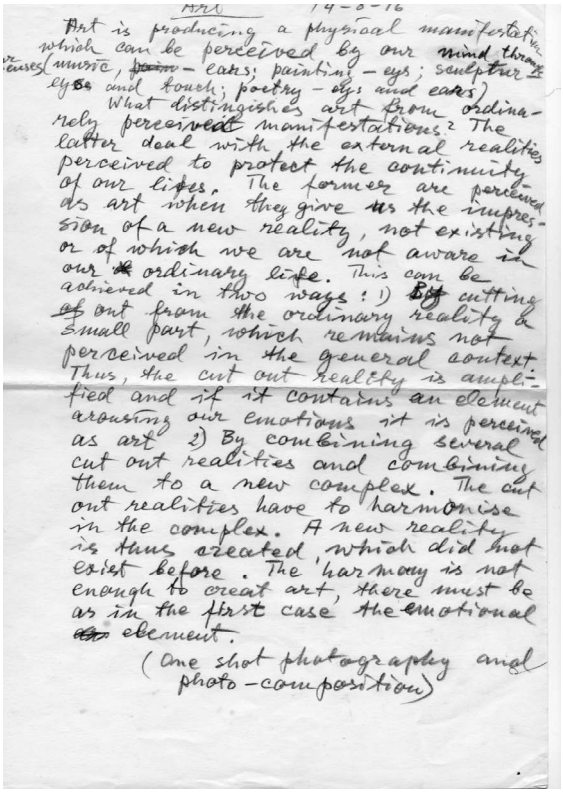
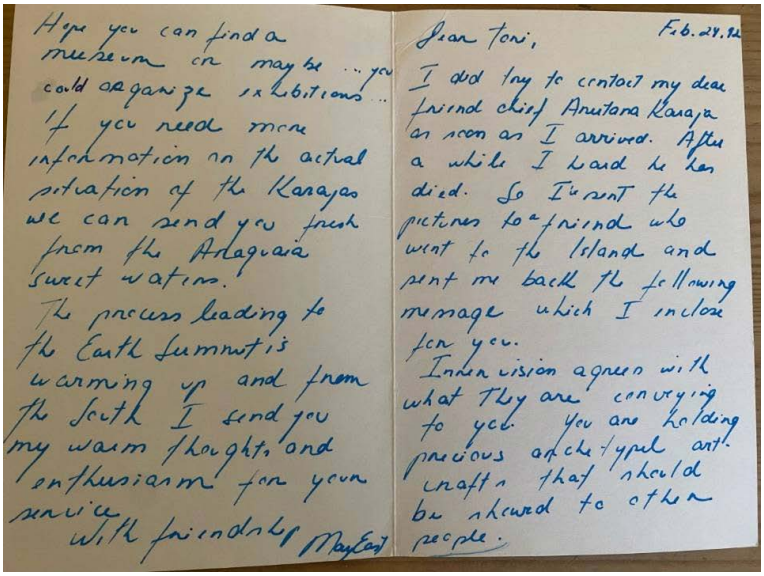


Figure 9: *Writing by Rafael Landau found in one of the bin liners.*

In January 1991, Toni contacted the Gaia Foundation in Brazil[3] and asked for advice on deciding the dolls' fate. The organization had links with the *Karajá* communities and the letter below implies

3 - https://www.gaiafoundation.org/

that someone from Gaia met with community leaders on an island, possibly Ilha do Bananal:


Hope you can find a museum or may be ... you could organize exhibitions ... If you need more information on the actual situation of the Karajas we can send you fresh from the Araguaia sweet waters.
The process leading to the Earth Summit is warming up and from the South I send you my warm thoughts and enthusiasm for your service.
With friendship
May Ean

Dear Toni, Feb. 29.92
I did try to contact my dear friend chief Aruitana Karaja as soon as I arrived. After a while I had to hear died. So I've sent the pictures to a friend who went to the Island and sent me back the following message which I inclose for you.
Inner vision agrees with what They are conveying to you. You are holding precious archetypal art-craft that should be showed to other people.

Figure 10: *Letter from 1992 by the contact in Gaia Foundation doing the mediation between England and Brazil.*

After showing the photographs presented above (see Figures 4 and 5) to some community members, that contact informed Toni that the dolls had been made in Mato Grosso and that the consensus was that they should go to a local museum, as seen in Figure 11.

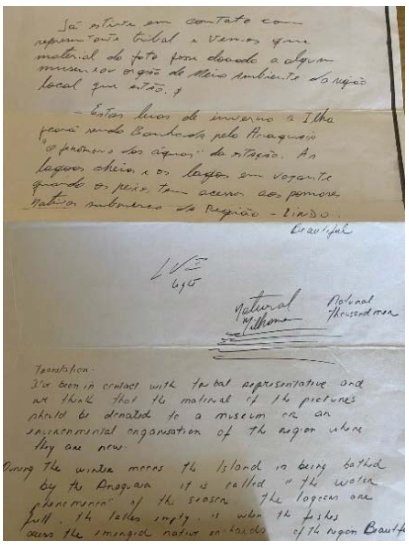

Natural History
National Museum
Translation
I've been in contact with tribal representative and we think that the material of the pictures should be donated to a museum or an environmental organisation of the region where they are now.
During the winter means the Island is being bathed by the Araguaia it is called "the water season" of the season the lagoons are full. The latter empty, it when the fishes

Figure 11: *Letter from contact in Gaia Foundation who spoke with Karaja community leaders.*

After this initial communication with Gaia Foundation, Toni reached a standstill because she had no idea how to take the dolls back to where they originated. In February 2018, as she was leaving the country, Toni saw in me, a Brazilian anthropologist and former ceramicist, the ideal custodian for the objects. Together we agreed that the ethically appropriate fate for the dolls was repatriation. As I started to contact *Karajá* specialists in Brazil, a few potential pathways were suggested: a local anthropological museum could house the objects, leaving them in the vicinity of the original birthplace of the makers; a British museum could host them and fund the making of a film registering a potential encounter between *Ritxoko* makers and the objects; perhaps the *Karajá*, now constituted by 23 communities, would want them back, but it was also possible that they would not care for old, disintegrating clay and feathers.

Thus far, the story has the following spatial-temporal markers: Brazil in the 1950s, England in the 1980s, and England in April 2018, when I became the custodian for the dolls and started researching the repatriation process. The fourth temporal marker in the narrative corresponds to the tragic fire at Museu Nacional (National Museum)[4] in Rio de Janeiro on 2nd September 2018, which reduced the museum's heritage accumulated over two hundred years, including a *Ritxoko* collection, to crumbling remains. Many anthropologists over the decades had studied the *Ritxoko* kept in the ethnology wing of that institution[5]. Constructed as the imperial home for the Portuguese Royal family before being turned into a museum in 1892, the prevalence of wooden features in the building helped to spread the fire even further. While ceramic pieces can withstand high temperatures, given the very nature of the firing technique, the museum building collapsed due to the fire

4 - https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/03/fire-engulfs-brazil-national-museum-rio

5 - The Iny Karajá collection that was housed in the Ethnology and Ethnography wing of the Museu Nacional had been donated by the North American scholar William Lipkind (LIMA FILHO and ANDRADE 2021).

crushing many objects that could have survived. While remains of the museum's collection are still being uncovered, it appears that only fragments were left from the original *Ritxoko* collection.

I was contacted almost immediately by people who knew about this set of *Ritxoko* under my temporary custody with the suggestion they could be donated to the museum. The museum seemed like the obvious home for the *Ritxoko,* however, politicised discussions in the broader media on who should 'own' material heritage problematised taken for granted assumptions. Reactions regarding the fire in Brazilian mainstream media were quick to blame the economic governance and the public-run Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, which managed the museum[6]. On the economic front, supporters of neoliberal tendencies in the country jumped to the occasion claiming that PPP (Private and Public Partnerships) was the only possible arrangement "given the country's poor record with safeguarding its precious heritage"[7]. As for the Indigenous peoples, they expressed anger at the neglect of their heritage.

This broader discussion appeared to make the repatriation of the dolls more timely than ever, and prompted me to continue my conversation with professionals in the area. However, questions emerged as to what would be the most ethical repatriation in this case; should the dolls go to a museum in Brazil or to the communities themselves? As we can see from the quotes below, some consultants questioned whether there would be interest from the part of the communities in having the dolls returned, not to mention the difficulty in finding out where exactly the dolls had originally been made:

> "The idea of repatriation is interesting, but there probably will not be a great deal of interest on the part of the women. They

6 - https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45398965
7 - https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniao/2018/09/abram-o-debate-sobre-a-abram.shtml

> are interested in producing the dolls, selling them, and buyers taking the dolls away".
>
> "Repatriation is more meaningful for ritualistic objects; very special objects that are key to performing a given ritual. [Repatriation] is usually down to a collective desire to have a particular object back. I do not think this is the case with this collection".

Other comments pointed to the need to speak directly to the makers before deciding on what to do:

> "Without knowing who made them, it is difficult to decide where you should return them to".
>
> "You may manage to give them the dolls back, but this will imply a process of dialogue and interaction to build trust and a relationship".

After the fire, there was also a renewed interest in the objects themselves as the loss of so many archaeological treasures made the aura of the ageing objects more salient:

> "The risk of them getting broken is much bigger if they return to the communities".
>
> "This collection was preserved with much care for decades; I do not think giving them back is the best option. They would get damaged and possibly destroyed. It may be the case to take these dolls to the National Museum".

The tensions made salient in the above observations point to the challenges related to repatriating the objects in question. They also indicate the need to consider the threats to indigenous livelihoods, which became even more severe over the last few years with Brazil's government that took office in 2019. In addition

to being endangered, Brazil's indigenous peoples are amongst the poorest in one of the most unequal countries in the world[8], and it could be argued that natural landscapes and indigenous rights over land and resources have never faced greater challenges. Latin America as a whole struggled to modernise despite political-economic arrangements that imposed over hundreds of years a flow of raw materials (and exotic objects) going north and intellectual resources going south. Discussions on heritage and repatriation must consider this imbalance to change that logic.

Heritage pasts: contextualising the dolls

The *Karajá* consist of around 3,000 people spread over 23 communities along the Araguaia and Javaé rivers in Goias, Tocantins, Mato Grosso and Pará states, including the world's largest fluvial island, the Ilha do Bananal. Three languages are associated with the *Karajá* group belonging to the *Macro-Gê* linguistic trunk. The making of the *Ritxoko* is associated with the *Iny Karajá* sub-group. The dolls and the technologies used in their making have drawn interest from scholars, travellers and collectors for many decades.

One of the earliest works tracing the changes in the making of dolls was by Brazilian anthropologist Luiz de Castro Faria (1959). Traditionally made as miniatures and modelled with beeswax, the dolls were named *tybora*. They later started to be made of clay and, at some point, were referred to as *Ritxoko*. Farias compared the formal characteristics of the dolls before the 1940s, when they were smaller, unfired and with no limbs, with later changes following the inclusion of firing techniques. He also observed changes in the activities depicted: from being used as toys for the socialisation process representing members of the family to becoming part of

8 - *https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/sites/default/files/analytics/document/2017/2/chap_21_05.pdf*

cultural and economic exchanges. The *Karajá* material culture was also the subject of studies in the decades that followed (SIMÕES, 1992; FÉNELON COSTA, 1978; FÉNELON COSTA and MALHANO, 1986; WUST, 1975; TAVEIRA, 1982; CAMPOS, 2002; LIMA FILHO and SILVA, 2012).

The more triangular shape found in the museum collections I visited is characteristic of the early period. In the 1940s, they gain greater detail, such as separate arms and the spandrel-effect[9] 'pleat' on the abdomen (WHAN, 2010), or 'little belly', which differentiates the female from the male figure. Specialists recognised the dolls, which are the object of this paper, as belonging to the 'transition phase', i.e., the 1950s, because the feet of the figures are still rigid. One of the people I consulted elaborated on this feature, "One can see this is a couple because she has a little belly while he does not".

Some scholars refer to the different styles in craftsmanship as the 'early stage' and 'modern stage' (CASTRO FARIA, 1959), while others reject the idea of a rupture because older styles continue to be made (WHAN, 2010). However, the literature is unanimous about how the history of contact prompted changes in the design, whether through the exchange with travellers, agents of governmental expeditions, or researchers from within the nations' borders and beyond. This history of contact is entangled with that of the national project and the 'imagined community' (ANDERSON, 1983), in which the indigenous and original peoples played a foundational role.

Located on the shores of the Araguaia river and at the centre of the Brazilian nation-state, the twenty-three *Karajá* communities are greatly influenced by river life and the surrounding landscape.

9 - Originally used in architectural design, the spandrel was applied to evolutionary changes by Gould and Lewontin (1979). It was subsequently used to refer to modifications (whether in architectural design or biology) that did not result from a decision made a priori, but from a practical solution to a problem. The resulting adaptation eventually becomes so widespread that it seems as though it was done on purpose. In the case of the dolls, Whan (2010) argues that the pleat was a spandrel, tacitly reproduced to distinguish men from women.

Between 1943 and 1967, this vast central-western area of Brazil was the stage for numerous expeditions, part of a broader nation-construction endeavour part of a 'civilising process' started by Getulio Vargas, one of the longest-standing presidents of Brazil (LIMA FILHO, 2001). Of relevance here is how the making of the *Ritxoko* was informed by the ripple effects produced through the construction of the nation, including the opening of that remote area to development, tourism, increased interest in the *Karajá* culture, and more recently, the heritagisation of the making of the *Ritxoko*.

Lowenthal compares heritage with history by suggesting that while the latter excavates pasts which have "grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes" (1996, p. ix), encompassing values as distinct as patriotism and tourism. Sometimes, a representation of pastness becomes the bearer of history 'inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past' (HALL, 2005, p. 6). Geismar (2015), in turn, suggests that heritage regimes result from power relations that envelop materials within a politics of recognition. If the nation is an ongoing and selective project (HALL, 2005), so is the discourse of heritage and the writing of collective social memory.

Lima Filho has written extensively about the entanglements between the nation and the livelihoods of the *Karajá* people (2015, 2012, 2001). His doctorate thesis, in particular, is a work of ethnohistory that is relevant in discussing heritagisation and repatriation, where museums emerge as an important political category of citizenship. He uses the concept of 'patrimonial citizenship' to refer to social action by ethnic collectives, which are 'modulated between the myth and antimyth of the nation' (2015:1). This understanding of citizenship sheds light on the role of the State via the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute

(IPHAN hereafter) in the heritagisation process.

IPHAN has played a protagonist role in heritage conservation in Brazil. Decree 3551 from 2000 expanded the remit of heritage processes to include intangible culture, paving the way to a new regime of value encompassing languages, festivals, knowledge and techniques (ABREU & CHAGAS 2009). However, new regime of value has to be critically and iteratively assessed to adequately address questions of subalternity, ethnic violence, and the cultural content of ideology (HALL 2005, CHAUÍ 2006, KRENAK 2019).

These important and timely issues may otherwise be side-tracked. The dolls represented a shared national identity even if they were displayed out of context and separated from the social-natural meanings ingrained in their making. The acknowledgement of these relationships within a temporal and spatial framework is vital to legitimise heritagisation processes and permanence over time (HARVEY 2001; SMITH 2006; LANG 2017). Some enactments of heritage demand skilled performances, such as oral narratives, which can help to reproduce social life and readdress post-colonial injustices (TONKIN 1992). In the case of the dolls, history, and arguably the history of contact, is narrated in the dolls' shape-shifting over time. It is as though the women speak through the dolls, who enact heritage. However, the dolls also play a powerful role in the livelihoods of the *Iny Karajá* people.

The moral economy of the Ritxoko

Another alternative way of exploring heritage is through the lenses of 'moral economy' (THOMPSON, 1971; POLANYI, 1957) and commodification of the dolls, which does not, in the case of the *Ritxoko,* exclude its heritagisation. Mastered by women from the *Iny Karajá* group, the *Ritxoko*, as already remarked, were originally

smaller and more robust for children to play with, and if they got broken, another one would be made to replace it. While they continued to be used pedagogically as part of the socialization process of girls, by the 1940s, the dolls were being exchanged for other products (FÉNELON COSTA, 1978). The idea of firing the dolls to make them stronger was allegedly something that emerged out of contact in the 1930s (FÉNELON COSTA, 1978) but it also meant that they became a viable commercial asset. As they increased in size, the limbs separated from the body, with more graphic depictions of everyday life and the inclusion of mythological scenes and non-human forms.

It is thus impossible to separate the development in the making of the *Ritxoko* from changes resulting from the exchanges with people from outside the communities. The dolls played a central role in the livelihoods of the *Iny Karajá,* with commercial production becoming increasingly intense to supply a burgeoning indigenous arts and crafts market (WHAN, 2010). With the increase of tourism in the Araguaia region in the 1950s (LIMA FILHO, 2001), the production of *Ritxoko* became an essential part of the local economy while giving voice to female ceramicists at both local and global levels. In terms of the division of labour, the actual sculptural work tends to be made by older women. If they get involved at all, younger women are more likely to do the drawings rather than the shaping of the dolls (WHAN 2010). Women of all ages bring the dolls to the town of São Félix do Araguaia to be sold.

Here again, the concept of commoning is relevant to indicate practices that translate into collective efforts to be productive using common resources (LANG 2018) and the related political ecology, here understood as the potential conflicts over access to and control of natural resources (ESCOBAR, 1996). While contact with people from outside their broader *Karajá* community was the main driver of

change in the making of the dolls, the availability or scarcity (in the case of beeswax) of materials also affected that making. While it is not within the scope of this paper to investigate the changes in the moral economy of the *Ritxoko* over the last few years, it suffices to say that these transformations are still ongoing, not least with the recent listing of the dolls' making as immaterial heritage.

Heritagisation processes are often informed by the perception that certain objects, practices or landscapes are endangered, which places the endeavour within a system of values committed to conservation practices. Over the years, this necessary 'ethical enterprise' (HARVEY, 2001, p. 336) has expanded to include efforts to protect knowledge and natural landscapes (HARRISON ET AL., 2020) associated with endangered material culture. My focus on the moral economy of the *Ritxoko* builds on that urgency to pay attention to the 'uncertain futures' (HARRISON ET AL., 2020, p.33) associated with the livelihoods of *Ritxoko* makers and of other makers who are part of the post-colonial experience.

Central here is the role of the dolls in the moral economy of the *Karajá*, which encompasses knowledge, traditions, techniques, and resources. The crafting of the ceramic dolls and the motivations that underpin it together make up the material and immaterial heritage of the *Ritxoko*. Equally important is the natural heritage that enables that making. There have been increasing discussions on the need to bridge heritage and conservation practices (HARRISSON 2015). However, there is still a lack of studies examining the relationship between heritage, communities and livelihoods.

Access to resources, whether clay, minerals, water or wood for burning, relies on access to the commons. The concept has been used to describe 'a property with no rights allocation and regulation', thus 'belonging to everybody and hence to nobody' (EIZENBERG 2011:765). Here, I use commons to refer to cultural

and ecological commons, such as air, rivers or oceans. While the land allocated to original peoples in Brazil does conform to regulations, there is a bureaucratic precarity associated with it that could put livelihoods at risk. Against this backdrop, it is worth assessing the dolls' political ecology. Access to the resources that enable their making is crucial, especially in the aftermath of the fire at the Museu Nacional. Here is where heritagisation can play an important role in securing access to the natural landscapes that enable practices deemed valuable to continue over time. Following that reasoning, the moral economy of the *Ritxoko* also speaks to the ethical component of heritage futures.

Heritage presents: commons, heritagisation and repatriation

The discussion on heritage as commons goes beyond material culture to encompass land and resources. In line with Gonzalez (2014), this section explores heritage as a commons, looking at the *Ritxoko* as a collective resource encompassing material and immaterial culture, objects and knowledge, nature and culture. Gonzalez's call is to avoid reifying heritage at the cost of alienating objects from subjects, and to focus on specific contexts. Thus, heritage as commons can be seen as an amalgam of nature and culture, encompassing history and bio-systems (LANG 2017: 641) with the *Ritxoko* as the overlap between tangible and intangible forms of heritage as they condense the materiality of clay and labour, and the knowledge-related commons they signify.

Some of the literature on the commons has suggested that its collective use may lead to over-exploitation (HARDIN 1968) while others have questioned whether collective management is appropriate for every type of commons (OSTROM, 1990;

STRONZA, 2010; LANG, 2017). Gonzalez, in turn, observes that heritage as commons is less susceptible to scarcity because of how heritagisation increases the value of an item (2014), including associated techniques and knowledge. While the heritagisation process could potentially resolve the tension concerning the management of commons as heritage, the question is thorny, as evident in the ethnography of the Wajãpi by Gallois (2012). Investigating the heritagisation process of the *kusiwa* graphic art after Unesco granted it immaterial heritage status, Gallois observes that as knowledge is passed to (or shared with) outsiders, the Wajãpi believe they lose out and become "weaker" (p. 23) hence the need to establish limitations on the use of traditional knowledge. Gallois rightly points out that the discussion translates into a struggle between distinct and unequal conceptual fields (p. 42), a relevant insight when considering heritage as commons. In other words, when reflecting on the conundrum of managing something that, by definition, belongs to the collective, it is also important to consider different ontological parameters that may affect collaborations within a commons.

A related point was made by Gonçalves (2009). He observed that heritage values and meanings are often imposed on cultural manifestations with little attention given to grassroots understandings. However, less has been written on the contrasting views on the criteria for legitimising the ownership and custody of objects. As for repatriation in the context of heritage as commons, some have called attention to the moral imperative of source communities having a say as to who should 'possess' the object (BOLTON 2015; SMITH 2006). In that context, questions emerge as to whether heritage commons should be managed collectively by each identity community or by a public-private partnership as some governing bodies would wish.

The approach used by the Anthropological Museum of the Federal University of Goiás, a public institution, to nurture more inclusive relationships with the *Karajá* is noteworthy. A digital platform with a significant collection of *Ritxoko* was created and hosted by the Anthropological Museum at the Federal University of Goiás to make access to objects more democratic. The museum leaflet is duly disseminated using Portuguese and Iny, the language spoken by the *Karajá*. The images elucidate the interconnectedness of nature and culture, with an image of the Araguaia river as a centrepiece[10]. The nature of this relationship emerged as one respondent talked about the possibility of repatriation:

> "It is possible that a daughter or a granddaughter is moved by seeing this doll. They may want to touch it, talk to you, and show it to others. But if she sees it as a very important piece, she will not want to keep it at her house; she will give it to the museum. They have a history with the museum. Since the museum was created, it has had a relationship with the *Karajá*. It is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and the relationship with the *Karajá* was never interrupted. Sometimes they have a demand that we meet; at other times, we ask for something from them. There is continuity in this relationship. Whenever they find something that they deem valuable, they bring it here. When the National Museum went up in flames, they brought a *Ritxoko* here to be gifted".

Digital repatriation has also emerged as a strategy for shifting objects worldwide without the bureaucratic hurdles involved. However, scepticism was voiced by those who see this alternative as an easy way out for larger museums to keep their collections intact. Suppose we are to achieve 'a symmetrisation of

10 - Please see the exhibition about the Araguaia River at the Anthropological Museum at the Federal University of Goiás. The endeavour was a collaboration with Iny community leads from Buridina, Goiás (https://projetorioaraguaia.ciar.ufg.br/exposicao-virtual/).

knowledge positions' (FARÍAS, 2011:372) and capture the agency of both creators and creation (GELL, 1998). In that case, we must trace all actors involved in the heritagisation process, including the nonhuman, to shed light on how politics emerges through different configurations (HERZFELD 1990; HARVEY 2001; SANDELL 2007). The same could be said when we address repatriation, a conversation that needs to be decentred away from European and North American strongholds to include the 'repatriation of Indigenous life and land' (TUCK and YANG, 2012, p. 1). Repatriation would also be a means to learn from the South (LOFTUS 2019) and from *Ritxoko* makers new ways to curate post-colonial museums while unpacking practices in the heritagisation process ethnographically.

Heritage futures and co-curatorship

In this section, I draw on the proposal of Heritage Futures, a project based in the UK that worked across four themes: Uncertainty, Transformation, Profusion, and Diversity. Of relevance here is the fourth subtheme, diversity, which 'compares ways of valuing and managing biological, cultural and linguistic diversity in indigenous landscape management' (HARRISON, 2016: 69) and is informed by the idea of 'plural heritage ontologies' (:70) and assemblage theories. Finally, I suggest that the endeavour by the Federal University of Goias in partnership with IPHAN shows the potential of collaboration in addressing heritage futures. The partnership worked on a series of projects which accompanied the heritagisation process, including a safeguarding project, a documentary, and ethnographic research of the techniques and drawings that paved the way to the listing of the making of the *Ritxoko* as an Immaterial Cultural Heritage in Brazil. The research served as the base for the report, and in 2012 the practice was

listed by IPHAN, the Brazilian governmental institution responsible for safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural forms: "The heritagisation process did increase the appeal of the making for the younger sector of the *Karajá* population, a relevant effect of the heritagisation process. Women feel more empowered and are producing more; younger generations are more eager to learn the technology of *Ritxoko* making; the commercial value has gone up, as has the symbolic value of the dolls. Moreover, they use this as an argument when they want to defend the price by arguing that the *Ritxoko* are now heritage, 'as the video shows'. Female visibility may disturb [the broader kinship structure] a little, but it also brings financial security to families. The dolls generate income, and younger women are interested in learning the technology".

Many museums worldwide have a dark history of colonial connections when objects from indigenous peoples the world over were appropriated by travellers and imperial powers. In that context, repatriation emerged in the 1980s as a 'way to right the wrongs of the colonial era' (BOLTON 2015: 229). However, the work by the Anthropological Museum of the Federal University of Goiás (Museu Antropológico da Universidade Federal de Goiás) to protect both the material and immaterial heritage associated with the *Ritxoko* is noteworthy as a benchmark example of heritage as commons. It draws on decades of a close relationship with the *Karajá* people and *Ritxoko* makers. Furthermore, it is a collaborative relationship whereby members of the *Karajá* community actively engage with the university as advisors and co-researchers in exemplary horizontal dynamics. The passage below illustrates the participatory component of research being conducted by the Federal University of Goiás, which offered scholarships to *Ritxoko* makers so that the women could share their knowledge and technologies with others as part of a series of workshops to

promote inclusiveness and participation:

> "A consultation was carried out amongst the craftspeople about what workshops they wanted amongst the different 23 communities. It entailed a significant amount of fieldwork through visits to the different communities, and presentations to local authorities and public institutions about the *Karajá* heritage. Researchers worked with the 23 communities over three years. The project included two training courses, one on the management of cultural projects and the other on documentary production. Students received the training in a central town before returning to their communities with the tasks they would have to accomplish: to elaborate a project and film the material for the documentary. The workshops depended on their demand after a public consultation. First, they asked for workshops on ritual ornamentations. Then, after mapping the makers in the 23 communities and objects being produced, they promoted an exchange of techniques. For example, a *Karajá* community in Pará that does not know how to make dolls asked for a workshop to learn this; another community had not performed a certain ritual for 40 years, so they asked for a workshop where they could learn to make the costumes and ornamentations for it. After the workshops, they performed the ritual in their community for the first time in decades. Another community asked for a workshop to learn to make a skirt used in a particular ritual, seeing that the craft used to be passed to men, and they had stopped making the skirts. The fourth aim was the book. All the craftspeople who gave workshops received a scholarship. They also helped to organise the workshops".

It is worth highlighting another project about and with the *Iny Karajá,* which aimed at more symmetric relations between communities and museums.

"*Presença Karajá: cultura material, tramas e trânsitos coloniais*" was an interdisciplinary project whose main objective was to map, identify and analyse collections of *Ritxoko* in museums in Brazil and abroad. Interestingly, the map of European institutions presented during the seminar *Presença Karajá* does not feature any *Ritxoko* collection in the United Kingdom. During the seminar, the collaborations revealed the range and depth of local knowledge associated with the *Ritxoko*, from the design and costumes of the dolls to the nonhuman mythological figures. In the presentations, the objects were vectors for local knowledge enabling the collective (of curators, researchers, makers and collaborators) to give continuity to and valorisation of the practices. In that sense, the heritagisation process is a fertile ground for decolonial practices. These are two relevant examples of how heritage futures can be co-produced as part of decolonising museums, paving the way to alternative ways of curatorship to address cultural and ecological futures from a different ontological perspective.

Discussion

Produced by older women who still have some control over their means of production within a moral economy that encompasses access to resources and heritage-related legislations, the dolls help thread a story with connections well beyond the boundaries of the *Karajá* communities in the interior of Brazil. As they trigger new flows of knowledge, resources, techniques and ideas (BEAR ET AL., 2015; TSING, 2015) these cultural-natural artefacts play a role in re-animating a world of things (INGOLD 2010:7) while inviting conversations on the ethics of heritage and repatriation. As the actors involved start to converse and negotiate the possible destiny of the dolls, something like a museological

process appears to unfold with the emergence of a 'collection' as a result, rather than eighteen ceramic dolls found in a bin liner.

The crafting of these dolls cannot be separated from the knowledge that inspires them, including myths, play, values, and gender roles. This knowledge is situated and changing, adding meaning to the making as it shifts over time. The recently acquired heritage status of the objects makes the relations in this human and nonhuman assemblage more complex, and their role as a source of income may generate tensions in this scenario. In a sense, the added value the dolls gained once they were given the status of material heritage by IPHAN appears to be in direct opposition to the loss of aura (BENJAMIN 2008 [1935]) implicit in their reproduction for commercial use and given the apparent paradox of producing heritage objects in large quantities.

Those initial findings suggest that using repatriation as a method could be fruitful in unveiling the tensions of heritagisation processes and their subsequent effects. Furthermore, they highlight the need for a conversation outside of academia about disseminating forms of knowledge and practices which are embedded in green spaces. Equally important is the issue of maintaining commoning practices and the possibility of a collaborative curatorship to make relations with museums more inclusive.

Conclusion

This present exercise in tracing the biography of the eighteen *Ritxoko* that were brought to England over sixty years ago prompted a reflection on the ethical ramifications regarding the ownership of cultural heritage, access to natural heritage, and potential repatriation of the objects. The making of the *Ritxoko* represents a privileged locus for the analysis of both natural and

cultural heritage. The crafting of the dolls produces both material culture, as in the dolls themselves, and immaterial knowledge, in the form of the techniques and practices involved and meanings associated with the ludic and didactic functions of the *Ritxoko*. That making also relies on access to shared resources and the natural heritage that enables productivity. As we trace possible homes for this collection of *Ritxoko*, tensions emerge and the dolls become much more than merely handcrafted ceramic pieces. The fire at the museum made related questions even more timely.

I argue that natural and cultural heritages are part and parcel of the same ethical effort of preserving resources for future generations. The urgency underlying this ethical imperative relates to the potential endangerment associated with some forms of knowledge and resources. The promotion of a more symmetrical knowledge exchange between different actors involved in the heritage and conservation assemblages, whether as makers, researchers, curators or policy-makers, was exemplified in the two examples of initiatives at the Federal University of Goiás and with the *Presença Karajá* project.

Finally, this analysis suggests that repatriation could be used methodologically as it may reveal what lies in the in-betweenness of what is not said. For example, perhaps there is a desire by some women to be the curators of the *Ritxoko*, or perhaps they would be keen on exchanging knowledge with other ceramicists. Using repatriation as a method could reveal the subtleties of the moral and glocal[11] economy of the *Ritxoko*, the geopolitics of heritage, and the effects of heritagisation on the making of the *Ritxoko* while promoting further collaborations with their makers.

11 - Glocal refers to a combination of global and local factors.

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