Local tribes and their myths

The Amazon rainforest is home to approximately 450,000 indigenous people, who are divided into 400 tribes, each with their own language, culture, and territory. It is estimated that there are also about 70 tribes who have had no contact with the outside world. The history of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon has been marked by the brutality and cruelty of Europeans, forced slavery, diseases, and centuries of genocide. It is not known how many indigenous people lived in the Amazon before the arrival of Europeans. It has been suggested that when the first European colonizers arrived in 1500, there were over 13 million indigenous people living in the forests, divided into about 2,000 tribes. We will never know how many there actually were. In the century following the first contact, over 90% of the indigenous population was wiped out. This was mainly due to European diseases such as influenza, measles, and smallpox. In the following centuries, hundreds of thousands of indigenous people died working as slaves on sugar cane plantations and rubber plantations. It has been estimated that one indigenous tribe died out on average every year in the last century. The Brazilian government has established protected areas and language areas to protect indigenous people. Whether they will be effective in the long term remains to be seen. Indigenous people have a very deep spiritual connection to their land. Nature is seen as animated, and everything has its own protective spirit. Protective spirits are like ancestors who care for their own. For example, protective spirits forbid fishing in many upper reaches of rivers where fish spawn. Such taboos allow fish to have true sanctuaries during spawning season and escape from ever-increasing fishing pressure. Thanks to protective spirits, indigenous people can live in a balanced way with nature, which excludes the destruction of local fish populations. The beliefs of indigenous peoples are reflected in their rich oral tradition, cosmology, rituals, and myths.

As presenting the myths in their entirety would be impossible here, we will only present some excerpts, which hopefully provide a brief overview of the uniqueness of indigenous myths and inspire further study:

Iamulumulu - The Formation of the Rivers (Kamaiurá Myth):
... The otters swam up slowly, saying to one another, "There seems to be a people here." One otter went ahead of the others and swam toward the Sun. "Where did you all come from?" the Sun asked. "We are coming home from the fishing."...

Kuatunge - The Origin of the Twins Sun and Moon (Kuikúru Myth):
... The jaguar said, "The girl belongs to me. Her father sent her to me." And turning to the girl, he said, "Don't look at the old woman or her head will fall off." Just as they came to the jaguar's house, the girl looked back at the old woman. The old woman's head fell off. "That girl doesn't have long to live. She will die soon," said the old wolf...

Igaranhã: The Enchanted Canoe (Kamaiurá Myth):
... Then he saw that it was the canoe coming back by itself to its place. "What this, my canoe is turning into a spirit?" He said this and watched. He saw that the boat had eyes, one on each side of the bow. "I think I'll climb inside," he said. As he sat inside, he said, "Can you carry me somewhere?"...

Kuát and Iaê - The Conquest of Day (Kamaiurá Myth):
... The flies answered him, but the urubutsin could not make out what they were saying. Nobody could understand the flies, as no one knew their language. One by one the birds questioned the flies, but none of them could understand what they said...

Iamuricumá Women – The Women without a Right Breast (Kamaiurá Myth):
... The small children were thrown into the lagoons, and they turned into fish. The Iamuricumá women are walking still today, ever adorned and singing. They use bows and arrows and do not have a right breast, so they can pull back their bowstrings more easily...

Mavutsinim – The First Man (Kamaiurá Myth):
… In the beginning there was only Mavutsinim. No on loved with him. H ehad no wife. H ehad no son, nord id he have any relatives. He was all alone.

Kuadê - Juruna Kills the Sun (Juruna Myth):
... After the Sun's death, everything got dark. The cudgel, at the death of its master, ran away and transformed itself into a snake, the *salamanta* or *uandáre*. The blood pouring out of the Sun turned into spiders, ants, snakes, centipedes, and other creatures...

Uuatsim - The Ear-Piercing Ceremony in the Village of the Birds (Kamaiurá Myth):
... And they went to look for the bird village. After a short while, they found a little *socó*, who was fishing. "What are you doing here?" asked the heron. "We're just here," answered Uuatsim...

Iamulumulu: The Formation of the Rivers (Kamaiurá Myth)
The only thing missing was jealousy. The Sun and the Moon were not jealous of their wives, who resented this and said that Ierẽp had a remedy to make jealousy. And so all of them went to get the remedy...

Avatsiu: The Language of the Birds (Kamaiurá Myth)
... There, in the middle of the forest, he leaned against a camioá tree and said, "Tamãi, I would like to become just like you." "You wouldn't be able to stand it, my grandson. To be a tree is very difficult. You have to stay awake all the time. If you fall asleep, you'll die, and that's that," the camioá answered...

Arutsãm: The Clever Frog (Kamaiurá Myth)
... Minorí went up to the moon, singing. Up there he began to play the nhumiatotó. The jaguar, on hearing the sound of the flute, got very angry at the snakes and said, "I told you to kill Minorí, and you didn't kill him. You're too soft." Minorí is on the moon still today.

Kanassa - The Conquest of Fire (Kuikúru Myth):
... The duck's canoe could not stand up against the banzeiro and sank to the bottom. The duck was screaming in rage. "Kanassa, bring back my canoe. You lied to me. This one is no good, it's made of clay."...

Alapá - The Rejuvenating Water (Juruna Myth):
... One day, in his roving, he came to a clear part of the forest, where he found a ladder coming down from the sky to the ground. The old man stopped and looked at the ladder without understanding the reason for it. After examining it for a long time, he decided to go up, saying to himself, "I'll go up and see what it's like there."...

Kuát and Iaê - The Conquest of Day (Kamaiurá Myth):
... In the beginning, everything was dark. It was always night. There was no day. People lived around the termite hills. Everything was very confused. Nobody could see a thing...

References

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