

# SEEDS

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## **BETWEEN ENCHANTMENT AND THE IMAGE-SPIRIT (UTUPĚ): THE ESSENCE OF THE IMAGE**

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### **Abstract**

It presents an unprecedented approach to the relationship between the Enchantment of the Tremembé indigenous people – beings of the forest that are present in the Tremembé cosmogony –, and the Spirit-Image (*utupĕ*) of the Yanomani indigenous people – the true interior of forest beings in the Yanomani cosmogony.

The central question arises: Is the Spirit-Image (*utupĕ*) necessary to see Enchantment? Problematizes indigenous knowledge from these Brazilian indigenous people. The connection between these two concepts is questioned, which share the (in)visibility, the representation of mythical ancestors and the ability to keep images as the essence of life.

**Keywords:** Enchantment; Spirit-image (*utupĕ*); Decolonial; Image

### **Introduction**

The doctoral research aims to rescue indigenous ancestry and keep the collective memory of the Tremembé people alive, collaborating for the production of indigenous knowledge.

The doctoral project has as its central axis an investigation into the relationship between Enchantment and Spirit-Image. How can an audiovisual work on the

Tremembé people's Enchantment contribute to the production of indigenous knowledge? For the first time, the shared realization of an audiovisual work with the Tremembé people is presented, in which he develops artistic practice in a docufiction on Enchantment, based on Art-based Research and Indigenous Decolonial Methodologies

## **1 – Between Enchantment and the Image-spirit (*utupë*): the essence of the image**

In this chapter, I approach the cosmogony of Tremembé<sup>1</sup> and the Enchanted, according to their form (living and dead), their abode (river, sea, dunes, among others) and their representation (transmutation of the body). Subsequently, the Yanomani<sup>2</sup> cosmogony and the Spirit-Image (*utupë*) are investigated, based on the Xapiri and their forms (multiplicity and visibility). Finally, I question the connection between these two concepts, which share (in)visibility, the representation of mythical ancestors and the ability to keep images as the essence of life.

Enchantment is present in several indigenous peoples in northeastern Brazil, but this research focuses on the Tremembé concept of Enchantment. Even with the presence in all groups originating in this region, research in which these spiritual entities deepen are still rare. Since my dissertation “*Open Letter to Anaíá Tremembé*”<sup>3</sup>, I have been investigating the Tremembé cosmogony, dialoguing about elements of nature, orality and Tremembé indigenous culture, allied to artistic practice.

The interest in relating Enchantment with the Spirit-Image arises after reading the book “*The fall of the sky: Words from a Yanomami shaman*”, by Davi Kopenawa

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<sup>1</sup>Indigenous people which I belong. It is the second largest indigenous people in Ceará (Fonteneles Filho, 2014). Before the colonial invasion, it lived in a nomadic way from the mouth of the Gurupi River (Maranhão), from the Serra de Ibiapaba (Ceará) to the mouth of the Aracatimirim River (Ceará). They used hunting and fishing and planting their own food. Currently, the Tremembé live in Ceará in 18 settlements in the municipalities of Itarema, Itapipoca and Acaraú. Due to the non-protection of the government of Brazil, the people are constantly threatened by land invasion and coconut planting.

<sup>2</sup> The Yanomami (Pró-Yanomami, 1988) are one of the largest peoples in the Amazon, living in the Parima range, between the upper Orinoco (in southern Venezuela) and the Negro river (in northern Brazil). They survive by hunting and gathering and agriculture, and have several languages and dialects. In 1940, the first visit of non-indigenous people to the territory took place, for reasons of spreading the Christian faith, which led to the beginning of the exploitation of the land and several outbreaks of epidemics. Currently, the Yanomami people are suffering several attacks due to mining.

<sup>3</sup> Dissertation presented to the University of Aveiro on July 16, 2021, to obtain the Master's degree in Contemporary Artistic Creation, carried out under the scientific supervision of the Doctor. João António de Almeida Mota, Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication and Art at the University of Aveiro.

Yanomami (2015) and Bruce Albert (2015). I notice that the xapiri are the guardians of memory and forests, acting in dreams and healing. All beings in the forest are a spirit-image (*utupë*), who, when they become xapiri, present themselves to the shamans forming countless and unspeakable images. The Spirit-Image (*utupë*) has already appeared to me a few times. For us, Tremembé, it is called Enchantment. To be enchanted is to be traversed by the beings of the forest and their varied dimensions, beyond the appearance of who we are and accessing the world of the forests.

### **1.1 - Tremembé Enchantment**

According to Maria Andreína dos Santos (2014), the enchanted are called in two ways: enchanted alive and enchanted dead. The living enchanted are living people who have been enchanted by entities and who transmit warm energy. The dead Enchanted are leaders who die, but remain in spirit to help us in times of spiritual teaching. These beings still act in the cure, helping in the confection of traditional medicines and in the removal of the disease.

Although everyone has this gift, these are not visible to everyone. Often we do not know how to identify them, as the enchanted ones appear in different ways and in unexpected places, since, “listening to the chants of the enchanted one is only possible for a Tremembé person who is predisposed to be a medium, someone whose body and mind can be produced to communicate with the cosmic dimension of the enchanted” (de Queiroz Lima, 2020, p. 247).

The abode of the enchanted are multiple spaces in which they appear to protect. Each being of the forest lives in a certain place and with a certain function. However, depending on the enchantment's purpose, it may have a fixed place, called the enchantment's place. The perception of the difference between the enchanted influences this space, and in turn, the interpretation of their image.

In the case of the enchanted dead, they appear in the woods, on the dunes, or in water passages, such as rivers, lakes, mangroves and the sea. In turn, the living enchanted ones appear in our dreams, thoughts or visions. For the enchanted ones to

become visible, it is necessary to call them, usually in spaces that favor their appearance, as is the case of the Torém<sup>4</sup> or in Umbanda<sup>5</sup> ritual works.

The enchanted act in the functioning of the region's ecosystems, since fishing and agriculture in Tremembé have ancestral practices of wisdom. The river and the sea are living beings protected by the enchanted ones. And, they present themselves in “three situations, in healing practices, in the group’s political events and in the daily dealings with their homes.” (Gondim, 2016, p. 27)

They have different functions, and are the ancestors of all Tremembé, which configures the transmutation aspect of the body. They are also everywhere, where their action and/or protection of nature is necessary. The Tremembé cosmogony would then be represented by Pai Tupã, Mãe Tamain and the enchanted ones. The Enchantment would then act in the memory and orality of the Tremembé people, as a link that connects all the people to the same mythical ancestors.

## **1.2 - Image-spirit (utupë) Yanomani**

The work “*The fall of the sky: Words of a Yanomami shaman*”, by Davi Kopenawa Yanomami (2015) and Bruce Albert (2015), deals with the Yanomami cosmogony from the figure of the shaman, through the individual and collective memory of the Yanomami people. From this cosmopolitical manifesto, I discuss the concept of spirit-image (*utupë*), specifically in chapter 4 of the book, “Animal ancestors”. It is highlighted earlier that the Yanomami call the Western practice of recording words on paper “image skins”. It is understood that orality is sacred in the Yanomami tradition, along with drawing and the body. The xapiri are “tiny, like dust of light, and are invisible to ordinary people, who only have the eyes of a ghost. Only shamans can see them.” (Kopenawa, Davi; Albert, 2015, p. 110). The xapiri are the guardians of memory, the protectors of the forests, and they bring with them the power of dreams and healing.

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<sup>4</sup> For the Tremembé, the Torém is a dance/ritual that the enchanted ones come up with with the forces of their ancestors. As far as organization is concerned, in the middle of the circle there is a Tremembé with a maraca that opens the ritual and at his side is the sacred drink called mocoioró. This drink is obtained from the fermentation of cashew nuts, and is essential for the preparation of the Torém, as it provides the necessary spiritual strength to see the enchanted ones.

<sup>5</sup> Brazilian religion that culminates in indigenous and African beliefs.

Human and animal ancestors are metamorphic, and their uncontrolled formation gave rise to humanity, which is here called the fall of heaven. According to Davi Kopenawa, all beings of the forest are a spirit-image (*utupë*), which, when they become xapiri, present themselves to the shamans. These beings are the true image of the game animals we eat. In addition to the representations, there are several similar images, which seem to be unique.

The spirits would then be invisible to the eyes of a ghost, only shamans would contemplate the spirit-image (*utupë*). With regard to the ability to differentiate the image, this is not possible for our ghost gaze, just because of the practice of drinking the *yākoana hi* powder for a long time. Kopenawa tells us that the xapiri always carry shiny mirrors with the spirits of the entire forest, in which they deposit the images that the shamans access when they drink the *yākoana hi*. The inner part is the xapiri, and the outer part, called the skin, is the game animals (*yaropë*). Therefore, when the spirits make their image in the shaman, countless and unspeakable images are formed. Hunting animals imitate the xapiri, that is, they are the essence of their representations and are not really them.

The xapiri can also represent images of mythical ancestors or simulacra, so there are images within images within each xapiri, in which “it is not just a spirit that names itself, it is a multitude of similar images. Each name is unique but the xapiri it designates are countless... their images juxtapose in the endless distance.” (Kopenawa, Davi; Albert, 2015, pp. 116–117).

The xapiri inhabit memories and images in the time of dreams, which then dance and sing for the shamans. The imagery condition of the xapiri is the eternal cycle of images, which are multiple and diverse. Can the spirit-image represent other beings? About this Marco Antonio Valentim (2019), in “*Utupë: Davi Kopenawa’s conceptual imagination*” elucidates:

The Yarori mythical ancestors as occupants of the vertex of an “ontological triangulation” that also brings together game animals and shamanic spirits, “constituting[ing] one of the fundamental dimensions of the Yanomami cosmology”. Such beings correspond to the originals whose images the xapiri are;

it is in relation to them that the complex mirroring between spirits and animals conforms: the latter imitate the spirits, which are images of the ancestors. The cosmological game of images brings together these three poles or vertices, and its logic is transformational. Subject to an “irresistible propensity to become-animal” (*yaroprai*), the ancestors “metamorphosed into hunting. (Valentim, 2019, p. 198)

Thus, the *xapiri* are animals, called *yaro*, but they are also the mythical ancestors of the *yarori*. And finally, they are also subjects. For the Yanomani, the spirit-image (*utupë*) materializes in the *xapiri*, forest beings who guard the images, and reveal them to those who do not have the eyes of ghosts. The projection of these images takes place in the identification that everyone is equal, everyone has the same origin, they only differ in the way they present themselves. Forest beings only imitate images, as they transform them into images of spirits. In this way, the image would be a multitude of similar images, within one another, as the essence of their representations. That is, the true interior.

### **1.3 - Is the Spirit-Image (*utupë*) necessary to see Enchantment?**

Enchantment and Spirit-Image (*utupë*) are empirical concepts that refer to an invisibility, in which the corporeal image is displaced. Both have as characteristics the omnipresence and the mutability of the form, sometimes they can be human, animals or entities. Through the human and non-human relationship, “all entities can transit between the worlds of the living and the dead,[and] have the ability to become invisible or visible depending on the circumstances.” (Gondim, 2016, p. 117). Although there are differences between the enchanted and the *xapiri*, due to the way and origin in which they are described, both are spirits and images, who share:

- 1) beings invisible to most people or sometimes visible to a certain number of them;
- 2) who inhabit the enchantries or “incantes”, located “above the Earth and below the sky”, generally in places far from human populations;

3) who had earthly life and disappeared mysteriously, “without dying”, or who never had matter;

4) who come into contact with some people in dreams, outside public places (in the solitude of the sea, the forest, for example) or during mediumistic rituals in halls of healers and shamans. (Ferretti, 2008, p. 1)

They share the essence of the image as a vital component, which has meaning and “synthesizes the minimum elements that characterize the way the model operates and it is for this reason that an image is an index and not a symbol or icon of its model” (Lagrou, 2011, p. 18). The relationship between image and what we see is discussed as the essence of what we see. Images that stare at us before we can see them, that transmute and become visible depending on the condition. For these two indigenous peoples, this perception denominates meanings between the human, the non-human, visibility, reality and dream.

The shaman or pajé assumes the representation of beings, making them visible and audible, by performing rituals, manipulating hallucinogens or dreams. Krenak explains to us that in order to understand the dream, we first need to “recognize the institution of the dream not as a daily experience of sleeping and dreaming, but as a disciplined exercise of seeking in the dream the guidelines for our day-to-day choices”(Krenak, 2019, pp. 51–52) How can we learn to dream? And to see with Enchantment and Spirit-Image (*utupë*)?

The psychic character of the deterritorialization of the gaze (Viveiros de Castro, 2006) operates precisely in evoking the concepts of images for the Tremembé and Yanomani peoples. These mythical beings break the idea of an image that is faithful to what we see, as transformation and essence are presented as the core of the image. The understanding of indigenous knowledge focuses on the different perceptions of the image. The body is the element where images are produced, reproduced and recognized.

For Hans Belting, in “*Antropología de la imagen*”, images do not exist by themselves, but that they “happen” in a relationship with the body and the media. Belting thinks in terms of what he will call endogenous images – those produced by the body itself and projected inside it, such as dreams and daydreams – and exogenous images, those that are projected in media external to the body: “we know that we all

have or that we all have images, that they live in our bodies in our dreams and wait to be summoned by our bodies to appear. This distinction means that we both own and produce images at the same time. (Belting, 2006, p.38). According to Belting, the image would be what happens in the meeting between the media and the body – the vital place of your life. About the essence of the image Didi-Huberman comments:

A well looked at image would therefore be an image that knew how to disconcert, then renew our language, and therefore our thinking. Because the image is something other than a simple cut practiced in the world of visible aspects. It is an impression, a trace, a visual trace of the time that it wanted to touch, but also of other supplementary times – fatally anachronistic, heterogeneous among them – that it cannot, as an art of memory, cannot unite. It is mixed ash from several braziers, more or less burning. (Didi-Huberman, 2021, p. 216)

It is only by collectively changing ways of seeing that we change how we are seen. Enchantment and Spirit-Image are concepts that translate indigenous thought, as they evoke the images of ancestors as countless and unspeakable. The proposed relationship recognizes that the understanding of image differs from Western rationality, as the act of making people see is understood as essential for the production of indigenous decolonial knowledge. Therefore, indigenous knowledge is motivated by the mutability and fluidity of the creation of images, which for now exist in the invisible and visible.

#### **1.4 - Final considerations**

Common points were observed, such as the visibility and mutability of beings, the representation of mythical ancestors, and the essence of the image as vital. About the first point in common, we can all see Enchantment and the Image-spirit, but we need to have the gift and the conditions conducive to its appearance, with the use of sacred plants, carrying out rituals or dreams.

In turn, the representation of mythical ancestors in each cosmogony is the link that links all beings to the same origin. The beings of the forest in their multiple



existence allude to the fact that all beings are equal, they only differ in the way they express themselves.

These forest beings present similar and unique images, through the transmutation of the body. The essence of the image as vital is evidenced in the orality and memory of the Tremembé and the Yanomani, as the enchanted ones and the xapiri are images, and keep within themselves the essence of their representations. This introductory chapter served to lay the foundations that allow a better understanding of these two concepts that will be fundamental for the understanding of indigenous decolonial knowledge, and for the understanding of image for the Tremembé people. The essence of the image resides precisely in the multiple compression of what we see.

Finally, I hope at the end of this text that with our ghostly eyes we have learned to dream.

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