

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

Entre el Encantamiento y la Imagen-espíritu (*utupë*): la esencia de la imagen

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Abstract

This work develops the first chapter of my doctoral thesis. 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 (*utupë*) of the Yanomani indigenous people – the true interior of forest beings in the Yanomani cosmogony.

The central question arises: Is the Spirit-Image (*utupë*) necessary to see Enchantment? The chapter problematizes indigenous knowledge from these peoples separated by their identity, but who share the belief in forest beings and their representations within each cosmovision.

Finally, 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 (*utupë*); Decolonial; Image

Resumen

Este trabajo desarrolla el primer capítulo de mi tesis doctoral. Presenta un acercamiento inédito a la relación entre el Encantamiento de los indígenas Tremembé – seres de la selva que están presentes en la cosmogonía Tremembé–, y la Imagen-espíritu (*utupë*) de los indígenas Yanomani –verdadero interior de la selva seres en la cosmogonía yanomani.

Surge una pregunta central: ¿Es necesaria la Imagen del Espíritu (*utupë*) para ver el Encantamiento? El capítulo problematiza los saberes indígenas de estos pueblos separados por su identidad, pero que comparten la creencia en los seres del bosque y sus representaciones dentro de cada cosmovisión.

Finalmente, se cuestiona la conexión entre estos dos conceptos, que comparten la (in)visibilidad, la representación de ancestros míticos y la capacidad de conservar las imágenes como esencia de la vida.

Palabras clave: Encantamiento; Espíritu-imagen (*utupë*); Decolonial; Imagen.

Introduction

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

For the first time, the shared realization of an audiovisual work with the Tremembé people is presented, in which they develop artistic practice in a docufiction on Enchantment, based on Art-based Research and Indigenous Decolonial Methodologies. Can audiovisual media help the decolonization process? How can an audiovisual work on the Tremembé people's Enchantment contribute to the production of indigenous decolonial knowledge?

This doctoral project has as its central axis an investigation in the relationship between Enchantment and Spirit-Image, and as its general objective the production of decolonial knowledge. Starting from the question whether the Spirit-Image (*utupë*) is necessary to see the enchanted ones, it reflects on the crossing between the Tremembé cosmogony and the Yanomani cosmogony. The research is based on the questioning of indigenous decolonial knowledge, based on Indigenous Decolonial Methodologies and Art-based Research.

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

A spirit, in the indigenous Amazon, is less a thing than an image, less a species than an experience, less a term than a relationship, less an object than an event, less a transcendent representative figure than a sign of the immanent universal background – the background that comes to the surface in shamanism, in dreams and hallucinations, when the human and the non-human, the visible and the invisible change places. (Viveiros de Castro, 2006, p. 326)

. In this chapter, I approach the cosmogony of Tremembé¹ 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 Yanomani² 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 Encantaria. 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 Anaúia Tremembé*”, I have been investigating the Tremembé cosmogony, dialoguing about elements of nature, orality and Tremembé indigenous culture, allied to artistic practice.

As part of the Ceará Indigenous Movement, I was able to observe that the enchanted people are commonly present in the discussions of the native peoples. In this context, it is through orality and memory that peoples perpetuate indigenous knowledge, evidenced by the oral transcripts that this document contains, that, after all, it is necessary to speak to be heard.

Discussing decolonization is perhaps taking a first step in denying its totality, or that discussing it would not be exactly what one has to do when deconstructing it ends up seeming more reasonable. This second option can give us a more energetic or more active meaning than discussing what ends up leaving us only in the

¹I am a descendant of the Tremembé people. 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..

² 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.

passive fields of validating a theorization. (Eshell Makuxi, 2020, p. 1)

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 Yanomami and Bruce Albert. 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 Encantaria. 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.

To see with Enchantment and Spirit-Image (*utupë*) it is necessary to decolonize Western and Eurocentric molds, and expand that the concept of image, for these two indigenous peoples, is the essence of life.

1.1 - Tremembé Enchantment

The perception of Enchantment was present in my childhood, but as life went by, I moved away from beliefs, at the same pace as my indigenous origin. As I mention in my dissertation *“Open Letter to Anaía Tremembé”*³, I had a lot of difficulty resuming my identity:

I felt “less indigenous” or “false indigenous” for not having been born in the village and living in an urban environment. As a child, I felt different within my family, my father affectionately nicknamed me “tapeba” - one of the indigenous peoples in Ceará -, “indiazinha” and “kunhã” - In Tupi-Guarani, it means young girl. My mother used to call me “neguinha” and “moreninha”. I confess that I always found it funny, even without knowing the meanings at the time, I loved it when they called me that...

Regarding my maternal family, I got stories from my mother and my grandmother. However, I was unable to access extensive information about my grandmother's parents, Maria Izabel Braga Monteiro, only that their names were António Braga Monteiro and Maria Braga de Barros, and that both were from Água das Velhas. With regard to my great-grandfather and my great-grandmother on my maternal grandfather's side, Francisco Monteiro Neto, my mother was able to tell me that my great-grandmother, Francisca Lopes de Araújo, was of "morena" color and was born in Bela Cruz, belonging to the Acaraú, neighboring city of Itarema. In turn, my great-grandfather was called Benedito Monteiro dos Santos, was white and was born in São Vicente, also belonging to Acaraú, like my grandfather. (Penha, 2021, pp. 35–40)

I spoke with Cacique João Venâncio, told my story and we had a brief conversation about my ancestors. The Cacique soon said: you are Tremembé, welcome! By rescuing my identity, Encantaria became present. With the strength of the recognition of who I am, I conclude my dissertation, in the same way, I begin my thesis. With that in mind, to academically formulate the thought of Encantaria Tremembé, I use indigenous and non-indigenous thinkers who systematize indigenous daily life. Mainly, authors who experienced Enchantment within the villages, an experience I only had as a visitor, as I was an indigenous person in the diaspora. Stuart Hall understands that the diaspora creates the new postcolonial subjects, which are not defined “by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of "identity" that lives with and through difference, and not in spite of it, by hybridity.” (Hall, 2006, p. 33)

According to Maria Andreina dos Santos (2014), in “The enchanted and their charms: narratives of the Tremembé people of Almofala about the enchanted”, when talking to the “*tronco vel*”⁴, the author realized that 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

⁴ Name popularly known to indigenous elders, who retain and disseminate sacred stories.

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. I emphasize in the words of the author:

With the pajé Luiz, I learned that all of us would be Enchanted, that is, in each of us there would be the gift of enchantment, and the question is how each one would develop this gift, or even never develop this gift during their lifetime because it has afraid or unaware of facts that refer to this subject. (Santos, 2014, p. 32)

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, 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 Torém⁵ or in Umbanda⁶ ritual works.

The natural spaces of Almofala are, in the group conception, inhabited by ancestral beings who are there to continue to protect

⁵ 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.

⁶ Brazilian religion that culminates in indigenous and African beliefs.

them, consequently, the narratives about such spaces will move to another narrative level that goes beyond the mere physical description, but will be full of emotion that it will encourage poetic imagination, the construction of symbols that denote the cultural, social, material and subjective importance of that land for them. (Gondim, 2010, p. 102)

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 protectors of the forest are the Mãe d’água, the Guajara, the Caipora and Rei Sebastião, whose function is to heal and protect. The haunting ones are The Werewolf, the Witch and the Whistler, with the intention of scaring and keeping the person away from that space. Some enchanted ones appear in the form of animals, such as birds, fish and snakes. In the Tremembé cosmovision, we also have Father Tupã and Mother Tamain. According to the report of our Cacique João Venâncio collected by Maria Andreína dos Santos:

Father Tupã, here for us indigenous peoples, is a messenger from our heavenly father... he listens, right, and he passes the message on to the creator. Because there is only one God, but we indigenous peoples have a messenger, who gives our message to the swimsuit. That's why he is called Pai Tupã. Mother Tamain is our Lady and she is the protector, as a mother protects her child, to whom you should cling, pray or ask for prayer for certain distressing moments in your life, right? So, we have a superior... because she is our strength, our mother Tamain. (Santos, 2014, p. 58)

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 and Bruce Albert, 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. For this reason, the book *“The fall of the sky: Words of a Yanomami shaman”* permeates orality, but is translated into image skins. .. They 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.

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. About this, Kopenawa explains:

The images of animals that shamans make dance are not of the animals we hunt. They are from your parents, who came into existence in the first time. They are, as I said, the images of the animal ancestors we call yarori. A long, long time ago, when the forest was still young, our ancestors, who were humans with animal names, metamorphosed into hunting. Human peccary

became peccary; deer humans became deer; agouti humans became agoutis. It was their skins that became those of the peccary, deer and agouti that live in the forest. So it is these ancestors-turned-others that we hunt and eat today. The images that we make descend and dance like xapiri, on the other hand, are their ghost forms. (Kopenawa, Davi; Albert, 2015, p. 117)

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 *yãkoana 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 *yãkoana hi*. The xapiri are characterized as luminous and translucent beings, who have light as a condition for their visibility. About this Viveiros de Castros points out:

The “mirrors” in which Kopenawa's narrative abounds are precisely the instrument of passage between the experiences of luminous intensity and the innumerableness of spirits, that is, to their quantitative infinity. As images of the image are formed, the mirrors multiply in the narrative, at the same time a sign of the presence and means of displacement of the xapiripë. (Viveiros de Castro, 2006, p. 333)

The spirit-image (*utupë*) are the true interior of the beings of the forest, they become xapiri to present themselves to the shamans. 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. Although their morphology is human, the xapiri are not human. According to Kopenawa, the xapiri are:

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 spirit-image configures itself in its multiplicity and its fractal self-similarity. That is, there are several images that represent similarity at any scale. Thus, *utupë* are all existing images, be they plastic, immaterial or spiritual.

Therefore, would it be possible for these beings to keep images? 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”. But the metamorphosis does not happen(u) in a single sense: by becoming animals, “skins”, the animals also transformed themselves into spirits, “ghosts”, so that animal skins and spiritual ghosts form a double aspect – respectively, the visibly and the invisible in the eyes of the “common people” – assumed by the mythical ancestors. If, “in the first time”, these “were humans with animal names”, human-animals, in the cosmological present the two aspects are necessarily dissociated; nevertheless, the supposedly definitive transformation of ancestors into animals is not irreversible, making up a

background cosmological potential that never runs out.
(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 charmed 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, as Viveiros de Castro elucidates:

Now, what defines an “image” is its eminent visibility: an image is something-to-be-seen, it is the necessary objective correlative of a look, an exteriority that poses as the target of the intentional glance; but the xapiripë are interior images, “internal moulds”... They are the object, one might say, of a superior or transcendental exercise of this faculty: images that would then be like the condition of what they are an image of; active images, indexes that interpret us before we interpret them; enigmatic images that must see us so that we can see them – “whoever is not looked at by the xapiripë does not dream, he only sleeps like an ax on the ground” -; images through which we see other images. (Viveiros de Castro, 2006, p. 325)

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

The conclusion is that nothing is finished. Neither colonization managed to exterminate us, nor did we gather consistent elements

to venture with ease in the midst of such opposing worlds, but being alive and trying is our great achievement. (Esbell Makuxi, 2020, p. 1)

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 article 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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