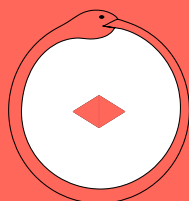
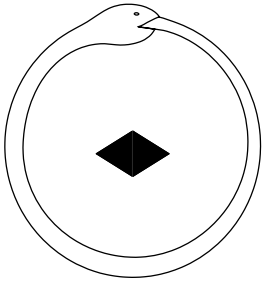


YEPAMAHSÃ
COMPLEMENTARITY AND
TRANSFORMATION
João Paulo Lima Barreto
Cycle BEFORE, THERE WAS NO WORLD
2/4



notebooks
SELVAGEM



YEPAMAHSĂ COMPLEMENTARITY AND TRANSFORMATION

João Paulo Lima Barreto

Reading cycle of the book

Antes o mundo não existia [Before, there was no world] 2/4

PRESENTATION

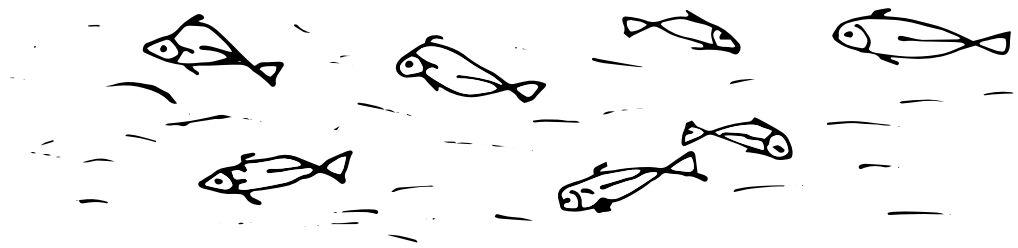
Idjahure Kadiwel

Continuing the Transformation Canoe journey on which we embarked through the virtual meetings of the reading cycle of *Antes o mundo não existia* [There Was no World Before], a *Desana* mythology book authored by Firmiano Lana (*Umusi Pãrõkumu*) and Luiz Lana (*Tõrãmũ Kêhíri*), we invited to our second meeting the anthropologists Dagoberto Azevedo and João Paulo Lima Barreto from the Rio Negro watershed [in the Brazilian Amazon]. Both are PhD students at PPGAS/UFAM and members of NEAI. The anthropology practised by the Indigenous *Tukano* people (who autodenominate themselves as *Yepamahsã* in their own language) expanded in all directions the already multiple dimensions inscribed in the narratives. If Jaime Diakara called the *Desana* mythologies *geomythologies*, telling us of the Indigenous perspective that sees subjectivity, life in objects, entities and places, having introduced us to the Transformation *Malocas*¹, Dagoberto and João Paulo went beyond the limits of a restricted understanding of mythology. They reformulated the advancing in the affirmation of an epistemology of their own, of the First Nations' own ways of knowing. As João Paulo Lima Barreto so brilliantly explained to us, this terms on which the ontologies, the Indigenous worlds should be conceived, also knowledge is centred on a particular understanding of what the body is.

Due to the impossibility of reproducing in full the content of the meeting, there are excerpts here, only from João Paulo's answers. The questions have been omitted, in a sample of the thinking that permeated the course. When he accepted the invitation to participate in the cycle, the *Yepamahsã* anthropologist was finishing his

1. The *maloca*, this large communal house that used to be typical of the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Amazon who live on the banks of the Uaupés River and its tributaries, is a model for thinking over different spatial scales: the house, the territory and the universe itself. Its architectural structure, the materials used in its construction, the way it is built and the blessings that protect it and give it life, make the maloca a sacred and safe place, and the very expression of the cultures and cosmologies of the peoples who inhabit them. Source: *The maloca between artefacts and plants : a guide to Richard Spruce's Rio Negro collection in London* / Luciana Martins ... [et al.] ; illustration Lindsay Sekulowicz. -- 1. ed. -- São Paulo : ISA - Instituto Socioambiental, 2021. (TN)

doctoral thesis, *Kumuã na kahtiroti-ukuse: uma “teoria” sobre o corpo e o conhecimento-prático dos especialistas indígenas do Alto Rio Negro* [*Kumuã na kahtiroti-ukuse: a “theory” about the body and the practice-based knowledge of the Indigenous specialists of the Upper Rio Negro*]. Stemming from the conflict between modern and Indigenous ontologies and their perspectives on body care, João Paulo recounts having embarked on the deepening of these differences in the company of specialists from different peoples from the **TUKANO** group of the Upper Rio Negro. The stories of the origin of the world, of humanity and of cataclysms, presented in *Antes o mundo não existia*, are thus complemented with a sharp interpretation of the anthropologist and coordinator of **Bahserikowi** – Indigenous Medical Center, a translator of complex concepts with which the **Yepamahsã** specialists work, distinguishing hierarchy and complementarity, bodies and cosmos, health and disease.



There are already some studies on this, and it is essential to think about the notion of hierarchy, of older and younger brother, of major, minor and last *sib*². That doesn't mean it is a hierarchical society, neither that we obey, that someone commands and others obey, it isn't so simple. Therefore, I want to bring up for discussion that these are societies, or peoples from societies – we are Indigenous, that we like complementarity very much. For us the more different, the better it is. So we are not a society based on equality, not in the sense of equal rights, but in the sense of knowledge. So, my older brother complements me, because he knows certain things, I complement him, because I know other things. This does not mean that I am a younger brother to obey his commands. It is a society of complementarity. That's why is important being able to discuss this issue, this part, which would yield a lot of debate, a lot of discussion for us to deepen these notions: what is a hierarchy, a hierarchical society, military style, and what would be, from our point of view,

2. In the language of anthropology, *sib* can be considered synonymous with clan, a related social group.

a society of complementarity. This notion of complementarity is very important for us. So much that it is not only present in society, among us, but also in our relations with our surroundings; by this I mean with the forest, with the water, with the air, with places, etc. So it is something much bigger, I even dare to say, it is our philosophy. Living in complementarity is our philosophy of life, of society, while other societies perhaps value hierarchy. This is a topic I raise for discussion.

About cataclysm, what it is, what it means, it is also a principle, an Indigenous philosophy, of saying that the cosmos is organised, the cosmos is inhabited. It is not wind, air, they are beings that inhabit and with whom we must necessarily communicate, keep dialoguing. Because each domain has its inhabitants, who unfortunately have been translated as “spirits“, but for us, for our Indigenous specialists, they are not spirits, they are not gods, they are “humans” living in other domains. But to be able to access, to be able to engage in dialogue with them, you have to go through a process of specialisation.

So it's not just anyone who can access them. You need to acquire the knowledge and skills to prepare and shape the body and access to dialogue in these domains. The cosmos is not simply clouds, it is not simply stars. It is where beings dwell, with whom we communicate and interact. This notion is essential for us. We have defined it as *kih̃ti-uk̃use*, which has been translated to Portuguese as “mythologies” or “mythical narratives”. But what we, Indigenous Peoples, students of anthropology, are trying, is to go beyond this mythology of ours and legends and mythical narratives the following way: what are *kih̃ti* and *uk̃use*? Why do we propose this *Tukano* concept? It is a range of threads in social fabric experienced by the organisers of the cosmos, responsible for the origin, for the organisation of the world, for humanity, beings, things, techniques, landscapes. In other words, we wanted to say that, when reading these publications, as you did, it is not simply reading for the sake of reading. It is an Indigenous model of explaining things, of relating things and of building interpersonal relationships, whether between humans or between political cosmoses. For this reason, we see the discussion of the importance of the role of experts in this whole. Building on that we say we also find the lessons, the rules, the obligations, the origin of

diseases, of *bahse*, of the rules and required behaviours in relations between humans and non-humans, especially the beings who inhabit the cosmos. That is, these are our communication codes, therefore they are beyond those concepts that we are used to hearing, as Dagoberto Azevedo recalled well, of religious verbiage, like this: “ah, the *pajé* is the religious leader, he is a shaman, or he is a spiritual leader”. Well, I have never heard of spiritual leaders in my culture, I have never heard that my grandfather did magic, have never heard that my grandfather is a charlatan. This is verbiage that we appropriate and we, Indigenous Peoples, appropriate and incorporate this into our discourse. Therefore, we Indigenous Peoples in academia, as researchers, anthropologists, from any other field, have this obligation to bring up this verbiage for debate.

I want to be critical here and state the following: Indigenous knowledge has now become “ethno”; everything has become “ethno:” It is ethnomathematics, ethnoscience, ethnobotany, ethnohistory, ethnotradition, ethno, ethno, ethno, in an attempt to label Indigenous knowledge in the Western model of understanding things. So I want to say that we are dealing with another model of knowledge. It is the Indigenous model of knowledge. It has its concepts, it is an Indigenous epistemology. From this epistemology, we understand who you are, that you are not in our community, that you do not belong to our community.

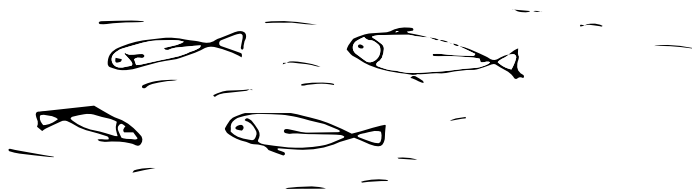
These translations that Dagoberto quoted, where they tried to use religious verbiage, we fell into another abyss, of wanting to label our knowledge in another model of knowledge, whether religious or scientific. So in these publications we will see a lot of these words – “sacred”, “spirits” – in an attempt to make the other understand it in Portuguese.

I want to go beyond these issues that are being brought up, that you are reading about. For us, this effort is very important. I’m a big fan of what you are doing because I always say that I can only dialogue or encourage a symmetrical dialogue, a symmetrical conversation to the extent to which I understand the other, their concepts, their conceptions. So what you are doing is this, you want to understand our model so that we can start a dialogue, so that we can start talking. If we are Indigenous, it is not just this biological body that is at stake. This biological body is connected to several other dimensions: territorial, political, social

organisation, labour, complementarity, cosmopolitan relationships. We are in a web of political and cosmopolitical relationships. When the body suffers, there is something unbalanced in these relationships.

To conclude, I should mention something. Once, I went to São Paulo for the first time and my colleagues there took me for a walk. The first thing they showed me was the subway – there is no subway here. We went to the Praça da Sé, entered the tunnel, like ants, and went ahead.

We descended, descended, descended, there were people selling things, there were people walking about, a lot of people, busy. At one point I asked my colleague how deep we were. He said it was 30 to 40 metres underground. Well, for someone not used to it, that is scary, imagining that you are inside the earth, you drop there and you will die. That stuck in my mind, and when I returned here, to Manaus, I told my father: “Father, the story there goes like this, we go in like, like ants, go ahead, go inside, under the ground, there is a car that circulates there, there are many people, selling things, singing, there are a lot of people there”. For my father, what I told him was surreal, because it is not part of our cosmology, it is not part of our daily life. That’s where I want to make a comparison: perhaps, for you, reading this book is surreal, but for us it is what I have just been speaking about.



Bahse, according to our definition, is the ability of a specialist to evoke or invoke and put into action curative, preventive substances infused in plants, animals, minerals and other elements. That is, when our Indigenous **kumu** specialist takes the element and starts talking about it, speaking with, he is not praying, he is not talking to the spirits, he is not transforming a water potion, tobacco into magic. It is not a magic potion. For example, if he does **bahse** on a wound, he will be invoking and evoking astringent substances contained in plants, but to do that he needs to know the plants that contain these substances. As I often say, for people to understand it, instead of manipulating chemically, he

is manipulating metachemically, so it becomes medicine. But for that, he has to go through a qualification process, it can't be done just anyhow, nor by just anyone. I, for example, do not have the power to do this, because you have to go through a process. So, that is what *bahsese* is: “therapeutic formulas”. We translate it that way to escape the term “blessing.” Blessing is a religious term, Catholics can use it very well, Evangelicals can use it very well, nobody is against this. But to label this term blessing as a translation of our knowledge, is a very big mistake.

In the book collection called *Reflexividades indígenas* [Indigenous Reflexivities], there is my book, which is exactly about the aquatic domain, the beings that inhabit it, called *Waimahsã: peixes e humanos* [Waimahsã: fishes and humans]. In the book I discuss this translation mistake of *waimahsã* as “spirit”, as “fish-people,” how this led to a misunderstanding in interpretation, anthropologically.³ There is a book by my colleague Dagoberto that deals with the earth/forest space, in which he presents how we organise the earth/forest space and who are the *Waimahsã* beings that inhabit these places, and with whom we need to maintain a relationship and dialogue. Another colleague of ours, Gabriel Maia, deals with the air space in his book, its inhabitants, bioindicators and their relations with diseases. Why did we arrive at these three big spaces? Because we have studied, a whole team from the NEAI (Núcleo de Estudos da Amazônia Indígena) [Nucleus of Studies of the Indigenous Amazon] has studied and realised that we, the *Yepamahsã* Indigenous Peoples, organise space, this cosmos, into three large spaces, which are the air space, the earth/forest space and the aquatic space. Their

3. In *Waimahsã: peixes e humanos* [Waimahsã: fish and humans] (2018), João Paulo addresses this complex *Yepamahsã/Tukano* category extensively. At a certain point in his reflection, he states: “*Waimahsã* are creatures who have the same qualities and capabilities as humans, including their physical appearance, but they are not visible to ordinary people and in everyday life. They can only be seen by a specialist, *Yai* or *Kumu*, or in dreams – situations that even permit interaction among them. They are responsible, they are guardians or protectors of the spaces and of all the animals that circulate there, although that does not make them ‘owners’ (the conventional translation for guardians of animals and places) of these animals, but really of the places themselves. *Waimahsã* are moreover beings of a multiple nature, since they are able to develop qualities and abilities of animals and plants to act in certain situations. Due to their complexity, finding a translation that accounts for all aspects is a task that I have abandoned in this work” (2018, p. 68).

subdomains are inhabited by beings called *Waimahsã* or “humans” who are there inhabiting these domains. That’s what we present in this collection. But it’s all sold out, everything has already been sold, and we have no idea when the second edition will come out.

And in the book *Omerõ*, we discuss this notion of the *Yepamahsã* concepts, which are the three fundamental concepts to understand the social practices, the social rules, the etiquette and the social organisation of the *Yepamahsã*, bringing up for discussion these *kihti-ukũse*, which have been translated as ‘myths’ or ‘mythologies’ or ‘mythical narratives’. We have discussed here the idea of *bahsese*, which, as I just said, is translated as ‘blessings’, but has nothing to do with it; we have dealt here with *bahsamori*, which has been translated as ‘rituals’, but it is nothing of the kind, we translate it as ‘social practices’. For those who want to understand all these details, we recommend that you read this book called *Omerõ*, which is also sold out, we don’t have any copies left, but if you want we can send you a digital copy, we have digitised it too.⁴



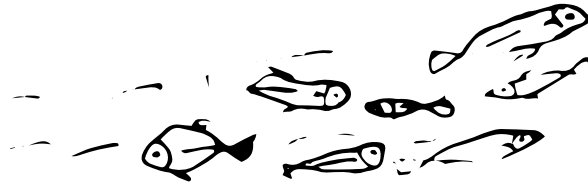
The *Bahserikowi* Indigenous Medicine Centre was founded exactly on the basis of these concepts, this idea, but above all it was created to encourage a discussion or a debate or a symmetrical dialogue with this Western model. But it was also created from a lot of painful experiences, I always like to say that. About 2950 people have already consulted with us; 99.9% of them are non-indigenous, for several problems – depression, anxiety, insomnia, uncontrolled menstruation, wounds, headaches – and people arrive there with packet upon packet of medicines. That’s the Medicine Centre, this effort to express our knowledge, this

4. The entire *Reflexividades Indígenas* [Indigenous Reflexivities] collection, produced by the Núcleo de Estudos da América Indígena da Universidade Federal do Amazonas (NEAI/UFAM) [Centre for Indigenous American Studies of the Federal University of Amazonas], can be accessed [here](#).

effort to put into practice how it works, because in the imaginary of society this idea of a *pajé* constructed throughout history is very present, be it in the dimension of folklore, be it in the dimension of translation or textbook dimension, a *pajé* who does healing by dancing, singing, playing maraca, wearing a feather headdress, all painted, jumping, etc. I say this because, when we protested, tried to put it into practice with the doctors, when my niece came to treat a snake bite, they wanted to amputate her foot, and we had proposed that before that we could do a joint treatment, biomedicine and our medicine, and amputation would be the last resort. This was legal, as the law and the Constitution guarantee it. We thought it was going to be easy, but it wasn't, it was complicated. The doctor, in a meeting brokered by the public prosecutor's office, said exactly what I am saying: "I will not allow a *pajé* to enter the hospital dancing, jumping, singing, with smoke, with a drum, maraca, with a feather headdress, with a rattle, doing a healing ritual." I said to him: "You are right, so right, because you watch and really like the *boi-bumbá*⁵ *pajé*. The *pajé* of the *boi-bumbá* heals the ox. We Indigenous peoples of the Upper Rio Negro, we eat the ox". Well, because of things like that we decided to create an Indigenous Medicine Centre. And, just to complete this, it has also been interesting that, as soon as we founded it in 2017, people came there with this very idea, of finding a *maloca*, of finding a *pajé* doing healing rituals, dancing, singing. And they would leave frustrated, because there is none of that. They would say: "Is this the *pajé*?" to my father, who would do the healing, and to my uncle. "But he doesn't wear a headdress, it's not original, right? And this house, it's not a *maloca*, right?" Because we are here in the centre of the city. So society has this imagery of theirs, and this is very important for us, and today we receive visits from medical students, law students, from several areas, to get to know our work. We have also problematized and we are standardising the relationship with these health programs that serve Indigenous communities in a differentiated way. In the 20, 25 years that

5. A regional variation of *bumba-meu-boi*, a traditional folk festivity in Brazil. The festivity revolves around a story, told through dance and music, which varies depending on the region in which it is played. However, its central theme remains the same, focussing on the death of an ox that is brought back to life by a religious figure who, in the case of the Amazonian *boi-bumbá*, is represented by the *pajé*.

we have been dealing with these programs, we, at least the people in my area, in my community, have literally become drug addicts. We have forgotten our specialists, we have forgotten the use of medicinal plants, and now we depend on dipyrrone, aspirin, paracetamol, doctors, nurses, pedagogues, anthropologists, sociologists, physiotherapists, and every day we are complaining that we don't have money. But we have literally forgotten our therapeutic system. So the Medicine Centre also wants to trigger this and, in this sense, has participated in several meetings and has been receiving several visits from Indigenous leaders, including Davi Kopenawa, several renowned leaders, Ailton Krenak, Álvaro Tukano, Fran Baniwa herself, students, Dago is involved, so all of this we have been promoting and showing.



To be a specialist is a construction, isn't it? Therefore, I am very sceptical about saying that it is a gift. According to the data, according to the guidelines, from conception onwards, the mother and father take care of the child's body towards its formation. So there is all the adopted care, such as food diet, sexual abstention, the use of certain medicinal plants, supervision by a specialist. The whole process of generating the child's life is supervised, whether the child is male or female. So the first step is to take care of the mother's and father's bodies. Then, when the child is born, there is another step in caring for the child's body, which is precisely that of the feeding. And then comes a very important step, which is when the child starts eating solid food such as beiju⁶, fish, game meat, fruit, etc., going through a process of decontaminating the food, because it carries diseases. And we could bring up several other issues. Then comes another phase of caring for the child's body, which involves

6. Baked food made with cassava dough, the method of preparation of which varies from people to people and region to region in Brazil. It can also refer to the cassava-derived food product from which the dough is made with. (TN)

stomach cleansing, inhaling pepper juice and consuming some *kahpi*⁷ and *wihõ*⁸ elements, snuff, that sort of thing, as well as caring for their food. In this formative period, the child can't eat fatty foods, large game, large fish; there are several restrictions on this, there are reasons for this.

To be a good specialist, the constitution of the body is fundamental for us, say the *kumuã*, the specialists. The body has to be light, the body has to be well, they say. Therefore the importance of using tobacco, the importance of using *patu*, *ipadu*⁹, as our colleagues, as Diakara has already said, as Dago is saying, important elements for the construction of the body. Then comes the actual process to acquire the knowledge and skills, the specific qualification, in which apprentices or candidates for specialist qualification are isolated, and we have three specialisms: *yai*, *kumu* and *baya*, they all undergo qualification. The qualification is specific; they isolate themselves, being under the care of specialised people, they have no contact with society, they have no contact with women – in fact, sexual abstention is fundamental for us, because it is part of the conditions for the body to be a specialist.

In order to acquire and build knowledge, my grandfather used to say: “Grandson, we don't have knowledge here. The houses of the *Waimahsã* are where knowledge is”. Precisely the domains of these ‘humans’ who live in the aquatic domain, the aerial space, the earth/forest space, he used to say; I have never forgotten that. “That is where the laboratories are. That is where we learn things. But in order to access them you have to use *rapé* [snuff], but not just any *rapé*; *rapé* that connects you to that domain. Use *kahpi* that connects you to that domain”. So my point is: when we had contact with the missionaries, we were forced to interrupt this connection. As we reconnect with this, we will

7. A ceremonial entheogenic drink of certain Indigenous peoples of the Amazon, prepared from the *Banisteriopsis sp.* vine, traditionally planted in the fields.

8. A kind of plant snuff, called *paricã* in *Nheengatu* or *Língua Geral*, carefully prepared by *Yepamahsã* specialists, which is ingested by young people undergoing a qualification process during ceremonies and at large *dabucuri* feasts, with the aim of connecting to the *Waimahsã*'s realm of communication and sociability.

9. *Erythroxylum coca* var. *ipadu*, also known as Amazonian coca, is a shrub from the *Erythroxylaceae* family. Commonly known as *ipadu* or *padu* (*patu*), it is a plant cultivated by many Indigenous peoples of the Amazon region, for both ceremonial and everyday use of its leaves. (TN)

have good specialists. We don't have them yet, because of this contact issue. It's also interesting to remember that the qualification used to take place during adolescence, up to 14, 15 years at most. My father used to say: "It's the period when the body is in formation. After that, the body can't resist temptation any longer". The guy wants to date, the body wants sex. Sex is dangerous for someone who wants to be a specialist. So there are all these precautions for those who want to be specialists. Therefore, we maintain that *kumu*, *baya* and *yai* are specialists. They go through a qualification process like any other professional who gets a qualification, such as an anthropologist, sociologist, doctor, nurse; they are equivalent.¹⁰



The question if women can also specialise, the question (of qualification) is not whether people are male or female, man or woman, the question is the body. Given that a body is built for this quality, for this matter, whether it's a woman's body or a man's body, it has the same possibility of being a specialist, but there's a difference: a woman's body emanates fluids, so it also has to be before emanating fluids, menstruation, or afterwards. Blood is very dangerous; a woman's fluid when she menstruates, when she gives birth, is very dangerous. I'm dealing with this subject in my thesis, so I'm not going to talk about it now. So it is the body that is at stake. By the way, I want to tell here, to remember my history. We have a story in my family that, when my great-great-grandfather, our grandfather, died, it was my grandmother who passed the knowledge on to my great-great-grandfather, she knew, so that's why I have this view, of saying that what is at stake, is the body.

Another question they ask in lectures is: "What about white people, can they be *pajé*, *yai*, *kumu*, *baya*?" Well, for that matter, within this logic, I think so. If you construct the body for it, you can.

10. *Yai*, *Kumu* and *Baya*, therefore, are three categories of *Yepamahsã* or *Tukano* specialities, acquired after a long period of qualification, which denote ceremonial masters of different qualities.



The idea of complementarity is recent, there is no written material yet, we haven't produced it, but it's an idea that we're pushing to debate, to somewhat oppose this notion of hierarchy, which abounds in teaching materials, in publications. We have no written material on this. This notion of complementarity, within the school, can be understood through the key of collectivity. We Indigenous peoples are very collective. There's an article by Marcio Silva, who was doing research among the *Waimiri-Atroari* here some time ago, when he started doing anthropology, which contains some very good reflections on this, on what it means to be collective. He tells the following story: when he was teaching a class of students and he gave them all a task to do, and one of them was ready first, the person who was ready first would help somebody else. Then the two would finish and would help another student and another, and suddenly the last one, who was having difficulty, had help from everyone to do the task. This notion I translate into an understanding about didactics, a notion that the school itself educates us to be individualists, to be competitive with each other. So this reflects on the educational practice of building an individualistic society. For me, the challenge for Indigenous school education is to understand this notion of collectivity in order to foster education. I'll give you an example, I'll quote *Ômerõ* again. This book was put together by a team – Dago, Gabriel, myself, our teachers Gilton Mendes dos Santos, Carlos Machado Dias Jr and other non-indigenous colleagues – debating, studying, thinking about concepts, analyzing and we came up with this work. In other words, it was put together collectively. Most of the publications in the *Reflexividade Indígena* collection, dissertations and theses too, are done collectively, not in the sense of writing together, but in the sense of debating ideas, debating the concepts. For me, this question of complementarity, collectivity, would involve the notion that from the point of view of Indigenous culture the school or classroom is not a place for individual promotion, but could be a collective space. That's the reflection

I'm proposing. But there's nothing written about it either, at no point did we write it down, but we're provoking this debate.



Reading the book *Antes o mundo não existia*, you will realise how the body was shaped. It shows you the steps, the first step about the cataclysm, then you'll hear about the origin of the human being, the origin of the woman's body, the origin of the man's body, how the body was shaped. The body was shaped. So everything is written down in this work. What I bring goes a little further than that. I was very curious during the debate, about this relationship between the doctors and the *kumuã*, the Indigenous specialists, because the doctor couldn't understand the Indigenous specialists acting on the body, to treat, to prevent, to look after the body. That was my starting point, that question led me to the study of the body from the Upper Rio Negro Indigenous point of view. In relation to this I had three main interlocutors: a *Tukano*, a *Desana* and a *Tuyuka*, from three large groups of Indigenous peoples from the Upper Rio Negro. I realised, and I bring this up for discussion, that the body is understood as a synthesis of everything by the Indigenous specialists. They say that in the body there is animal life, plant life, air life, fire life, earth life, water life and *mahsã*, which is human life. When they talk about plant life, for example, they are not just talking about one type of plant, it's the whole range of plants, in other words, everything that constitutes the earth, the forest, everything that is there; we see, regardless of classification, this life that is there. And also, when they talk about animals, they're not talking about any particular kind, they are talking about the condition of animal life, that's the synthesis. The earth too, when talking about earth life, we are not talking about any particular kind of earth, but about this domain, this whole that constitutes earth. They say that the body is made up of these substances, is a synthesis of them. Therefore, the body is well when all the substances are equalised, are well balanced. When one of these substances is out of balance, or not equalised, the body begins to feel it, and this will manifest itself as illnesses or

discomforts or ailments. That is why the Upper Rio Negro specialists have this very clear notion of what the body is. This allows them to act on the body. That is, equalising these substances, either by adding more substances that the body needs, or by protecting the body.

The body is also subject to external attacks, and this notion is fundamental. This function of attacks on the body operates with protocols in the hands of specialists. The body is attacked by phenomena; for example, the sun is dangerous, it can affect you with a series of skin diseases; the night is dangerous, the dark is dangerous, because it can also cause a series of discomforts in the body; rain is dangerous, a series of elements is dangerous, because they can attack the body. I'm talking about the extent of the phenomena. That is why lightning and thunder are very dangerous, they can attack the body. Another attack comes from food. Food can attack the body because of contamination. The concept of food is that it is not enough to rinse food with water or boil it. It has to be neutralised by the action of the beings that eat the meat, the microorganisms of which it is constituted. If you don't do this, these beings that are in meat, fish, etc., will eat your body just as they eat that meat or food. Therefore, the metaphysical action of the organisms upon the body will continue. This leads to itching, sores, a series of skin diseases and also internal ones, stomach diseases, etc., a series of attacks that food can cause to the body. Another attack comes from hot or fried food. The idea is that the heat that cooks, when you eat, in addition to eating the meat, fish or food, you are eating the fire, the heat of the fire. If you don't moderate the fire, the food will ferment in the stomach, causing a series of internal discomforts in the body, which appear as heartburn, sores, ulcers, there are several explanations for this.

Another attack comes from this relationship we've just talked about: all the domains – mountains, lakes, rivers, forests – are homes inhabited by these 'humans', who we call *Waimahsã*. Just as we take care of our homes, putting up walls, barbed wire, dogs and even watchmen, they also take care of their homes this way, setting up protective devices; not these, but others. So if you go hunting in a region you've never been to, these 'humans' will attack you, because they don't know you. You will suffer a series of attacks: snake bites, fatal accidents, nausea and even

death. So these beings, whom we call *Waimahsã*, attack people if you don't communicate with them. There are other attacks, just to give you an example. So this notion of an attack on the body is on the minds of the Indigenous specialists. When they see that you are nauseated, they already know that you have been attacked by these beings. When they see on your skin that you have itches, are scratching too much and have certain characteristics, they already know that you have eaten such and such food, which is harming you because the organisms are eating your skin. That's fundamental, that's why they act on the body. So it's not sorcery, an Indigenous specialist is not a sorcerer.

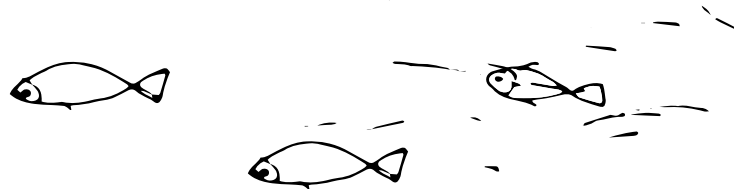
I want to tell you about something that happened at the Medical Center. A lady came in and said to my father, who was attending, "Are you a *paJé*? Then find out what illnesses I have in my body". Then my father said: "But you are the one who has to say what your problem is". Then she said: "Aren't you a *paJé*? Aren't you a magician? Aren't you a sorcerer?" He said: "No, indeed, I'm not a sorcerer." Then the whole argument started. In other words, once again the imaginary was present.

Another point I make about the body is that, for us, the body is not something that stands still, something that is fixed, something that is stuck; it is something that transforms. It is transforming all the time, in several ways. In my thesis I present and discuss several examples. One of them is the protection of the body under protection of *bahsese* or 'blessings'. One of the techniques to protect the body is *bahsese*, as a therapeutic form, to turn the body into stone, to turn the body into a resistant body, into a tight body, into an explosive body, because the body has to withstand these attacks. This strategy, this technique, has been used a lot now to fight the coronavirus in my region, protecting the body, transforming it into a resistant body, a stone body, an explosive body. So, for this, the specialist has to know the elements that are in it, because it is understood that these covid-19 viruses are beings that travel by air currents. So, when they encounter a wall, they won't be able to penetrate. So, from the specialist's point of view, the body becomes a wall, an impenetrable body. That is where this whole notion of protection comes from.

Another is transformation by using the qualities of animals as clothing, actual clothing. For example, we have a story which we know

about, we've witnessed, that Indigenous specialists – particularly from the *Desana* group, from the author of the book *Antes o mundo não existia* – are specialists in transforming themselves into jaguars, the animals themselves, because they are able to take this quality of the animal as clothing. And they go off as a jaguar to hunt for enemies. It is another form of body transformation.

The other is to transform into an animal after death. For the body or for the person who didn't comply with rules during their life, a consequence will be the transformation of their body into an animal; it could be an agouti, a jaguar, an anaconda, etc. Therefore, for us, the notion of the biological body also undergoes this transformation. That's why I bring up the discussion about the body.



We're talking about different models of knowledge. In our model, you can be whatever you want to, as long as you master bahseese, this knowledge we have been talking about all this time. As long as you master this area of knowledge that is here, in this book that you are reading. You can manipulate it however you want, say, transformed into an animal, transformed into something else, even to get married, you may be ugly, but you can use the things here to make yourself beautiful, conquer women, there are several things you can manipulate. In other words, there are no boundaries; the boundary is the limit of your mastery of this knowledge.

Like that example I gave you of the subway. It may sound surreal, but for our specialists it is real. And it will be even more real if one day you prepare your body and drink ayahuasca. Then you'll see, you'll really get in touch with the people who live there, talk to them, ask for guidance. This element is fundamental. If you ever want to do this, to get to know the place where you are living, you'll have contact with them. But there has to be preparation. As I said, you have to prepare your body, cleanse your body, have the guidance of a specialist to be able to do this.

It's not that distant, maybe one day you'll have the opportunity. And that's how it is for us, these are the houses where our knowledge is. It's the same as when you go to Harvard to study for a degree or a doctorate. For us, Rio de Janeiro is our Harvard, our university. Belém, Manaus are houses where there is knowledge, where knowledge dwells, where these keepers of knowledge are present, but I will only be able to access or dialogue with them as long as I prepare my body, cleanse my body, and use these elements that I mentioned: ayahuasca, *rapé*, not just any ayahuasca, not just any *rapé*, but important elements to be able to have contact and access to them. That is also why we explain, as we destroy these houses, we also suffer from diseases. Not just skin diseases and so on, but conflicts, deaths, all this social, political, economic and environmental disorganisation.

Thank you for this willingness to understand, it strengthens us, it dignifies us, it keeps us fighting, showing and being sure that we have partners like you, who are listening to us. Thank you very much for that!

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The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem community. The editorial direction is by Anna Dantes, and the coordination is by Alice Alberti Faria. Layout by Tania Grillo and Érico Peretta. The coordinator of English translations is Marina Matheus.

More information at selvagemciclo.com.br

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