

Wolfgang Kapfhammer*

**Amazonian pain.
Indigenous ontologies and Western eco-spirituality**

Abstract: Recent discourse within Western ecologism raises numerous issues relevant for the debate on animism within anthropology. Instead of perpetuating the image of the cosmological alterity of indigenous societies and instrumentalizing it as an environmental utopia, this article argues for a certain “monism” of environmental ethics. Based on insights of Western eco-psychology, Western tradition of nature philosophy, as well as the work of anthropologists like Bird-David, Ingold, and Hornborg and their contributions to the debate on a “new animism”, it is argued that the spatio-temporal accumulation (or diminishment) of capacities to manage the borderlines of cosmological domains gives shape to the quality of human-nature-relationships. As the example from the Sateré-Mawé shows, their modes of human-nature relationship form a kind of sequence that has as much to do with historical external relations of an Amazonian society as with progressive advances and regressive longings in a person’s life cycle. Taken together, both Western discourse on an ecological turn of developmental psychology and the sequential modes of Sateré-Mawé human-nature relationships make a strong argument for a common ground of environmental ethics. Both Western and indigenous societies are nowadays challenged by the necessity to re-construct an environmentally beneficent “animic way of being” (Ingold). To be aware of this common ground opens up the space for a more “symmetric anthropology”.

Keywords: Ontologies, ecologism, Sateré-Mawé, Amazonia, Brazil, 20th-21st centuries.

Resumen: El discurso reciente en el ecologismo occidental plantea muchas cuestiones relevantes para el debate sobre el animismo en la antropología. En vez de perpetuar la imagen de la alteridad cosmológica de las sociedades indígenas e instrumentalizarla como utopía medioambiental, este artículo argumenta a favor de un cierto “monismo” de la ética medioambiental. Basándose en algunos puntos

* Wolfgang Kapfhammer is an anthropologist in the Cultural and Social Anthropology section of the Department for Comparative Cultural Research at Marburg University. His research interests are the anthropology of religion, cosmology, and indigenous people of the Amazon. He conducted several periods of fieldwork among the Sateré-Mawé of the Lower Amazon, Brazil, and has published on the evangelical movement. He is currently working on a research project about religious change and environmental relations among the Sateré-Mawé.

de la ecopsicología occidental, la tradición occidental de la filosofía de la naturaleza así como el trabajo de antropólogos como Bird-David, Ingold y Hornborg y sus contribuciones al debate sobre un “nuevo animismo”, se argumenta que la acumulación (o disminución) espacio-temporal de las capacidades de gestionar las fronteras de los dominios cosmológicos da forma a la calidad de las relaciones entre los humanos y la naturaleza. Como muestra el ejemplo de los sateré-mawé, sus modos de la relación humano-naturaleza conforman una especie de secuencia que tiene tanto que ver con las relaciones históricas externas de una sociedad amazónica que con los avances progresivos y los anhelos regresivos del ciclo de vida de una persona. En su conjunto, el discurso occidental sobre el giro ecológico de la psicología del desarrollo así como los modos secuenciales de las relaciones humano-naturaleza de los sateré-mawé constituyen un argumento de peso a favor de un terreno común de la ética ambiental. Hoy en día, tanto las sociedades occidentales como las indígenas se enfrentan a la necesidad de reconstruir una “forma de ser anímica” ambientalmente benéfica (Ingold). El conocimiento de este terreno común abre un espacio para una antropología más “simétrica”.

Palabras clave: Ontologías, ecologismo, sateré-mawé, Amazonía, Brasil, siglos XX-XXI.

1. Solastalgia

The main feature of the 2010 Munich Biennale, a festival dedicated to avant-garde music theatre, was a three-hour-long production called “*Amazonas. Music Theatre in three parts*”. According to its web presentation,¹ the project

[...] tells us of the climatic, political and cultural drama playing itself out everyday in Amazonia [...] ‘Amazonas’ homes in on three dimensions of an issue that may decide a goodly portion of our global fate, casting a glance on the past, present and impending future of the Amazon region.

Representative of the variety of indigenous Amazonian cultures, the Yanomami² played a prominent role, both in the opera itself, but also in the events that complemented the production. It need not concern us here that artistically the production was generally considered a failure,³ rather what I would like to discuss is a statement by German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who prior to the event spoke somewhat

1 <<http://www.goethe.de/ins/pt/lis/prj/ama/ueb/en5356286.htm>> (10.10.2012).

2 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/may/07/amazonas-opera-world-premiere>> (10.10.2012).

3 For a selection of critiques see the links at <<http://www.goethe.de/ins/pt/lis/prj/ama/prs/sti/deindex.htm>> (10.10.2012). See also Prinz (2010).

cryptically of “Amazonian Pain”.⁴ What exactly he meant by “Amazonian Pain” was not clear,⁵ but I would hazard a guess and say that he wanted to express the feeling of loss and discomfort that the West has experienced in the wake of climate change and the global warming crisis. So, “Amazonian Pain” meant the projection of Western discontent onto the Amazon as a “Paradise Lost” rather than the Amazonian peoples’ own suffering.

And to turn to another buzzword, “Amazonian Pain” would then be a kind of exotic “solastalgia”, a neologism by Glenn Albrecht implying the psychic distress and suffering caused by the experience of negatively perceived environmental change within one’s home environment (Smith 2010; Albrecht et. al. 2007). Australian psychologist Albrecht is an exponent of the emergent sub-discipline of ecopsychology (Fisher 2005). Given the fact of the myriad interconnections between bodily care and environmental issues (Radkau 2011: 88),⁶ it is somewhat surprising that the discipline of ecopsychology, which is committed to “placing human psychology into ecological context” (Fisher 2005: 557), still occupies something of a niche existence. Its main idea is that the human mind is not separate from the natural world but an aspect of the larger psyche of nature. It claims that psychological well-being involves establishing mature, reciprocal relationships with the natural world. “As a failure to develop such relationships, the ecological crisis can be viewed as a psychological and spiritual crisis” (Fisher 2005: 557-559).

A glimpse at the still recent history of ecopsychology already reveals a range of topics relevant to the recent anthropological debate on animism: First, there is the sense of relatedness to non-human reality as a significant fact of life emphasized by two of the earliest proponents of ecopsychology, Harold S. Searles’ (1960, cit. in Fisher 2005), and Theodore Roszak’s “attempt to revise an animistic worldview by drawing on the latest ideas in scientific cosmology” (Fisher 2005: 559; Roszak 1993) holding that “there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being” (Roszak 1998). Secondly, ecopsychology scholars maintain that the establishment of human-nature relationships is a process of maturation (in the sense of developmental psychology) and should be successfully constructed via cultural interventions during an individual’s life cycle. Environmental philosopher Paul Shepard, one of the intellectual forerunners of ecopsychology, (1982) argued for the

4 <http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/cms/de/programme/kultur_der_nachhaltigkeit/multimediale_amazonas_oper_4088_5.html> (10.10.2012).

5 <<http://www.freiepresse.de/NACHRICHTEN/KULTUR/Amazonas-Oper-bei-Muenchner-Biennale-aufgefuehrt-artikel7371147.php>> (10.10.2012).

6 Radkau emphasizes the role of occupational medicine and its toxicological findings in environmental history (2011: 88).

necessity of already bonding children to the natural world, culminating in an initiation of adolescents into the sacredness of earthly life. Any disruption of this normal process of psychogenesis would be a symptom as well as a cause of the Western ecological crisis (Fisher 2005). Thirdly, the ritual or therapeutic techniques developed by Deep Ecologist Joanna Macy call for an acceptance of personal distress at the state of the planet. The positive and creative use made of the resulting “pain for the world”, not as a symptom of personal neurosis, but as a healthy expression, should bring about the “Great Turning” from industrial-growth society to life-sustaining civilization (Strobel 2005). Joanna Macy’s emphasis on rendering conscious and experiencing the “pain” one feels over the individual’s disruption with the encompassing natural world,⁷ not only brings us closer to an understanding of Sloterdijk’s dictum of “Amazonian Pain”, but is, as will be shown, also an important aspect of indigenous ritual construction of critical human–non-human relationships. Finally, sound human–nature relationships are predicated on a strong sense of place. Glenn Albrecht’s neologism “solastalgia” is made up of Latin “*solacium*”, “solace”, and the ending “*-algia*”, “pain”:

The pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault [...] a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home’ (cit. in Smith 2010).

There can be no doubt that many Yanomami or other indigenous people of the Amazon are suffering from “solastalgia”, given the fact that large portions of the Amazon region have already fallen victim to Western environmental “pathology” (Kopenawa & Albert 2010). On the other hand, from a Western perspective the Amazon is still presumed to be an edenic landscape primarily because the local indigenous peoples have developed millennia old cosmologies that are based on “sound” relationships between what we call “humans” and what we call “nature”. Many scholars hold that it is exactly these ontologies and epistemologies that blur the line between culture and nature, which marks the difference between “pathological” and “non-pathological” human-nature-relations.

2. New animism and Western ecologism

As is well known, this is not the first time that the alterity of the marginalized cultures of Amazonia has inspired a major intellectual debate that leaves the confines of anthropology; this occurred when Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1971-1976) published his opus magnum “*Mythologica*” in order to decenter the Cartesian subject. More recently, leading intellectuals like Bruno Latour (1997) have once again taken up

7 <<http://www.joannamacy.net/theworkthatreconnects/theoretical-foundations.html>> (12.12.2011).

the highly abstracted models of Amazonian cosmologies by Philippe Descola (1986, 1992, 2005, 2006) and Viveiros de Castro (2005) in order to challenge the Western modernist self-image.

All this is not just a matter of sophisticated philosophical debate. In the light of ensuing climate change and given the crisis of the modernist project, the discussion now pragmatically references the differential human-nature relations of indigenous societies of the Amazon and elsewhere as a viable alternative. Western “anthropocentrism”, which differentiates between human and non-human nature, objectifying and exploiting the latter, is considered the basic cause of our disastrous dealings with planetary existence (Taylor 2010).

The theories of “perspectivism” or “multi-naturalism”, that is, the extension of subjectivity from human to non-human persons in Amazonian ontology, not only reveals a differential cosmovision which triggered the comeback of the long dormant term “animism” in anthropology (Descola 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2005) but – and this is the point – it also attributed a differential environmental responsibility to cultures that adhere to these cosmological predicaments.

What I would like to stress here is that, once again, a discussion among anthropological specialists of marginalized cultures of the Amazon is converging with a much wider field of discourse, especially among scholars of environmental issues and eco-activists. This comprehensive discourse on “new animism” in Western ecologism clearly attributes superior environmental ethics to “animist” cultures. Let me give you a few examples that I have picked up more or less at random:

On the Amazonas opera’s webpage, a subpage called “*Humanimal*” teaches children about Yanomami ontology:⁸

Schoolteachers use to tell us that human beings originate from animals. The Yanomami in the North Amazonas region believe in the opposite: According to their beliefs, rainforest animals (*yaropë*) were part of an ancient human population that lost its human shape when the world began. They were humans with animal names – so to speak *humanimals* called *yaroripë*. They violated the rules of their world – something which is referred to in many myths of the Yanomami – , and thus transformed themselves one after the other, in hunting animals. This is why the Yanomami believe that all animals they chase in the forest are their former human predecessors. They also say that the animals themselves consider themselves still as human beings, as the real ‘inhabitants of the rainforest’ (*urihi theripë*). This mythical connection of humans and animals can also be depicted in the fact that each Yanomami possesses a ‘double animal’ (*rixixi*) which is the essence of his soul [...] The thought that we all – humans, animals, plants – are connected with each other, is just fascinating. This is how the Yanomami see it.

8 <<http://www.goethe.de/ins/pt/lis/prj/ama/wet/was/en5995819.htm>> (10.10.2012).

The website's authors invite (Western) children to choose or detect the animal that "lies within" and "accompanies" them. I do think that we should not dismiss this playful invitation as mere exoticism and that we should take note of the fact that children are open to an animistic worldview (see below).⁹

Ethologist Mark Bekoff, who argues that to understand the roots of human goodness, we have got to look beyond humans, and who often collaborates with famous primatologist Jane Goodall, has released an "*Animal Manifesto*" asking,

If animals can think and feel, what do they think and feel about the ways humans treat them? What would they say to us, and what would they ask of us, if they could speak a human language? Here is what I believe their manifesto would consist of:

1. All animals share the Earth and we must coexist.
2. Animals think and feel.
3. Animals have and deserve compassion.
4. Connection breeds caring, alienation breeds disrespect.
5. Our world is not compassionate to animals.
6. Acting compassionately helps all beings and our world.

Is such a manifesto radical? I think it's common sense. These six items are also the six 'reasons' we can use to expand our compassion footprint.¹⁰

Graham Harvey, lecturer of Religious Studies at the Open University, recently published an "*Animist Manifesto*", maintaining on the opening page:

All that exists lives. All that lives is worthy of respect. You don't have to like what you respect. Not liking someone is no reason for not respecting them. [...] Reasons are best worked out in relationships.¹¹

In one of his articles on "new animism", Harvey (2006a) refers to the seminal work of Hallowell on the Ojibwa (1969; see also Harvey 2005, 2006b), who linguistically attribute personhood also to "other-than-human persons". These persons are a "communicative community" and one that "places constraints" on each person to become a "better person in some way". Accordingly, animism refers to cultures in which people seek to live "respectfully" towards those around them:

9 Taylor (2010: 132-138) hints at the "dark green" subtext of Disney animated films where he detects "the explicit and implicit spirituality and ethics [...] that seem to express themes common in dark green religion" (Taylor 2010: 138).

10 <<http://www.readthespirit.com/explore/696-compassion-for-animals-may-sound-radical-but.html>> (10.10.2012); Bekoff 2010.

11 <<http://www.strangeattractor.co.uk/pdf/animist1.pdf>> (15.12.2011).

The ethical implication of animist worldviews is that no ‘environment’ is given to us, or to any other persons, and that whatever we need we must seek in the give and take of relationships and actions and in honest engagement with a diverse community of similarly needy and desiring persons (Harvey 2006a: 12).

Furthermore, a respectful “animist” must also seek ways to eat others with “impunity and respect”. Central to the negotiations of these consuming relationships are ritual and shamanistic mediation. This “new animism” is characterized by a relational epistemology and ontology:

It is about people working to improve ways of relating with other persons, not all of whom are of the same species. Its leitmotiv is respect [...] carefully and constructively (Harvey 2006a: 13).

Both Bekoff and Harvey advocate the rescission of a hierarchical relationship between subject (human) and object (animal) not only in order to rectify mutual perspectives, but also on *moral* grounds, by investing affective expenditure-like “compassion” or “respect” into relationships between human and non-human beings.

Considering nature as a moral object (or subject, as it were) in such a manner, certainly has its own intellectual forebears in the West too, initially independently of any anthropological information. For instance, there is a pronounced spiritual underpinning in the North American “transcendentalist” tradition of environmental consciousness (Radkau 2008: 277). One of the seminal texts of American environmental ethics is without doubt the chapter on “land ethic” in Aldo Leopold’s *A sand county almanac* (1949; Taylor 2005: 598). Analogous to the behaviour of an individual as part of a social community of interdependent parts, Leopold claimed that a “land ethic” should “simply [enlarge] the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (1949: 239; cit. in Taylor 2005: 598). Thus, the former hierarchical position as a “conqueror” of land would be levelled to one of a “member and citizen” of it (1949: 240; cit. in Taylor 2005: 598). According to Taylor, Leopold’s land ethic provided a model for “ecocentric” or “biocentric” environmental ethics (2005: 598).

Within this tradition of environmental thinking, religion has often been detected as the differential factor separating “anthropocentrism”, held responsible for the ecological crisis of modernity, and “biocentrism”, considered more feasible in mooring a more sustainable environmental practice. Tying in with Lynn White’s famous brushing off of Christianity as an anthropocentric cosmology responsible for the Western environmental crisis, philosopher J. Baird Callicott considered Asian and indigenous religions as more viable than Judeo-Christian religions in generating environmental ethics in the Leopold’s sense:

The implicit overall metaphysic of American Indian cultures locates human beings in larger social, as well as physical environments. People belong not only to a human community, but to a community of all nature as well. Existence in this larger society, just as existence in a family and tribal context, places people in an environment in which reciprocal responsibilities and mutual obligations are taken for granted and assumed without question or reflection (Callicott 1989: 189-190; cit. in Nelson 2005).

Although in many ways rooted in the occidental philosophical tradition (e.g. Spinoza's pantheism, Hume's sensualism as well as Darwin's theory of evolution in the case of Callicott,; Nelson 2005), the "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" (Berkes 2005) of indigenous peoples kept inspiring environmental ethics. Many environmental thinkers considered the extension of sociability to non-human domains and persons as a central idea of Amerindian cosmologies creating a moral field based on mutual obligations and respectful relationships (Callicott 1982; Berkes 1999, 2005).¹² In a similar vein, George Sessions maintained that the anthropocentrism of the Judeo-Christian tradition represses the ecologically sustainable cosmographies of indigenous peoples. Western societies however, Sessions claimed, could work back via Spinoza's pantheism to finally merge with a kind of Perennial Philosophy (as Aldous Huxley called it in the wake of Leibniz) that likewise embraces the presumably nature-beneficent spirituality of indigenous peoples (Sessions 1977; cit. in Taylor 2005).

What can only be hinted at here is (a) the existence of an alternative occidental philosophical tradition contesting the much maligned Baconian and Cartesian dominance of man over nature; a tradition, which (b) is certainly inspired by indigenous cosmologies, but (c) whose evident parallels with anthropological representations of non-Western animistic worldviews implicate a certain "monism" in environmental ethics instead of absolute alterities.

The simple question is: Is it viable to think about the cosmologies of marginalized cultures in order to "animate" or "re-animate" the hegemonic Western cosmology that has tumbled into crisis? Or does this mean abusing these indigenous cultures once again as a mere projection space to compensate for our cultural discontents?

In what follows I will refer less to the "perspectivism" and "multi-naturalism" theories of the Brazilian school (Viveiros de Castro 2005), but rather to the work of Bird-David (1990, 1999, 2005, 2008), Ingold (2000, 2006) and Hornborg (1998, 2006), scholars who stress the relational constitution of persons – human and other-than-human – primarily among hunter and gatherer societies.

12 Indigenous cosmologies and lifeways prompted more radical environmental thinkers like Paul Shepard to indulge in a "primitivist" utopia which constructed agricultural origins as the ecological Fall of Man. Militant activists like "eco-warrior" Dave Foreman were heavily influenced by Shepard's "Pleistocene paradigm" (Taylor 2010: 78).

Interestingly it was Viveiros de Castro who was initially approached by the producers of the “Amazonas music theatre”, but he bluntly denied any possibility of mutual understanding between Western consumers of avant-garde art and indigenous people of Amazonia.¹³ Based on the case of the Sateré-Mawé,¹⁴ indigenous horticulturalists of the Middle Amazon in Brazil,¹⁵ I will instead make a case for a kind of “symmetrical anthropology” (Latour 1997) – not so much by inverting perspective, as did Kopenawa & Albert (2010), who *did* participate in the “Amazonas” opera – but by looking for potential commonalities between indigenous and Western “animists”.

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- 13 “Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is convinced, however, that there really is no dialogue, and there can’t be any either. Indigenous culture is so fundamentally different, he argues, that we should not delude ourselves into believing we could develop a project like this together with Ameríndios. There can be no real mutual understanding, says the pre-eminent expert in these cultures” (excerpt from an article by Joachim Bernauer, available online at <<http://www.goethe.de/ins/pt/lis/prj/ama/lab/en5445315.htm>> (10.10.2012) (Bernauer 2010)).
- 14 I would like to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) (MU 359/28-1, HA5957/6-2) for generously funding my research on the Sateré-Mawé, and the Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa (010581/2009-0) for authorizing it. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Luiza Garnelo of FIOCRUZ Amazonas, Manaus, who went out of her way to support and inspire this research project. Last but not least, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the many Sateré-Mawé who not only collaborated but became dear friends during this project.
- 15 The Tupí-speaking Sateré-Mawé, numbering approximately 11,000 people, live in the *Terra Indígena* Andirá-Marau, on the two southern tributaries of the Amazon bearing the same names, south of the provincial town of Parintins, on the boundary between the states of Amazonas and Pará. Since they inhabit the river banks, they live from fishing and hunting, and they cultivate manioc by means of slash and burn. They are also known as the original cultivators of guaraná. The cornerstones of their Amazonian economy have now begun to crumble. In addition to a number of other factors, the high population density means that the immediate environment of each village has reached the limits of its capacity to support the inhabitants. In addition, the economy is monetized and tied into the regional market under conditions that are disadvantageous to the Indians as suppliers and consumers. However, this external orientation is also an echo of the typical “extrovertedness” of Tupí societies, a basic conceptual figure which regards external contacts as constitutive of internal identity. This basic figure determines not only the social life of a society structured by exogamous clans, but also characterizes participation in global phenomena such as evangelical conversion, ethno-political affirmation, and ecologically and ethically motivated economic projects. These social movements are understood internally by their protagonists as ways of reacting to critical developments. The political practice of these reform movements, their strained relationship to traditional strategies, and their effect on man-nature relations are the subject of my research interest (Kapfhammer 2004a, 2004b, 2008, 2009a).

3. The Sateré-Mawé – modes of human-nature relations

For the present discussion it may be useful to reconsider that in a globalized world any potential “animist stance” can hardly be totalizing, even within marginalized indigenous societies. For one, the Amazonian person or “multi-vidual” is always the result of a multitude of external relations and as such subject to diverse historical trajectories. Accordingly, the capacity of an Amazonian person to manage his or her relationships with external cosmological domains or “timescapes” (Halbmayer 2010) develops along a temporal vector punctuated by important passages of the life cycle. Thus, this spatio-temporal accumulation (or diminishment) of capacities to manage the borderlines of cosmological domains (“*Grenzmanagement*”, Halbmayer 2010) also gives shape to the quality of human-nature relationships. The following presentation of modes of human-nature relations among the Sateré-Mawé obviously forms a kind of sequence that has as much to do with the historical external relations of an Amazonian society as with progressive advances, as well as regressive longings in a person’s life cycle. Bear in mind that ecopsychologists like Paul Shepard and Andy Fisher, in an ecological turn in developmental psychology, opt for an observation of “rites de passage” in their therapeutic endeavours to remedy “nature deficit disorders” (Louv 2008). Fisher illustrates the principles of a “naturalistic psychology”:

[...] through an examination of the human life cycle in the context of a more-than-human world, I discuss the infantile need for loving, responsive human relations and for exploratory contact with wild nature; the childhood need for playful immersion in the natural world; and the adolescent need for rites of passage into a sacred adult cosmos, wherein the natural world is understood not as a fallen realm to be transcended but as the everyday ground of our limited and mysterious human existence. Attending to the human life cycle is a key concern of my approach (2002: xviii).

the giving environment	the “toxic” environment	the larger giving environment
TRUST	DISILLUSION	SALVATION
“ <i>childhood</i> ”	“ <i>adulthood</i> ”	“ <i>regression</i> ”

Figure 1. Modes of human-nature relations among the Sateré-Mawé.

3.1

Among the Sateré-Mawé, the environment can be a giving one, just as Nurit Bird-David has laid out in her seminal article on the Nayaka, Indian hunters and gatherers. The “root metaphor” of this kind of relationship is the “forest as a parent”: gatherers and hunters

[...] view their environment as giving, and their economic system is characterized by modes of distribution and property relations, that are constructed in terms of giving, as within a family, rather than in terms of reciprocity, as between kin (Bird-David 1990: 189).

This kind of relationship can be said to be based on “trust”; trust not in the contractual, Hobbesian sense, but in the sense of *Urvertrauen*, the “basic sense of trust”, as it has been used by psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson (1950). The forest is a parent who unconditionally provides food for her children. The Sateré-Mawé also maintain this kind of non-reciprocal relationship with a person called *miat ehary*, the “mother of animals”. The ritual mediation of this consuming relationship was carried out by the shaman. According to the narratives no reciprocal relation is established between providers and consumers. Instead, the ritual of summoning up the animal-mother resembles what has been called “demand-sharing” (Peterson 1993), the pressure for generosity. Consequently the caring stance of the “mother of animals”, respectively of the mediating shaman, is stressed. The following is an account by Plácido de Oliveira of Boa Vista on the Rio Andirá, albeit related with the scepticism of a devout evangelical:

The work of the pagé (*paini*) was good on the one hand, bad on the other. The pagé did not like all people, that’s why the Bible says, there is no pagé who is good! At that time my father-in-law was pagé. He was trained as a pagé and he knew how to sing. He even called the mother of the harpy eagle (*hywi wato ehary*). Also, he called the mother of the coatá monkey (*tuwaha ehary*). The song of the mother of the harpy eagle was good to put back the shadow (soul; *ãu*) of a person, while the song of the mother of the coatá monkey was good to cure the sickness of the monkey leaf.¹⁶ He even summoned the soul of my grandfather. But it wasn’t true, he just changed his voice. He did that to impress people. Several times he called a pack of (white-lipped) peccaries (*hamaut wato*). He had brought a stone from the river Marau. That stone contained the mother of the peccaries (*hamaut wato ehary*). At that time we went to his house and there people said: ‘It would be good to summon peccaries this week, because we really need food!’ [...] Then, my father-

16 *Wahue yhop* (monkey/leaf), used for “love magic”; it lets the desired one fall ill with symptoms similar to depression.

in-law lit his cigarette and smoked. He danced. He danced with a calabash of guaraná (*sap'ó*) in his hand. He took his rattle and shook it while singing. At that time we strongly believed in him. Because it was the first time that he did this. After he had stopped dancing, he said: 'I'm sure the pack of peccaries will arrive! You can already prepare your weapons in your homes. But you have to take accurate aim, because if you fail, the pigs will only be hurt and will die at some other place. That will be no good!' The next day the pack of peccaries arrived at his port. At that time Mr. Clóvis visited my father-in-law, just as the pigs arrived. He took the gun of my father-in-law and killed six pigs! Even chief Adelino killed some. Because the pack of peccaries had arrived, people believed in the pagé very much (Plácido de Oliveira, Boa Vista).

The Sateré-Mawé narrate quite a few stories of legendary shamans who acted as great providers for their kin. One of them was Chicú Pucu:

One day Chicú Pucu gave notice to his daughter that he would visit her. Before he arrived he told her to prepare guaraná (*sap'ó*). She put it on the *patawi* (stand). She had grated a very thick guaraná. [...] This guaraná she offered her father and he drank. He told his son: 'Go and call our friends (*ewyria'in*)!' And he went and assembled them. At midnight he talked to himself in the presence of the people. He lay down on a piece of cloth. He blew smoke from his cigar over the guaraná. He told them: 'I have blessed this guaraná, now let's drink it!' He told them: 'This month the piranga bird and the tukano will arrive.¹⁷ And after them, the band of peccaries will arrive. Don't be afraid, for it will be dangerous'. At that time his house was very large. The people assembled there, because they were afraid of the thunderstorm. It went by, but one week later another one came. This time it was very dangerous. His wife said to him: 'Chicú Pucu, I am afraid because of this! Don't let that thunderstorm grow too big!' There were two thunderstorms with a lot of lightning. The old man took his hoot and blew and the thunderstorm stopped. Early in the morning, when the sun was rising, a lot of tinamous arrived as if they were his flock. They killed them and heaped up a lot of tinamous. They also heaped up tucanos. The birds remained close to the house. After this had happened, he said to himself: 'Now, I will think again!' That's why they asked him: 'Why do you talk like this, dad?' He replied: 'It is because in my thinking the words come to me.' [...] Then there was another thunder. This thunder signaled the arrival of the band of peccaries. After one week his daughters went to the manioc garden. There they heard the noise of the pigs. They ran to call the others. But the old man said: 'Let them come here!' His daughter replied: 'Won't they break into our house?' At that moment a big band arrived. And the old man said to them: 'Now it becomes a reality what our ancestors said about

17 The arrival of these birds connotes the period when palm fruits are ripe in the rainy season. This is also the time when great bands of white-lipped peccaries pass near the villages. It was the duty of the shamans to call this game after taking guaraná. When taking guaraná, the Sateré-Mawé still jokingly say: "Hey, let's call meat!"

pigs: When it's time to cultivate the garden, to collect, and when it's time to build a new house, this will happen!' And they ran to attack with arrows. 'Don't kill too many, in order not to waste anything!' They killed many. This is how Chicu Pucu worked (Dona Mariquinha, Vila Feliz).

Another one was *Sakaré Poran* (Caiman the Jinx), who was always pressed by his affines to call game like howler monkeys, peccaries and saúba ants for them, until one day he metamorphosed into the voice of a bird. His disappearance resembles an act of self-sacrifice,¹⁸ unlike the majority of Sateré-Mawé myths, where the origin of important plants that ensure subsistence, is invariably triggered by the violent act of killing a primordial being. Chicu Pucu, as told by Dona Mariquinha, even ventured into a kind of netherworld to directly contact the mother of animals. There, in a spot of forest in the midst of a savannah he came to a house made of stones where he asked the female owner for tinamous and tucanos. The woman showed him stone effigies¹⁹ of the birds and of peccaries and asked him to blow tobacco smoke over them. She promised that peccaries would soon arrive at the home of Chicu Pucu and his people.

This kind of shaman tapped the primordial source in its fullness, only mildly placing some moral restraints on their following. All moral qualities aggregate in the parental figure of this kind of shaman, who does not act in an ambivalent manner as these manipulators of death and life usually do. His behaviour is more consistent with the characteristics of a great tuxaua (*tuisã wato*) able to construct social consensus and harmony (Kapfhammer 2004a; Wright & Kapfhammer 2004).²⁰ The unconditional relationship with the animal mother (or her stand-in, the shaman) may be affectionate and relieving, whether any *moral* obligations towards the non-human environment arise from this non-reciprocal relation may be left open (cf. Hornborg 2006: 25).²¹

18 Cf. Wright 2009 on this non-predatory, peaceful aspect of Amazonian mythology.

19 *Iã'akap*, image, photo; the "stony" quality, already present in Plácidos' account, refers to the primordial place of *nusoken* (*nu*, rock, stone) in Sateré-Mawé cosmology. Every time a guaraná bar is grated on a stone to prepare the beverage, this primordial space-time is evoked.

20 In traditional Sateré-Mawé politics, the capacity to "harmonize" a conflictive social field revolved around the ritual of the *puratĩg*, a ceremonial object (obviously a war club) with designs on it. These designs are considered as writing; only a *tuxaua* who was able to read this "moral text" could resolve social conflicts or construct the consensus necessary for communal work. The drinking of a thick guaraná, the placing of the beverage on a stand connoting an *axis mundi*, the summoning of "friends" (*ewyria'in*) instead of members of different clans (*ywania*), all mentioned in the text on Chicu Pucu, are ritual components of the *puratĩg* complex (Kapfhammer 2004a, 2009b).

21 According to Bird-David (2005: 101) the generalized children-parent relationship among hunters

3.2

The environment of the Sateré-Mawé can also be a nasty or even “toxic” one. At the outset I mentioned the painful feeling of “solastalgia” over the loss of an intact environment. In Western projection, the Amazonian forest is still devoid of any “place pathology”, the people living there enjoy “healthy” relations with their environment. However, Sateré-Mawé ontology and epistemology actually demands a rather *dis-illusioned* stance towards the extra-human cosmological domains that we would subsume under the term “nature”.²²

As in many horticulturalist groups the transition from childhood to full personhood as an adult requires a ritual. In the case of the Sateré-Mawé the adolescent boys are treated with the painful stings of poisonous ants (Kapfhammer 2007):

The tucandeira ant lived below the earth, that’s why the armadillo went to fetch it; it dug a hole to fetch it. Up to that time the young men had stung themselves only with this little ant. As armadillo also wanted to put in his arms [into the ‘glove’], he said: ‘No, we already have the true tucandeira ant, we have a beautiful girl; this is what’s good for you! Do you want it, shall I show you?’ ‘Yes, yes we want it!’ The young boys got excited. The tucandeira ant is a young woman, the daughter of an enchanted man, like a siren, but in Sateré language it is ‘daughter of the snake’. She is a beautiful woman. Armadillo said ‘If you want it, I will dig a hole to fetch her!’ And he brought her, beautifully clothed. And he said: ‘Now it’s good, this is the right one!’ And they celebrated and got excited; she was so beautiful in all her clothes. The young men liked her very much.

Armadillo said: ‘There is only one thing. When you make love to her, you have to respect one thing: If you put in your arms you have to finish [the whole series of feasts] first before you can make love or marry! If one makes love at the beginning, after only one or two times, he will not be happy, he will be sick and sad. A guy who won’t hang on until the end will remain unhappy, sick and slothful. According to his regime the snake (*moi*) has already made him luckless (*panema*), has already bewitched him, the tucandeira ant has already cast a spell on him. Because he had cheated the young girl. That’s why a man who did not finish stinging himself will do badly. But the guy who is courageous will be happy, strong, and healthy; will be a courageous warrior, because he passed’. That’s what the old people tell about this. That is, the feathers of the arara and the harpy eagle, the [red] urucú paint, all this is her clothing (José ‘Zuzú’ Miquiles, Umirituba).

and gatherers “connotes an emotional attachment, a shared living, a shared sense of identity and mutual responsibility”. As will be shown below, a similar mode of relationship among the Sateré-Mawé historically translates into a more “regressive” stance that rather dissimulates any obligations towards the “provider”.

- 22 Interestingly, Joanna Macy’s therapeutic exercises (which she calls “despair and empowerment work”) are designed to cut through illusions and help people to see the world as it is. In short: to put the pain experienced over the state of the planet at the service of the “Great Turning”, a mature relationship with the non-human environment (Strobel 2005).

The seductive *tucandeira*-woman is *Uniamoire'i*, the snake-woman, and the *tucandeira* ants, whose painful stings the young boys have to endure, hail from her pubic hair (*hariporia ypysap*). Thus, the symbolism of the rite could not be more explicit: The ants originate from the vagina²³ of an ophidian woman of the aquatic underworld. The richly decorated wickerwork of the *luvas* (“gloves”)²⁴ connotes both the beauty of the woman, but also conveys the violent mythological background of the initiation ritual.²⁵

The unconditional, caring-sharing relationship with *miat ehary*, the animal-mother, gets disrupted, only to be replaced by the reciprocal, dangerous, and violent relation to *Uniamoire'i*, the Snake Woman. Quite contrary to clichéd Western notions of Amazonian ways of living, for the Sateré-Mawé to reach full personhood means constructing the phantasm of a “toxic” nature! Thus, the adult Sateré-Mawé person is entangled in a web of affinal and reciprocal relationships; his (or her) ontological status will always be precarious, demanding constant support of the shaman’s manipulation of trophological and nosological relations with non-human domains and calling for an everyday ritual routine of managing these borderlines of the human self. According to the humoral logic of Sateré-Mawé theory of sickness and death, contact with or consumption of certain animals or plants classified as “cold” amounts to a cosmological descent into the pathogenic underworld domain of the Great Snake (*moi'ok*), a relation that inevitably causes illness. The correlative contact with or consumption of things classified as “hot” makes a cosmological re-ascend, i.e. a return to a sound physical status, possible again (Figuroa 1997).

This epistemologically and aesthetically demanding regime of mature human-nature relations thus upholds the addressability (Halbmayer 2010) of nature (or rather: with non-human beings) and can therefore be considered a stabilizing factor in human-nature relations.²⁶ This regime, sociologically based on balanced reciprocal exchanges with the communicating domains of the cosmos and represented as notions of psycho-physical well-being, imposes a compelling moral regime on human-nature relations.

23 The mythological motif of a primordial woman whose vagina contains stinging insects is quite widespread in lowland mythology. The hero’s sexual intercourse with her is not only painful, but spreads powerful substances like hallucinogens contained within the vagina (Kapfhammer 1997: 234-276).

24 See <<http://www.online.uni-marburg.de/satere/religion/initiation/handschuhe/galerie1.htm>> for examples (10.10.2012).

25 Harpy eagle’s campaign of vengeance culminated in the killing of his affines, who had murdered his father. After the killing the first *tucandeira* dance was held.

26 E.g. Gregory Bateson, who considered the environmental crisis a communication crisis (Hornborg 2006; see also Halbmayer 2010).

The structural ambiguity of relations within this cosmography, however, contributes to a certain historical instability of the system itself, mostly due to a high degree of conflictive content. Sateré-Mawé mythology most clearly shows the violent background of creative forces within the cosmos: the origin of life-sustaining plants, which provide either staple food (manioc) or ritual alimentation (guaraná) is the outcome of an escalating conflict between affines; a primordial being is killed by a *hamu*, ideally the WF, due to cross-cousin marriage at the same time the MB (cf. Leacock 1973). Out of the body parts of the slain victim grow important food plants. In the myth on the origin of manioc the hero has to cope with a cannibalistic jaguar addressing him as *hamu nokap* (father-in-law/enemy). He finally outwits him, triggering a series of transformations through killings whose end result is manioc, the life-sustaining staple food of the Sateré-Mawé. Thus, the conflictive *hamu*-relation is the momentum behind Sateré-Mawé cosmological dynamics and the adult person has to pay attention in order to maintain his or her ontological status. This insight into “cost-intensive” human-nature-relations is, as the next variant of human-nature relationships among the Sateré-Mawé shows, opposed to the salvational promise of the new consumer culture.

3.3

Nowadays, the larger environment of the Sateré-Mawé, including Western consumer culture, is still required to be a giving one.

In an article on the notion of “animal masters” among the Runa of Ecuador, Kohn (2007) stated that “thinking about beings that exert control over the forest” is also “a way to understand how interaction with them reflects the impact of history”. As is well-known, Descola (1992) defined “animism” as the way animals, their masters and people interact among themselves and with each other according to the same logic of sociability. And it is exactly the impact of colonial history that has moulded the “animistic” logic of interaction (Kohn 2007).

In a narrative that explains the unequal distribution of goods between the Sateré-Mawé and the White People, it is Grandfather Emperor (probably Dom Pedro II) who leads his people out of the inhospitable “paradise” *nusoken*. He asks the Sateré-Mawé to go ahead down to the river bank where he will be waiting for them to take them with him on his ship. Halfway along the trail the Sateré-Mawé get distracted by palms ripe with fruits, forget about time and miss the boat. The Emperor leaves without them, taking along only a frog and a monkey who become the ancestors of black and white people. The Emperor is the master of all the industrial commodities, while the Sateré-Mawé are put off by the Emperor’s promise to send them merchandise every once in a while (Kapfhammer 2004b).

First, the Emperor lived in the paradise *nusoken*. But he wasn't satisfied, because roaches, mosquitos and mites ate up people. That's why the Emperor said to his people: 'Let's go downriver!' He then sent some of them ahead of him. Those who went ahead later became the Indians. As it happened there were a lot of *bacaba*, *patawá* and *inajá* palm trees along the way. They paused and started to gather the fruits. Only two persons stayed with the Emperor, the monkey *kāi kāi asīg* and the frog *hawura'i*. *Kāi kāi asīg* became the first White man. With him the Emperor went downriver. Halfway along the trail he met the others. 'Why did you stay here, losing so much time?' The Emperor then spoke to them: 'If you don't want to leave, you can stay here just as well. From now on you will live right here in the forest! It is true, there are a lot of products here in the forest: Much *pau-d'arco*, *arumá*-cane, *siringa*-rubber, *cipó*-lianas; there's a lot of money here in the forest! These products you can manage here in the forest. One day I will remember you! In order to exchange new sieves, axes, new clothes; I will bring along a lot of merchandise! I will meet you again!'

This is how he talked to the Indians. Then, the Emperor left with *kāi kāi asīg*. He took along only two persons, *hawura'i* also accompanied him. That's why the Indians stayed here in the forest and raised their children (Emidio de Oliveira, Vila Nova).

This narrative is of course an elaboration of the historical experience of extractivism and regional *assistencialismo*, an experience that over decades has developed into a downright *cargo*-stance: a regression to a passive, albeit unconditional, demand for Western commodities.²⁷ The "demand-sharing" mode of human-nature relationships carries over from the relation between shaman and animal mother to the relation between *tuxaua* and river traders, from recent political leaders tapping the funds of government agencies or international NGOs to common people as beneficiaries of social benefits. However, this kind of "salvation" has to conceal the historical fact of asymmetric and hierarchic relations, of violence and exploitation during the era of extractivism. What is more, it also has to dissimulate the disruption with the local environment by dislocating the source of salvation outwards.

27 The FUNAI administration has probably been an important factor within this scenario of stimulating an ever-growing demand for social benefits, which was then successfully revitalized by the populism of the Lula administration (Luiza Garnelo pers.com.). In another version of the Emperor narrative, the *Inspetoria*, S.P.I. and FUNAI are actually mentioned as "avatars" of the Emperor. Social welfare today is by far the biggest source of income and lamented by many Sateré-Mawé activists as the greatest obstacle to attaining more economic autonomy.

Tim Ingold once spoke of the “poetic involvement”, the aesthetic and affective relationships hunter and gatherer societies have with their environment (2000). If you look at it from that angle, the historical trajectory from “trust” to “salvation” amounts to a disembedding of the Sateré-Mawé’s “poetic involvement” with the forest. It seems as if they had been forced to barter this relationship for downright “commodity fetishism”.²⁸

4. Conclusion

The intention of this paper is certainly not to reveal another case of “ecologically noble savages” fallen from grace. On the contrary!

Bird-David spoke of “relatedness” that could translate into “responsibility” (2005). Indeed there are Sateré-Mawé leaders who have creatively inverted the predicament of the Emperor narrative: instead of passively awaiting erratic donations, the Sateré-Mawé who have been left behind in the forest should rather revalue their environment and indulge in the *stewardship* of the “*sateré-mawé eko ga’apiat mi-motypot sese*”, the “ecological and cultural sanctuary of the Sateré-Mawé”, to use a phrase of the *Consórcio dos Produtores Sateré-Mawé*, an indigenous syndicate that collects, processes and sells guaraná and other forest produce to European Fair Trade partners.²⁹

However, this novel kind of stewardship may only be sustainable culturally if it is accompanied by an aesthetic and affective re-embedding of relational epistemology and ontology. Older Sateré-Mawé narrators used to weave a poetic language called *sehay poti*, “the old words”, into their rendition of myths. Using mythological metaphors and metonymic phrases to connote other-than-human beings of the forest, for instance palm fruits, made procuring these fruits a poetic act, an interaction with animated, enchanted beings. The gathering of palm fruits amounted to an immersion into the mythical world.

This all may seem very remote from Western cosmography. But, as Tim Ingold and Alf Hornborg have repeatedly pointed out in their works on “new animism”, the relational detachment within the modernist project is *contextual*. While we have been trained to relegate this disconnectedness primarily to our specific professional

28 On the political dynamics that accrue from the desire for commodities among the Xikrin-Kayapó, see Fisher (2000).

29 The literal translation is: “Sateré-Mawé / custom / forest-place / valorized / very”. Phraseology like this habitually raises doubts among anthropologists. Of course slogans are there to project, to animate. The most convincing answer is, however, the increasing practice of Sateré-Mawé of opening so-called *roças consorciadas*, an ingenious fusion of traditional gardening and certified forest-gardens, contributing considerably to the aesthetic of the place.

subcultures, we all still retain our intimate spaces, where we are “practising animists”, whether baby-talking to our cat or encouraging the plants in our allotment. And above all: we are all *born* animists (Ingold 2006; Hornborg 2006). After all, the capacity of children for astonishment at the wonders of nature is crucial for the development of an “animic way of being” (Ingold 2006: 18).³⁰

local name	modern sateré	<i>sehay poti</i>	aproximate translation
<i>burití</i>	<i>miriti</i>	<i>uniã mākuru'i po'apyawa</i>	palm of the good woman
<i>patawá</i>	<i>hawuhu'i wato</i>	<i>haryporia eputu'yp kawiat uniã mākuru'i</i>	women with shaman's feather stick of the good woman
<i>inajá</i>	<i>puwi</i>	<i>awyato ywaiti'i</i>	jaguar above
<i>assai</i>	<i>wasa'i</i>	<i>awyato ywoti'i suu</i>	blood of the old jaguar

Figure 2. Poetic designations of palm fruits.³¹

Taken together, both Western discourse on an ecological turn in developmental psychology, as well as the sequential modes of Sateré-Mawé human-nature relationships make a strong argument for a common ground of environmental ethics. Once the “animistic” mode is neither confined to the “primitive other” (as Tylor did) nor relegated to an esoteric cloud-cuckoo home, a space for dialogue opens up, a kind of “symmetric anthropology” that takes into account all the different cosmographies, including our own, colliding within the ambit of a marginalized indigenous culture. Two examples from recent Sateré-Mawé cosmography might illustrate this:

30 To re-enchant life through exposure to nature is also the message of Richard Louv's bestseller “*Last child in the woods*” (2008).

31 The poetic phrases for *burití* and *patawá* refer to *Uniamāku'i*, one of the two “Earth Sisters” who sacrifice themselves and transform their bodies into the earth. The other two phrases refer to the origin myth of manioc. It is important to note that these narratives not only refer to the origin of staple food plants, but also to the origin of the capacity to produce them (Turner 2009), predicated on a mature, adult, non-regressive human-nature relationship.

Up to now I have done fieldwork mostly among evangelical Sateré-Mawé. In recent times some pastors have entertained a new environmental discourse that relocates the “toxicity” of the “wilderness” as it is established in the initiation rite. The pathogenic substance “*satek*” (poison) is no longer associated with cosmological domains that used to be manipulated by the shamans, but with the space of “civilization”, that is the village, where the “contaminating” impact of the local fringes of Western culture makes itself felt. This new “toxic” space is now pitted against a “safe and sound” forest, an edenic realm of purity. Although my interlocutors on this subject have precious little knowledge of Western environmental discourses, there are certainly points of contact. Obviously there is the biblical discourse, for instance the Book of Revelation that pits corrupt Babylon against a New Jerusalem, where “[...] the leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations [...]” (Rossing 1998), but this indigenous understanding of the environment also touches on the American transcendentalists’ notion of wilderness as a sanctuary (Taylor 2010: 42-70).

Closer to European consumers of Sateré-Mawé forest products may be a kind of aesthetic activism, which manifests itself in certain lifestyle practices. These persons might be sympathetic to the values of *Slow Food* – which does endorse Sateré-Mawé products – a popular movement clearly dedicated to the “re-embedding” of consuming relationships gone astray in Western society (Kapfhammer 2009b).

In a recent publication that I have already cited repeatedly, religious studies scholar Bron Taylor surmises the emergence of a global, civic, environmentalist, earth religion, which he calls “Dark Green Religion” (2010). As has been pointed out above, “animistic perceptions, often accompanied by ethical mores specifying the sorts of relationships that human beings should have, or avoid having, with nature’s diverse forces and beings” are part and parcel of this cosmography.

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