

THE NOTION OF ENEMY ACCORDING TO DAVI KOPENAWA AND BRUCE ALBERT

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Abstract

Taking as a starting point the words of Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert – both known as main references for the Yanomami studies; Kopenawa as a renowned shaman and political leader; and Albert as the ethnographer who lived for more than thirty years among them –, this article aims to understand how the Yanomami organise their intercultural relationship system, emphasising the role that the *napë thë pë* (usually translated as “enemies” or “outsiders”) play within this system. This will be done by distinguishing two different senses this expression acquires when applied to describe: 1) indigenous people; and 2) white people, corresponding to the two phases in which this article is divided: the enmity before and after contact. To conclude, a reflection on how the Yanomami understand the concept of violence will be conducted, seeking to bring the notion of “enemy” closer to the concept of “Other”, as we find it mainly in Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Michel Tournier.

Keywords: *napë thë* (enemy); other; Yanomami; Kopenawa; Albert

1. Initial Remarks

The expression *napë thë* (pl. *pë*), that Kopenawa uses to describe white people is part of a much broader morphological system, from which the Yanomami designate their relationships among themselves and with other groups. According to Albert’s division¹, this morphological system is composed of five major categories:

¹ Albert, Bruce: *Temps du sang, temps des cendres. Représentation de la maladie, système rituel et espace politique chez les Yanomami du sud-est (Amazonie brésilienne)*, PhD diss, Université de Paris X, Paris 1985, p. 193.

- 1) *yahi thëri pë*, which designates the cohabitants of the collective house, the relatives *par excellence*, the group that functions as an ideal model of conjugality;
- 2) *hwama thë pë*, which designates the “guests”, that is, the close, known and allied groups, with whom some kind of exchange (symbolic and/or material) is entertained;
- 3) *napë thë pë*, which designates the class of known, actual and relatively close enemies, nowadays represented by white people;
- 4) *napë thë pë hwätho*, which designates the people “who may be hostile”, that is, a set of relatively known or former enemies with whom hostility has already been experienced or is foreseen;
- 5) *tanomai thë pë*, which designates the set of distant and unknown enemies, people not known or seen (potential enemies).

Such categories mark both the relationships of alliance/hostility and the spatial position close/distant from a reference group (1) in relation to the others, as in the model below:

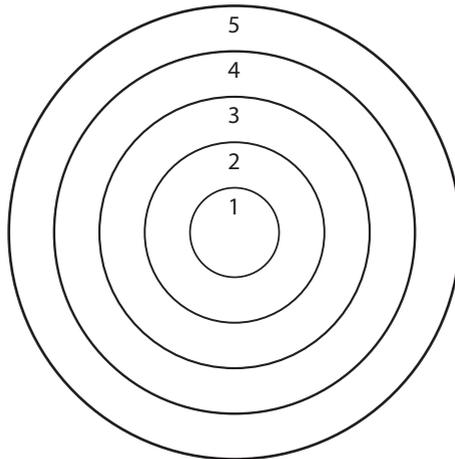


Figure 1: Classificatory system of the Yanomami according to Albert.²

² Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

We follow two of Albert's³ remarks about this system. The first one states that we have a socio-centred classification system, that is, all its divisions rely on the local group – a group of cohabitants belonging to the class of *yahi thëri pë* (1), in the case of the Yanomami. The internal cohesion of the group is the point of departure for reaching the other levels of the classification, due to the fact that Yanomami society is organised in the same way Clastres defines primitive society: “a series of neo-monads”⁴ that relate to each other according to a higher or lower degree of friendship/hostility, but that would cease to exist if they ceased to configure each one as an “undivided We”, an internally cohesive and self-sufficient group in economic and material terms.

Albert's second remark is that this classification system is variable. This means that any group can be positioned by the reference group (1) within any of the other concentric spaces (2 to 5). Under certain circumstances – for example, demographic expansion or decrease, fissions, migrations etc. –, even the *hwama thë pë* (2), close and known allies, may come to occupy different positions (3, 4, or 5) in the system, just as groups that previously belonged to these classes may pass into *hwama thë pë* condition. Thus, the communities surrounding a local group may successively move from one circumscription to another. The only exception to this rule of mobility is the local group (1), which although it may move spatially or be at the origin of other groups – mainly through matrimonial exchanges – cannot represent itself as an enemy (3 to 5), and it is, at the same time, an irreducible cohesive group even in relation to its close allies (2). The local group corresponds to the universe of kinship-cognates and generalised reciprocity, where the matrimonial ties guarantee the absence of any kind of aggression (symbolic and/or material). The other groups correspond to the “others”, an uncertain universe where, as the domain of kinship is attenuated and distended, the rate of violence tends to increase⁵, for every form of aggression that afflicts a reference group (1) has its origin in an outside group (2 to 5).

To each of these groups is attributed the action of a pathogenic power that causes harm, death and disease among the reference group. Even the allies (2) are feared to be the source of a specific form of sorcery named by Albert as “common sorcery”.⁶ Its effects, however, can be treated with appropriate shamanic healing and rarely lead to death. Sorcery from allies is associated with illnesses of a marital

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Clastres, Pierre: *Archeology of violence*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2013, p. 262.

⁵ Albert: “La fumée du métal: histoire et représentations du contact chez les Yanomami (Brésil)”, in *L'Homme*, Vol. 28, Nr. 106/107 (1988), EHESS, p. 90.

⁶ *Ibid.*

nature (impotence, infertility, conflicts etc.) and/or somatic illnesses (asthenia, fever, sweating, muscular pains etc.) that are generally non-lethal. In some exceptional situations, close allies may be blamed for the death or serious illness of a relative, in which case the tendency is that these allies will soon be considered to be on the side of the enemies (3 to 5).

Regarding the group of the *napë thë pë* (3), the current enemies, sorcery has invariably lethal ends. This type of sorcery, termed by Albert as “warrior sorcery”⁷, consists of launching a raid by “brave men” *waithirimë thë pë* to surprise the enemy away from his weapons and his collective house. Upon finding him, the killer fires blowpipe arrows loaded with highly poisonous “sorcery substances” that will cause the opponent’s death. In other cases, raiding enemies consists of casting a substance on the fire of the targeted house, releasing a toxic smoke *xawara wakexi* that will strike one or more cohabitants.

The enemies of the group (4), whose hostility, although relatively distant, has already been experienced or is foreseen, are associated with deaths by what Albert calls “aggressive shamanism”, an activity that consists of an enemy shaman sending evil spirits *ne wari pë* to kill his victims. These spirits, although they have a human appearance, are considered by the Yanomami to be supernatural beings. They are therefore invisible to the eyes of the non-shaman. They attack the vital image *utupë* of a being with weapons and other pathogenic objects considered equally supernatural, with which they paralyse their victims before devouring them.

Finally, some deaths are attributed to very distant groups (5), enemies who kill by arrowing a person’s animal double *rishi*. The Yanomami believe that every human being has an *alter* animal that inhabits the most centrifugal limits of the social space. Their fate and the fate of their *alter* are inseparable: when the latter is shot, the human associated with it will also be wounded and eventually die.

There will be opportunity to return to these pathogenic powers later on. For now, it is important to point out that the Yanomami classification system has no intermediate zones between enemies and allies: when a group leaves a position, it necessarily falls straight into another. A group can cease to be an ally or an enemy, but it will never be treated as indifferent. One can say that this classification of intercommunal relations functions as “radar image”⁸ within *all* groups – even those that are unknown or very little known – are guaranteed to occupy a position. This position, as we have seen, expresses contextual relations of a mainly geographical order (position near/distant, demographic proportions etc.), but never reflects

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

a substantial and/or a permanent unity. It is an essentially mobile system, in which different groups may come to occupy different spaces.

The stories told to Kopenawa⁹ by his stepfather bear witness to this. Originally coming from a family that inhabited the Amazon highlands near the headwaters of the Orinoco River, the shaman's family, at the beginning of the 20th century, entertained a hostile relationship with the inhabitants of the headwaters of the Macujai River. The large number of hostile incursions led the family of the future shaman to settle in the upper Toototobi River, during which time the aggressions from one group to another ceased. It was during this interstice that Kopenawa's in-laws and grandparents became friends. However, after a period of peace in mid-century, hostilities resumed with groups from the upper Catrimani River. After another move to the lower Toototobi, several attacks began between members of his group and the inhabitants of the Parima River and the upper Demini, which were only a few dozen kilometres away from *Marakana*, the house on the lower Toototobi, where Kopenawa spent his childhood. According to Albert¹⁰, the Toototobi River groups stopped warring only in the late 1960s, as a result of the first contact with the New Tribes Mission¹¹ and, consequently, the successive epidemics they brought upon the Yanomami. It goes without saying that these first missions paved the way for the Yanomami's permanent contact with white people.

Contact with white people meant a radical change in the Yanomami's intercultural relations. The hostility that was once aimed exclusively at the few indigenous people of a relatively small portion of the Amazon territory has today acquired global proportions, reaching not only the white people who live nearby, in Brazilian territory, but inhabitants of distant continents, engaged in the same purpose of annihilation and disrespect for indigenous traditions. We take, for example, the Kopenawa's feeling of anger when he sees with his own eyes that Europeans expose without any shame, in their museums and glass cases, the spoils and mummified bodies obtained in Africa. "The white people do not have as much wisdom as they claim! They constantly tell us that it is wrong for us to arrow each other for

⁹ Albert, Bruce; Kopenawa, Davi: *The falling sky: word of a Yanomami shaman*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge/London 2013, pp. 360–370.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 557.

¹¹ New Tribes Mission is an American organisation of fundamentalist evangelicals that arrived at *Marakana* on the lower Toototobi for the first time in June 1958, together with an expedition of the *Serviço de Proteção ao Índio* (SPI, which would become what is currently FUNAI, an agency of the Brazilian federal executive branch that is intended to deal with the protection and demarcation of indigenous territory). It is estimated that Kopenawa was two years old at that time.

revenge.¹² Yet their ancestors were so bellicose they travelled great distances to plunder the land of people who had done them no harm!”¹³

The notion of enmity crossed oceans and the condition of enemy *napë thë pë* came to have as an ideal “prototypical referent”¹⁴ in ourselves, white people, no matter where we come from. But how was this possible? How and why did white people, non-indigenous populations, come to occupy this position? In order to understand this shift, it will be necessary to retrace some aspects of the Yanomami history and cosmology in order to distinguish the conditions under which an enemy effectively becomes what he is. Let us examine in more detail what Kopenawa tells us.

2. The Enmity Before Contact

According to the shaman¹⁵, the “bravery in war”, called *waithiri* by his people, does not exist by chance. It appeared in the forest, long before white people knew it, and is directly associated with the mythical character *Õeõeri*. The myth says that *Õeõeri*'s mother was killed by a shaman who sent evil spirits *në wari pë* to devour her soon after giving birth. Orphaned, *Õeõeri* was abandoned on an anthill. The stings and burns made him cry *Õe! Õe!* – the onomatopoeia that is the origin of his name – until he was transformed into an *alter*, a supernatural being who, in the Yanomami language, is designated by the expression *yai thë* (pl. *pë*). *Õeõe* then became *Õeõe + ri*, a superlative suffix that indicates membership in this class of supernatural beings. As may be supposed, the evil spirits *në wari pë* – responsible for *Õeõeri*'s mother's death – also belong to this class.

Õeõeri grew up very fast and soon became a warrior. He then went to all the surrounding villages to find the killer of his mother. He asked angrily, “who was the killer of my mother? Who devoured her?” And then a *Xamathari* – name given by the eastern Yanomami (Kopenawa's group) to the western inhabitants of the indigenous territory – claimed the deed: “It was me! It was I who killed and devoured your mother!” Furious, *Õeõeri* attacks the killer with several arrows dipped in poison. The men of the enemy group react and try to kill him, but in vain, for *Õeõeri*

¹² In Yanomami language, war activities are designated by the verb *niyayuu*, which can be translated as “war”, but has the literal meaning of “shooting each other with arrows”. See: Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

¹³ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

¹⁴ Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo: “O recado da mata”, in Kopenawa, Davi (ed.): *A queda do céu*, Companhia das Letras, São Paulo 2015, p. 12.

¹⁵ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

is a supernatural being. By killing his opponents, the character enters in what in Yanomami language is called *ōnokae*, his “state of homicide”. *Ōeōeri* continued to launch offensives. Long before the other warriors left towards new incursions, *Ōeōeri* had already advanced. He would arrow enemies without leaving his place. He would launch raids without the previous ones having ended. His qualities were truly supernatural.

When he was struck by an arrow, *Ōeōeri* retreated to a mountain and the attacks ceased for a while. Soon, however, they returned. And *Ōeōeri*, from the top of the mountain, continued killing, devouring and mocking his enemies. “Devour me! Try to devour me!” After much killing to avenge his mother’s death, *Ōeōeri* began to feel ill on account of his *ōnokae*. He had entered the *ōnokaemuu* rite, which all murderers must undergo.¹⁶ *Ōeōeri* started to vomit the blood of all the human prey he had killed and consumed. Finally, the shamanic spirits of the *Xamathari* took advantage of his weakness and came to avenge their own dead. They offered him the *yākoana* powder and made him inhale inordinate amounts of it.¹⁷ “Son-in-law! Bring your nose closer! Sniff it! This will cure your illnesses.” After much inhaling, *Ōeōeri* finally collapsed. The enemy spirits devoured him and *Ōeōeri* went to inhabit the back of the sky, from where he still descends in the form of a spirit to the shaman who knows how to call him.

The myth of *Ōeōeri* is interesting for several reasons. First, because it evokes a fundamental aspect of how the Yanomami understand warriorship: it invariably stems from a hunger for revenge. *Ōeōeri* goes in search of the person responsible for his mother’s death. It was necessary for her to die and, above all, to die by the hands of her enemies, for *Ōeōeri* to launch his campaign against them. Otherwise, his fury would be meaningless. We can also see that, at first, *Ōeōeri*’s intention is not to promote an indiscriminate killing: only after the killer has claimed his deed does the character take revenge on the enemy and his group. Revenge which, in return, is the motive for the revenge of the *Xamathari* and their own victims. *Ōeōeri* had no other destiny: although he was already ill from the unrestrained consumption of his prey, he ends up dying by the action of evil spirits who sought nothing but revenge for their own dead. From the Yanomami point of view, warriorship would be unthinkable without the reciprocity of revenge. The enemy, then, is the

¹⁶ In Yanomami language, the suffix *-muu* has the meaning of “acting as”, “under the condition of” (As in, Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 490). Therefore, *ōnokaemuu* literally means “acting in the condition of a homicide”.

¹⁷ *Yākoana* is the name given to a powder made from the resin of the *virola elongata* tree, which contains a powerful hallucinogenic alkaloid (As in Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 492). It is invariably used in Yanomami shamanic procedures.

one who, in a first moment, is defined as both ‘object’, target, and ‘subject’, actor, of the vengeful activity.

But vengeful reciprocity is inseparable from a second aspect: the consumption of the victims. In the myth of *Ōeōeri*, all victims are consumed: his mother, the people he killed and, in the end, himself. We see that the deaths of the mother and of *Ōeōeri* are directly associated with what Albert has named “aggressive shamanism”, *modus operandi* that exemplarily describes the enemies of the group (4). It was the evil spirits *ne wari pë*, coming from far at the behest of another shaman, who ended up killing mother and son. It is true that the mother’s death triggers a series of effective and reciprocal incursions between *Ōeōeri* and his enemies, in which, one might say, “warrior sorcery” – a form of violence associated with the *napë thë pë* (3) – prevails. However, especially when thinking from the point of view of *Ōeōeri*’s enemies, it is not difficult to imagine that he himself was seen as a *ne wari pë*, that is, a supernatural being sent by another shaman to eat human flesh. In a second moment, therefore, the enemy is one who is defined as both the ‘object’ and the ‘subject’ of cannibalistic reciprocity. Vengeful reciprocity and cannibalistic reciprocity constitute the two fundamental and inseparable aspects of Yanomami warriorship.

It would be necessary to add a third aspect. We saw in *Ōeōeri*’s myth that the cannibal killer, soon after his deed, enters what in Yanomami language is called *ōnokae*, a “state of homicide”. According to Albert¹⁸, this word is formed from the junction of *ōno*, which denotes the “trace” or the “mark” (visible or invisible) of an aggression, and *kae*, which means “with”, “accompanied by”. For, being in *ōnokae* means being “marked” by the death one has just committed. Moreover, a close variant of this word, *ōnokë*, alludes to everything that belonged to a dead person: everything one has touched or owned, his possessions, ornaments and even his footprints on the ground, natural or manufactured objects with which one came in contact. These are the “traces” of the dead person. Finally, the variant *ōnokë* can also designate the traces of blood that remain on the arrow after it has acquired an “impact mark”, that is, after striking the prey.

These semantic considerations on the Yanomami notion of “trace” (*ōno*) allow us to delimit more precisely the “valence” of the *ōnokae* concept. “*Ōnokae* thus denotes a state of ritual danger brought about by certain symbolic retroactive effects on the killer, associated with the contact with the blood of the victims and with the persistence of the memory of that spilled blood”.¹⁹ For the ‘normal’

¹⁸ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

Yanomami, non-supernatural beings, direct contact with the blood of victims consists in a deadly danger: it would lead to an incurable skin disease that would begin by covering the legs and would end up contaminating the entire body. Moreover, a terrible smell is attributed to the spilling of blood: “it [the blood] gives off an acidic smell... a disgusting and intense smell! One who has killed loses all his perceptions of taste”. It is not by chance that, to avenge aggressions, the Yanomami say it is necessary to “take back the value of one of our relatives’ blood”.²⁰

Thus, every vengeful/cannibalistic aggression leads the killer to experience a “state of homicide” *ōnokae*. And this state is nothing more than the killer’s exposure to a symbolic danger linked to the oozing of his victim’s blood. “Blood”, Albert states, “constitutes for the Yanomami the fundamental biological substance of human *animatio*, insofar as this is associated with the vital image *utupë* which, in turn, constitutes the metaphysical essence”.²¹ The presence or absence of blood is the main index to measure the quantity of life among the Yanomami: female sterility (menopause), old age, or even youth are considered periods when there is less life, when the bodies – and altogether, the vital image *utupë* – are drier, lacking the primordial element of both biological and metaphysical life. The presence of blood, by contrast, is indicative of fertility, virility etc., where there is a greater concentration of life. But, precisely for this reason, these are the periods when the organism, that is, the sum of the vital image *utupë* within the body, is considered to be more susceptible to disease, death and, especially, putrefaction.

If metaphysical death happens by the action of supernatural pathogenic powers – evil offensives led by spirits *ne wari pë*, symbolic predation of the animal double *rishi* –, putrefaction is the continuation of this death by biological means: it is the corruption of the carnal envelope, which consistency is entirely due to the presence of blood. The decomposition of the dead enemy’s body mixes up with the symbolic consumption of the blood that once irrigated it:

These results allow us to infer that the “homicidal state” (*ōnokae*) and the symbolic danger that instates it rest on a conception of homicide (effective or invisible) as cannibal hematophagy (devouring the vital image/blood) and, more precisely, as incorporation of the hematogenic process of corruption of the victim’s corpse. First of all, the cannibal aggression exposes the killer to the physio-symbolic danger that represents the incorporation of an exogenous vital fluid placed as a factor of an increased biological mutability.²²

²⁰ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

²¹ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 351.

By consuming his victim's blood, the killer himself becomes an *alter*. After the raid's tension, the killer finds himself overcome by the smell of his victim's spilled blood. This olfactory impregnation constitutes the symbolic state that opens the observance of the *ōnokaemuu* rite. He returns to his group with a "mark" of blood, and is thus physically and symbolically changed. He is considered a supernatural being that comes from killing (*ōnokaerima thë*), as opposed to ordinary people: the "innocent" (*mohoti thë pë*) or those who are "dry" (*weherima thë pë*). The body and spirit of the killer become inhabited by the image of various beings that eat putrefying flesh – such as the vulture, the jaguar, and the *herama* hawk, as well as flies and worms, and even the *xaki na*, *ōi na*, and *wakopo* bees²³ –, who set out to symbolically devour the decomposing corpse of the enemy. When the entities that inhabit it are satiated, this reflects in the physiology of the killer: his mouth begins to exhale the fetid smell of blood and his forehead begins to sprout fat – hence his opposition to "dry" people – consumed from the enemy's body. The duration of the *ōnokaemuu* rite is parallel to the duration of the decomposition process of the victim's corpse.

During this entire period, while the cannibal spirits inhabiting the killer devour his prey, he must submit to a strict reclusion. According to Albert, the killer must first be completely isolated in his hammock. "Immobile, with arms folded, he refrains from uttering the slightest word and remains lying down by a permanently burning fire."²⁴ Contact with other people should be kept to a minimum, at the risk of provoking a skin disease on them. If he sits directly on the ground, the skin of his buttocks should wrinkle and become like parchment; if he walks through the forest, the spider webs touching his face may cause him to lose his sight. The fat that sprouts through his forehead, an effect of consuming the enemy's fat, must be prevented from reaching his eyes, in which case they would be immediately burned.

The *ōnokaemuu* rite also imposes several dietary restrictions. In general, the killer should eat as little as possible. He is allowed to eat only a few pieces of boiled banana, or small portions of some kinds of fish cooked in leaves. Fatty foods grilled directly over the fire are strictly forbidden. In addition, eating must be followed by a meticulous ritual: washing the forehead and hands, rinsing the mouth cavity and using a small wooden stick to bring the food into the mouth. Once nibbled, whatever food left must be thrown directly at the fire. The killer does not eat (or eats very little) because his body is already saturated with the symbolic digestion of the enemy. All these restrictions are intended to mitigate the biological danger

²³ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

²⁴ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

to which he submits himself when consuming the victim's blood. And, more profoundly, as Albert states, they are meant to mark or highlight a "culturally founding form of correlation and symbolic opposition between cannibalism and feeding".²⁵

Among the Yanomami, the act of killing triggers a "deculturalisation" of the killer: he remains isolated, without saying a word, turned into an *alter* – a human flesh eater. By symbolically digesting the body of his enemy and incorporating his blood, a kind of cooking ritual is established in him that, inversely to domestic cooking, "applies a 'naturalising' process of transformation on the predator rather than a 'culturalising' process on the food".²⁶ For any imputed killing, the "deculturalisation" of the predator prevails *over* the "culturalisation" of the prey, even if that prey is an animal. Just like all human beings, animals also possess a vital image *utupë* associated with their blood. This image is endowed with an aggressive potential that can be turned against the predator, from which it follows that a hunted animal cannot be eaten by the one who hunts it and must be extremely well cooked ("culturalised") before being consumed. Ingesting its blood, as with human prey, would be an aggression to its vital image *utupë*, which would provoke vomiting – and even death, in severe cases – in the predator.

The "naturalising" – or "deculturalising" – transformation of the killer means that to the extent that his stomach is filled with the victim's blood, he leaves what would be the normal universe of culture, becoming a human-eating spirit: a cannibal. But to this transformation another one is added, which functions, one would say, as the final turn in his "deculturalisation" screw: if we consider cannibalism as an intra-specific form of consumption, then it means that the killer's own flesh and vital image are now able to become a prey, that is, to be consumed by the same *alter* which he himself became. The killer cannot "deculturalise" the victim – which happens through the consumption of his blood and raw/putrefying flesh – without running the risk of going through the same processes himself, becoming at the same time a human-eating spirit and a prey to be devoured by them. Both the paths of killer and victim intersect: the process experienced by the former may end up leading him to the state of the latter. There is, then, in the Yanomami symbolic cannibalism, a kind of progression that makes the enemy leave extreme alterity and become part of a substantial identity: from the enemy's point of view, the killer and the human-eating spirits *ne wari pë* are the same thing; in return, human-eating spirits see the killer and the victim in the same way; finally, the way

²⁵ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

the killer sees himself after the deed is no different from the way he first saw his enemy, that is, as prey to be devoured.

Now, if we can point out the existence of a nodal point of identification between killer and victim, this does not happen when we think about feeding and cannibalism. In almost homeopathic doses, the killer starts eating again precisely to stop being a cannibal. He gets into a process of “re-culturalisation”, of “re-humanisation” that consists of eschewing the cannibal that inhabits him through, among other things, the controlled ingestion of neutral foods that in no way resemble – and even oppose – the symbolic consumption of the victim’s blood and putrefying flesh. By any means, we are led to think that the cannibals are always the *others*. The killer becomes an *alter* and suffers deadly consequences due to the fact that he himself becomes able to be cannibalised by these others he is transformed into:

The logic of this symbolic transformation [between cannibalism and feeding] sheds a particularly interesting light on the Yanomami’s conception of their cannibalism. In fact, to systematically oppose the modes of cannibalism to those of the feeding is equivalent to associate to the former, by demarcating them, the obscure figure of the savage cannibalism of those “others” – the supernatural people hungry for human flesh – whose radical alterity excludes them even from the category of enemies (...). The Yanomami thus simply understand, by their figurative cannibalism, to meticulously distinguish themselves from cannibals.²⁷

The closing of the *ōnokaemuu* rite is the final proof of this distinction and repeats what happens to the mythical character *Ōeōeri*: after falling ill, the killer vomits the consumed flesh and blood, at the risk of seeing his own stomach inflate and cause pain that would lead to his death. The regurgitations are induced by the ingestion of emetic foods: small fish or crabs, but especially honeycombs taken from the top of the *buuashi na* bee’s nest, known for their acidity and extreme repugnance.²⁸ After much vomiting, for days or even weeks, the killer finishes the process by cleaning his forehead and bathing. He can then paint himself with the red paint of *urucum*. The use of the paint thus constitutes, along with the consumption of neutral food, another “re-culturalising” process: the face full of paint is opposed to the face full of fat. The rite will be definitively concluded after the killer rolls up and hangs the hammock in which he had been lying on a high branch, for it is assumed that the killer should age at the same rate of growth as the tree to which

²⁷ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

his hammock is now tied²⁹, which would serve, finally, to reaffirm his “normal”, rehumanised biological periodicity.

But, although “normal” conditions are re-established, the killer knows that, sooner or later, the death inflicted on the enemy will lead to his own death. Or, if not, to one of his relatives. Whether through the supernatural action of evil spirits or through effective incursion, killing inevitably means being killed and consumed. Revenge and cannibalism elevated to the position of universal law: an idea that cannot be considered orthodoxly Kantian. On the other hand, the Yanomami “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals” prescribes something that we, white people, are still a long way from understanding; or, perhaps, from truly taking seriously: it prescribes that absolutely no life can be taken in vain or in an indiscriminate way, without suffering an equally deadly consequence. This is what, from the Yanomami point of view, distinguishes true humans from true cannibals.

3. The Enmity After Contact

In a first moment, contact with white people occurred without any readjustment having to be made in the structure of the Yanomami intercultural classification system. According to Albert, the period from approximately 1730 to 1930 was marked by predominantly indirect contact between white people and the Yanomami.³⁰ During this period, white people served mainly as vectors for the acquisition of new metal tools and cultivation goods, something that probably favoured their demographic growth. Although the Yanomami were occasionally affected by epidemics of white origin, the difficulties imposed by the terrain and the periodic migrations of the Yanomami contributed to limit the scope of the contagions.

Also, according to Albert, even sporadic epidemics of white origin were attributed to “warrior sorcery” of exclusively indigenous origin, which is, in turn, typically associated with the action of the *napë thë pë* (3). What we have here, therefore, is “a simple extension of the ‘warrior sorcery’ theory to account for the new fact represented by the spread of the first epidemics by indirect contamination”.³¹ That is, because diseases of white origin reached the Yanomami indirectly, they ended up being attributed to the actions of neighbouring indigenous ethnic groups and not to the white people themselves. Not even the metal objects acquired in the exchange circuits were associated with the presence of white

²⁹ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

³⁰ Albert: “La fumée du métal...”, *art. cit.*, p. 94.

³¹ *Ibid.*

people, since they were part of the material universe known and dominated by the Yanomami since “the beginning of times”: although rare and of poor quality, metal was used by *Omama*, the demiurge of Yanomami culture, to help him work his fields and crops.³²

Arriving, therefore, through indirect sources, the epidemics and the metal objects were incorporated by the Yanomami without causing any change in their classificatory system. In concrete terms, nothing forced, yet, a revision of the “theories” used to explain death and diseases, and the existence of other (indigenous) humans and certain work tools. As Albert states, at that time, “the reflection concerns rather the origin and the existence of the surrounding ethnic groups whose difference is sanctioned by a mythological discourse centred on the degenerative character of the ethnic alterity”.³³ The other indigenous groups, as opposed to the true Yanomami (*yanomae thë pë* = “true humans”) were considered part of an inferior or degraded humanity (*yanomae thë napë* = “outsider humans”), whose origin goes back to the mythical character *Remori*, a drone spirit, demiurge of the outside languages that resemble, according to Kopenawa, the indistinct and inarticulate buzzing of bees. In the Yanomami’s relationship with other indigenous people, the human character of their enemies is considered under suspicion, as “they are not as human as we are”. Or, which would be the same, that “we are more human than they are”.

This begins to change in the first decades of the 20th century, with the arrival of the first groups of the SPI and the CBDL (Comissão Brasileira Demarcadora de Limites).³⁴ In the 1940s, following the explorations led by Marechal Rondon, several “pacification” posts were built in the vicinities of indigenous territories, from the Aripuanã river (on the border of the State of Mato Grosso and the State of Amazonas) to the upper Demini, where Kopenawa’s ancestors lived. According to the reports of the shaman’s stepfather³⁵ and to the reports of Carlos Eugênio Chauvin³⁶, chief inspector of the SPI expeditions in Amazonas at the time, the first contacts of the white people with the Yanomami imposed enormous difficulties.

The post of Ajuricaba, built in upper Demini, was opened under the pressure of a “serious event” that occurred between indigenous people and a small group of the CBDL.³⁷ According to the inspector, Commander Braz de Aguiar, head of the

³² Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

³³ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

³⁴ A group of agencies created in the early 1920s, whose function is to demarcate the Brazilian territorial limits. It is currently attached to the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³⁵ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

³⁶ Chauvin, Carlos: *Relatório de inspeção do Amazônia e do Acre*, 1941. Digital copy provided on request by Museu do Índio, Rio de Janeiro, SPI.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

CBDL party, refrained from giving SPI any further information about this “serious event”. On the 14th of January 1941, the Commander left hastily towards the site of the incident in a speedboat provided by the Amazonas Interventory, on the same date that the SPI, upon learning about the Commander’s hasty departure, sent its own expedition to the site. On the SPI’s party, a speedboat, a barge and a canoe left from Manaus, which, among a majority of unprepared workers recruited at the last minute, transported the SPI’s assistant, Sebastião Moacyr de Xerez.

After almost two weeks sailing in adverse conditions and having lost most of the vessels, the SPI entourage finally reached Commander Braz de Aguiar’s group. Xerez’s first impressions indicate that the “serious event” that first motivated the expedition was not as serious as imagined. This is what Inspector Chauvin writes based on his assistant’s account: “from the eight arrows received, only one seemed to be in a centre of vital importance. Even the one in the left flank had not interested the kidneys. The most serious was the one lodged near the copulation area.”³⁸ It was not possible to obtain any precise information about the group that attacked the CBDL agent. However, from some objects found in the recently abandoned village where the SPI group had spent one of the previous nights, the doctor accompanying SPI party was able to reach the following conclusion: “from the size of the bow, it can be concluded that these indigenous are not tall, but of average height; they do not have the warrior spirit, as they apply indistinctly the plumage of birds without selecting the bellicose species”.³⁹

As we are used to saying in our scientific circles, the doctor’s conclusions were partially correct. In fact, the Yanomami are of average height and have arms strong enough to stretch bows, climb trees, build their homes etc. On the other hand, however, as we have seen, the Yanomami have a warrior spirit since the beginning of time, which also functions as an imperative of their current culture. In any case, once the misadventures were over and the arrowed patient from the CBDL was treated, assistant Xerez finally gained access to the details of the attack that had occurred:

their residences are located far from the shore. They were hiking in search of turtle eggs when they came upon their camp, with those monsters, armed musketeers. They threw sticks that pushed them to move. Such monsters were agitated. They could do them harm. Were they *cannibals*? Such would be the question posed by childish imaginations that never saw such things in those parts.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Chauvin: *Relatório de inspetoria...*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

The position in which assistant Xerez places his own expedition companions is curious: placing himself in the point of view of the natives, he believes that the image they made of the white people, especially of those who carried weapons, referred to monstrous types, in short, to *cannibals*. Refusing the thesis that this was the result of mere “childish imaginations”, Xerez’s prognosis would turn out to be surprisingly correct. The Yanomami’s aggressive response when they encountered the white men’s camp contrasts radically with the climate established when the white men surprised the Yanomami in their own houses: “most of them, frightened, immediately fled to the fields or to the forest, and only a few men dared to face the invaders, making agitated speeches, overexcited with fear, before letting themselves be grabbed, trembling, by their ‘peacemakers’”.⁴¹

The memories Kopenawa shares with Albert bear witness to this, even though the shaman’s first contact with white people took place more than a decade and a half after the incident in Ajuricaba:

Today, our children no longer fear white people. But in the past, they really scared me a lot! They truly seemed to be others. I watched them from afar and told myself that they must be *ně wāri* evil beings! The mere sight of them horrified me. They were ugly and hairy. Some were alarmingly white. I wondered what their shoes, their watches and their glasses could possibly be. I listened hard to try and understand their words, but it was useless. They sounded like inarticulate sounds! They also feverishly handled all sorts of objects, which were as strange and frightening in appearance as they themselves. Even long after this first visit, I ran off crying whenever one of these white people approached me. Truly, they terrorised me! I feared the light that emanated from their flashlights. I was even more afraid of the rumble of their motors, the voices of their radios, as well as the explosions of their guns. The smell of gas disgusted me. The smoke from their cigarettes made me fear I would get sick. *I really thought they must be evil beings starved for human flesh!*⁴²

Assistant Xerez’s intuition was right: the white people were indeed seen as cannibal spirits, non-human entities, or rather entities whose human character is at least under suspicion. Not because they were animals, but because they were perhaps superhuman spirits.⁴³ Their strange features, their repulsive hairiness and, espe-

⁴¹ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁴² Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁴³ Compare this passage to what is probably the best-known passage in the entire work of Lévi-Strauss: “[In Porto Rico, so Oviedo tells us], the Indians used to kill off any captured Europeans by drowning. Then they would mount guard for weeks around the dead men to see whether or not they were subject to putrefaction (...); and whereas the white men took the Indians for animals, the Indians

cially, their objects, led them to be recognized as human-eating spirits. As epidemics broke out systematically after the arrival of new shipments, the Yanomami understood that these objects must contain the same pathogenic power as the supernatural objects used by the *ne wari pë*. Unlike before, when death and illness, even of white origin, were attributed to the actions of neighbouring ethnic groups, the white people and their objects are now directly responsible for death and disease in Yanomami society. The thesis on warrior sorcery and cannibal consumption had to be revised and adapted to the new context of interaction, starting with the myth of origin of the outsiders.

The first version of the myth tells that the Yanomami ancestors inhabited *Hayowari*, a mountain situated between the headwaters of the Parima River and the upper Orinoco. On the last day of a funeral celebration *reahu*, guests and hosts began to inhale large quantities of *yäkoana* and began a *yäimuu* dialogue, intended for the negotiation of goods and the resolution of matrimonial disagreements. During the dialogue, the men turned out to be too exalted and began to assault each other. A group of guests was formed to attack a host. Seeing the situation from the other side of the house, a woman shouted to her son-in-law, “come help, your brother-in-law is in trouble!” The boy, who was cooped up with his wife – she had just had her first period – ran to help him. As soon as he stepped outside, breaking the rite of reclusion⁴⁴, a river erupted from deep within the earth, causing a great flood and taking everyone with it. Nothing remained of the destruction except a blood red foam that flowed toward the sunset and which *Omama* reshaped to give rise to the indigenous outsiders. *Remori*, the drone spirit that lived always by *Omama*’s side, gave them the tangled tongue.⁴⁵

The second version of the myth, created to explain the origin of white people, is virtually identical. It differs only in secondary aspects: in this version, the torrent does not flow only toward the place where the other indigenous people now live, but reached the far-off lands of the white people. The white people, therefore, came to be created by *Omama* later, when the waters reached the land of their ancestors. Moreover, having travelled a long way, the blood that tinged the foam dissipated, giving rise to white-skinned human beings. More than a mythical transformation, what we have here is the raising of a series of hypotheses, of “exploratory variants

were content to suspect the white men were gods”. In: Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *Tristes tropiques*, Criterion Books, New York 1961, p. 80.

⁴⁴ As we can see, contact with blood from menstruation should be avoided as much as blood from homicide, as Albert discusses in Chapter XIII of the following work. Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–167.

that attempt to reconcile the recognition of a common humanity and the recognition of radical cultural and physical differences”.⁴⁶ There was an effort on the Yanomami side to “de-spiritualise” white people, which does not mean, as in white culture, relegating them to the status of an animal. On the contrary: this would be the Yanomami way of trying to make white people *human*, removing them from its position among the class of supernatural beings.

As we have seen, at first the Yanomami doubted that the white people were human: their appearance and the epidemics resulting from contact with their objects gave the impression that they were cannibal spirits. Nevertheless, the cosmological hypothesis created to explain the presence of these beings was nothing more – nor could it have been – than the application of the same hypothesis that the Yanomami use in order to distinguish themselves from the others indigenous humans: they must be as human as our enemies, that is, “metamorphosed” or degraded humans just as were the indigenous carried away by the flood. The process of humanising white people had to lead to a rearrangement of interethnic classifications: “the intruders were called *napë kraïwa*⁴⁷ *pë*, ‘white outsiders,’ as opposed to *yanomae thë pë napë*, ‘human (indigenous) outsiders’”.⁴⁸

However, this new division could not be carried through. Due to the successive epidemics brought by the white people, the neighbouring ethnic groups disappeared at a vertiginous speed. The almost 2,500 medical attendances provided in the region between 1971 and 1974 jumped to more than 12,000 between 1974 and 1977.⁴⁹ With the accelerated disappearance of their former enemies, the Yanomami no longer had anyone to whom to direct their enmity. The gap left by this process coupled with the lack of cogent explanations of this new class of enemies – the expression *napë kraïwa pë* is used very few times by Kopenawa – indicates that the division between “white outsiders” and “indigenous outsiders” did not go forward. On the contrary: the myth of origin of the outsiders progressively became the myth of origin of white people, while the category *napë thë pë*, once used to classify other Amerindians, came to designate exclusively non-indigenous populations.

⁴⁶ Albert: “La fumée du métal...”, *art. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴⁷ *Kraïwa* was probably borrowed from *karai’wa*, an Old Tupi word used to designate white people (Kopenawa; Albert: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 513). It is at the origin of the term *caraiaba*, widely spread in Brazilian popular culture. (In: Viveiros de Castro: *A inconstância da alma selvagem*, Cosac Naify, São Paulo 2013, p. 201). It shows that the word *karaïba*, in the Tupinambá culture, designates demiurges, cultural heroes and high shamanic entities. Their association with the white men is due to the fact that the first missionaries were presented to the Tupinambá as very powerful beings, holders of the science that would lead them to eternal life.

⁴⁸ Albert: *Temps du sang...*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

In the late 1970s, with ongoing contact and the rampant spread of new epidemics, the Yanomami classification system undergoes a new transformation. White people and their objects, the cause of disease and death, were once again associated with non-human beings that eat human flesh. Attempts at humanisation had failed. This time, however, white people itself were displaced one degree down on the scale of symbolic identification: they are considered the doubles of a new class of spirits, the *napënapëri*, who become part of Yanomami mythology as ancestors of the white people. Created by *Remori*, the *napënapëri* roam the land of the white men just as the *ne wari pë* roam the land of the Yanomami. They always accompany the white people when they travel in their vehicles and can reach the most remote parts of the forest. Simultaneously with the effective annihilation of the neighbouring ethnic groups, the *napënapëri* were included in the list of supernatural beings that could be evoked in shamanic procedures:

We have not called down the spirits of these ancient outsiders *Watata si* in a long time.⁵⁰ Instead we now call the *napënapëri* spirits of the city white people's ancestors. We know them well and we often call them and make their images dance. They own airplanes and they are fierce warriors. They look like white people, but compared to them they are very beautiful. They are not human beings. These *napënapëri* spirits are very tall. They are also very different from the spirits of the forest and of the animal ancestors. They are wrapped in uniforms, like very long white shirts. Their eyes are hidden by shining metal skins. These are eyeglass-like mirrors that allow them to see the evil beings coming from a great distance. Their heads are also covered with burning iron hats that scare away the epidemic fumes. They have beards as bushy as saki tails and black hair like the hair of *Omama*, who sends them to us.⁵¹

Although one can point out differences between the *napënapëri* and the forest spirits – for example, the former are taller than the latter –, it is no less true that they possess several characteristics in common with other shamanic entities, such as the *ne wari pë*: they have human features and appear in the form of brilliant and beautiful images; they carry their weapons and supernatural objects with which they battle against other supernatural beings; they also possess the science of metal: they are the ones who have taught today's white people how to make their airplanes, tape recorders etc. And, in what is perhaps their main characteristic in

⁵⁰ *Watata si*: extinct indigenous group with which the early Yanomami were in contact until the first decades of the 20th century in the region of the upper Rio Parima and from whom they obtained metal tools. In: Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 593.

⁵¹ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.* p. 161.

common with other spirits, they constantly oscillate between the roles of prey and predator. They are predators because they devour the image of several diseases. But the *napënapëri* cannot be considered less prey than predator, when we imagine them, for example, having to face the image of a disease or a kind of death that even white people are unaware of. Be that as it may, even Kopenawa recognises that the spirits of white people need to be evoked to combat certain diseases: “other *xapiri* spirits prove to be weak and clumsy when faced with its power. They no longer know how to heal sick people. It is so.”⁵²

By this, we do not mean at all that Kopenawa would be waiting for some white saviour spirit that could put an end to the increasingly accelerated degradation of the living conditions of the Yanomami, since shamanic procedures involve everyone, white and non-white spirits. On the other hand, the successive transformations in the classification system, the mythical adaptations, the incorporation of white entities in shamanic procedures: all this shows that, in one way or another, the Yanomami culture has never ceased to absorb what comes from the culture of others, from the outside. There is a kind of terrain that is prepared to receive the outsider, as if its arrival had always been expected. The idea of “outsider” seems to have a conceptual value among the Yanomami, insofar its presence expresses a necessary modification in their thought and, consequently, in their ways of acting.

4. The Outsider as a concept

The “Outsider” seems to be for the Yanomami what the “Other” is to Michel Tournier’s Robinson: a powerful *factor of distraction*. “Not only because it constantly breaks into our activities and interrupts our train of thoughts, but because the mere possibility of their doing so illuminates a world of matters situated at the edge of our consciousness but capable any moment of becoming its centre.”⁵³ This is an exemplary description of what happens in the Yanomami universe. From different modalities of contact, this figure of the “Other”, the “Outsider”, incarnated both in white and other indigenous people, has always forced Yanomami thinking beyond its stable ground, leading to a series of classificatory, political and mythological rearrangements. And through these rearrangements, “objects” that originally stood at the margins of thought can, at any given moment, come to occupy the centre of its attention.

⁵² Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁵³ Tournier, Michel: *Friday or the other island*, Collins/St. James Place, London 1969, p. 33.

Thinking along with Deleuze, the part of the “objects” that the Yanomami *do not see* – a secret warrior incursion, a pathogenic power of a mysterious smoke or the sudden appearance of evil spirits – corresponds to the point where all the efforts of their sight converge. But this sight, “this knowledge or sentiment of the marginal existence”⁵⁴ of these “objects” would not be possible without the intermediation of the Other. For the invisible “objects”, those that are therefore behind the Yanomami, on their backs, only connect and come to form a world because they are perceived by the Other. It is only through the Other’s vision in front of us, through the way his sight reacts to the objects that are behind our backs, therefore out of the reach of our sight, that we can have an idea of the existence of these “objects” that, after all, are the ones that matter the most.

In Deleuzian terms, the Other is the one who gives *depth* to these “objects”. “From my point of view, the Other introduces the sign of the unseen in what I do see, making me grasp what I do not perceive as perceptible for an Other.”⁵⁵ In short, the Other is not simply the perceived: he is the condition of all perception. It is he who secures the margins and transitions in the world, as can be seen so clearly in the Yanomami’s stubborn need to attribute a meaning to everything that comes from the outside. “I’m only concerned with what is not mine.” The “law of Man, law of the cannibal” affirmed by Oswald de Andrade in the *Cannibalist Manifesto*⁵⁶, and often evoked to explain the “structure-Other” and its implications with Amerindian perspectivism⁵⁷, can now be rewritten as if in a third person infinitive: they are only concerned with what is not theirs, a concern that, as we have seen, is awaiting and preceding us.

It is precisely this “indispensability of others” that, according to Kopenawa, white people fail to assimilate. From the shaman point of view, enmity toward other indigenous groups differs from enmity toward white people in this fundamental aspect: white people are indeed the others, but they are the others *without others*. They deny the structure from which the “objects” behind themselves could be seen. “Raw and obscure world” [*Monde cru et noir*], as is indeed the favourite flesh of cannibals, “without potentialities or virtualities: the category of the possible has collapsed”.⁵⁸ In place of the depth that the perception of the Other establishes, what remains is only a rebellious and devouring groundless abyss, “where the

⁵⁴ Deleuze, Gilles: *The logic of sense*, The Athlone Press, London 1993, p. 301.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

⁵⁶ Andrade, Oswald de: “Manifesto antropofágico”, in *A utopia antropofágica*, Globo, São Paulo 1990, pp. 47–52.

⁵⁷ Viveiros de Castro: *Métaphysiques cannibales*, PUF, Paris 2009.

⁵⁸ Deleuze: *The logic of sense*, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

known and the unknown, the perceived and unperceived confront one another absolutely in a combat without nuances”.⁵⁹ The absence of Other is a plunge into the universe of indifference.

Is not this exactly what Kopenawa recriminates in the way white people fight their wars? “We never killed each other without restraint the way they did. We do not have bombs that burn houses and all their inhabitants. When in old times our warriors wanted to arrow their enemies, it was a *truly different thing*.”⁶⁰ Clearly, what concerns Kopenawa is not an abstract idea of violence, which is why violence, within Yanomami thought, cannot be considered a necessarily ‘bad’ thing. It would be wrong to assume that the Yanomami are a ‘pacifist’ people, bearers of a truth that, if followed, could miraculously put an end to all the wars of our time. However, it would be equally mistaken to assume that the Yanomami are simply a ‘ferocious’ or ‘savage’ people, insofar as their very conception of violence, as can be so well seen in the variations of the notion of “enemy”, is sufficiently complex that one can differentiate between at least two forms of violence: the one practised by indigenous people and the one practised by white people.

What seems more instigating, however, is that this difference can only be given by the very different/indifferent character on the way the violence is practised: in the first case, regarding indigenous people, one has a differentiated type of violence, fully aware of the deadly consequences it brings, leading to a very painful series of “re-humanising” rituals; in the second, regarding white people, one has an undifferentiated type of violence, a type of violence that is content to slaughter humans as if they were animals, “game in the forest”, prefiguring a cycle in which “dehumanisation” is what always returns.

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⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Albert; Kopenawa: *The falling sky...*, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

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