

Eraldo Medeiros Costa Neto

Elis Rejane Santana da Silva

(Organizadores)

Ecologia Espiritual:

Integrando Natureza,
Humanidades e Espiritualidades

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Dedicado a todos e todas que almejam construir uma Nova Terra, reconhecidamente majestosa, irmanados na convivência harmoniosa com os seres que vivem em suas diferentes dimensões.

PREFÁCIO

O presente livro é uma ação e organização de membros do grupo de pesquisa “Ecologia Espiritual: integrando Natureza, Humanidades e Espiritualidades”, da Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana, cadastrado no Diretório dos Grupos de Pesquisa no Brasil (DGP), ligado ao Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq). O livro tem por organizadores os professores Dr. Eraldo Medeiros Costa Neto (UEFS) e Dra. Elis Rejane Santana da Silva (UNEB, *Campus 3*), com a colaboração de diversos pesquisadores, de diferentes instituições de ensino superior, os quais vêm demonstrando interesse e ações no campo interdisciplinar da ciência, com foco na busca e compreensão da relação do universo espiritual com o universo natural, dentro da temática da Ecologia Espiritual. Aproveitamos esse momento para parabenizar tanto os organizadores quanto os demais autores dessa obra literária tão importante no atual momento que vivemos na ciência e academia, parabenizar pela determinação e ousadia em quebrar os paradigmas cartesianos e fechados da ciência tradicional, e por evidenciar que a ciência é um campo aberto e que nela podemos ter diferentes diálogos, diferentes olhares, diferentes percepções e diferentes atores sociais envolvidos.

O livro está organizado em quatro partes: 1) Ecologia, Espiritualidades e Conservação da Natureza; 2) Ecologia Espiritual na vertente de uma Ciência Ecocentrada; 3) Conexões com os Seres Elementais; e 4) Ecologia Espiritual e Saúde Integral. Os capítulos distribuídos nessas quatro partes apresentam diferentes olhares no contexto da Ecologia Espiritual, com reflexões sobre possíveis caminhos a serem trilhados pelo grupo de pesquisa, formado junto ao CNPq em março de 2021. Os autores destacam, entre outras coisas: a tentativa de extermínio da percepção da Terra como a Grande Mãe, como vetor, embora não isolado, da separação ser humano-Natureza; correntes de pensamento integrativo onde o ser humano não está apartado da Natureza, mas dela é elemento; e desafios e possíveis caminhos para que a Ecologia Espiritual auxilie na reunificação ou reconexão do ser humano com a Natureza.

Sobre a Ecologia Espiritual, podemos encontrar afirmações e explicações interessantes, como as que seguem, extraídas do livro “Ecologia Espiritual: o choro da Terra” (The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), editado por Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, no qual temos textos de escritores, filósofos e mestres espirituais:

“Se é para nós restaurarmos o equilíbrio em nosso planeta, nós precisamos ir além da superfície para curar a separação entre espírito e matéria e assim contribuir em trazer o sagrado de volta à vida.”

“A Ecologia Espiritual é uma resposta espiritual à presente crise ecológica. Este campo em desenvolvimento une ecologia com a consciência do sagrado existente na criação, firmando uma nova forma de se relacionar no mundo”.

"A Ecologia Espiritual propõe que as realidades físicas da crise ecológica que vivenciamos – desde os fenômenos de alteração climática ao consumismo exacerbado e poluição das águas, ar e solo, refletem uma realidade mais profunda, a da crise espiritual".

Diante da importância dessa área da ciência e de toda a contribuição que a Ecologia Espiritual pode trazer para auxiliar no entendimento e busca por soluções das crises ambientais que o mundo vem passando, inclusive com impactos na vida emocional, pessoal, social, familiar e espiritual de cada pessoa, que referendamos o presente livro, o qual chega em hora muito oportuna para fazer eco e propagar essa realidade, que tem sido negligenciada por muitos. Precisamos nos reconectar com a natureza e salvá-la enquanto temos tempo. Essa reconexão também passa pelo respeito e proteção dos povos indígenas e populações tradicionais, os quais são os guardiões da natureza e vêm passando por diversos e complexos momentos de destruição de suas culturas e formas de viver, assim como suas conexões com a natureza.

Outro ponto a ser destacado no presente livro é seu caráter internacional, pois temos capítulos de pesquisadores de países como Argentina, Canadá, Colômbia, Equador e Estados Unidos, evidenciando que a temática da Ecologia Espiritual está sendo observada, discutida e desenvolvida em várias partes do mundo. Nesse contexto, o Brasil tem como colaborar fortemente nesse universo, em virtude da gigantesca diversidade biológica e cultural que temos em nosso país, em suas diversas regiões, com uma ampla heterogeneidade cultural, étnica, social e econômica, aliadas e relacionadas aos diferentes biomas como a Amazônia, Caatinga, Cerrado, entre outros, e em cada um deles, a presença marcante da espiritualidade com seus mitos e lendas, dos quais, muitos são relacionados com a proteção dos ecossistemas e sua biodiversidade.

Esse livro também contribuirá com a formação acadêmica de alunos, professores e pesquisadores que se interessem pela área da Ecologia Espiritual, fortalecendo assim o contexto da mesma como uma ciência séria, e que vem para somar com resultados robustos e necessários para enfrentar os problemas atuais da sociedade.

Termino deixando meus imensos parabéns aos organizadores e autores do livro "Ecologia Espiritual: integrando Natureza, Humanidades e Espiritualidades", e desejo que o mesmo possa promover uma reconexão espiritual e natural de cada pessoa, cada leitor que tiver contato com o mesmo.

Reinaldo Farias Paiva de Lucena
Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul
Campo Grande, 05 de novembro de 2021

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ABSTRACT: Spiritual ecology argues that reconnecting with nature is necessary to reduce, if not completely resolve, the environmental crisis from the local to the global levels. Furthermore, the elemental, pivotal, and vital principles of Indigenous Animism may well be one of the most appropriate paths for this revolution, the Great Turning. Learning from and adapting these principles will not be identical to any particular variant of Indigenous Animism in specific details, but can usefully pursue generic Animism as a heuristic model for developing more sustainable, greener, and just lifestyles and societies. Accordingly, this chapter successively surveys the meaning and significance of spirit and its scientific study, spiritual ecology, Animism in general, Indigenous Animism in particular, and the ethnographic case of the Amazonian Yanomami variant. Numerous references to the literature and websites are provided to assist readers in exploring further many of the points raised.

KEYWORDS: Spirit. Spiritual ecology. Animism. Indigenes. Yanomami.

ECOLOGIA ESPIRITUAL: RECONECTANDO-SE COM A NATUREZA

RESUMO: A Ecologia Espiritual argumenta que reconectar-se com a natureza é necessário para reduzir, se não resolver completamente, a crise ambiental do nível local ao global. Além disso, os princípios elementares, centrais e vitais do Animismo Indígena podem muito bem ser um dos caminhos mais apropriados para esta revolução, que é a Grande Virada. Aprender e adaptar esses princípios não será idêntico a qualquer variante particular do Animismo Indígena em seus pormenores, mas pode buscar o Animismo genérico como um modelo heurístico para desenvolver estilos de vida e sociedades mais sustentáveis, mais verdes e justas. Conseqüentemente, este capítulo examina sucessivamente o significado e a importância do espírito e seu estudo científico, a Ecologia Espiritual, o animismo em geral, o animismo indígena em particular e o caso etnográfico da variante amazônica Yanomami. Numerosas referências à literatura e sites são fornecidas para ajudar os leitores a explorar ainda mais muitos dos pontos levantados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Espírito. Ecologia Espiritual. Animismo. Indígenas. Yanomami.

"We can find, in the love that grounds us in the living Earth, clarity, courage and self-respect to free ourselves from bondage to a sick and death-

SPIRITUALITY

In Latin, among other things, "spiritus" refers to breath. The wind is not visible, yet its effects may be, such as the movement of leaves and branches in a tree. Likewise, while a scientist may not see a spiritual being or force, individuals who claim to have done so can be interviewed and their behavior observed such as in shamanic rituals and other activities. An open mind is indispensable for science and scholarship (cf. GOTTLIEB, 2013). In anthropology, cultural relativism is a methodological principle. Judgement is suspended in order to try to objectively study, understand, and document phenomena. Thus, ideally the validity of the spiritual should not be contested. It can be problematic to try to understand something summarily rejected. Moreover, some anthropologists candidly claim to have had spiritual experiences during their field research (e.g., SCHLEGEL, 1998; TURNER, 1993; YOUNG; GOULET, 1994). However, even if one does not accept the existence or possibility of spiritual beings and forces in nature, nature can still be inherently spiritual in the sense that humans are and they may react to nature spiritually (e.g., EVANS, 1993; RIPATRAZONE, 2021).

Spirituality may involve profoundly moving emotional experiences generating vision, meaning, purpose, and direction in an individual's life and the pursuit of the sacred. Often the experience is a sense of awesome unity with the cosmos, inner peace, and even transcendence. Spiritual experiences may be profoundly transformative in reorienting an individual's identity, worldview, values, attitudes, behavior, and even life trajectory. The locus of spirituality may be thought to reside in the individual human being, supernatural being(s), and/or nature.

Evidence for the antiquity of spirituality is the awesome paintings at Chauvet Cave in France dated at around 32,000 years ago (CHAUVET et al., 1996). This is documented in the film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* by Werner Herzog. The art of animal forms is most likely associated with shamanic rituals. Another form of prehistoric art is painted hand prints on rock surfaces such as cliffs that can be impressions or stencils using rock pigments. These are found worldwide on every continent except Antarctica, and on many islands like in the Pacific. This might be interpreted as a universal manifestation of human spirituality. Awesome rock art, including hand prints as well as human and animal figures and geometric patterns, is known from the Brazilian Amazon near Monte Alegre in Para State at Caverna da Pedra Pintada (Painted Rock Cave). It is dated at around 11,200 years ago, the earliest in the Amazon and also among such sites in the Western Hemisphere (DAVIS et al., 2017; ROOSEVELT et al., 1996).

Several different lines of evidence may be interpreted to suggest that contemporary humans are inherently spiritual. Children naturally express spirituality until it is suppressed

by a society's dominant religions (TOBIN, 2003). Many astronauts report having spiritual or mystical experiences when viewing the Earth from outer space, a phenomenon sometimes called the Overview Effect (WHITE, 2014). Another line of evidence is the revitalization of religion after state government suppression was relieved in China, Mongolia, the U.S.S.R, and elsewhere (JOHNSON, 2017).

SPIRITUALITY IN ECOLOGY

Spiritual ecology is the vast, diverse, complex, and dynamic arena of interactions of religions and spiritualities with environments, ecologies, and environmentalisms. The plurals emphasize the diversity within each of these five domains. Spiritual is more inclusive than religion. Followers of any religion may be spiritual; but people who are not religious may be spiritual as well including atheists and agnostics (CROSBY; STONE, 2018).

Secular approaches to environmental problems, although indispensable and achieving many successes, have proven insufficient to resolve the environmental crisis which is only growing worse such as with biodiversity loss and global climate change. Adding religions and spiritualities to environmental concerns may help to turn things around for the better. In general, spiritual ecology does not privilege any particular religion or spirituality, but encourages all to be more environmentally aware, responsible, reverential, and caring toward promoting more sustainable, greener, and just lifestyles and societies.

Spiritual ecology has three primary components: intellectual (including science and scholarship), emotional (including spiritual), and behavioral (including activism). Individuals and organizations may focus on one, two, or all three components.

Spiritual ecology is extraordinary in promoting collaboration among and within religions, between science and religion, and among the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Consequently, it transcends some habitual conflicts and antagonisms. Participants recognize their common interests as fellow passengers on spaceship Earth and the need to collaborate to grapple with the environmental crisis.

Religious leaders and their organizations can provide important motivation, guidance, and resources for environmental education and activism (GARDNER, 2006). Religious organizations own 8% of the Earth's habitable land mass, 5% of all commercial forests, 50% of schools worldwide and 64% of schools in sub-Saharan Africa, 14% of all community development corporations, and 10% of the world's financial institutions (UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME AND PARLIAMENT OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS, 2020, p. 7). Through leveraging these assets world religions can be crucial for environmental and biodiversity conservation and mitigating global climate change (e.g., VELDMAN et al., 2014; YAHYA, 2010). While secular environmental education remains critical to increase environmental information, awareness, and responsibility, clearly religions can help too.

There are, however, many difficult obstacles to religious environmentalism and more broadly spiritual ecology. Perhaps the greatest obstacle is the frequent discrepancy between ideals and actions. Also, some aspects of religions can be maladaptive while others are adaptive (WEXLER, 2016). It should be acknowledged that spiritual ecologies, including Animism, are not always positive, there can be negative aspects as well (e.g., WHITEHEAD; WRIGHT, 2004).

Mutual healing of nature and humans may be achieved through reconnecting with nature, the pivotal principle of ecopsychology which overlaps with spiritual ecology (CHALQUIST, 2007). Time in nature can improve physical fitness and mental mood, lower blood pressure, and improve immune function (HARTIG et al., 2014; ROBBINS, 2020; SCHIFF; SENFT, 2021; SELHUB; LOGAN, 2012). Reconnecting with nature may also generate spirituality. Often one of the underlying working presuppositions is that both nature and humans are spiritual in various ways and degrees. A correlate is that this mutuality must be recognized and facilitated for healing humans physically and emotionally in many cases as well as healing the biosphere and other planetary systems like the atmosphere (COSTA NETO, 2020a, p. 17).

A specific example is walking through a forest which can be emotionally calming and have positive physiological impacts (FRIES, 2018). This reflects neurotheology as well as an affective attraction to living beings (biophilia) and landscapes (topophilia) (SPONSEL, 2018). Neurotheology is the scientific study of how religion may affect the structure and functioning of the brain employing methods like brain scans (ARVAY, 2018; NEWBERG, 2018; TUAN 1990; WILSON, 1984).

In general, spiritual ecology is a quiet revolution because it is growing exponentially since the 1990s; nonviolent but radical (root causes and solutions); and potentially transformative at both the individual and societal levels. As one indication of its growth, from 2004 to 2021, the number of results for a Google.com search of the term “spiritual ecology” increased from 420,000 to 19,900,000. Moreover, the overall pattern of increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events caused by global climate change may become a catalyst accelerating the growth of this spiritual ecology revolution. Throughout history various events associated with climate change have often influenced significant changes in religions and spiritualities (JENKINS, 2021).

Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (2012) refer to this revolution as the Great Turning in contrast to the Great Unraveling and Holding Actions. Tragically, we are witnessing the Great Unraveling in many ways, such as the human consequences of the unprecedented droughts and wildfires in many countries of the world. Holding Actions are initiatives like environmental regulations and conservation programs for endangered species and habitats. While vital, these are only treating the superficial symptoms of the environmental crisis. Ultimately, this is a moral and spiritual crisis (e.g., ROCKEFELLER; ELDER, 1992). In this

context it can be useful to distinguish between moral ecology and immoral ecology (see BOURNE, 2008; KAZA, 2020; KORTEN, 2006; MACY; BROWN, 2014).

Spiritual ecology does not diminish the necessity of secular approaches for dealing with environmental crises and problems (cf. SPONSEL, 2016). It is grounded in environmental sciences and studies, but adds the profound forces of religions and spiritualities (WILBER, 2017). This mutual relevance is recognized by natural scientists like Edward O. Wilson (2006), and secular environmental organizations like the Worldwatch Institute (GARDNER, 2006).

A quote from environmental historian Carolyn Merchant (2005, p. 136-137) encapsulates the meaning and significance of spiritual ecology: “The main purpose of spiritual ecology is to effect a transformation of values that in turn leads to action to heal the planet. Whatever religion or form of spirituality one practices, it is possible to find a connection to the earth and to the political work that needs to be done to change the present way of managing resources.” (For more on spiritual ecology see the FORUM ON RELIGION AND ECOLOGY, 2021; GRIM; TUCKER, 2014; KINSLEY, 1995; SPONSEL, 2012, 2014a, 2019; TAYLOR, 2005, 2010; VAUGHAN-LEE; HART, 2017).

ANIMISM AND NATURE

The widespread belief in spiritual beings and forces in many cultures of the world was recognized as Animism by the first anthropologist at Oxford University, Edward B. Tylor in 1871 (SEGAL, 2013). (Here Animism is capitalized like other religions out of respect). As a unilinear evolutionist, Tylor considered Animism to characterize the stage of savagery, and as merely mistaken, pre-scientific, and irrational superstition. Yet he considered Animism to be the origin and foundation of subsequent religions. Now Tylor’s characterization has been rejected for over a century. However, in recent decades the term Animism has been revitalized with new meaning and significance (BIRD-DAVID, 1999; DESCOLA, 2014; HARVEY, 2006, p. xii-xv; SWANCUTT, 2019; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 1996). Graham Harvey (2006, p. xx), the foremost student of Animism as well as a practitioner, asserts: “Far from being a primitive, simplistic and irrational misunderstanding of the nature of life, animism has much to contribute to significant debates taking place in particular academic disciplines.”

Harvey and others refer to the New Animism as a life-affirming world religion. Animism is distinguished from other religions by its unique antiquity and ubiquity. It is also quite diverse and its vitality persists, even when forced underground by dominating religions and/or hegemonic sociopolitical systems. Animists reverentially engage in relationships with inspired persons including animals, plants, “things”, and places. They understand nature as inspired and sacred.

Modernity and scientism disenchant, desacralize, and objectify nature. Some even reject all religion as delusion (cf. DAWKINS, 2006; HAUGHT, 2006). Harvey critically challenges this as ignorance and prejudice (cf. BERMAN, 1981; JENSEN, 2000; OBEYESEKERE, 2012). Moreover, the objectification of nature facilitates its commodification and commercialization generating its degradation and destruction. Part of the problem is also the simultaneous dehumanization of nature and the denaturalization of humans (SPONSEL 2012).

Harvey asserts: “[...] consciousness is embedded in the nature of all things and seems intimately linked to matter at every level.” He concludes: “[...] If every ‘thing’ we humans encounter might in fact be a living person, the implications and ramifications are immense. It is this that generates the particular etiquettes, protocols and dialogues that are at the heart of the lived realities that are animism.” Harvey observes: “Animism provides various ways of speaking, listening, acting and being [...]”. He explains: “Animists are people who recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others. Animism is lived out in various ways that are all about learning to act respectfully (carefully and constructively) toward and among other persons.” (Quotes respectively from HARVEY, 2006, p. 193, xiv, 212, and xi).

Animism is also pursued by many non-indigenous people, often identified as Pagans or Neo-Pagans in Europe, North America, and elsewhere (HARVEY, 2011; YORK, 2003). Furthermore, Animism may be integrated into the beliefs of adherents of other religions, even some Christians (BECK, 2015; JOERSTAD, 2020; WALLACE, 2019).

Animists view nature as alive and sentient with intelligence, volition, and agency (WEBER, 2016). One possible line of evidence is the fascinating documentation of soundscapes by Bernie Kraus (2012). For decades he has recorded the sounds of nature encompassing some 15,000 species of animals.

Animists view nature as permeated with spiritual beings and forces, including in particular places that are often considered sacred. Nature has inherent or intrinsic value, not just extrinsic or utilitarian value for humans. As Harvey (2013, p. 5) asserts: “[...] the world is a community of living persons, all deserving respect [...]”. This is reminiscent of a statement by the Catholic priest and historian of religions, Thomas Berry (2006, p. 17): “[...] the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects [...]”. Although it is unlikely that he would consider himself an Animist, his statement coincides with such beliefs even if inadvertently.

Harvey (2006, p. 207) writes that Animism provides “[...] alternative ways of understanding what it means to be human [...]”. A Jesuit priest, philosopher, and geological scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin contends: “We are not human beings who have a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” (See AMERICAN TEILHARD FOUNDATION, 2021). Teilhard’s provocative statement could reflect Animism,

and perhaps even imply that there are also spiritual beings having an animal experience or a plant experience.

Animists tend to favor ecocentrism, while rejecting anthropocentrism. In Animism, humans are spiritual beings, but among many other spiritual persons in nature, involving “things” that many others would consider inanimate lacking sentience and agency. Harvey (2006, p. 113) observes that: “[...] the boundaries of a person are not coterminous with their body.” Indeed, any human is connected with nature with every inhalation and exhalation of air. A multitude of microorganisms in the intestinal tract facilitate food digestion. In these and many other ways, humans, like everything else, are interconnected and interdependent with nature, an elemental, pivotal, and vital principle often obscured in contemporary non-indigenous societies.

Many Animistic cultures are an integral part of nature, reverentially engaged with it in sustainable and green lifestyles, especially relatively traditional indigenous societies like the Yanomami in the Amazon bordering Brazil and Venezuela. Even indigenous cultures that changed through contact with others may still retain core aspects of their culture like Animism (e.g., KOPENAWA; ALBERT, 2013).

Many non-indigenous cultures are unnatural and unsustainable, especially industrial capitalist societies fixated on rampant and rapacious materialism and consumerism, and on economic development at any costs instead of spiritual development (FOSTER et al., 2010; KASSER, 2002; MOORE, 2016; SUZMAN, 2017; ZERZAN, 2008). Increasing urbanization over the last 5,000 years, and especially in the 20th century, has increasingly alienated a multitude of people from nature. Many urbanites suffer a nature-deficit that can detrimentally affect their physical and/or mental health (LOUV, 2008). Some even fear nature (biophobia).

For Animists, humans are spiritual beings and part of nature which is inspirited. Human relationships with spiritual beings, forces, and places should be responsible with respect, reverence, care, gratitude, reciprocity, and rituals like seasonal celebrations. Humans have a moral responsibility to nature as well as to ancestors and future generations.

In general, many dualisms typical in Western thought do not imprison Animist thought: mind/body, self/other, person/thing, human/animal, culture/nature, nurture/nature, animate/inanimate, sentient/non-sentient, life/matter, life/death, spirit/matter, supernatural/natural, subject/object, and religion/science (DESCOLA, 2014; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 1996).

Yet there are some convergences between Animism and Western science. For instance, recent discoveries in botanical research demonstrate that plants actually possess cognition, awareness, and communication, as for example, through chemical transmission in their symbiotic networks of roots and fungi (e.g., SIMARD, 2021). Researchers describe plant cognition, intelligence, and neurobiology plus plants as social organisms (cf. BUHNER, 2014; NARBY, 2005). Arguably plants deserve respect, gratitude, and moral consideration

(STONE, 1974).

As a component of spiritual ecology, Animism offers one example of how religion can help facilitate the vital re-thinking, re-feeling, and re-visioning of the place of humans in nature (e.g., WILDCAT, 2009). This is imperative in order to deal with the worsening challenges of environmental problems and crises from the local to the global levels, including the existential threat of global climate change. (See CORLETT, 2012; IPCC, 2021; MCKIBBEN, 2019; RIPPLE et al., 2019).

INDIGENOUS ANIMISM AS SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY

The public appeal of Animism is revealed with the popularity of the awesome Hollywood movie *Avatar* by James Cameron. The Na'vi indigenous inhabitants of Pandora reflect Animists, plugged into nature literally as well as metaphorically (SPONSEL, 2012, p. 137-146; TAYLOR, 2013).

Most Indigenous people are Animists in some ways and degree (WOLFF, 2001). Indigenes comprise 4% of humanity with 300 million individuals in 75 of 184 countries. They inhabit 22% of the world's landmass containing 80% of all biodiversity, mostly in tropical rainforests. The 5,000 Indigenous cultures of the world comprise 95% of world cultural diversity. From that perspective, the role of Indigenes as spiritual ecologists assumes even greater meaning and significance (SOBREVILA, 2008). The protection of cultural diversity protects biological diversity, and vice versa (MAFFI, 2001; MAFFI; WOODLEY, 2010; COSTA NETO, 2020a, p. 19; POSEY et al., 1990). Generally, there is a correlation between high cultural diversity and high biological diversity, especially in the tropics. This is apparent in megadiversity countries like Brazil, Congo, Indonesia, Mexico, and Papua New Guinea (SPONSEL, 2016). Sacred sites in nature, and sometimes entire landscapes as sacred, are especially important for biocultural diversity conservation (LITJEBLAD; VERSCHUUREN, 2019).

In the Amazon, usually wherever indigenous communities flourish so does the forest, as proven by satellite images (cf. RAISG, 2021; SPONSEL, 1986, 1995). Wherever non-indigenous people have invaded the tropical forests, such as shifted farmers, cattle ranchers, agribusiness monocrop plantation farmers, and miners, the forest is degraded and usually totally destroyed with the enormous loss of invaluable biodiversity (CHARITY, 2016; SPONSEL et al., 1996).

In many ways, Indigenes may be considered to be the original spiritual ecologists (GRIM, 2001; PORTER, 2012; SPONSEL, 2012, p. 13-30). This was demonstrated by the pioneering research with the Tukano Desana in the Vaupes River region of the Colombian Amazon by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971, 1976, 1996). Analyzing myth, symbol, and ritual, he argued that the shaman is like an ecological engineer in managing the dynamic

balance between the Desana population and the ecosystems in their habitat. This was accomplished through regulating food and sex taboos which, respectively, managed the use of natural resources and Desana population growth.

Animists may be environmental activists too. The Kogi are extraordinary Indigenous in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta of Colombia. In recent decades, they tried to warn the rest of humanity about environmental degradation and destruction, as Western scientists have also done (EREIRA, 1990).

YANOMAMI

An extraordinary case of Animism is revealed in the book *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* by Davi Kopenawa and anthropologist Bruce Albert. Kopenawa is a Yanomami in the northern Amazon of Brazil, and also a leading political activist for his people recognized internationally (HUTUKARA, 2021). He provides a unique account of Yanomami spiritual ecology and his shamanic apprenticeship. He is also something of an environmental activist, recognizing that the survival and flourishing of the Yanomami depends on the survival and flourishing of the ecosystems in their habitat.

This book is a unique and awesome masterpiece. It provides any reader with the special privilege of beginning to enter, understand, and appreciate the complex and profound mental and spiritual realms of the Yanomami. It reveals the intellectually rich and complex cosmology and symbolism of the Yanomami and their mystical shamanic rituals.

The first part of the book describes Kopenawa's shamanic training and experience. Albert writes that Kopenawa "hoped not only to denounce the direct threats affecting the Yanomami and the Amazon rain forest, but to launch an appeal, in his role as shaman against the widespread damage caused by 'the People of Merchandise' and the danger it represents for the future of humanity [...]" (p. 8). Further Albert writes that

"Davi Kopenawa is a complex man, alternately tense or welcoming, introverted or charismatic. Every episode in his personal trajectory attests to his remarkable intellectual curiosity, his unflinching determination, and his great personal courage [...]. Despite his fame, he remains utterly detached from material things, and he takes pride only in challenging the arrogant deafness of white people. In the forest, his passion is to respond to the songs of shamanic spirits; in the city, to advocate for his people. A tireless defender of Yanomami territory and rights, he remains a zealous partisan of the tradition of his elders and especially their shamanic knowledge" (p. 5).

The extraordinary friendship and collaboration between Kopenawa and Albert gradually developed over several decades. Their book is the result of 93 hours of interviews, most during 1989-2001. Albert transcribed the recordings into over 1,000 pages, all in the Yanomami language. The final revision of the book was completed during March 2008 in the

community of Watoriki. Albert asserts: "I sought to keep together ethnographic accuracy and aesthetic concerns, make the text readable, convey the poetic and contrastive conceptual effects of Yanomami speech, and bring out the voice of the narrator, at times indignant, jovial, or poignant" (p. 453). Both agreed completely on the final text.

Albert started his field research with Yanomami in March 1975. He writes: "The Yanomami charmed me immediately with their elegance and mocking pride as they wove their way among giant bulldozers opening the road, or humorously outsmarted the intrusive good intentions of a local Italian priest" (p. 5). Moreover, Albert decided to make a permanent commitment to basic and applied research with the Yanomami as an engaged observer and as a way of life (p. 5-6).

Kopenawa celebrates the spiritual ecology of the Yanomami and their forest habitat. He warns about the existential threat to them and the planet of the rampant and rapacious materialism, consumerism, and greed of industrial capitalism.

For the Yanomami, spirits enchant the hills and mountains. In the forest every being has a spirit image. These spirits can be awesomely beautiful and powerfully helpful in curing the sick. Alternatively, they can be terribly frightening, dangerous, and malevolent under some circumstances.

The book chapter called "The Spirits of the Forest" provides a unique lesson in Yanomami spiritual ecology. The Yanomami, forest, and spirits are ecology. He says that: "What the white people call 'nature's protection' is actually us, the forest people, those who have lived under the cover of its trees since the beginning of time [...]. We have friendship for the forest because we know that the xapiri spirits are its true owners" (p. 398). Kopenawa states that: "If we did not know anything of the xapiri, we would also know nothing of the forest, and we would be as oblivious as the white people. We would not think to defend it. The spirits worry that the white people will devastate all its trees and rivers" (p. 257).

In the chapter titled "Merchandise Love" Kopenawa observes:

"But the white people are other than us [...]. Their thought remains constantly attached to their merchandise. They make it relentlessly and constantly desire new goods. But they are probably not as wise as they think they are. I fear that this euphoria of merchandise will have no end and that they will entangle themselves with it to the point of chaos. They are already constantly killing each other for money in their cities and fighting other people for minerals and oil they take from the ground. But they do not seem concerned that they are making us all perish with the epidemic fumes that escape from all these things. They do not think that they are spoiling the earth and the sky and that they will never be able to recreate new ones." (p. 338).

In December 1989, Kopenawa traveled for the first time outside of Brazil at the invitation of Survival International in London in order to represent them in Stockholm to receive the Right Livelihood Award, the alternative Nobel Prize. This provided the first

important international venue for him to speak in defense of his people and the forest against the ongoing mining invasion. As he movingly says: “We do not want to tear the minerals out of the earth nor make their epidemic fumes fall back on us. We just want the forest to remain silent and the sky to be clear so that we can see the stars when night falls” (p. 340). Kopenawa says: “The shamans clearly see that the forest is suffering and sick. They fear that it will finally return to chaos and that all the human beings will be crushed, as it happened once before.” (p. 255-256).

Kopenawa comments that: “These white people’s thought is obscured by their avidity for gold. They are evil beings” (p. 263). Miners become by far the greatest danger for the survival, well-being, and rights of the Yanomami. During the late 1980s, an estimated 40,000 miners invaded Yanomami territory in Brazil. This illegal invasion caused the deaths of more than a thousand Yanomami, more than 13% of the population, mostly from introduced diseases, but some from violence. Kopenawa responded to this catastrophe by starting an international campaign to defend his people and their forest. Most tragically, in recent years illegal gold miners have again invaded and devastated communities and their forests and waterways, and spread diseases, worst of all COVID-19. (For example, see SPONSEL, 1994, 1997).

Kopenawa reflects: “I often listen to the words of my spirits who angrily ask themselves: Why are the white people so hostile to us? Why do they want us to die? What do they have against us who do not mistreat them? Is it simply because we are other people, inhabitants of the forest?” (p. 408). (For more on this book and the Yanomami see SPONSEL, 2014b. For more on Yanomami shamanism see JOKIC, 2015. For other aspects of shamanism see DUBOIS, 2009; COSTA NETO, 2020b; and NARBY; HUXLEY, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

Those with an open mind can learn by studying the profound knowledge and wisdom of the spiritual ecology of Indigenes like the Desana, Kogi, and Yanomami (OLUPONA 2004). Many Indigenes pursued sustainable societies for centuries or even millennia, as archaeology, ethnohistory, ethnography, linguistics, and other lines of evidence prove. Seriously exploring the spiritual ecology of Indigenous cultures may help others to reconnect with nature in more sustainable, greener, and just ways (DESCOLA, 2014; KOHN, 2013; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 1996; YONEYAMA 2020).

Reconnecting with nature can be healing for people and the planet, as ecopsychology affirms. Moreover, Indigenes could be the only hope for the future, if only their human rights are defended and promoted, and if racism and ethnocentrism can be transcended (e.g., GOODALE, 2009; MANDER, 1991; ROBINSON, 1994). Among other things, that encompasses respecting and defending their ancestral territories. That would also help

conserve biodiversity.

For centuries, Christian and other missionaries tried to convert and “civilize” Indigenous peoples throughout the world (e.g., LEWIS, 2013; VILACA, 2016). The time is long overdue for the reverse, for Indigenous to convert the rest of the world to Animism in order to restore eco-sanity! This must happen within coming decades, if not sooner, to avert global ecological catastrophe (HARVEY, 2013). It would not be the same as Indigenous Animism, but could emulate and engage its elemental, pivotal, and vital principles. Arguably, spirituality is inherent in both humans and nature, and they would both be healthier if reconnected, similar to many Indigenous who are intimately and viably connected in socially and ecologically profound ways.

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¹ Related websites are included for easy access to further information, unlike many publications that may not be readily available. All websites were accessed on October 10, 2021.

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