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Fantastic entities of the Amazonian indigenous culture

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ABSTRACT

What we call fantastic, one of the dimensions of the supernatural, is, in turn, understood as one of the forms of the real by the indigenous people. This study sought to document the rich culture of the fantastic entities of indigenous populations from different regions of the Amazon, from which folkloric and demonic beliefs often emerge. The purpose of this article is to expand and develop an understanding of an aesthetic, semiotic, metaphorical, and symbolic order of the indigenous culture of the Amazon, through sensitivity, ecological awareness, and respect for the culture and history of these traditional peoples. The method of this study aligns with the Indigenous worldview, and respect, and upholds its relational significance. It transcribes lived and presented cultural experiences with a rich use of metaphors, stories, and symbols, of sound and visual features and landscapes as an experience of living space, exploring the environmental, mythical, and spiritual dimensions of indigenous peoples.

Keywords: Indigenous, fantastic entities, supernatural beings, Amazon rainforest, ethnoconservation

1. INTRODUCTION

Mysticism is a determining factor for the various human-animal interactions and is represented by many species. The “mythogenic” Amazonian ecological culture is one in which the elements of the natural environment are thought of according to their role in the myth and

their place in the native cosmos. This type of ecological culture is a direct heir of indigenous culture and has in common the oral transmission of cultural practices from one generation to the next [1].

The myths are present in all societies. They organize cosmovisions and propose solutions to dilemmas, enigmas, and contradictions that the real world cannot solve. As machines of time suppression, as defined by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), the mythic narratives do not submit themselves to the linearity of history [2].

Cosmology is the set of beliefs and knowledge that encompasses the natural and human universe. Cosmogony, on the other hand, exposes, in the form of myths, the origins of the cosmos and the process of the constitution of society. In this perspective, it is important to understand that both cosmology and cosmogony, as forms of knowledge, are not reducible to a single meaning, but are composed of narratives, interpretations, dynamic, and symbolic worldviews [3].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The studies were carried out with Indigenous people living in the Brazilian Amazon, from the Juruna (recognize themselves as Yudjá), Arara, Tenharim (recognize themselves as Kagwahiva), Mura, and Sateré Mawé ethnic groups, after authorization by the Indigenous communities and National Indigenous People Foundation (FUNAI is a Brazilian governmental protection agency for Amerindian interests and their culture). Interviews with Kagwahiva were conducted in October and November 2014; with the Mura and Sateré Mawé in January and February 2016 and March 2018; and with the Juruna and Arara in 2019. Riverside communities were also interviewed, in November 2013.

One of the study regions is known as “Volta Grande do Xingu” (Xingu River’s Big Bend), situated in the State of the Pará, Brazil, located at latitude 03°23' S to 03°38' S and longitude 51°33' W to 52°00' W, a 130 km stretch of rapids and braided channels on the Xingu River, which is an important tributary of the Amazon River and where the Indigenous people of the Juruna and Arara ethnic groups live [4].

Indigenous people of the Kagwahiva ethnic group live in the Tenharim Marmelos Indigenous Land, located entirely in the State of Amazonas, in the municipalities of Humaitá and Manicoré, between geographic coordinates 7°48' and 8°53' south latitude and 61°35' and 62°10' west longitude [5]. In the past, before the opening of the Trans-Amazonian Highway, these Indigenous lived together in a single village on the banks of the Marmelos River, in the area where the Trans-Amazonian Highway currently crosses the river [6].

Indigenous people of the Mura and Sateré Mawé ethnic groups live in the Rio Urubu Indigenous Territory, located in the Itacoatiara municipality, Amazonas State, at the left margin of the Amazon River. It lies between 02°59'S to 03°12'S latitude and 58°04'W to 59°48'W longitude [7]

The riverside communities interviewed are located along the Jari River, in the municipality of Laranjal do Jari, in the State of Amapá, between the coordinates 00°38' and 00°42' south latitude and 52°30' and 52°29' west longitude. These communities live almost exclusively from the collection of Brazil nuts.

As method for collecting the data was used open and semi-structured interviews [8]. Indigenous and riverside were interviewed, with both genres and different ages.

The interviewees were chosen through the indication of the communities themselves, based on the knowledge of these people on the entities. The basis of this approach encompasses a socio-affective construction of knowledge since such knowledge is an integral part of the history and reality of the subjects.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are many narratives about fantastic entities that live in the forest and that have an ecological connotation and a mysterious nature, some of which are popularly known, mainly in the Amazon. The most commented entities among the interviewees were Mapinguari, Capelobo, Pai da Mata (Father of the Forest), and Curupira. They are entities that punish people who destroy forests and animals in them. In this way, the presence of these beings is related to a “conservationist ethic”, since they guide ecologically correct behavior to those who believe in their real existence [9].

Some believe that these entities protect wild animals. They are beings that few people managed to see, and the evidence of their existence is given by testimonies that have been passed down through generations. The respect of the indigenous people for the forest is translated in different ways and is related to the individual beliefs of each one, whether hunter, gatherer, or craftsman, not having verified a common pattern of interpretation of these entities of the forest, being demonstrated that, in general, that the people of the forest have admiration, fear and respect for what the forest and its members represent.

The presence of these fantastic entities confirms that the world is full of surprises. It is in this perspective that the philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) states that there is an impossibility of seeing the world within a rectilinear motion: “When it finally proved impossible to make the whole world enter the laws of rectilinear motion when the complexity of the vegetable and animal resisted the simple forms of extended substance sufficiently, so nature needed to manifest itself in its strange richness” [10].

These beings are presented with a strange natural richness, which does not fit into a standard shape, as they are different or change constantly, acquiring other forms. However, it is worth emphasizing that these are not beings that metamorphose, but beings that, despite having a simple and determined body structure, inhabit the popular imagination in a heteroclitic and non-linear way.

The role of the entities may be directed to the protection of a certain element, activity, or place according to the cosmovision of the indigenous community. These protective entities, which inhabit the forests, lakes, rivers and streams, the wind, the subsoil, and other natural surroundings, in different strata of the cosmovisions of these indigenous people, precisely protect the plants of interest, as well as the animal species involved in activities of hunting and fishing, or the natural space important in the culture of these traditional peoples [11]. These entities usually adopt a corporeal form to punish those individuals who enter sacred places without asking permission, where, in most cases, it is necessary to make an offering or request permission; or who overdo hunting or fishing and do not comply with certain rules, for example, hunting more than necessary for food consumption; or that invade and destroy forests, among other situations [12, 13].

On the threshold between metaphor and metamorphosis, some beings gain bodies. However, these beings can only be visible through an invisibility characteristic of literary

language. As much as they are illustrated, it is in the text that these entities find the full realization of their being, in the unlikely. It is these metaphysical perplexities that embody these beings, such as the “metaphysical animals” themselves.

The Mapinguari

The beast known as Mapinguari is widely mentioned throughout Amazon. It is a pan-Amazonian beast, which haunts indigenous and non-indigenous populations throughout the Brazilian Amazon, in the States of Rondônia, Amazonas, Acre, and Pará [14]. The name “Mapinguari” is possibly a contraction of “mbé-pi-guari”, in the Tupi language, which means “the thing that has a clubfoot, twisted, inside out” [9].

It is a huge creature [it is said to reach three meters in height], covered with black hair, but it looks like people. It has hook-shaped nails, huge teeth sticking out of its mouth, and red eyes. Anthropophagous, "people eater", attacks with raised arms, like an "evil spirit" and kills people by ripping off arms and legs before devouring them [15].

“What else we tell you are stories that the elders told us. That's because today it's more difficult for us to go deep into the forest. Myself, for me it is more difficult. I only tell the things I've been told, and we don't always tell the same story that was told to us. So, there is a gorge called “Grotão do Bicho”. People say that an animal appeared there. Nobody knows what it was. They thought it was a Mapinguari” (C.R.S. Santos, 46 years old, ♂, Paquiçamba village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 29, 2019).

The Mapinguari may be a reference to giant sloths [species of *Megatherium*]. These giant Pleistocene herbivores weighed about four tons and reached up to six meters in height when they stood on their hind legs. The Mapinguari may be a subjectivation of the encounter between the indigenous people and the fossils of the megafauna that inhabited the Amazon, particularly the *Megatheriums* (giant sloths), extinct around 10,000 years ago [16]. It can also be assumed that the appearance of this entity was due to the contact of indigenous people with *Megatheriums* still alive and that, in this way, the Mapinguari beast would be a distortion of the image of this gigantic animal. It is noteworthy that the paleoindigenous occupation of the Amazon occurred around 11,400 years ago [17].

However, the first reports of the Mapinguari date from the end of the 19th century, coinciding with the first rubber boom in the Amazon [between 1879 and 1912], and it is precisely among the rubber tappers that some of the oldest reports about the Mapinguari are found: a gigantic creature, similar to a great ape, with a body covered in long hair, with enormous claws and an even larger mouth, which chased and devoured people. It is a gigantic being, with a height varying from three to six meters [18].

Its feet are sometimes described as facing backward, like the feet of the “Curupira” and other forest beings that use this strategy to confuse their pursuers. In the most common versions, their footprints are round, like mortar hands or the bottom of a bottle. The giant mouth, located on the abdomen, is often depicted vertically. The teeth are huge, about a hand span in size, positioned outside the mouth. The Mapinguari is usually described as having only one eye, which underscores its bestiality. This eye is red, like fire. Unlike other fabulous entities, Mapinguari does not walk at night. During the night it sleeps. The danger is during the day when it attacks. But it doesn't go silent. It comes screaming loud, deafening screams [9].

The presence of the Mapinguari is given by the bestial cry that echoes throughout the forest, accompanied by the sound of breaking branches. Its smell is also widely mentioned, sometimes reminiscent of rotten garlic. This beast, with its nauseating smell and its horrific roars, indistinctly pursues humans in the woods and devours them, usually eating the head first and then the other parts of the body. According to some indigenous people of the Karitiana ethnic group [who live in the north of the State of Rondônia, Brazil], the Mapinguari sometimes screams like the peccary, deceiving hunters who, unwary, approach the supposed game [14].

Ornithologist David Oren has been a tireless defender of the thesis that giant sloths still roam the forests of the immense Amazonian plain, unknown to science, but present in the lived experience of native populations who, more than anyone else, know the mysteries of the Amazon [19]. The creature that Amazonian populations call Mapinguari would then be a living fossil, a giant sloth, “the world’s last living giant ground sloth” [20].

The Capelobo

There are narratives of the Juruna indigenous people, or Yudjá, as they call themselves, from the Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, State of Pará, Brazil, told by the elders who have passed away and remembered by those who still live, about entities that live in the forest and that have characteristics described as that of the “Capelobo” and also like that of the “Mapinguari”, responsible for “a lot of noise in the middle of the night”, and that on certain occasions, “slap our ears, threw stones” and the dogs that accompanied the indigenous people until that place, known as “Grotão do Bicho” [literally Beast's Gorge], they all came back very wounded. That is why this area, located on the banks of the Xingu River, is respected by all the Juruna.

The legend of the Capelobo is common in the State of Maranhão and in the region of the Xingu River, in the State of Pará, Brazil. The name is probably of indigenous origin, a combination of “cape” (broken, crooked or crippled bone) with a wolf [9]. According to legend, when an Indian gets very old, instead of dying he gains a new life in the form of a Capelobo, and this thesis is widespread among the indigenous people of the Juruna ethnic group, and the entity is correlated to an ancient shaman who was called Miratu.

The description of the Capelobo is quite varied, being portrayed in some regions as a humanoid being with a hairy body and the snout of an anteater (*Tamandua tetradactyla*). In other regions, it is described as a tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*), but with more distinct characteristics, being larger than a common tapir, but faster, with a muzzle more like that of a dog or pig and long hair.

The Capelobo usually prowls around houses and camps in the forest at night, being noticed by the frightening screams it produces. These screams, which in the middle of the forest multiply in all directions, bewilder the hunters who start to walk aimlessly, get lost, and sometimes go crazy. The Capelobo feeds on puppies and kittens, as well as humans. It is said to hug the humans it meets along the way, pierce their skulls with its snout and suck out their brains, something similar to what an anteater does when it finds a termite mound looking for termites. It also drinks the blood of its victims. According to the indigenous people, the Capelobo can only be killed if it is hit by an arrow in the navel.

“They say that Capelobo is the turn of an old Indian [turned is when a person leaves this world and passes into another dimension]. My grandmother lived in the mouth of “Grotão do Bicho”. And then she was there and when it was about four o'clock in the morning, it came screaming. It headed towards the

river. Then she said: it's Capelobo! It's Capelobo! A couple was walking along the road and then they heard the Capelobo's cry. The husband responded to the scream, but the wife told him not to answer anymore because it was Capelobo. So, they stopped and hid behind a rubber tree. And they waited and then they went back to the road, and they saw a person also walking, like a normal person, with big hair that covered his ass. The couple hid again in the forest. That's when the Capelobo gave a strong cry again, entered the forest and the couple felt an intense bad smell. They spent sick days because of the bad smell. My grandmother used to tell me that the Capelobo leaves a trail like the mortar hand wherever it steps" (M.P Juruna, 74 years old, ♂, Juruna ethnic group, Paquiçamba village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, January 5, 2019).

"The Capelobo's cry is like that of a horse. It eats people, its paw is closed, and we know its footprint. It gives a huge scream, it's chilling. Capelobo lives at the top of the hill. It is an old Indian who became a Capelobo" (M. Vieira, 46 years old, ♀, Juruna ethnic group, Lakariká village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 4, 2019).

"Capelobo was an Indian who lived in the forest. The Indian, when he got very old, didn't die, he spent one, two, or three days in the forest and never came back. He would start eating raw meat and become a beast. The old Indians cured their illnesses with shamanism. Miratu was a healer, witch doctor, and shaman. He knew everything bad on Earth. The old people say that he had two bad people on Earth, one of them was Miratu" (O.P. Juruna, 50 years old, ♂, Juruna ethnic group, Lakariká village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, August 7, 2019).

"The Miratu, they say he didn't die. People say he died, but he didn't die, he turned into a jaguar. He got old and turned into a wild animal. This is a long story. His island is over there in Jericoá [Jericoá is a complex of waterfalls of cosmological importance for the Yudjá, where Xingu River's Big Bend begins]. He turned into a jaguar and was buried there. There is his grave, but his body, they say, didn't stay there. That's what elders say. He went on to roam the forest, protecting the forest. He is the kinsman of all of us Juruna. He's the oldest Indian, he's the oldest, our first, he's one of the first Juruna. He protects the forest; he watches over everything. He's not against anyone, of course, if you don't disturb him... You just ask for permission to enter the forest. Many people have seen him in the village walking at night. We only see him when he is in human form. But they say he is half human and half jaguar." (M. Vieira, 46 years old, ♀, Juruna ethnic group, Lakariká village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 28, 2019).

The Pai da Mata

There are divergences among the indigenous people who live on the banks of the Xingu River, whether "Pai da Mata" and "Mãe da Mata" is just one entity or two; and also, if "Pai da Mata" and "Curupira" is the same entity. However, for some riverside dwellers on the Jari River, in the State of Amapá, in the extreme north of the Brazilian Amazon Forest, the indigenous "Pai da Mata" is called "João da Mata", an entity distinct from "Curupira".

“One day my father was walking in the forest and came across a bunch of wild pigs [white-lipped peccary, known locally a queixada]. He shot the animals. He killed four pigs and the others started fighting and then he climbed a tree and heard the owner of the pigs calling the pigs [made imitation of the call]. He didn't see the owner of the pigs; he just heard him calling. Here in the forest, every animal has its owner. I believe that the forest also has its owner, and the water also has its owner. Sometimes we realize that there's something strange about the forest: it's when the owner of wild animals is nearby. Surely the pig owner gets mad when we hunt a wild pig” (M.P. Juruna, 74 years old, ♂, Juruna ethnic group, Paquiçamba village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, August 13, 2019).

“I've seen an animal out there... it almost looks like a human being. He was hairy and ran through the forest like people. About this size [he pointed with his hand to a height of approximately 1.5 meters]. Our pajé [shaman] told us that he was the "Pai da Mata". If you don't torment him, no problem. He protects the forest from hunters. He is the one who protects the wild animals' game. I was hunting when I was face to face with him. I went back home and got a little sick and then I talked to the shaman. I asked him a question: Uncle, since you've been here, has anyone seen any different animals? Then he told me that once the hunters were in the forest, which is called “Serra do Bicho” [literally Beast's Ridge], the dogs cornered an animal that no one saw. They saw the dogs drop dead. This is the "Pai da Mata", he told me. You must respect the forest, all the beings and entities that live within it” (A.P. Arara, 42 years old, ♂, Arara ethnic group, Terrawangã village, Arara's Big Bend of Xingu Indigenous Land, January 24, 2019).

“The “Pai da Mata” is the king of the forest and owner of game animals. When people start killing many wild animals, he doesn't like it, and he punishes them, and people get sick. He protects all wild animals, but he has the ones he likes the most, which are pets. They say that when people mistreat their animals, these people get sick. He lives in the foothills. Not everyone has the sense to see him and that's why they can't even talk about him” (M.P.S. Arara, 52 years old, ♀, Arara ethnic group, Itkoum village, Arara's Big Bend of Xingu Indigenous Land, January 26, 2019).

The forest is a sacred space that is under the control of protective entities. Therefore, the forest is the home of plants, animals, and their protectors. The hunter must recognize this domain and return the favor and permission granted to access the sites and make use of their resources. He must act correctly before, during, and after hunting, always in constant ritual negotiation with the guardians of the wild animals. This protocol includes a whole set of precepts, restrictions, practices, and specific ceremonies that determine the duty to be and the duty to do of the good hunter. In this way, the act of killing a wild animal is legitimized by creating a moral and social structure of action, emotion, and control [21].

The “João da Mata” is the master, the leader of the wild animals. If you are going to do things unethically if you are going to do it with mockery or with badness, the person takes risks, the person sees anything, feels any remorse, right? When they do things out of perversity, the “João da Mata” gets angry, because he protects the wild animals, his animals, which belong to him, and the forest. He doesn't like dogs as these dogs are used to hunt wild animals.

So, sometimes he takes the dogs and "dá uma pisa" [hits, spansks], and the dogs get sick and can never be used in hunting again and many die. I never saw him. We only hear the dogs scream and when we get to the place, we find the dogs all crazy, scared. For a moment we think it's because of the jaguar, but it's not. He owns the forest, the forest, and everything in it. That's why we respect him. All this was informed by our ancestors. To enter the forest, you must ask for protection, at least for him. It is in thought that we ask for protection. But we must hunt, to bring our food. So, we ask for protection for him, so that we can bring food to our family. And then, with respect, we go and get it the food" (E.P. Arara, 50 years old, ♂, Arara ethnic group, Itkoum village, Arara's Big Bend of Xingu Indigenous Land, January 25, 2019).

The Amazon Rainforest is beautiful and rich in natural resources, animal, and plant species. So many beauties need protection, which cannot come from the human condition, not even from the indigenous people. Thus, as hunting is protected by the "Father of the Forest", an entity that has frightening characteristics according to the indigenous people, the forest is protected by the "Mother of the Forest" which, as the provider of everything that exists in the Arara universe, has extraordinary beauty, despite all the marks and scars caused by the action of humans. However, it is clear that some interferences in the forest, such as the "roças" [small agricultural fields], are subject to recovery, as they belong to the indigenous culture.

"Plants have an owner. Plants like the rubber tree, the Brazil nut tree, all the trees have the "Mãe da Mata" who takes care of them. Even the rubber tree, the ancients say that the "Mãe da Mata" is all cut down because of the rubber tree, because people cut the trunk of the rubber tree to remove the latex. So, she lives all wounded by the cuts they make on her. The ancestors say that this is not a legend, this is true... The forest is beautiful, but it has several aggravated parts. It's cut, it's bruised, it's beautiful, but it has scars. It is constantly mistreated, and almost every human being alive abuses it, insects gnaw her wood, and other insects eat its leaves. All this is a concern for the "Mãe da Mata". Capoeira [young forests growing in degraded areas] is its. The "roça" has a caveat: you destroy the forest and then it reproduces. It is like an animal that loses its feathers and then grows back" (M.P.S. Arara, 52 years old, ♀, Arara ethnic group, Itkoum village, Arara's Big Bend of Xingu Indigenous Land, July 12, 2019).

"João da Mata" also represents, for the riverside dwellers of the Jari river, a mythological entity that protects wild animals, mainly the white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu pecari*): "João da Mata is an entity that takes care of wild animals. This comes from ancient times. Curupira says there is, but it's up on the Jari river [near the source of that river]" (A.O. Gomes, 53 years old, ♂, Brazil nut collector, Padaria community, Laranjal do Jari, Amapá, November 16, 2013).

According to the Brazil nut collector interviewed, the peccary had disappeared for three years in the region where he lives: "I don't know if it was "João da Mata" who kept the peccaries in his pigpen. The old ones said that "João da Mata" took care of the wild animals and people

said that when an animal disappeared it was "João da Mata" who locked it inside his pigpen, so he could take care of them, for them to be able to return to nature again. White-lipped peccary always go "de lote" [in flock] and so, you can tell when they are around because there are droves of 20, 30, 40, and even 100 pigs. If they spend all this time without showing up, where are they going? This story has been told since the old days and for us, some rules are passed down from father to son. These rules come from a long time ago. What happens is that on hunts, where many hunters are present, there are a lot of "bicho atirado" [injured animals], which do not take advantage of, and what happens? The owner, who is "João da Mata", takes these animals to care". In Indigenous and riverine cultures, oral language and storytelling are one of the oldest traditions.

Any thought, decision-making, or conduct that is considered contrary to what is validated by the elemental entities themselves will be grounds for punishment, with the risk of the hunter or a family member suffering accidents, falling ill, or even dying. For example, overhunting or harming animals; also attacking the conservation of the environment; not performing ritual obligations, among other actions [22-24].

“My brother hunted, he hunted everything until he found “mesura” [something suspicious] in the forest. Some peccaries came and he shot, but the lead went back in his eye. He tells us that before shooting, a surucucu snake [*Lachesis muta*, it is a venomous pit viper species, also known as the Southern American bushmaster] jumped on him. I know him very well. Whenever any kind of snake jumped on him, he returned home. But he insisted, killed the snake, and went after the peccary. When he got close to the drove of peccaries, he saw a black man sitting on the back of a tapir. He didn't know if it was “João da Mata”, who takes care of the animals. When a friend of his came to his rescue, he was almost dead. This was around two o'clock in the afternoon” (A.O. Gomes, 53 years old, ♂, Brazil nut collector, Padaria community, Laranjal do Jari, Amapá, November 16, 2013).

“According to the story people tell, “João da Mata” is the guy who takes care of the peccary. I don't know if that's true... I know that the peccary is unpredictable, it “arreia” [remains for a long time] in a place, then a year, two years pass, and it comes, appears... Then the hunters return to attack him a lot, then he disappears again. There in the Padaria community [a small community of fishermen and extractivists located on the bank of the Jari river, in the municipality of Laranjal, do Jari], the hunters attacked a group that was crossing the river and killed 78 peccaries at once... They killed them all. That was in 2011. After that massacre, the peccary disappeared, because the peccary is like this: if he is used to passing by a place, he will always pass by this place. So, it's been about three years since anyone has killed a peccary around here... "João da Mata", some say he's a black guy... At the Padaria there's a man named Macedo, who today is crippled and crazy. They spent night and day after the peccaries. Each hunter had already killed four or five peccaries. They were hallucinated with the number of peccaries and ran after the animals. So that is when he saw a little black guy who was walking behind him, and he started to get upset in the head. To complete the story, a hunter friend of his who was also hunting peccaries, shot a peccary and it seems that a bullet hit him in the head. It was an “avariado” lead [that was dizzy]. Then he got a fever because of the animal he saw and then he went crazy and

crippled” (L.F. Faria, 63 years old, ♂, Brazil nut collector, community of Santo Antonio da Cachoeira, Laranjal do Jari, Amapá, November 19, 2013).

“A hunter always takes a head of garlic with him when he enters the forest, because of certain things that happen... Sometimes some animals betray us through the bush, hauntings... and the use of garlic “alisa” [softens] all of that there... Some animals haunt people in the forest... There is the owner of the bush, who is the “João da Mata”. My uncle, when he lived here, one day a boy appeared and asked him to cross him by the river. Then he boarded the canoe. So, my uncle asked him what his name was, and he replied: I don't know. Where did you come from?, my uncle asked: I don't know, he replied. Do you want to cross? So, he was silent, and my uncle took him across the river. The boy jumped into the stern of the canoe and my uncle brought him out. When he got to the other side of the river, he ran into the forest. But the people surrounded him, they caught him and locked him inside the rubbish dump. My uncle said he brought him lunch, but he didn't eat. One day my father said: I'm going to open the door and I want to see what this guy is going to do. He was a little boy, black. So, they left the door open. Then he ran off into the forest. They went after him and saw a trail of deer, agouti, paca, all the animals, but they didn't see the trail of the little boy... One day, when we were collecting Brazil nuts, we saw him hiding behind a tree. He was blowing in our ears. There were days when we arrived, and he was on top of the storehouse... He's just like a person... He's a little black guy just like these black kids here. When they start mistreating wild animals he appears. He appeared to my niece's husband who had killed a tapir. I don't know how many shots were fired at that tapir, but its meat was no good to eat, because the meat was green, meat that no one ate, they threw it away... This tapir was his horse... So, this hunter caught a bad one, its skin is all painted, just like the “surubim” [Amazonian fish]. Today he is disabled. There in the Padaria community, they killed a drove of peccaries. They saw a big man and a small man in the forest. The little one riding a horse and the big one following. Every time the hunters tried to shoot; he jumped in front of them... So, they separated, each one-to-one side and that's when a hunter shot and hit lead in the eyes and ear of a hunter... The “João da Mata” goes after the hunters who are threatening the lives of the animals. He protects everything that is an animal: peccary, paca, collared peccary... If the hunter kills only one animal to eat, there is no problem, but if they exaggerate and start killing all the animals they find in front of them, then the “João da Mata” appears to defend them. It has been five years since anyone has seen a peccary.” (A.C.P. Silva, 50 years old, ♀, quilombola community of Vila de São José, Laranjal do Jari, Amapá, November 18, 2013).

The Curupira

The entity of Tupi-Guarani mythology, one of the most popular and amazing, fantastic beings of the Brazilian forests, the Curupira is represented by a dwarf, with red hair, feet in reverse, and heels forward. The oldest mention of his name was made by the Jesuit priest José de Anchieta, in São Vicente, Brazil, on May 30, 1560: "It is known and by everyone's mouth that there are certain demons and that Brazil's [the indigenous peoples] call Curupira, who attack to the Indians many times in the bush, they give them whips, hurt them and kill them”.

The Curupira is a protector of the forest. In the State of Pará, when traveling along the rivers and hearing a bump far, inside the forest, the rowers say that it is the Curupira that is

beating the sapopemas [aerial roots of some trees like the *Ceiba pentandra*, popularly known as Sumaúma], to make sure that the trees are strong enough to withstand any storm that is coming. The name Curupira derives from the word 'curu', a contraction of 'curumim', referring to 'boy' or 'child', and 'pira' meaning 'body', that is, curupira means 'body of a boy' [24].

Allusions to this fantastic entity appear not only in the Amazon, but throughout Brazil, and it is also present in other countries in South America, presenting itself under different names. For some authors, it is a legion of beings whose purpose is the protection of wild animals, the care of pregnant females and defenseless young, as well as large trees [9]. Its main targets are predatory hunters, lumberjacks, and people who destroy forests in a predatory manner [14]. However, they help those hunters and fishermen whose only source of protein is slaughtered animals or fishing for food [9]. The ambiguity of his character, according to oral and written narratives, raises doubts about knowing for sure whether Curupira is a caretaker of the forest or if he is just an evil being who takes pleasure in punishing hunters and other passers-by who enter the forests [24].

It is a phenotypically polymorphic entity, presenting itself to humans in different forms: as a generous elf, a demon, or a gnome. In some narratives, he appears as an Indian boy of about seven years old, with his body covered in long hair and his feet turned backward, or as a very small man, with red hair, green teeth, a hairy body, and feet facing backward [14, 25]. It is said that the Curupira cannot speak and only makes guttural sounds [26]. In Guarani mythology, he is known as Kurupi, being described as: “a small being, semi-human in appearance, scaly skin, pointed ears, beard, and hair that cover his face, revealing a huge mouth with huge teeth, a misshapen nose, and a hypnotic gaze. He has his feet turned backward, with his heels forward” [24, 25]. The translation of the interviews was carried out literally. Note that Curupira is sometimes treated as “he” and as “she”, even by the same interviewee.

“Once I went hunting with my uncle. There was an “açazal” [açazal is the term used for a forest environment dominated by the açai palm tree *Euterpe oleracea*] and the footprint of a peccary, and behind the footprint of the peccary there was the footprint of the jaguar and behind the footprint of the jaguar there was the footprint of a child, but with the little foot turned backward. My grandfather used to say it was the Curupira” (J.K.H.V. Juruna, 20 years old, ♂, Juruna ethnic group, Furo Seco village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 29, 2019).

“The Curupira is a malefactor [bad element, evildoer, destroyer, ill-intentioned] that exists in the forest. He just wants to do bad. You enter the forest, she looks at you and you're stunned, you can't find your way home anymore. Some people even die there in the forest. I've seen it like this in person: it's a little black, but it's already done. There's a man and a woman. He is not one to stay with that person's spirit. The "Curupira" transfers the earth to hell, and everything is left to the devil. He transforms the spirit of the person to walk with him. I've seen it and I wasn't “abestado” [crazy]. She doesn't mess with me. Just looking at the person gets crazy. I don't get crazy because I have the gift that God gave me. The “Caruara” kills people with its arrow, it is a big grasshopper, and it shoots with its eyes. Look at that! The person gets a headache. Each river has a “Caruara”. There are also several Curupiras. There are more Curupira than Caruara” (J. Nicaço, 78 years old, ♂, ex-rubber tapper, Brazil nut collector, Iratapuru community, Laranjal do Jari, Amapá, November 13, 2013).

I observed that there is a lot of wealth in the forest and there are also forest spirits, who protect the forest. Do you know what I also observed? I was some time ago, in an indigenous land a little further away from the city and they gave me a list of various forest spirits. Now I am talking to you [Mura indigenous peoples of the Urubu River] and observing that there are very few of these entities here. Do the spirits start disappearing too? “The spirits?” asked me the indigenous elder. Yes, the beings of the forest, the Curupira, these things, what is in the forest, who protects the forest.

“Today it exists here, but there is little. There is the Curupira who protects, the Curupira is the boss. The Curupira is a type of being, an invisible Indian that we don't see, and she protects the forest a lot. The jaguar also protects the forest a lot. The jaguar is also a protector of the forest, but the jaguar is not a spirit, it is itself. So, what you have here in this region is Curupira... Curupira. Seeing the Curupira is very difficult. I never saw it. I've heard her noise, but I've never seen her" (A.C. Rosas, 65 years old, ♂, Mura ethnic group, Taboka I village, Rio Urubu Indigenous Land, February 4, 2016).

However, despite the “distancing” of Maria das Dores Monteiro (blesser and prayer healer, 80 years old, ♀, Mura ethnic group, Taboka I village, Rio Urubu Indigenous Land) from the “things of the bush”, during the interview (February 4, 2016), she told us that “The forest is governed by the Curupira”, which other indigenous people call the “spirit of the forest”: “The spirit of the forest, which we know about is only the Curupira. She takes care of the game and trees. He is the guardian of the forest. I only saw his movements: he hits the tree trunks, he screams, he makes a noise like a gunshot... He only messes with us when someone challenges him. Here's Curupira. He's a small Indian and his feet are turned backward, but nobody sees him. He is like a spirit that is the guardian of the forest. He takes care of the trees and the animals and if you don't respect the forest, he keeps scaring the guy, making him get lost in the forest. That's why I don't go into the forest making a mess. I respect a lot, I remain silent, I take the game and leave” (A.C. Rosas Filho, 39 years old, ♂, Mura ethnic group, Taboka I village, Rio Urubu Indigenous Land, February 1, 2016).

An important issue that deserves to be highlighted is the respect that Mura indigenous hunters show for the forest and its inhabitants. They believe in the existence of the Curupira, which they define as a small Indian with his foot turned backward, but whom nobody can see. He is the protective spirit of the forest and if people, but especially hunters, do not respect it, they can be punished by Curupira.

Respect for the forest is translated in different ways and is related to the individual beliefs of each hunter, not having verified a common pattern of interpretation of the 'spirits' of the forest. Evangelicals, especially Baptists who hunt more than Adventists, say a prayer asking for protection and to find an animal during the hunt; The Sateré Mawé who are not Adventists can also say a prayer, but in addition, the hunter V. Araújo (63 years old, ♂, Sateré Mawé ethnic group, Aparecida do Correnteza village, Indigenous Land Rio Urubu, February 2, 2016) mentioned that he makes a cross with sticks and leave it planted at the entrance to the trail as protection.

The consensus regarding this matter is that hunters only kill prey that they effectively consume and never sacrifice animals that will not be used. In addition, they believe that the Curupira determines a stock of animals for each hunter, which controls their populations and the frequency of hunting.

Other fantastic entities

“The gameleira [*Ficus insipida*] is a waiting point [hunting ground because this tree produces fruits that are appreciated by many wild animals]. The tree has science. To wait, you must hit her because it gives too much visage [imaginary vision of an entity without correspondence or in contradiction with the real world, according to personal interpretation], it has “mizura” [it is the same as visage, soul, soul in pain, ghost, things like]. You hear a step like a paca, you think it's a paca, you focus with the flashlight, but you don't see anything. So, if you cut the trunk of the gameleira, with a bit of a blow, the milk comes out and there is no more mizura” (J.M. Gonçalves, 66 years old, ♂, Arara ethnic group, Terrawangã village, Arara's Big Bend of Xingu Indigenous Land, July 15, 2019).

“You must ask for permission to wait because there are bats, mizura, you see ghosts, you hear moaning, you hear footsteps, and you don't see anything. So, when you focus on the flashlight, you don't see anything underneath it. That makes the guy run with fear... When I come to wait, I strike her trunk three times with my machete, on the side where the sun rises. Excuse me and wait... The gameleira is a powerful tree” (P.V. Sena, 47 years old, ♂, Juruna ethnic group, Miratu village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 24, 2019).

For the Amazonian peoples, including the indigenous people of the Rio Urubu Indigenous Land, the “sucuri” (the anaconda *Eunectes murinus*), the “Cobra Grande” [big snake] is an animal with maximum ferocity, as well as the jaguar (*Panthera onca*), being described in several places as a kind of forest entity. For the Mura indigenous people, this large snake is not an invisible entity, but a serpent itself, which has the essential role of caring for the fish.

They describe this huge snake, which can reach ten meters in length and is very thick, but its role in protecting the fish, for the Mura, seems to be unintentional. Its large size inhibits people from frequenting the places where it exists, as well as fishermen, do not go to these places, consequently, the number of fish is greater, but it is not there to protect them, but to feed on them and others. animals that will eat them, including man.

“The “cobra grande” is not a spirit, but it protects the fish, where it is there is always a lot of fish and the fisherman doesn't go, because it eats them too. It reaches 10 meters and is about the width of this gasoline drum [referring to the 50-liter drum]” (A.C. Rosas Filho, 39 years old, ♂, Mura ethnic group, Taboka I village, Rio Urubu Indigenous Land, February 4, 2016).

As for the Sateré Mawé, who also believe in this version of the “big snake”, the cosmological importance of the anaconda goes further. They believe, like many other indigenous peoples in Brazil, that they can incorporate characteristics of animals, which usually occurs through the consumption of their meat, but also through other means:

“When I was a boy, my father brought me here [the interviewee is not born in the Rio Urubu Indigenous Land], we ate the tip of the anaconda's tail to become strong like it. But I couldn't kill the snake so neither it nor I would lose strength. If the snake was small, instead of cutting the tail, we would wrap it around our arm and it would keep squeezing, squeezing, squeezing, and it would exert a lot of force, a lot of force, then it would lose strength for people

when it got tired. So, we would throw her back in the water, and she would stay there, still, because she had given all her strength to us” (O.A Akuri, 39 years old, ♂, Sateré Mawé ethnic group, Taboka II village, Indigenous Land Rio Urubu, February 1, 2016).

Another entity, the Matinta-Pereira, is a fabulous tradition that is widespread in the State of Pará. It has several versions and for this reason, it is often confused with other entities such as Curupira, Caipora, and Saci-Pererê.

According to Câmara Cascudo (1898-1986), a scholar of Brazilian folklore, it may be the same entity for different regions of Brazil. The name Matinta-Pereira is a modernization of the Tupi word *Mati-tapereira* [the Tupi-Guarani linguistic family is one of the most important in South America, and encompasses several indigenous languages], which translates as “the little demon of the ruins”, because “tapera” is an abandoned village, in ruins [27]. Anyone who lives in a “tapera” is a “tapereira”. The word “mata” means “big thing” and “mati”, “small thing” [9].

In some versions, she is depicted as an old hag who turns at night into a bird of ill omen. In other versions, it is an old woman accompanied by her faithful and ominous bird or an old woman who turns into an owl at night. She haunts houses at night. The bird emits a loud, shrill whistle for residents to become aware of its presence. At that moment, people should say out loud that they will offer her the desired tobacco.

The next day, looking like an old witch, Matinta goes to the houses and receives what she was promised the night before. If not given to her, she curses all the residents of the house, with illness or even death [9]. Note that, in the same way as for Curupira, Matinta-Pereira is sometimes treated as “he” and as “she”.

“The Matinta-Pereira whistles loudly. People are superstitious about him. I never saw him, only heard her whistle. It whistles in the middle of the night, and they say that if you offer tobacco, you'll find out who it is in the morning. Because the person comes to get tobacco in the morning. It's a legend, but whistling I've heard” (C.R.S. Santos, 46 years old, ♂, Paquiçamba village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 29, 2019).

“Saci Pererê has only one leg, he has hair, he looks like a monkey, he smokes “maratá” [a type of tobacco popular in Brazil] in his pipe, he has a tail to “dar peia” [beat] the dogs. The Curupira has its feet turned backward. He is Saci's female. They have a child. He lives together in the woods, feeds in the woods. Caipora is the same thing” (A.P.S. Juruna, 68 years old, ♂, Juruna ethnic group, Miratu village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 26, 2019).

“Some people say that there is a Saci, an animal that looks like a monkey. He “dá peia” [beat] the dogs. People say he's ugly. I never saw him. He is more of the virgin forest. You also must ask him for permission because he owns the forest, Saci also takes care of the forest. You must ask for permission when you go into the forest if he authorizes it. He asks permission in thought, only in thought, he cannot speak aloud. If something happens, it's because he didn't authorize it: like an accident with something, the person sees things in the forest” (M. Vieira, 46 years old, ♀, Juruna ethnic group, Lakariká village, Paquiçamba Indigenous Land, April 28, 2019).

The Anhağa'avukuhua and other Kagwahiva entities

According to the Kagwahiva, when the forest is cut down, the entities that protect the forest go away. Therefore, it is evident that impacts on the forest severely alter not only the Kagwahiva way of life, but also deeper aspects, such as the cosmology, and the loss of this cosmology, transmitted between generations, can produce irreversible damage to the Kagwahiva culture.

Kagwahiva cosmology integrates living and non-living, human, and supernatural elements, representing different domains, such as the Sky, the Forest, the Water, and the Underground. Several of the activities carried out by the Kagwahiva “are marked by rituals that denote another type of relationship with the world and another type of cosmology” [6].

The fantastic entities of the Kagwahiva can only be “sighted” by a few people, on very special occasions. These “sightings” occur place through other types of senses, as these beings are often in other dimensions. They live in worlds incommunicable to most people, as we have a vision as the center of the senses. So, can we call these experiences supernatural? Indigenous people often use metaphors to explain some entities. This procedure escapes schematic models, also because it is practically impossible to describe a being inherent in different modes of presentation. In this way, by contrasting the metaphorical with the metamorphic, the metaphor becomes a starting point for the continuous movements of metamorphosis.

According to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), “The visible indicates the invisible. The realm of the visible is a luminous realm of the world of the invisible.” What manifests itself, what it is because it is, cannot fail to appear. Appearing shows what it is, it means; that is, what is shown, shows itself, and the other, signifies itself, signaling its relationship with itself and with the whole. By appearing, what is configured, takes shape. If the form is conceived as something in motion, as what is always in the process of becoming, then the form is, in its primordial sense, formation: the doctrine of form is the doctrine of transformation [28]. The Kagwahiva have great knowledge and respect for the environment in which they live, and it was possible to learn a little about the diversity of fauna and flora, the relationship between animals and plants, and the richness of the entities of the forest. The Kagwahiva have a perception of the social organization of forest beings that categorizes them into groups and leaders, in addition to also belonging to the Mutum [Curassow] and Gavião [Hawk] clans, each group of animals has its own leader:

“The entities protect the forest. Only the pajé [shaman] saw it, but there are no more pajé in the villages ... “Mbaira” likes to pinch people's ears when they're little kids. All these risks that we have in our hands are “Mbaira” who risked them. “Mbaira” is on the rock ... The forest has its leader, “Pai da Mata”. Each animal has its boss. Peccary has his boss. Do you know the name of the chief of the peccary? “Amoim”. He stays away. Peccary is here, but he is far away. Before you get close to the peccary, “Amoim” is already feeling down. “Amoim” has many pajé [the word pajé in this context refers to power], he is very powerful. He's tiny, he doesn't have fur, and he's naked ... Plants also have a leader, which is the “Mãe da Mata” [Mother of the Forest]. What's here is... I've never seen it, but there's one here in the woods: “Curupira”, who is like a person, except that his foot is backward. There's “Kwatazin”, who is “Mãe da Mata” too. He likes to walk in the igarapé. We've already seen traces of him. He walks with the bow and arrow. His trail is just like that of a child. Some of them are angry, they want to shoot people. Sometimes they go in

pairs. There are male and female ... The “Mãe da Mata” beats sapopemba [large prop root of some Amazonian trees]. She hits with a stick and the sound goes far. She doesn't like to be hunted, but getting medicine is no problem [...]. There is also another one, “Anhağa'avukuhua”, who is the “Mãe da Mata” and has long hair. In that long hair, there are all kinds of insects, snakes, lice, cockroaches, scorpions, and lizards. He's evil. He walks during the day. It's hard to see. Only the pajé who sees ... There is “Tandavuhua”, who is also evil, who wants to burn his hair, from “Anhağa'avukuhua”. There's “Pejogwauhua”. There is “Manti”, who is a “curupirinha” [little Curupira], and he whistles for people. He's evil. He says he's just like us too ... There's “Mãe do Barreiro” [Clay's mother] too. She stays in the clay pit and people think she's the tapir, but she's not. She is the tapir's mother” (M. Tenharim, 37 years old, ♂, Kagwahiva ethnic group, Hawk clan, Mafuí village, Tenharim Marmelos Indigenous Land, Humaitá, Amazonas, November 11, 2014).

“In this forest, there are several types of entities. They are people, but they are not like us. They have the “Mãe da Mata”. She is from the forest because she is part of nature. She also has “Kwatai”, who is a small being, like a three-year-old child, but he is an adult. They are always in pairs. They fish a lot, and they protect the “igarapés” [streams]. They consume water and fish from streams. They eat more fish than game animals. There is also “Añana Vukuu”. They are all entities that protect the forest a lot. The “Añana Vukuu” has hair that is very long and feeds on fish as well. If there are no more fish for her, she will have to look for fish in other streams. If these entities leave, we will lose them from our culture and we will no longer have their protection” (M.S. Tenharim, 52 years old, ♀, Kagwahiva ethnic group, Curassow clan, Mafuí village, Tenharim Marmelos Indigenous Land, Humaitá, Amazonas, November 8, 2014).

The signifier is the sound or the image, and the signified is the concept or meaning the signifier represents. For the philosopher and linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional, because the signs can mean anything we agree that they mean, as well as mean different things to different people.

The existence of every being has meaning for Kagwahiva. Army ants, which are carnivorous and known for organizing themselves in periodic expeditions of thousands of individuals, were recorded on one of the walks through the forest and it was explained that:

“When these ants sting a person, can't scream [...]. “Tandavuhua”, who is their boss, is laughing. He's like people. It is hidden in the tree hollow. Only the pajé can see it. My grandfather's father told to my father who told to me. The “Tandavuhua” is not the boss of all ants, only some of them. His right arm is short, and his left is long. His arm is like a saw.” (J.C. Tenharim, 33 years old, ♂, Kagwahiva ethnic group, Hawk clan, Taboka village, Tenharim Marmelos Indigenous Land, Humaitá, Amazonas, November 9, 2014).

4. CONCLUSIONS

During the studies carried out with the indigenous populations, it was possible to notice the perfect harmony that most of the people of these traditional communities have with the

environment in which they live, consolidated by the rich collection of cosmological concepts that are directly related to elements of nature, such as plants, animals, fungus, outcrops of rocks, fallen trunks at the foot of trees, dead leaves forming the floor of the forest, trails of wild animals left on the ground, streams, the passage of the wind and even the silence that occurs inside the forest.

According to the cosmological perceptions of these indigenous people, the fantastic entities act directly or indirectly in regulating the activities carried out by them, guiding their behavior so that they are always protected in different natural environments, whether during hunting, fishing, gathering, cultivation, and crossing territories.

The respect that indigenous people show for the environment in which they live is evident. They are in contact with entities that protect the plants and animals, which most cannot see or understand because the translation of this relationship is quite subjective and needs a lot of reflective awareness. Respect for the forest is translated in different ways and is related to the individual beliefs of each indigenous person, having verified common patterns of interpretation of the main entities of the forest.

In addition to providing resources, the forest provides one of the most important values of the indigenous people: freedom. Unfortunately, this freedom is always under threat from the transformations and impacts that have occurred and may still occur on indigenous territories. That's why the Amazon rainforest and the traditional peoples who live in it need protection and these fantastic entities seem to be fulfilling their role.

Believing in the existence of these beings is a step towards feeding curiosity, which is one of the main structural sources of indigenous culture. Accepting the existence of these entities is penetrate a mysterious world they live in, in all its complexity, especially in a culture fed by stories and narratives transmitted from generation to generation, which permeate one of the richest biomes in fauna and flora, where thousands of beings, entities, and animal archetypes live.

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