

## **Transforming Spirit Bodies: Changing Materialities and Embodied Dependencies**

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Organized by Research Group “Marking Power: Embodied Dependencies, Haptic Regimes and Body Modification” (Sinah Kloß, Lena Muders, Taynã Tagliati), Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS)

Venue: Bonner Universitätsforum, Heussallee 18-24, 53113 Bonn, Germany

### **Panel I – Religion & Healing**

#### *Being Affected in Kali Worship, Guyana*

Marcelo Moura Mello (Federal University of Bahia, Brazil)

In this paper I explore ritual practices designed both to incorporate and to repudiate non-human powers into the very bodily essences of Hindu devotees of the goddess Kali in Guyana. Drawing attention to healing treatments performed by Hindu deities in persons that are, as it is locally said, *affected* by spirits of the colonial time, I describe how Kali’ devotees make their bodies susceptible to divine power (*shakti*) in order to counter-effect potential nefarious consequences of spiritual agency. Paying close attention to the manipulation of religious artifacts in Kali worship, I argue that the presumed ontological differences between Hindu deities and spirits depend upon practices designed to develop certain sensibilities in the human body. I draw inspiration from McKim’s Marriot dividual model to understand how humans are engaged in transfers of bodily substances with other-than-humans. As they become involved with Kali rituals, humans transform their bodies by incorporating and separating their bodily essences from other-than-human powers. In Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s terms, their bodies are both sites of transformation and of ontological differentiation; they have the capacity to affect and to be affected by human and other-than-human others.

#### *Bodies of Salvation Embodied Powers among the Moqoit People of the Argentinean Chaco*

Agustina Altman (ICA- Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina) & Alejandro Martín López (CONICET; ICA- Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Originally hunter-gatherers, the Moqoit people are an indigenous group that inhabits the Argentine Chaco. During the 18th century the Jesuits founded missions among them and from the 1960s onwards they were missioned by evangelical churches of various denominations. Currently, their reinterpretations of Christianity play a key role in their social dynamics. In this paper we aim to explore the complex ways in which Moqoit bodies have been and are thought as sign and place of the links with non-human powers. For pre-Christian moqoit logics, human life and abilities depend on pacts with them.

Power, linked to abundance and plenitude, is a crucial feature of these moqoit conceptions and is expressed in a privileged way in bodies. Potent non-human beings can access varied bodily regimes linked to brightness. Resistance and emotional control are signs of power and pacts with non-humans. However, a lacking and battered body can inspire compassion from them, who can also appear in pestilent forms to test human compassion. For the missionaries, Moqoit bodies have been seen as an expression of a great diversity of relationships with the divine. Gluttonous, drunken and immoderate bodies, signs of sin or ignorance; proportionate and resistant bodies, signs of a nature open to grace; scarified and tattooed bodies, disfigured like the devil; bodies with an austere diet, in consonance with evangelical precepts, etc.

Jesuits, Mennonites, Adventists, Pentecostals, all these Christian missionaries will see in Moqoit bodies hopes of salvation or testimonies of the fall. On the other hand, Moqoit reinterpretations of Christianity will understand the body in ecstasy, as inhabited by the Holy Spirit, and its health as proof of a successful pact with the god of the Bible. But simultaneously the body's needs, desires and appetites will lead to periodically take a "time off" from the Christian pact.

### *Healing Arts: Body Painting in Some Jê Groups*

André Demarchi (Federal University of Tocantins, Brazil)

The paper presents a comparative approach to body painting among Jê peoples, more specifically the Menêngôkre (Kayapó), Ramkokàmekrà (Canela), PykopCatiji (Gavião), Mehin (Krahô) and Panin (Apinajé). The starting point is the ethnographies on these peoples, highlighting a facet of body painting that has not been explored in analytical and comparative terms. It is a question of understanding how, for different Jê peoples of Central Brazil, body painting takes on a therapeutic, prophylactic and even protective dimension of the bodies, where those who hold this knowledge (mostly women) turn into experts of healing powers. The paintings hold these powers in specific contexts, especially those related to situations such as post-childbirth, pregnancy, childbirth, illness and mourning. This praxiological approach, centered on the action of the painting and not on its representation, allows one to understand body painting as an art of healing.

## **Panel II – History and Memory**

*“Losing one another is like the cutting of history, the shredding of encyclopaedias”:  
Ancestors and Country in Contemporary Indigenous Australian Fiction*

Tina Helbig (University of Göttingen, Germany)

Australia is distinguished by the diversity and vast cultural richness of its indigenous cultures, but many Aboriginal groups know a version of the ‘Dreaming’. This imperfectly chosen English

word came to stand for the belief that at the beginning of time, the Ancestors created ‘Country’ – that is the land, its human and non-human inhabitants, culture and the Law. When their earthly forms died, some transformed their bodies into parts of the landscape, for example trees or hills. According to this animistic worldview, the spirits of the ancestors are embodied in Country and take care of Country, but also need to be taken care for. In contemporary fiction written by Indigenous Australian authors, engagements with Ancestors open up knowledge systems alternative to Western ideas of rationalism, and range from the retelling of traditional creation stories, to the role of Ancestors and the Law in everyday life, to the ongoing consequences of colonisation not only for Indigenous people, but also for Country. In Ellen van Neerven’s short story “Water”, these various strands run together: in a not so far away future, at a time of massive eco-crisis, the ancestor spirits take on a half-human, half-plant form and help the traditional human owners of the land defend it against a governmentally approved invasion – rephrased as land-development – a scenario which is once more repeating Indigenous Australia’s (ongoing) colonisation by the British. Country, ancestors and humans cannot exist without each other – trying or being forced to do so would bring on a loss of apocalyptical dimensions, the loss of past, present, and the future, “like the cutting of history, the shredding of encyclopaedias.”

*Invisible Actors, Visible Memories: Stories and Expressions of Intergenerational Trauma in Contemporary Israel*

Yael Ben Horin (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

As a socially and culturally diverse setting shaped by the omnipresence of conflict, contemporary Israel is a field where multiple understandings of grief, death-worlds and resilience interact and shape local narratives and expressions of intergenerational trauma. Regarding the role storytelling and memory play in making the past present in the family context highlights how invisible agents such as deceased family members and loved ones engage with the living in shaping individual and collective traumatic experiences, narratives and discourses.

Affective bodies preserve traces of past interactions and correspondences between human and non-human actors and carry them into the present. The traumatic experience takes place through an extensive array of expressions closely linked to continued and discontinued bonds with the dead, ranging from cancer, eating disorders and heart palpitations; to anxiety, nightmares and spirit visitations. These experiences are strongly embedded in Jewish death-world cosmologies, in which a deceased person’s soul is considered to linger in Earth well after death.

In the context of intergenerational trauma, local expressions of distress and resilience become manifestations of embodied memory and a way to interact, care for and maintain bonds with the past and dead loved ones; rendering the immaterial material and the invisible visible.

*Between the Limits of Solidarity and the Coping of Suffering: The NN's Adoption in Colombia*

Luis Bastidas Meneses (University of Bayreuth, Germany)

During the decades of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s in Colombia, right-wing paramilitary armies dominated a large region of approximately 30,000 square kilometers, crossed by the Magdalena River, known as Magdalena Medio. The armies waged a campaign of extermination against guerrillas, and members and sympathizers of leftist political parties, leaving more than 1,000 people murdered.

As in other riverside towns, the inhabitants of Puerto Berrío, a municipality in the southern Magdalena Medio, witnessed the bodies of hundreds of murdered people (most of them civilians) by paramilitaries floating down the river. Between the late 1990s and during the second decade of 2000s, many people in this town rescued the mutilated, beheaded, dismembered, and decapitated bodies, and buried them as NNs<sup>1</sup>. Residents would then give the NNs a name and prayed for them. The relatives of murdered victims sometimes adopted these NN bodies in the hope that people in other riverside towns would do the same for their relatives who had been thrown into the river by the paramilitaries. Others, in the framework of popular Catholicism, adopted the deceased under the belief that the nameless souls would grant miracles<sup>2</sup> from the afterlife in exchange for prayers that would shorten their passage through purgatory (Bastidas Meneses, Kaden, Schnettler, 2021). This paper looks for answers to the question of how inhabitants of Puerto Berrío interpret the life-world (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) in a context of extreme violence, and examines the aspects of the relationship with the dead – both from beliefs and practices framed by lived religion (McGuire, 2008; Ammerman, 2020) and the relations of solidarity that allow the living to cope and share the suffering of others (Alexander, 2006) – that enable agents to incorporate the victims into the community and explain the daily social relations.

### **Keynote Lecture**

*Kanamari Shamanism and Relations of Dependency across Generations*

Luiz Costa (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

One of the defining technical operations of Amazonian shamanism is familiarization. The shaman engages powerful spirits, which it defeats through methods of shamanic warfare, or seduces through magic, or tricks through cunning, thus placing spirits under his control. Familiarization, usually conceived as the instatement of a relation of filiation between shaman and spirit, is often a strategic element in the acquisition of shamanic power: for shamanic initiation to be complete a novice must successfully place powerful others under his control, and acquire the means to make them do his bidding. This control is never complete, and the shaman's ambivalence is inseparable from his imperfect control over beings whose agency risks overwhelming his own.

In this presentation I will trace a history of familiarization across two generations of Kanamari shamans from Brazilian Amazonia. I show how spirits exist within and without shamanic bodies, how these movements affect the shaman's capacity to produce effects on the world, and also how relations of dependency between shaman and spirit are inseparable from other relations of dependence and subordination. I begin with the story of the shaman Dyo'o, who led Kanamari resistance against invading rubber tappers during the rubber boom in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. After his death, his 'jaguar soul' emerged from his corpse, regained consciousness, and started attacking its ex-kin, whom it saw as 'enemies'. His young son-in-law, the initiate Dyumi, had to meet his father-in-law's jaguar soul in the forest and defeat it, thereby converting Dyo'o into his 'spirit son'. Set against the backdrop of changes brought about by the increasing presence of rubber extractors in Kanamari land, the story of Dyo'o and Dyumi shows how kinship, dependence, control and shamanism are entwined with histories of contact with non-Indigenous peoples.

### **Panel III – Ecology & Shared World**

#### *Animal Spirits, Spirit Animals, and the Shape of Unseen Minds in Suriname and Singapore*

Stuart Earle Strange (Yale-NUS College, Singapore)

Spirits and animals seem to accompany each other almost inevitably. This paper explores this relationship by considering the parallel ways in which spirit mediumship and social relations with animals both complicate and assuage the problem of knowing other minds. Examining how the materiality of bodies shapes the interpretation of ritual and interspecies relationships, I outline the semiotic conditions under which different expectations about mental interiorities become socially meaningful. Drawing on ethnographic examples from contemporary Singapore and Suriname, I detail the practices that create or obstruct intersubjectivity between or beyond human, animal, and spirit bodies, to lay out how different expectations about interiority are interactively constituted. Doing so, I show how this influences the characteristics generally taken to define ontological difference between humans, spirits, and non-human animals and thus the way in which these differences become socially significant.

#### *Shared Vulnerabilities: Avenging Spirits, Corporate Groups and Other Concepts (Saamaka, Suriname)*

Rogério Brittes W. Pires (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil)

The Saamaka Maroons from the Upper Suriname River, understand that there are many ways the dead take part in the affairs of the living. They may come in visions, dreams, or through possession. They may act as ghosts, as ancestors... And the dead may appear as *kunu*, avenging spirits who act matrilaterally; or as *neseke*, spiritual godparents who often act patrilaterally. The Saamaka argue that, through different mechanisms, both *kunu* and *neseke* can bring people

together through their shared vulnerabilities. Being potential victims of the same avenging spirits is part of what makes people part of their matrilineages; and, having the same spiritual godparent means being spiritually “germinated” and “raised” by the same ancestor, sharing bodily substances, and thus having the same food taboos. Dangers such as the potential attack of a *kunu* create, through counter-actualization, relations of mutual protection, which may, or may not, result in *social groups*. Experimenting with different anthropological theories, I claim that the ideas espoused by the Maroons about embodiment and corporeality, about cooperation and corporation, may ironically be described as a kind of *spiritual-functionalism* inasmuch they resonate with outdated anthropological concepts such as *corporate groups* and *complementary filiation*. However, the Saamaka are surely *not* functionalists for, in their own conceptualizations, ghosts and other spirits are deemed much more relevant than the agency of social structures and related constructs.

### *Cuerpos y Ritualidades: Tratamientos Mortuorios Para Regenerar La Vida*

Milton Eyzaguirre Morales (Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (MUSEF), Bolivia)

The talk shows the forms of ritual treatment of bodies during the pre-Hispanic and current period, as part of a review of continuities influenced by the spiritual management of their environment.

This talk is related to the Andean world, to a force called *ajayu* or as a forced translation “soul”; Wind, fire, air, earth, rocks, animals, plants, etc. have this entity. Human beings can have more than one soul, and this explains the form of treatment of the body by ritual specialists (chamankanis, yatiris, laicas, etc.) who simultaneously treat the body and soul different from the practices of the biomedicine.

The soul or *ajayu* exists in both living and dead beings and for this reason within a productive calendar whether agricultural, livestock or mining, these deserve permanent ritual attention, which generates a series of rites linked to the fertility, well-being of human beings and their environment. This relationship rejects anthropocentric theories that undstrand humans as the center of the universe. In Amerindian approaches the human being is one of many components of our pluriverses.

Moreover, it is important to resort and to understand the study of fluids such as blood, fat, urine, tears or snot, as part of the bodies, which are not simply biological in nature; at the cultural level they also serve to establish communicational relationships of ritual nature connect living, dead and the natural environment.

In the local context, the dead have tasks to fullfiel, and are recognized as *sullka* dioses (gods of second order). The Western ontological proposal establishes a dichotomous view in which death is opposed to life. Locally the celebrations of the dead, their recognition as ancestors and the treatment of bodies (*chullpa*) or heads (*ñatitas*) are rituals of joy and fertility: The dead bring life along with rainfall and enable the germination of plants, animals, minerals and human beings.

(The Talk will be in Spanish)

## **Panel IV – Production & Objects**

### *The Transformation of Bodies in Ancient Amazonia*

Cristiana Barreto (Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Belém, Brazil) & Marcony Alves (Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, University of São Paulo, Brazil)

In the last decades, Amazonian ethnographies have emphasized the importance of “growing” and “fabricating” the body in Amerindian ontological practices for differentiating diverse peoples, humans and other-than-humans, who inhabit the same world. Moreover, in the Amazon, the world is in a constant process of creating bodies, but whose forms and images are unstable and relational, always in interaction with and reaction to each other. The very large number of objects and images depicting bodies in Amazonian archaeology offers enormous potential to explore these indexes of identity building in past Amerindian societies. This presentation will focus on some of these materials, especially ceramic objects (funerary urns, figurines, and ritual vases) depicting human and animal bodies, addressing the variability in the way bodies are conceived within and across different regional contexts. We will focus on materials from two main archaeological cultures in the lower Amazon, Marajoara (AD 400-1350) and Santarém (AD 1350-1600). Special attention will be given to diverse principles of body composition, including multicomposite bodies, fusion of human/non-human bodies, and humanization of objects, all of which fit well within Amazonian animistic practices of subjectification of objects. From there we will discuss how depiction of bodies show human/animal interdependency organized along principles of predation in diverse ways across regional cultures. At last, we will address the role such objects and images could have played in the past, remembering that, to understand the diversity of Amerindian relational ontologies today, we need to perceive how they are rooted in a deep history of aesthetic technologies.

### *The Role of Ikat Weaving for the Ritual Ceremonies in Eastern Indonesia*

Julita Oesanty Oetojo (University of Bonn, Germany)

The term "ikat" is a Malay-Indonesian word. It has the meaning of "tie," which refers to the manufacturing method and fabric. It is a resist dye technique that begins with the yarns being tied in a pattern before applying the dye. The power relations of ikat weaving textiles in traditional rituals in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, are examined in this study. Rituals and ceremonies were very important in their religion. Birth, death, marriage, and the start of essential tasks such as planting a field, building a house, and starting and ending war are all major events. Every important ceremony includes textiles. They played symbolic roles in some minor rituals, and the processes involved in making cloth necessitated their rituals. To dedicate new designs, weavers must perform a smaller ceremony that includes prayers to the ancestors and the sacrifice of an animal. The motifs were thought to have high philosophical value and function by the community. A corpse is wrapped in traditional ikat textiles before burial as a symbol of connection between individuals, spirits, and ancestors. The quantity and quality of ikat are determined by the deceased's status. The study looks at how ikat weaving fits into the discussion of asymmetrical dependencies and social hierarchy. The study explores the relationship between the weaver's roles in textile production, their tradition, and their

ancestors. This research's methodology is based on art history, cross-cultural studies, asymmetrical dependencies, and descriptive qualitative research. The aim is to look into and find out how the ikat textile is embodied as part of people's spiritual lives and how the value of this link moves or changes in the present.

*Scarification and Tooth Mutilations in the Second Slavery: Representations, Persecution Markers and Biometry*

Michael Zeuske (University of Bonn, Germany)

Scarifications and dental mutilations were ethnic identifiers and expressed belonging as well as hierarchies in African societies. In slavery and slave trade in Africa, on the Atlantic and in the Americas, they formed the basis for the assignment to the so-called African "naciones". In particular, the dynamics of the capitalist second slaveries were closely related to the ongoing supply of freshly stolen people from Africa (often over smuggling: hidden Atlantic), mostly all with decorative scars, tattoos and dental mutilations (representations in costumbrist painting). In the Second Slavery societies, these markers formed legally recorded signalements for the persecution of fled and rebellious slaves as well as the argumentative and material basis for racist biometries.