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# INDIGENOUS LIVING AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LANDSCAPE

## O HABITAR INDÍGENA E SUA RELAÇÃO COM A PAISAGEM

## EL HABITAR INDÍGENA Y SU RELACIÓN CON EL PAISAJE



**Figure 0.** *Opy the Tekoa Itaty.* The *Opy* the Tekoa Itaty, collectively built, is inserted in the landscape of Serra do Tabuleiro.  
Source: Nauíra Zanardo Zanin.

## RESUMO

O presente artigo busca tecer relações entre o habitar, a paisagem e os povos originários, em especial os Mbyá Guarani que vivem no Sul do Brasil. Buscamos relacionar os seres e elementos que compõem a paisagem e estão presentes em suas narrativas de origem e nas formas construtivas que elaboram para habitar esta paisagem, ao transformarem seus componentes em arquitetura e lugares de convívio. Utilizamos uma abordagem etnográfica que inclui observações, diálogos e percursos pelas paisagens. Publicações de autoria indígena e não-indígena são referenciais teóricos interdisciplinares que auxiliam nossas reflexões. Compreendemos que a relação dos povos indígenas com a paisagem é ancestral, vinculando-se às suas memórias, narrativas e cosmologias. As formas construtivas por meio das quais habitam a paisagem revelam afeto e sentimento de pertencimento e parentesco com os elementos que dela fazem parte. Como conclusão, percebemos que a sabedoria vivenciada dos povos indígenas com relação à paisagem, desde tempos imemoriais, oferece ensinamentos para repensarmos nossa relação com o planeta como um todo.

**Palavras-chave:** povos originários, arquitetura, paisagem, percepção, pertencimento.

## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to weave relationships between living, the landscape, and the original peoples, especially the Mbyá Guarani from Southern Brazil. We seek to relate the beings and elements that make up the landscape and are present in their narratives of origin and in the constructive forms they create to inhabit this landscape by transforming its components into architecture and places of conviviality. An ethnographic approach was used, including observations, dialogs, and journeys through the landscapes. Publications by indigenous and non-indigenous authors are interdisciplinary theoretical references that help these reflections. It is understood that the relationship between indigenous peoples and the landscape is ancestral, linked to their memories, narratives, and cosmologies. The constructive forms through which they inhabit the landscape reveal affection and a feeling of belonging and kinship with the elements that are part of it. In conclusion, it is perceived that the experienced wisdom of indigenous peoples about the landscape since time immemorial offers lessons to rethink our relationship with the planet as a whole.

**Keywords:** original peoples, architecture, landscape, perception, belonging.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo busca tejer relaciones entre el habitar, el paisaje y los pueblos originarios, especialmente los Mbyá Guarani del Sur de Brasil. Buscamos relacionar a los seres con los elementos que componen el paisaje y están presentes en sus narrativas de origen y en las formas constructivas que crean para habitar este paisaje, transformando sus componentes en arquitectura y lugares de convivencia. Se utilizó un enfoque etnográfico que incluye observaciones, diálogos y recorridos por los paisajes. Las publicaciones de autores indígenas y no indígenas son referentes teóricos interdisciplinarios que ayudan a estas reflexiones. Entendemos que la relación entre los pueblos indígenas y el paisaje es ancestral, ligada a sus memorias, narrativas y cosmologías. Las formas constructivas a través de las cuales habitan el paisaje revelan afecto y sentimiento de pertenencia y parentesco con los elementos que forman parte del mismo. En conclusión, nos damos cuenta de que la sabiduría experimentada de los pueblos indígenas con relación al paisaje, desde tiempos inmemoriales, ofrece lecciones para repensar nuestra relación con el planeta en su conjunto.

**Palabras clave:** pueblos originarios, arquitectura, paisaje, percepción, pertenencia.

Nota sobre a grafia dos termos indígenas: as palavras em línguas indígenas não possuem plural, portanto ao nos referirmos a um povo utilizamos maiúscula no singular (ex.: os Guarani); enquanto a utilização como adjetivo é em minúscula (ex.: escola guarani). Os demais termos têm como base o Léxico Guarani, de Dooley (2013). São respeitadas as formas utilizadas pelos autores guarani e, no caso de citações de outros autores, é mantida a forma utilizada por eles.

Note on the spelling of indigenous terms: words in indigenous languages do not have a plural, so when referring to a people we use a capital letter in the singular (e.g.: the Guarani); while the use as an adjective is in lower case (e.g.: Guarani school). The other terms are based on the Guarani Lexicon by Dooley (2013). The forms used by the Guarani authors are respected and, in the case of quotations from other authors, the form used by them is maintained.

Nota sobre la ortografía de los términos indígenas: las palabras en lenguas indígenas no tienen plural, por lo que cuando nos referimos a un pueblo utilizamos mayúsculas en singular (por ejemplo, los guaraníes); mientras que cuando se utiliza como adjetivo va en minúsculas (por ejemplo, escuela guaraní). Los demás términos se basan en el Léxico Guaraní de Dooley (2013). Se respetan las formas utilizadas por los autores

## INTRODUCTION

Living refers to the feeling of belonging, recollection, and the welcome of the abode. It refers to the sense of shelter, to what is familiar and intimate. In our search for theoretical references that delve into the concept of living, we come across many possible understandings, with many ways of approaching the subject. Here, we present those that enable dialog with other knowledge, such as the inhabitation of native peoples and their ways of relating to the landscape. In our research, we found correspondence between the positions of different indigenous peoples concerning the Earth and the recognition that other beings and elements that make up the landscape are part of their cosmological conceptions. The indigenous living we present is poetic not only because of the aesthetics evidenced but also because it defies understanding - it is difficult to grasp by eyes used to other configurations and forms of human habitation, so it invites us to different perceptions. Something that destabilizes, as inhabiting involves affections, identifications, conformations, and sensitivities educated in certain directions.

We aim to understand indigenous living and the relationship of the native peoples with the landscape and territory, looking closer at some aspects of the dwellings (places configured for permanence) observed with the Mbyá Guarani of southern Brazil. The Mbyá are a Guarani subgroup found in several Brazilian states, especially in the south and southeast regions and other countries such as Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay. Their geographical occupation includes different biomes and landscapes whose ancestry is recorded by archeology, which considers them as producers of these environments from their cultivation system that consisted of agroforestry polycultures forming "anthropogenic forests" (Noelli et al., 2019, p. 18). Archaeological records show their occupation's landscape and environmental diversity, which can be observed to the present day, even with the limitations imposed by colonization. For a long time, the Mbyá avoided relating to national society, constantly avoiding contact with it, leading them to invisibility (Souza, 1998) and losing their territories. However, this also allowed them to cultivate cultural aspects such as language, music, religion, art, architecture, and their relationship with the environmental context. These characteristics, added to the facilitation of access to the villages by more experienced researchers, led to our choice of research.

We introduce this article with some theoretical discussions that help the reader understand our point of view regarding the topic. Next, we present the methodology used in the research and then refer to the field findings related to the origin narratives of the Guarani and the transformation of landscape elements into architecture. In this way, we broaden our perceptions to understand the connection between Indigenous peoples and landscapes. Finally, we reflect on the contributions that Native peoples offer, through their ways of life and world views, to our self-criticism as beings who share the same planet and constantly transform it to adapt it to our way of living.

As authors of these reflections, we are inserted in a Westernized and capitalist society, which has not prioritized dialog or understanding of other ways of life practiced here since its arrival on this continent. We observe that until today, the colonizing posture remains in force, depriving their places of ancestral and plural wisdom from a deep relationship with the context in which they are found. As a theoretical basis, we use interdisciplinary references of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authorship, which make it possible to weave relationships between Indigenous knowledge and academic rationality. Our reflections are based on an extended research journey with the Guarani, during which we maintained a dialogical posture (Oliveira, 2000) that uses strategies of the ethnographic method. Being in the field, in the most different opportunities for interaction and learning, was fundamental to understanding the Guarani living and their relationship with the landscape.

Tim Ingold (2000, 2015) argues that we are constituted by going through places, making exchanges with the environment, and absorbing and becoming part of the spaces through which we move. Similarly, when discussing the understanding of human spatiality, Bollnow (2008) goes further with the reflection on spatial perception mediated by the body:

The body is not only a tool with which space is experienced, but it is itself an experienced space, and indeed the most primitive experienced space, in whose example all other spaces can be understood. Thus, we are immersed in the larger, more comprehensive space not as a non-spatial subject but, through the body, as a product that is itself spatial. (Bollnow, 2008, p. 298)

With the help of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Bollnow (2008) ponders that the spatial world is transmitted through the body, permeating it as part of sensorially perceptible space. We share Merleau-Ponty's (1994 [1945]) notion of the body, which the idea of a phenomenal body can clarify. It is our own body just as we experience it, from within, a body that rises toward the world. Thus, we cannot look at our bodies distanced and purely objectively. It is about our body through which our thoughts and feelings come into contact with objects. This is how the world exists for us: a body in the first person, the subject of experience. We experience the world with the senses, acting on it through the most sophisticated technology down to the most primitive movements, having feelings that give us a range of complexity and subtlety. The body is a sensitive among the sensitive; it is the one in which an inscription is made of all the others; it is a thing among things that is dimensional by itself. Similarly, the house can be considered as an

Expanded body, with which man identifies himself similarly and by which he correspondingly classifies himself in a larger surrounding space. (...) Thus, there is also an immediate

identification in the house, even if not as pronounced as in the body. The man identifies with his house. He merges with it. Once he lives in his house, he is present in it all. (Bollnow, 2008, p. 309)

The domestic space of our home is the most common and where we can live for the longest time. In the book "The Poetics of Space," by Gaston Bachelard (1998), we realize how rich the house is in poetic ephemerities. In the domestic sphere, space assumes and reassumes roles and is (re)designed by bodies. It is also in it that body that paths are traced. It is very pretentious to draw such poetic details. Thus, space is a space lived with all the partialities of the imagination. Therefore, what we experience with our body serves as a foundation, as a starting point to create the possibility that another body has its own perceptual experience.

The house as a cosmological representation is a common reference "for our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, our first universe. A real cosmos in every sense of the word" (Bachelard, 1998, p.24). Following this understanding, Bachelard (1998, P41) integrates the house into its context: "The house has become a natural being, whose fate is bound to that of mountains and of the waters that plough the land." Just like bodies, living spaces also (co)respond to the environment where they are. Moreover, they explore the environment where other beings and elements that maintain the cosmological balance inhabit.

To inhabit means to have a fixed lease on the space, to belong to it, and to be rooted in it. However, for man to remain there to feel protected, the "place" of the living cannot be conceived as a simple point, as initially, we speak of a natural center of the space experienced to which all paths would be referred. To be able to live there quietly, this lease must be expanded in a certain way. There, man must be able to move in a particular territory. (Bollnow, 2008, P. 138)

It is interesting, here, to reflect on the indigenous dwellings beside roads, adjacent to their ancestral territories, those located literally on the margin of a dwelling, where people are separated from all the elements that give meaning to their life (the *nhanderekó*<sup>2</sup>, in the case of the Mbyá Guarani). It is really a life uprooted, out of its context, a provisional life, and subject to diverse forms of violence and injustice (Heurich et al., 2010). At the same time, many of the so-called indigenous "settlements" on the roadsides are meant by them as forms of "retaking," of re-appropriating their territories, in a kind of "self-demarcation" of lands, while the state does not do so. There is political power in this if we think of politics as defined by Jacques Rancière (2012) when he refers to the hierarchical division of our society and the individuals who integrate it based on their social positions, functions, identity traits, etc. The indigenous people, according to Rancière, would be one of the groups excluded from the hegemonic socio-political

<sup>2</sup> *Nhanderekó*: our way of life, our way of being and living.

order: One of the “Without a part” (*sans-part*) in the division of the parties. Nevertheless, against this social-political order, they can rebel in different ways, including by reaffirming their political capacity.

For a man to be able to inhabit his room, in order for him to have a resort there against the assault of the world, in order for him to find his security and his peace, it is necessary to guarantee this territory with the appropriate means. (Bollnow, 2008, P. 138)

The need for territorial guarantee is currently latent for Indigenous Peoples after centuries of usurpation and expropriation of their territories. Even if they feel affectively linked to certain places, that they see themselves as part of them, that they are deeply rooted, and that they believe that a document confirming this is not necessary, the colonizing process, which is still perpetuated, determined that they began to seek legal guarantees of access and permanence to their territories. The logic of private property is imposed on the kinship relationship that Indigenous Peoples maintain with the land. Indigenous peoples' relationship with the landscape is more profound than subsistence or survival. It represents a spiritual and cosmological connection, guided by respect for all forms of life and elements in the landscape.

It is necessary to understand the conception of territory encompassing territoriality and landscape, considering different ways of being in a place and being part of a landscape. The reading of Indigenous authors allows access to their ways of understanding the territory as something that connects with their lives, linking relationships of kinship, affection, and spirituality (Krenak, 2020; Yxapyry, 2022; Gakran, 2015).

The feeling of kinship with the Earth, in turn, makes room for potential affinity with all beings living on it. Here, from America, animals, plants, minerals, meteorological phenomena, spirits, humans, and non-humans coexist in constant communication in a space-time of transformation. Here, time and space are axes that unfold; distances and landscapes are thought of as life in motion, possessing a temporality, a dynamic, a duration. (Freitas, 2008, p. 18)

We consider that landscapes, as life support spaces, become symbolic places through the appropriation and reading of the world based on cosmological narratives, forming places of reference and memory: “Landscapes belong to the present – even containing a history of past interactions – reified in memory about past interactions and present practices to preserve ancestral connections and identities based on the Earth” (Zedeño, 2008, p.214). In this way, we understand that Indigenous territoriality is marked by ancestry and displacements (forced or spontaneous) experienced throughout the history of occupation of a landscape. By following the paths of their ancestors, they constitute themselves as Indigenous people and become part of the landscape they created, which is demarcated by the symbolic plant species present there.

## METHODOLOGY

### WALKING THROUGH LANDSCAPE AND EXPERIENCING ARCHITECTURE

The discussions presented here result from a research journey initiated approximately twenty years ago, if we count the first research on the subject. It is impossible to separate the path experienced by researchers because experiences shape our worldview. In this sense, we can consider as methodology ethnographic interaction, observation, photographic surveys, focus groups, journeys in landscapes and places that have been building our understanding of living. We agree with Geertz (2008, p.4) when he states that what gives identity to ethnographic work is not the methodological resources employed but “the type of intellectual effort it represents” by enabling the researcher to generate a “dense description” of the reality where he proposes to investigate.

Because we are in dialogue with Indigenous interlocutors, ethnography strategies were used, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and dialogue with focus groups (André, 2012). Previous experiences have shown that for the success of the research, it is necessary to establish a relationship of trust; we need to be accepted by the group, which happens over time as dialogues become more profound. Formal acceptance to perform the research is also fundamental, with consent being signed by the leaders and interlocutors, even though they value the words spoken and feel them more than the written ones.

Our research approach is qualitative, including some characteristics such as direct contact with the studied context through intensive field research, collection and production of data related to the problem, greater focus on the research process than on the product, understanding of the perspectives and meanings attributed by the interlocutors; absence of pre-established hypotheses, putting into practice a data analysis process that begins with broad questions that are looked closer at and delimited throughout the study based on interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks (Lüdke & André, 2012). In this article, we use previously registered and published sources as theoretical references from different areas of knowledge with a focus on Indigenous thought. We examine various sources such as books, articles, theses, dissertations, interviews, audiovisual elements, and documentaries. We resort to the spoken, written, and recorded words of Indigenous thought, which allow a greater understanding of their way of relating to the landscape. We follow the path indicated by Indigenous leaders and Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, seeking to understand, learn, and reconnect with other wisdoms that go beyond academic paths but which are also in them.

When researching landscapes, walking through the places can be exhilarating and eye-opening. In this research, we report on the opportunities experienced in the field when visiting ancestral indigenous places in southern Brazil. We bring images of the places we have been, although only one image cannot convey the atmosphere (Zumthor;

2006) perceived in these experiences. As an alternative to the written text, photographic records are a relevant contribution, as they capture not only a snapshot but the perspective of the observer, suggesting interpretations and revealing the vital force of a place (Ferrara, 1997). The displacement through different places, the sensation of the textures of the walls warmed by the sun's heat, the freshness of the spring's water, or the wind whispering in the middle of the forest need to be experienced. Still, photography can represent many perceptual aspects through shapes, colors, textures, details, surroundings, lights, and shadows. Even if it captures only a snapshot, the photographic record helps in the subsequent analysis, complementing the memory and field notes (Attané & Langewiesche, 2005).

## MBYÁ GUARANI ARCHITECTURE AS A REFLECTION OF COSMO-ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Indigenous people experience and teach other ways of being on Earth, other ways of life. The *nhanderekó* guarani values harmony, joy, and beauty in the simplicity of life. Spirituality is experienced in every dawn, in every daily activity. Sustainability is expressed as a demonstration of respect for elders and the wise (Zanin, 2006). The *opy* (prayer house) is the place to honor all wonders, to pray for shared joy, for children, to transmit and follow the teachings of the creator deities: beautiful words, divine song, and infinite love (Popyguá, 2017; Poty, 2015).

These other ways of living, found with the indigenous peoples, as Ailton Krenak (2021) said, as a representative of the indigenous peoples in the National Constituent Assembly of 1987, do not even endanger the lives of animals. The transformation of the landscape by Indigenous Peoples is a landscape formation by distributing sacred plants and symbolic trees, which (de)mark a presence but which, for non-Indigenous people, can go unnoticed. A reading of the landscape (through archaeology, ethnobotany, or landscape anthropology) can reveal that the constitution of landscapes in different biomes is the work of the indigenous peoples who inhabit them and reproduce symbolic elements that are part of their oral narratives, worldviews, and spirituality.

Just as they go (con)forming the landscapes (natural, but as we understand, cultural), the trans-form-action of space, converting them into living places (*Tekoa*<sup>3</sup>), also translates an integration with the landscape. Meliá and Temple (2004) consider that *Tekoa* consists of some distinct spaces, such as the virgin forest (used for hunting, fishing, and gathering), the cultivable forest, and the house with the yard, the principal place of daytime use. In addition to the forest, the presence of water is fundamental in the composition of the *Tekoa*.

Generally, the housing areas are located near the forest and include buildings a nuclear or extended family uses. One or more houses and a

## RESULTS

<sup>3</sup> *Tekoá* ou *tekoha*: village, suitable place to live according to Teko. Teko or reko: guarani system, way of life, way of being and living.





**Figure 1.** Set of homes and *opy*, *Tekoá Koenju*. The buildings have the colors of the Earth used as enclosures for the walls. The roofs and structures comprise local plant species with symbolic meaning. Source: Zanin, 2006.

covered open space may be used for cooking with a camp-type fire (Zanin, 2018). There is no specific design for distributing these housing nuclei within the *Tekoá*, usually located in clearings and connected by trails in the woods or the field. An *opy* (House of prayers) and its courtyard (Figure 1) represent the non-geometric center of the *Tekoá* (Schaden, 1954). This is the main building and can serve as housing for the *karáí* (spiritual leadership).

Dwellings are built with local materials that contain symbolic meanings and can protect the spirit (Zanin, 2006). They reveal the contextualization of the shelter inserted in the landscape, using its elements, colors, textures, and, we can say, reaching all the senses. They are part of a full, joyful life, which is rarely achieved today.

[*Teko Poran*] This is a blissful, joyful, contented, and satisfied state, happy, pleasurable, pleasant, and calm. Good living exists when there is harmony with nature and community members and enough food, health, and peace of mind. It is also a cultural identity fully possessed and free from threat. (Melià, 2016, p. 24)

**4 Yvy Tenondé:** First Earth, where everything was perfect and imperishable.

In the Mbyá Guarani narratives of the creation of the first Earth (*Yvy Tenondé*)<sup>4</sup>, sacred elements that participated in this creation appear and are demarcations of the existing spiritual connection between human beings and the other landscape elements. To create the first Earth,



Nhamandu Tenondegua initially created *tenhirui pindovy*, five Blue Palms (Popygua, 2017). This palm tree, called *pindó* or *pindó ete* by the Guarani, is popularly known as the jerivá coconut tree (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*) and is found in their places of residence, especially near the *opy* (houses of prayer). As investigated by Zanin (2006), houses of prayer can be built with this palm tree in places where it is abundant. Its leaves can be used in roofing or side closures. The trunk can also serve as a fence for the walls. However, generally, the Mbyá choose to conserve the *pindó* next to the *opy* as a spiritual protection (Figures 2 and 3). The new areas humanized by them are symbolically demarcated with the *pindó*<sup>5</sup>. We understand that this is one of the plant species that symbolizes the bond they have with landscapes.

The *taquara mansa* (*takua ete í-Merostachys sp.*) bamboo grass is widely used in the roofs of the native buildings of the Mbyá Guarani and the fence structures of the *opy*. To be used in roofing (Figure 3), the *taquaras* are opened longitudinally and folded from the inside out, forming a tile (*takua oje kava 'ekue*). According to what was observed and discussed with the Guarani, this natural cover presents relative durability because it can remain in use for a decade by following the appropriate guidelines for collecting, managing, and maintaining the material (Zanin, 2006). However, this material is not always available to use because, despite their rapid growth, since the *taquareiras* have

**Figure 2.** Yard of the *opy* of the Tekoá Itaty, with *pindó* coconut trees nearby. Source: photo by Nauíra Zanardo Zanin.

<sup>5</sup> *Pindó*: jeriva coconut tree, sacred palm that symbolizes the creation of the first Earth.



**Figure 3.** Opy covered with taquara and set of pindó in the surroundings, Tekoá Yynn Morotchi Wherá. Source: Zanin, 2021.

a collection period every thirty years, in which they remain in a kind of hibernation for seven years, which leads the Mbyá Guarani to seek alternatives for roofing.

We braid taquara straw to make baskets and also to make roofing. It is also done with *pari* to catch fish. Taquara is very important in Guarani life. The *takuapu*, a musical baton that women beat on the ground during singing-praying, *mborai*, is made from the trunk of the taquara. (...) Taquaras also offer *takuaraxó*, a larva it has in the center of the trunk that can be eaten as food. These only give larvae every 30 years; one way to count a person's age is to tell how many taquaras they have. If you're 30, you say you have one taquara; if you're 60, two. Some people live to three taquaras. So, the taquara has a life cycle, which the life of the Guarani accompanies. At 30, the taquara dies, dries up, then blooms and gives this larva, *takuaraxó*. (Papa Miri Poty [Carlos Guarani Fernandes], PIB, 2018).

The Mbyá Guarani spiritual leader and filmmaker Carlos Papa Miri Poty says that taquara was also created by *Nhanderu Papá* (our Heavenly Father). Therefore, its use has symbolic meaning for making various elements used in daily life and ceremonies. Valéria Macedo (PIB, 2018) reports how Xaí, Carlos Papá's mother, presents taquara and yerba mate as gifts from *Nhanderu*:

And here, Xaí enters the conversation, highlighting that both *Takuá* and *Ká'a* - yerba mate- are daughters of *Nhanderu* and gifts to the



Guarani, enjoyed in the form of *chimarão*, in the case of *Ka'a*, and music/prayer (*takuapu*) and basketry (*ajaká*) in the case of *Takuá* -, all of which are of great relevance to village life. Xai describes *Ka'a* and *Takuá* as inhabitants of the first Earth, from which they departed in the company of *Nhanderu* with the advent of the flood that ended it. In today's world, marked by the imperfection and transience of subjects and things, yerba mate and taquara are some of the resources that bear the mark of the First Land of the Immortals.

**Figure 4.** Detail of the Tekoá V'a opy wall. Detail of the Tekoá V'a opy wall, on light-colored raw land, due to its proximity to the coast. The marks left by the fingers that smoothed the wall can be seen, a trait of the traditional Guarani construction process. Source: Zanin, 2021.

In addition to the plant species used in the construction of the *opy*, the walls are usually covered with Earth (*inharu kangua*). According to our interlocutors, this coating gives thermal comfort and protects the wood and taquara used in structures and seals. It also represents a local feature, as the color and composition of the soil will give a different aspect to the construction in each place. When they cover the wall, they leave the fingermarks that smoothed it on the surface (Figure 4).

The *opy* (Figure 5) represents the shelter where the deities protect them, where the Mbyá Guarani way of life is lived and transmitted, the *nhanderekó*. "The symbolic place that the *Opy* and its courtyard occupy in the context of a community facilitates the understanding of Guarani cosmology, behavior, and worldview" (Zanin, 2018, p.191). The house represents a symbiosis with the territory, landscape, and specific place it was built in (Zanin, 2021). It is the materialization of a dwelling. It is the



**Figure 5.** Opy interior. Opy interior with musical instruments used in religious rituals, Tekoá Piráí. Materiality is observed as a reflection of locally available materials. Source: Zanin, 2021.

translation of a cosmology configured in a home instead of permanence and shelter.

In general, buildings are considered shelters, places we inhabit, places in which we “live” (Heidegger, 2001). When Heidegger (2001) states that living is related to the creation of places that welcome and preserve the square – the integration between heaven and Earth, gods and mortals – this refers us to the meaning of the indigenous Mbyá Guarani constructions as the shelter of the deities (Zanin, 2006). We understand that Indigenous constructions can express the integration of quadrature of the Mbyá cosmological relationship, which translates into their way of life.

The constructive process also provides integration with the quadrature, leading the quadrature to space and welcoming its multiplicity. For Heidegger (2001), the meaning of production is greater than that of the thing itself: the process of transforming space connects the thing to the quadrature, producing a place and an appropriate environment. We observed the correspondence of this statement to the mode of production of the living environments of the Mbyá Guarani because the constructive process is part of their way of life. It generates an economy of reciprocity in the community, enables the transfer of constructive knowledge between generations, values *ogapuá* (wise builders), and the gifts received by the deities, among others (Zanin, 2006). “The materialization of indigenous construction, due to its durability, favors the continuity of constructive knowledge in the periodic repetition of this process” (Zanin, 2018, p.354).



We highlight the importance of continuity in the transmission of this constructive knowledge because it fosters the autonomy of the communities, promotes socio-environmental connection, and sustains the Mbyá way of life, which is guaranteed by the living in these buildings, especially in the presence of *opy* in the communities. The constructive process of the *opy* happens through a *mutirão* (*potiron* - help), a gathering of relatives or a nuclear family for a collective construction (Figure 6). Meliá and Temple (2004) characterize the *mutirão* as collective reciprocity, where hands are extended for mutual aid (*jopói*), expressing joy in sharing the tasks, which feeds hope, trust, friendship, and spirituality.

Indigenous constructions are not made to last long, but to integrate into nature easily. As Zanin (2006) pointed out, this characteristic is related to the posture of the Mbyá before the transience of life, which manifests itself in little durability and detachment in relation to the constructions. However, the continuity of the Mbyá architecture, as a reflection of the context/landscape, depends on balanced natural environments, access to forests, *Tekoa*, in the complete sense of the word- suitable places for the *nhanderekóto* to live. Their constructions materialize a living that can only link to the territory because it expresses a cosmo-ecological relationship. Since the European invasion, recognizing their right to land (and to be part of it) has been the great struggle of the original peoples. It is a struggle for the right to life, to their way of living and inhabiting.

**Figure 6** Opy the Tekoa Itaty.

The Opy the Tekoa Itaty, collectively built, is inserted in the landscape of Serra do Tabuleiro. Source: Nauíra Zanardo Zanin.



## DISCUSSION

**Figure 7.** View of Tekoa Itaty. Landscape view from Tekoa Itaty, with the Maciambu River in the foreground and Serra do Mar on the right. Source: Zanin, 2018.

### BEING PART OF THE LANDSCAPE

The territory has importance for life, both the continuity of a way of life and the Mbyá *Guaraninhanderekó*, which relates to the elements of the landscape and the cosmos, as well as, in practical terms, to subsistence (through the cultivation of food and other ways of interacting with the territory and generating income, such as crafts, guided tours, and cultural festivals). Through the research by Zanin (2018), we realized that territory is always present in Mbyá education because knowledge is transmitted and generations are connected through it. An example is the use of clay found along the Maciambu River (Figure 7) in the educational processes of Tekoa Itaty. The elders keep and transmit knowledge through practices that need to be experienced in natural environments in cultural landscapes, which contain significant elements (plants, animals, minerals, water...). Constructive knowledge is also linked to the territory, the availability of plant elements, and the soil and climate characteristics. It also depends on the transmission of knowledge during the construction process (Zanin, 2006). Therefore, life, the continuity of this way of life, is directly and affectively linked to the territory.

Amerindian cosmology is fruitful in examples of affection towards landscapes and their elements (Popygua, 2017; Kaingang, 2022; Gakran, 2015). In the origin narratives of various indigenous peoples, we can find connections between the elements of the landscape (origin narratives of the world, animals, humans, plants, etc.). Indigenous peoples in various

parts of the world can read in the landscape forms and elements related to their ancestral narratives (Barabas, 2017; Morphy, 1995). These connections establish other ways of relating to places by providing feelings of affection and belonging, such as deep and ancient knowledge derived from their oral traditions, which make them belong to specific landscapes.

The markings identified in the natural landscape can be living elements (such as the jeriva coconut tree - *pindó*) and for that very reason, 'transitory' ones, ephemeral as life. Thus, we understand the natural elements as readings of a cultural, symbolic landscape that reveals narratives of the creation of the Earth, of human beings, non-human beings, and divine beings. The relationship with the territory, as argued by Indigenous women Brulina Baniwa, Joziléia Kaingang, and Giovana Mandulão (2023), is also guided by spirituality, recognizing the sacred in each element:

Thinking of the indigenous body-territory as a free and healthy space involves physical dimensions and spirituality. Similarly, for Indigenous peoples, the spiritual issue is linked to our present body-territory. We understand spirituality as a whole. We understand spirituality as our waters that flow in our territories; we understand spirituality in the territory that we live in, and we understand it as the part that composes us as human beings and also made of non-human beings.  
(Baniwa, Kaingang & Mandulao, 2023, p. 19)

Indigenous living gradually composes the landscape, transforming it and its elements into living, into shelter. It perceives and dialogs with the elements and other beings of the landscape, responding to their calls, challenges, characteristics, and limitations. It is a posture that stems from integrated living, which recognizes the interaction between everything in a given place. We find this understanding in several Indigenous authors, who reiterate the need to rethink and feel our relationship with other beings and elements that make up the mosaic of life on the planet by sharing their visions to provoke an awakening to recognize and respect these other beings. Guarani activist and psychologist Geni Núñez (2021) translates this feeling into the form of a poem, evoking being part of the landscape and being composed of nature:

(...) If most of my body is water, I am also a river  
If only I exist, if I breathe, I am also wind  
The trillions of microorganisms that coexist in me, in us, do not  
allow me to claim the individual authorship of the being that we  
are  
How many millions of beings are our smiles, tears, and joy made  
with?  
Every time I see the sunset or the rain, I celebrate the memory of  
knowing that I am also (part of) the sun, the rain, and the Earth.  
Every time we hurt the Earth, it is self-destruction (...)  
(Excerpt from poem by Geni Núñez. Núñez, 2021, p. 5)



**Figure 8.** Waters of the Brito River. Crystal clear waters of the Brito River, surrounded by the Atlantic Forest of Serra do Mar, Tekoá Yaka Porã, Morro dos Cavalos Indigenous Land. Source: Zanin, 2018.



By inhabiting the landscape, we consider that we live with all the beings and elements that are part of it, just like us. Thus, we can speak of being part of the landscape, of being constituted by the landscape, the rivers, the plants, the Earth, the minerals, and the animals (Figure 8), and being part of a collective of beings and elements that exchange sensations, perceptions, and feelings (Souza & Guaragni, 2021).

Heidegger (2001, p.140) criticizes the uprooting of human beings, which leads to the crisis of living. The author suggests that we must first “learn to live.” We consider that indigenous living, as exemplified here in Guarani living, provides rich and significant lessons about “learning to live” as part of a knowledge that can be recognized in its importance instead of being invisible and silenced by us (the *jurua*). We understand

that *nhanderekó* is a way of living that respects all other forms of life, all human and non-human beings, and the elements that make up the planetary balance. In this way, it offers lessons on how to “save the Earth” by leaving it “free in its vigor,” like the living of which Heidegger argues:

*Mortals dwell as they save Earth*, taking the word *save* in its old sense (...). Saving doesn't just mean eradicating a danger. It means, in fact: to leave something free in its own strength. Saving the Earth is more than exploiting or depleting it. (Heidegger, 2001, p. 130, not original)

When we reflect on this position of Heidegger, we can consider that the Guarani ways of living are configured as “practices of freedom” in the sense given by Deleuze and Guattari (1977). Freedom occurs through what is learned and experienced with *nhanderekó*. We can think of the landscape and the territory as a source of both this learning and the experience that leads to knowledge, as we understand from Larrosa-Bondía (2002, p.21): “Experience is what happens to us, what we go through and what touches us. Not what happens, what is gone through, or what touches”, that is, the order of the event. The experience crosses the subject and their history, becoming an ingredient of their singularity. We understand that living needs to be experienced with all senses, feelings, and thoughts to constitute a deep connection with the place.

From the argumentation built in dialog with Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, we end our discussions with the words of Ingold (2022, P.121): “inhabiting the world, on the contrary, is joining the processes of its formation. It is to participate in a dynamic world of energies, forces, and flows. I think this is the world of Earth and heaven.”

## LEARNING FROM THE JOURNEY

When we turn to the poetic living of indigenous peoples, we find manifestations of how we can establish deeper relationships with the landscape. We find, in a general way, and we can say emphatically, many Indigenous voices that alert us to the living crisis that manifests itself in the lack of adequate spaces for healthy living, not only due to the threats and destruction suffered by natural environments but also due to the precariousness of life in the city (Krenak, 2022). We understand that this crisis is related to a way of life associated with environmental imbalance and massive exploitation of “natural resources” – destroying landscapes and elements that, as we seek to demonstrate in this article, have deep and sacred meanings for these peoples. We must rethink our way of life and relationships with the landscape and nature. We need to feel that we are an integral part of the world, recognizing and caring for other beings and elements that integrate it and make it possible for us to live.

## CONCLUSIONS

Indigenous peoples' lives can be inspiring because they provide examples of a smoother walk on Earth. Knowing other ways of relating to landscapes, with the elements of nature that make up our environments, allows us to glimpse other perspectives and possibilities for constructing inhabited spaces. It is about something more profound than discussing sustainability in a system that supports just one worldview based on exploiting natural resources. Such perspectives and possibilities imply a greater integration with the context and landscape, in line with the continuity of sociocultural processes. It is the search for greater involvement in the care of life, the environment, the ecosystem, and its vital processes.

Finally, it is essential to note that the ways indigenous peoples live are only possible when they are allowed access to their ancestral territory and landscapes and when their rights are recognized and respected. This is a basic premise so that their ways of life can continue.

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