

***Napëpë* footsteps¹**

Bruce Albert

Anthropologist, researcher IRD-MNHN and associated to ISA – Instituto Socioambiental

Davi Kopenawa was born in the middle of 1950 in a collective house near to the Venezuelan border with Toototobi River (creek of Alto Demini, Amazonas state). Between 1987 and 1990, the time when an intensive race for gold generated the death of more than one thousand Yanomami in Brazil, he became the main spokesman for his peoples' cause and one of the most well-known indigenous leaders in Brazil and in the rest of the world.

Davi had already been fighting since 1983 for the Yanomami land demarcation and during the tragic episode of the *garimpeiro* invasion he visited various European countries as well as the U.S. in order to defend his people. He received important international awards and national distinctions for his action in favor of the Amazon protection and for arousing the public consciousness regarding the importance of the culture and of the traditional knowledge of peoples in the region.

He lives in the *Watoriki* community (Serra do Vento), extreme Northeastern of Amazon state, since the end of 1970 and is married to the daughter of the elder who founded the village (*pata thë*) and also its oldest shaman. Davi Kopenawa is one of the most influential leaders of the yanomami indigenous land and also a well respected shaman.

He remains a restless land and rights defender for the yanomami as well as a rigorous guardian of the values of his culture.

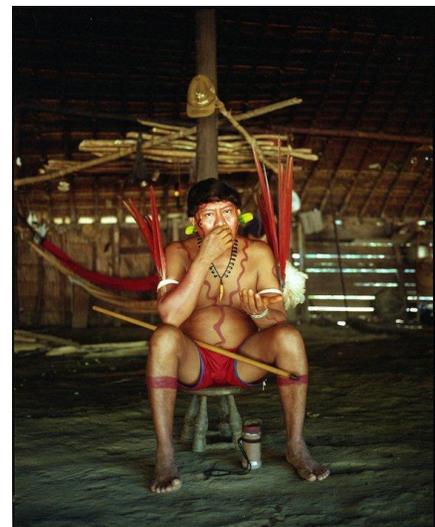
Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert launched in the end of 2010 the book *La chute du ciel. Paroles d'un chaman yanomami* (*The fall of the sky: words of a Yanomami shaman*, literal translation), Portuguese translation to be published in Brazil in 2012, by Companhia das Letras.

The following testimony was recorded in April 2011 by Marcos Wesley de Oliveira in the form of a message to Bruce Albert, who translated and edited it.

“All this destruction is not our mark; it is the trace of the white, your trail on earth”

Davi Kopenawa Yanomami

I want to give you my words such as I think them. It is so. We, the Yanomami, inhabitants of the forest, we do not stuff the earth with epidemic-smoke *xawara*. It is the white, the *napëpë*, who contaminates the earth. This is my speech. He seems not to worry about it, but we, who live in the forest, we know these things and because of that we think so. The



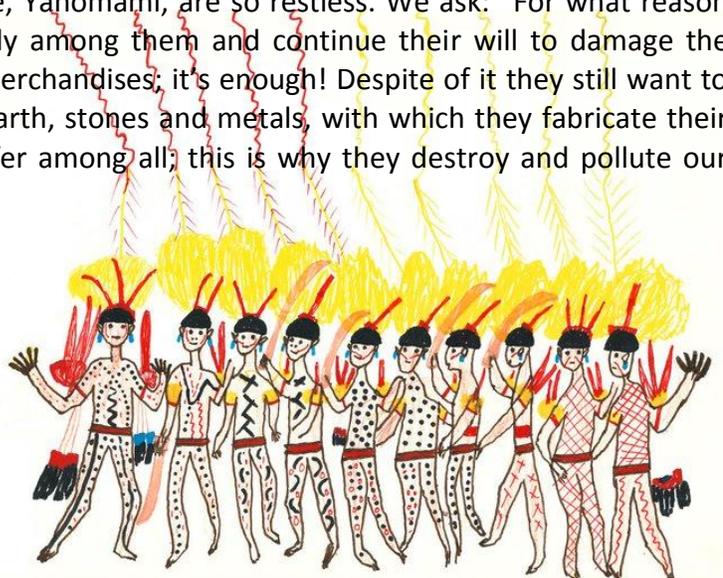
¹ The Portuguese version of this testimony was published by ISA – Instituto Socioambiental, Brazil, in 2010. This version was literally translated from Portuguese to English by Marco Antonio Zamboni Zalamena, UNESCO Bangkok, Thailand, in 2012.

white grew into a too large number and began to destroy the forest, to cut its trees and to pollute the rivers. They fabricated quantities of merchandise; made cars and airplanes to go fast. In order to fabricate these merchandises, they dug the ground to extract things that are in its depths. Thus, they began to disseminate lots of epidemic-smoke *xawara* all over, damaging the earth.

Because of that, the rain is beginning to drop in a strange way. When the white was way from us the forest was beautiful and healthy. Since he became too many and approached us the forest became another. Now it is worse, full of epidemic-smoke *xawara*. We, shamans, who make the spirits *xapiri* dance, we take care of the forest-earth: this is why we know it. We don't ask as the white does: "What is happening with the Earth, all of a sudden?" We know that what is badly happening is not because of our mark on this ground. If it were, we'd try to fix it soon!

The ancestor who created this forest, *Omama*, created us also to take care of it. He didn't want we to destroy it. We are his children and, because of that, we should not deteriorate it. We, inhabitants of the forest and of its hills, of its rivers and its streams, who have lived all over it before the white approached, we take care of it with attention. The shamans are always attentive to its welfare. When the forest is sick they drink the *yākōana* powder and heal its ills. The white, on the contrary, seems not to want to take care of it. These are the words of wisdom that we want to give to you. A large part of the white ones will not listen to them, I know; they will not say: "The Yanomami are right! Let's stop before the whole forest is destroyed!" Nevertheless, I want these words to be heard.

We, the Yanomami, we are very worried because the white thinks only about destroying the Earth; he only knows how to destroy the forest. He has no friendship to it, doesn't want it. From the depths of its ground only extracts things to fabricate his merchandises, later burn them and then the world is full of smokes that become *xawara* disease to all. The forest also falls ill from these smokes, its trees die, as well as its water and animals. This is how we understand things. Because of that, we, Yanomami, are so restless. We ask: "For what reason the big white men do not speak wisely among them and continue their will to damage the Earth?" They already have too many merchandises; it's enough! Despite of it they still want to extract all these brilliant things from earth, stones and metals, with which they fabricate their precious things. This is what they prefer among all; this is why they destroy and pollute our Earth!



Illustrations by Davi Kopenawa Yanomami

They don't know how to take care of the forest, not even want to. They only think: "The forest grew up alone, without motive, we are the owners of the merchandises and will continue to fabricate much more!" They dig its ground, cut its trees and burn all over. Afterwards, all of you talk about what is called *climate change*. We hear these words, but do not find them beautiful. What you have named as such does not come from our trail. We, inhabitants of the forest, do not harm the Earth. We do not deforest the forest immeasurably. All this destruction is not our mark, it is the white's footstep, your trail on earth. This is what we want to say. The white lacks wisdom and does not think very far.

Thus, once my yanomami words transformed into white words on paper, listen to them! You, young men and women, you, elders, listen to them! Then, think: "This is it! This is how the Yanomami inhabitants of the forest speak and this is why they are so worried!" Why are we so worried? Because we ask ourselves: "When all these thick smokes from the white arise to the sky's chest and the thunders begin to die, what, then, will be the forest?" This is why we are restless. There are no remedies to heal the Earth so it can be good again. If you, white, kill the forest, you will not be capable of fabricating another, a new one. When all these brilliant things that you extract from earth, the gold, the diamonds, the minerals, and also the things to make fire (fuel), and all trees, when all these end, the Earth will stay dead.

We give these words to open the way ahead of you, as an advice. We hope that, with them, you become more aware, wiser. You ought to stop harming the Earth. We can't continue destroying it in this unbridled way! Who created it will end up feeling rage. His image still exists; his spirit still exists in the world. If he ends up getting upset, you will suffer. Big rains will not stop inundating your houses; windstorms will shake and pull them down, even in cities where they are high and resistant. In the end, they will fall down beneath the earth.

We, who live in it, we know about these things of the forest. We see when the days do not dawn beautifully and stay full of smoke. We see, in the midst of the night, when the moon also stays smoked and reddened. The rain drops too few. But, afterwards, in the next moon, it, all of a sudden, drops very strong, continuously. The forest shows its rage; all of a sudden, it wants to dry out or to cover itself with water. We, shamans, ought to work in order to help it to control its rage. Only when it calms down we can live in it without danger, we as well as the white ones. But, if all shamans of the inhabitants of the forest die, when the white earth eaters will have killed all its trees and its rivers, you all could suffer as well.

I join my white friends here in order to make these words heard to other *napëpë*, whose thoughts are full of vertigo, so they can start thinking about this thing that you call *climate change*. While we, inhabitants of the forest, are alive, you, white, will dawn safe in your house, gently warmed by the sun, and will be able to work under the daily light in good health. But if we all end up devoured by the epidemic-smokes *xawara*, then, the earth will feel rage. So, the spirits of the windstorm and of the thunders will take revenge with strong force. It is so. The white mind is much ostracized, that's why they produce all these dangerous smokes of *climate change* and let us live in this restlessness.

We are the children of *Omama* and because of that we protect the earth that he created. Our way of working in it is different (from the white's). Our trails in the forest leave it beautiful as it is. We don't deforest it for nothing, we leave its waters clean. It remains always clear, full of hunting and fishes. These are mine words. Once written down, I hope that all people who listen them will be able to think: "Yes! This is how the children of the (ancient) inhabitants of the forest think! These are their true words! It is not them who created this thing of *climate change*; it is our own trail in the grounds of the Earth! We lack wisdom, indeed!" If they speak like this among them after seeing these drawings of words, I will be happy. Thus was my speech, over.

