

*Discursive Fragments of Kayabi / Kawaiweté / Brazil Indigenous Youngsters  
About Life Project*

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**Abstract**

The general objective of this paper is to present a study on the life projects, realities and expectations of young indigenous high school students from the Kayabi / Kawaiweté of the tribe Tatuí, in the city of Juara / Mato Grosso /Brazil. We used qualitative, bibliographical and ethnographic approach in education research to answer the questions. We interviewed eight youngsters from the tribe, high school students at the Juporijup State School. These youngsters aim to leave a legacy for indigenous and non-indigenous societies from experiences carried out in the present and from the learning inherited by their ancestors. This research is justified by the need to disseminate the ideas of indigenous youngsters who currently are fighting for the preservation of their cultures in a scenario in which indigenous lands are being flooded by agribusiness, and the construction of hydroelectric plants, among others, which have a great impact on the environment and on indigenous societies. The data are based on an investigation into the self-representations of young Kayabi / Kawaiweté and their relationship with their life project. We concluded that the conceptions of time and bonds with the community are important elements in the life project of these young indigenous people participating in the research. The conception of past, present and future is strongly related to the culture of the group to which they belong.

Keywords: Youngsters, Indigenous, Life Project

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## Introduction

The Life Project theme gained evidence from the High School reform supported by Law nº 13.415/2017 implemented in the Brazilian educational system. The reform in question points to the youngsters as protagonists. This protagonism develops through the realization of their “Life Project”. According to Santos (2016), the life project is built on the most diverse perspectives and conceptions of the world that make up the context in which each youngster is inserted. A context of constant transformation and movement.

According to authors such as Damon (2009), Brurrow and Hill (2010), Bronk (2009), Boutinet (2002), Guimarães (2005) and Araújo, Arantes and Pinheiro (2020), the formation of the subject's identity is related to the construction of their life project. The relationship between identity and life project, according to Araújo, Arantes and Pinheiro (2020), takes place in the interaction that each subject has with himself, with others and with his social context, constituting a unique life trajectory for the subject.

Therefore, this paper focuses on investigating the self-representations of youngster Kayabi / Kawaiweté and their relationship with their life project. To answer the research questions, we opted to carry out the research with a qualitative, bibliographical and ethnographic approach in education. We interviewed eight youngsters from the Tatuí tribe, high school students at the Juporijup State School, located at indigenous land Apiaká / Kayabi, in the city of Juara-MT, 695 km north of the capital of the state of Mato Grosso and with a territorial area of 21,492 km<sup>2</sup>. The tribe is located in the Amazon Forest, in the vast Amazon Basin, having as tributaries of the Amazon River the Arinos River, which receives the Peixes / Tatuí River, and the Telles Pires River, into which the Apiaká River flows (FERREIRA, 2014).

## Life Project

We emphasize that the expression “Life Project” is a term called by the non-indigenous culture, thus, the young collaborators report that they understand life project as “me in the future”. Based on their understanding of the terminology, the interview begins individually by asking:

“How do you characterize the present? And the future?”

- C1. “The present is special; the future I don't know, I only think about now, the future is very far away”.
- C2. “The present is very complicated because when you want to take a course in the city, transportation is difficult, so you have to stay in the city. If I think about going to college, I have to leave the tribe and stay in the city, then there are no conditions to stay there. The future is something that is yet to appear”.
- C3. “The now. Life. The future? It doesn't exist yet”.
- C4. “Lately I don't think about him. I wonder if I'll be able to study, if my family will support me, what they'll say.... As for the future, I only think about it”.
- C5. “Today's present has been wonderful and the future I hope will be even better”.
- C6. “The present is great, it is now. And the future I hope is good”.
- C7. “Good. Is today. The future is far away”.
- C8. “The present is now, the future is yet to come, let it be the best, right?”

It is noticeable, in the speeches of the young people interviewed, that they live in the present and conceptualize the future as something that is yet to come. It is something that does not exist. In the documentary *Reflections on good living: Present*, professor and writer Daniel Munduruku (2020) mentions that “Living the present is the great teaching that indigenous peoples offer to Brazilian society” and he explains that, for many indigenous peoples, the word “Future” does not exist in their language, as it is a time not lived and not experienced. The author argues that indigenous peoples create words based on their own experiences; consequently, the word future cannot be originated, because it does not exist, it does not come from something experienced.

The writer reports that, for indigenous peoples, today is just what compromises them, such as, planting, harvesting, fishing, hunting, studying, etc., guided by a feeling of cosmic and universal belonging, which goes beyond of the white man's vision, which imposes on non-indigenous society the idea of producing to satisfy the desires of the body and society.

Daniel Munduruku (2020) reports that indigenous peoples do not develop the idea of accumulating things to enjoy in the future (capitalism), because there is no such thing as being happy when you conquer something, the moment is now. For them, the idea is that the present time is received from the universe, a gift, which must be experienced now, enjoyed immediately. In the words of the author, “[the] belonging means that we are inserted in a greater understanding of life and existence, that is why indigenous peoples sing, perform rituals, ceremonies, etc. precisely to communicate with nature now”.

This is evident from the responses of the researched participants in the following question: How do you see your life in 2 to 5 years? Young people unanimously answer, “I don't know, I never thought, I know about now”, “I still don't know, I never thought? Will I be trained? ”I haven't thought about that yet”.

In fact, we realize that the construction of the life project of indigenous youngsters takes place from the experiences lived in the present, in the daily learning in the community and with the family. According to a Kayabi teacher, in his culture, educating children for what they will be in the future starts from an early age, teaching them values, beliefs, traditions, the importance of studies, for example. Teaching children the values for what they will be in the future is the family's task and not the school's, and this starts from childhood.

For Damon (2009), young people want to fulfill their dreams based on their reality and families must teach them the way to achieve this. In the meantime, seeking to understand the role of the family for the interviewees, we ask: Is the family a source of support for building your future? All respondents were categorical in mentioning that the family is the basis of everything. In this sense, Damon (2009) argues that young people value adults who have experiences and care about them.

Therefore, for the construction of a vital project, Damon argues that it is necessary for the family to guide young people with practical and constructive advice. The life project is carried out from the individual interests and cultural values of the context in which the young people are inserted, as well as from the influences of other people and community projects. To investigate which values families teach, we asked:

“What teachings did you receive and do you still receive from your ancestors?”

In addition:

“Which teachings collaborate to build your self in the future?”

- C1. “My grandparents taught me not to give up on my dreams and this is very important. They encourage us to move forward.”
- C2. “To preserve nature and our culture”.
- C3. “To respect and to listen to others”.
- C4. “To achieve something we have to have respect and wisdom”.
- C5. “So, they always talk to me, to share their examples, teachings such as education, our culture, how it was in the past, respect. Do not leave the example of the grandparents behind, always pass it on”.
- C6. “To study to protect our land that has been destroyed by non-indigenous people”.
- C7. “To study and to respect the other”.
- C8. “To respect others and respect yourself, valuing your roots”.

All the subjects mention that such teachings start from childhood and that they remain until the present day “The families, elders are always guiding us” complements C8 in his answer. A Kayabi teacher reports that the elders prepare the children for the cycle of their life in the community, narrating the entire culture and tradition of their people, so that it never ceases to exist.

Damon (2009) reports that young people, when receiving guidance and counseling consistently and effectively, accept these teachings, which become essential for building their life project, built on ethnic and moral values, arousing the subject's interest in doing the difference in the world you live in.

We noticed, in the speeches of the subjects of this research, that the teachings received by the young people from their ancestors are supported by the values of ethics, respect and collectivity and are built in the midst of narratives that consider the life history, values and traditions that permeate generations, constituting the identity of the indigenous youth.

According to Baniwa (2006), indigenous youth currently have a purpose that unites them in rescuing and in the historical memory of their people, continuing their collective life projects, endowed with values and customs inherited by their ancestors, lived through the rituals, traditions and beliefs. The desire for change and transformation beyond the “me” allows indigenous youth to fight for the greater good with resistance, resilience, optimism and perseverance in the context of protecting and preserving their peoples.

The anthropologist mentions that the indigenous youth is attributed the act of fighting and resisting to maintain the rights conquered by their people, care for the demarcated lands, appreciation of cultural traditions, protection, sustainability of the villages, the language and the knowledge, which are the existence of the indigenous being.

It is possible to observe that young Kawaiweté/Kayabi are also attributed this responsibility and hope when analyzing, for example, the answers referring to the following question:

“What does your family expect from you?”

“What about your community leaders?”

- C1. "Being a good person and helping the community". "Many things are expected, for example, that we graduate".
- C2. "Having a better future, being able to help them and the community". "May we preserve our culture and remain in the community".
- C3. "They talk a lot to study, which is important". "May we study and preserve our culture and take care of the community".
- C4. "Study, be what we want, help the family and the community". "That we do a good thing for the community, they help young people to be better later on: study to be a good chief, study to come back and help the community".
- C5. "She is very proud of her son focusing on what the community wants and working for it".
- C6. "Don't just sit there, be responsible". "We are expected to focus on the interests of the community, study and help".
- C7. "Be sensible and be a good person". "May it not be lost and help the community".
- C8. "A lot. Finish your studies". "Young people are the future of the community, to keep the culture and traditions".

According to Damon (2009), having a purpose and a noble cause means fighting and acting to achieve it, attributing to it not only meanings, but also motivation and persistence to achieve objectives and goals. In this way, young indigenous people seek their place in the world as subjects of resilience, to continue and preserve the indigenous knowledge left by their ancestors.

According to the author, for the construction of a life project, it is necessary that the young person knows not only himself, but the context in which he is inserted, realizing the difficulties, conflicts and interests present in his surroundings, to set long-term goals and thus contribute to society, based on all ethical teachings and learned values. "The element closest to a prerequisite for a culture of vital projects is the notion of community (DAMON, 2009, p. 17)". Given the above, ask yourself:

"What does your indigenous community represent to you?"

- C1. "Various things, my language, a specific culture, very special".
- C2. "The community makes people stronger. So it's everything".
- C3. "I like to live in it".
- C4. "It teaches us to strengthen ourselves more and not get lost".
- C5. "It represents many things, even more so when there are cultural parties, presentations, singing that shows our culture".
- C6. "Strength, culture and presence".
- C7. "Everything".
- C8. "A lot, I am proud to be an Indian".

For Baniwa (2006), each indigenous people is a unique society, with characteristics of its own group. Its particular cosmology bases on the entire cultural, economic, social and religious life of a community. The young people interviewed mention that the community is a source of ethnic and cultural strengthening and a source of learning. Damon (2009) considers this experience as indispensable, when thinking about the construction of a vital project:

What about the other places where young people spend time in the community soaking up popular culture? What kind of guidance do they find there? It's the big lottery in youth development. Some are fortunate to have adult mentors who introduce them to vital goals and projects that inspire them, as well as practical ways to achieve them. Others will have contact with the best of arts, history and literature that the media and schools are capable of transmitting. (DAMON, 2009, p.132)

It is in this diversity of teachings and learning that the life projects of young indigenous people are built, who have, in themselves, the projection of the community in keeping their culture and traditions alive, in memory of their ancestors.

In order to get to know the representations of the community for young people, we asked:

“What do you consider a problem for Kayabi indigenous teenagers/youths?”

In addition, for indigenous peoples:

“What do you consider a problem?”

- C1. “The drink. This is too much. The young man is drinking a lot”. “The time frame indigenous peoples are fighting to preserve our lands. My parents went to Brasilia in a movement against the time frame”.
- C2. “Alcohol”. “Alcohol is now a problem for indigenous peoples”.
- C3. “Alcohol is a problem”. C3 “Alcohol, time frame, many things”.
- C4. “Alcoholism and the fact of wanting to leave the village to study, party, work ... Some parents don't let them because they are afraid their children will get lost out there”. “Currently, I think it's the time frame. It is tense. Because if there is no demarcation, we indigenous people can lose our lands”.
- C5. “Alcohol and the lack of continuity in studies in the village”. “The division in the village, sometimes the chief takes things to the community, some like it and others don't, they are against it and they can't carry out the work”.
- C6. “Alcohol”. “Protect our lands, the jump”.
- C7. “Alcohol”. “Do not approve the time frame”.
- C8. “Cachaça. Alcohol. Not being able to have the complete studies. Not having college within the village. Having to go away to study”. “Several, but the timeframe is the biggest”.

In the speeches of the young people, it is noticeable how much they are informed about current facts, which point to the concern with the social, the political and the sense of citizenship. In this sense, social concerns are restricted to alcoholism in the village and, in terms of citizenship and politics, concerns related to the fight against the *Marco Temporal* and the defense of the Salto Sagrado Kayabi. Considering the importance of listening to young employees, a few lines are described below, explaining the issues raised.

Alcoholism in indigenous communities is a worrying scenario, which is not restricted to the Kayabi people. Guimarães and Grubits (2007) argue that, among Brazilian indigenous groups, the so-called “social diseases” have been occurring, of which alcoholism is a part, which is one of the main causes of death, due to the fact that subjects, when intoxicated, encounter accidents, fights, etc. Therefore, a prevention and health care policy must urgently be formed to discuss and deal with this problem in the context of indigenous communities.

The *Marco Temporal da Terra Indígena* (Indigenous Land Time Frame) is an ongoing proposal in the Federal Supreme Court that challenges constitutional acts, as it proposes that indigenous peoples claim and demarcate only the lands they already occupied up to the date of enactment of the Federal Constitution of 1988. a threat to indigenous peoples, since most ethnic groups today would be harmed, due to the colonization process, which meant that they were no longer in their lands of origin. Indigenous movements fight and resist this scenario, which places indigenous peoples on a vulnerable level, with their rights denied and discussed at all times.

### **Kayabi Fall**

This is the case with the Kayabi Fall. Another concern mentioned by the young people interviewed is the Apiaká-Kayabi indigenous land. This territory is located in the *Rio dos Peixes* region, below a large fall that, according to Kayabi (2016), is known as the Sacred Fall, because for the Kawayweté people, it is sacred, since it represents the strength and resistance of the people. The fall is marked by tradition, mystical stories and the culture of the Kawayweté/Kayabi people.

According to Kayabi (2016), the fall belongs to the Kawayweté/Kayabi people, but, in the first land demarcation, around 1975, it was outside the indigenous land. After a great struggle by the Kawayweté/Kayabi people, in 1978, the leaders began to claim the expansion of the reserve.

Figure 1: Kayabi Sacred Fall



Fonte: Dionísio Mairaiup Source: Dionísio Mairaiup

Currently, the fall is the target of government leaders and large companies seeking the implementation of hydroelectric plants, in the words of Kayabi (2016):

Today, a conflict that frightens us is the construction of hydroelectric plants in indigenous areas, belonging to the Kawayweté people and other peoples. They are being made either on indigenous lands or very close to them. This knowledge about the Sacred Fall and the resistance to not letting the plant be built in the fall are valuable and need to be recorded, they are part of the memory and struggle of my people. Past, present and future generations must know and help this movement to protect the Sacred Kayabi Fall. (KAYABI, 2016, p. 7)

In 2012, according to the website *Kanindé Associação de Defesa Etnoambiental*, the court suspended the construction of a hydroelectric plant. The decision was made through a judge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Court of Mato Grosso, who invalidated the license granted by the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA), under penalty of a daily fine of R\$ 100 thousand reais, if the explosions of natural rocks in the region continued. According to the Kanindé website, the judicial suspension begins with a strong report from indigenous people:

The construction of this hydroelectric plant, drowning the waterfalls of Sete Quedas, polluting the waters and drying up the Teles Pires downriver, would destroy the fish that are the basis of our diet. In addition, Sete Quedas is a sacred place for us, where the Mãe dos Peixes and other spirits of our ancestors live — a place where one should not move. (KANINDÉ, 2012, p. 1)

Kayabi (2016) reports that generations must unite in the movement to protect the Kayabi Sacred Fall, as its destruction results in the weakening of the Kayabi people.

The Kayabi Fall is sacred to my Kawayweté people. In it is the strength of the shamans, place of Ita Mait, on its banks the arrow. It is the place where the Kawayweté seek strength. It is difficult to explain the sacred, but it is in the feeling that it appears, when Kawayweté fall, he knows that the feeling is strong and seeks his energy. Going on the jump in the most sacred place has to be accompanied by a shaman, when we arrive we need to talk to the shaman, the water gets angry and the wind lifts the leaves. There must be silence and the pajé will accompany him to provide protection and then prepare the pajelança. The jump holds the culture, wisdom, and entire spirituality of the Kawayweté people. The jump has life, it is alive and cannot be destroyed, and the destruction of the jump is the weakening of the Kawayweté people. It is important for our life, culture and tradition. (KAYABI, 2016, p. 7)

Certainly, we can observe this finding in the speeches of the young people interviewed. They show a committed and attentive vision to the social and political scenario that surrounds their context, and such observations made point to what Damon (2009) mentions as a purpose “noble”, because, according to him, the construction of a vital project is thought from a central concern, which goes beyond the self.

The research participants did not mention a concern with the absence of parties, material assets, among other ostentations of capitalism, but turned their attention to the difficulties of the current world, the pressures of the social and political groups to which they are exposed and the concern with the other. When concluding the block of questions referring to this category, the young people interviewed answered the following question: Does living in the village interfere with building your future?

All respondents were proud and belonging to their community, bringing only the difficulty of continuing their studies, since, to attend Higher Education, they need to leave the community and live in the city.

They also mention that living in the city requires staying away from the family, community and indigenous knowledge, and that non-indigenous society is very prejudiced and exclusive. The students also reported that even though the Public University has policies for accessing



indigenous youth to studies, it does not have a policy of permanence in the institution, with young people having to face difficulties such as financial problems and the challenges of being away from the community.

Due to the above, this paper investigated the representations of the “I” of young Kawaiweté and their relationship in the construction of their life project, as well as seeking to identify the most emerging issues that guide these young people. When analyzing the participants' responses, we see that their representations of the self are constituted by the idea of a noble purpose and a vital project. As proposed by Damon (2009), as they have discourses of ethics and values aimed at the family, to the cosmos, for the community and for longings located beyond the self-thought of in the collectivity.

In this context, Damon (2009) identifies four groups of young people: the disengaged, the dreamers, the superficial and those with vital projects. The disengaged are those who do not have any life project, are self-centered, show little concern for the world beyond the self, do not seem to seek a goal and are apathetic and disinterested. Dreamers have ideas for the projects they want, but do little or nothing to implement them. Superficial ones, on the other hand, even engage in projects with purpose, but lack focus and determination, frequently changing from one activity to another. Those who have vital projects seek something to dedicate themselves to that has meaning and meaning, being aware of what to do and why. Through an objective and a goal, they have planning for a coherent future, which motivates them to build, every day, steps to fulfill their objective.

Such young participants in this research, then, seek support in their families and in the community for the realization of their ideals, not establishing immediate concerns, such as competition, material gains and financial security, as they think of a greater good for the community.

It is clear; therefore, that contact with the teachings of values, ethics, respect and community begins very early of young person's life, of their family. The elders, family members and the community propagate indigenous knowledge and traditions.

In this way, there is a conception of time facing the present and they consider the past, as it carries ancestral teachings. In this logic, the future not yet experienced does not have immediate projections, imposed by capitalism. However, such factors do not refer to the lack of future projects for the young people interviewed, given that it is built daily in the present.

## **Conclusion**

In this way, the young people interviewed respond to the general objective of this research by pointing to a life project concept in the same way as conceptualized by Damon (2009). As a vital project, they have a desire to leave a legacy for their community, expressing a vital project that seeks to satisfy beyond their own self, seeking to make a difference in the context in which they are inserted, by proposing a tomorrow that contributes to their family and their community.

They express the desire to leave a legacy for their families and for indigenous and non-indigenous societies, as well as having a speech marked by the cultural values of their ethnicity. They have the perception of time facing the present, which does not exclude their

planning and point out that it is in the now that the future that did not exist until then is built. Therefore, the past is valued, as it is from it that their ancestors narrate experiences.

Such young people have a desire to contribute to the collective, to their community, considering and preserving their values, traditions and customs. In this way, they demonstrate central concerns, such as the political scenario, sustainability, territory protection, citizenship and social well-being.

Therefore, they elucidate family and school as a source of support for the realization of their life projects. In dissonance, they do not present a neoliberal and capitalist vision and exclude from their speeches the concern with the accumulation of material goods, money, power and individualism.

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