

Author

Tania Hoesli
Tannenbuehlweg 2
CH-3652 Hilterfingen
Switzerland
phone +41 77 414 43 79
mail 1603809@student.uwtsd.ac.uk // info@natoura.ch

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• **Wedding the Wild** •



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Faculty of Humanities & Performing Arts
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Lampeter Campus
Ceredigion SA48 7ED
United Kingdom

Schumacher College
The Old Postern
Dartington Totnes
Devon TQ9 6EA
United Kingdom

"Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears, and nostrils - all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness. This landscape of shadowed voices, these feathered bodies and antlers and tumbling streams - these breathing shapes are our family, the beings with whom we are engaged, with whom we struggle and suffer and celebrate. For the largest part of our species' existence, humans have negotiated relationships with every aspect of the sensuous surroundings, exchanging possibilities with every flapping form, with each textured surface and shivering entity that we happened to focus upon. All could speak, articulating in gestures and whistle and sigh a shifting web of meanings that we felt on our skin or inhaled through our nostrils or focused with our listening ears, and to which we replied - whether with sounds, or through movements, or minute shifts of mood. The color of sky, the rush of waves - every aspect of the earthly sensuous could draw us into a relationship fed with curiosity and spiced with danger. Every sound was a voice, every scrape or blunder was a meeting - with Thunder, with Oak, with Dragonfly. And from all of these relationships our collective sensibilities were nourished."

David Abram¹

¹ David Abram (1996: ix)

Cover picture left: *Orisha Oxóssi*

[ONLINE] available <https://naturezalivre.tumblr.com/image/108642586528>.

It was not possible to find the name of the artist who painted this beautiful picture of Oxóssi. [last accessed 17 July 2017]

Cover picture right: *Orisha Oxóssi*

[ONLINE] available: <https://aprendinaumbanda.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/oxossi-trono-masculino-do-conhecimento/>
[last accessed 17 July 2017]

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Wedding the Wild

1 The Notion of the Wild

In our Western culture, the 'myth of the wilderness' has a dreamlike notion with association of many well respected attributes such as freedom, adventure and beauty. 'Wilderness' awakens in many people in the West a deep longing and therefore it plays an important role in many books and films². In my daily work in Environmental Education and as an Outdoor Guide I observe that it is often not about climbing on the highest and remotest peaks in the Swiss Alps or going on a true expedition. To experience wilderness can happen in our backyard, simply by reconnecting with the elements fire, earth, water and air and by doing things you 'normally' would not do. So next to the wild savage land there must be an inner wilderness too.

"It is in vain to dream of a wilderness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brains and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us that inspires that dream."

Henry David Thoreau, Journal, August 30, 1856³

The saying 'you're wild' is often used to express already the tiniest aspect of uncivilisation or partly 'undomesticated' actions, so 'wildness' appears to have a strong relation to the 'norm' of a specific group. To be wild means for me to be authentic, to be the spiritual woman with the smelling pelt⁴ I am. What is wild is free and does not belong to a human, a brand or an enterprise. And what is wild does not follow to human's commands or control. I often feel wild, when I act out of the norm, for example when I do something people normally do not do at this time of the day, at this time of the year, at this particular place... "Wild places are those not under our control and not subject to our wills, walls, or arbitrary boundaries." (Taylor 2008: 1749).

To wed someone signifies that you commit to a common path, you engage yourself in loyalty to each other. And what does 'wedding the wild' really mean?

² One famous example is the American biographical drama survival film by Sean Penn (2007) 'Into the Wild' which tells the story of a young man, Christopher McCandless, who donated his heritage and went to the wild with very little equipment and knowledge. After about 113 days on his own he died of starvation. The public reactions vary from seeing Christopher's actions as suicide to taking this young man as their hero. [Online] available: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_McCandless [last accessed: 18 July 2017]

³ Leal (2004: 46)

⁴ This anecdote refers to a story about a foxwoman Shaw (2017) told us during the module Myth & Ecology.

2 Two Examples of Wedding the Wild

2.1 It is Oxóssi who brought me up

"Com três dias de nascido, minha mãe me abençoou,
me soltou na mata virgem, senhor Oxóssi me criou." (Kreszmeier, 2017)

*Three days after birth, my mother blessed me
and set me free in the virgin forest. It is Oxóssi who brought me up.*⁵

These lines are part of a song, which is sung in the ritual context of religious traditions of Orisha worship. An 'Orixá' or 'Orisha' is a nature deity, which originally belongs to the cultural area of Yoruba and later mingled with African Diaspora and other similar principles (as Voduns and Inkisses) (Kreszmeier, 2017)⁶. Oxóssi⁷ is the Orisha of growth, of the forest and of the hunt (Kreszmeier, 2009: 53)⁸. Furthermore he represents the power, who accompanies us though the immense time period of the hunter-gatherer era. To perceive the true and deep quality of Oxóssi it is necessary to train oneself to think and see in a much wider time frame to get a glimpse of the value of this very long time period where humans used to live as hunter-gatherers on this planet (Kreszmeier, 2017). Macy and Brown (2003: 165) emphasize that we have never lived in such a short-thought time period before. The global economic and technology systems are dependent on fast-made decisions acting upon short-term aims, which lead to distancing society both of the rhythms and cycles of nature and also of past and future. Through art, rituals and myth we remember the ones who went before us, as well as the ones coming in the next generations, and we re-learn to deeply relate to them. Rituals are performed to strengthen the perception of the individual existing as part of a great stream of life that transcends the self and links the individual to a chain of generations (Asante and Mazama, 2009: 576).

Oxóssi is sagemess, an image, a story, a dance, a force - a sacred space. He is the wild forest, who carries everything within. In abundance and good degree: plants, trees, minerals, animals, water, air, fire. He is also the human in such a forest, who knows to find his paths, his wellbeing, his nourishment and his tribe in abundance. Oxóssi is the story of the deep time, which lies native within us. (Kreszmeier, 2017)

It seems to be totally natural, even indispensable that we are held by this force from the moment so shortly after we are born and that from then on we grow up with it. It is an immense gesture of love, courage and devotedness of the child's mother to let go and commit her own child to Oxóssi. We can assume that this song is not about an irresponsible abandonment of a newborn to a wild forest, it is much more about a true relation with an indispensable force. It is about a connection with - in this case - a male power, which can teach us sustainable livelihood and species survival incorporated in an animated, interconnected world. (Kreszmeier, 2017)

⁵ Translated from Portuguese to English by Tania Hoesli

⁶ All texts referring to the references Kreszmeier (2009) and (2017) were translated from German to English by Tania Hoesli

⁷ In this paper the author uses the spelling common in Brazil, which is Oxóssi. 'Oshoosi', 'Ochosi' and 'Osoosi' refer to the same Orixá.

⁸ Astrid Habiba Kreszmeier is 'mãe de santo' and 'Yalorixá' of the terreiro *terra sagrada* (Kreszmeier, 2009: 53) an orixá tradition practiced in Switzerland, Germany and Austria. 'Terreiro' means 'spiritual community' and 'mãe de santo' means 'the mother of the sacred' / 'abbess of the terreiro'. The author was initiated during the period of seven years on this spiritual path. The organisation terra sagrada is described on their homepage: www.terrasagrada.info. There is not much literature about this community in particular because it is mainly transferred as an oral tradition, through ritual, music and myth.

2.2 Wilderness Passage Rites

"Across time and in countless ways, people of many cultures have gone into the wilderness to mark life transitions and seek guidance. They sought closeness with God, the Mystery, or a higher self. They found a time alone, exposure to the elements in an unfamiliar place, a radical shift in self and world, a trial and a gift, and a ritual death and rebirth. The core of the form was clear: leaving the ordinary world, crossing a threshold, and returning with a gift and a task. It was an initiation, a rite of passage, a new birth in the womb of the natural world." (Taylor, 2008: 1748). Asante and Mazama (2009: 570) and Campbell (2017) describe that rites of passage play and have played for hundreds of years a major role in African and in general in indigenous communities, in assisting people in their development as human beings to become more complete and perfect. Stang (2009 :30) describes how the tribe of the Mehinaku assume that "the body only grows because it is *made*, and one is constantly involved in the 'building' of this substantial self". Therefore I interpret different rites as part of the 'building process' to become more beautiful, and take the wilderness passage rites in the following as an example out of Amazonia or 'Indigeny today'⁹ to discuss the notion of wedding the wild.

In many cultures still connected to the ancestor's way of marking important life passages with initiatory rites, especially the transition from adolescence to adulthood is marked with a wilderness rite of passage (Taylor, 2008: 1748). In some African cultures, this rite of passage can last for a year and all the boys of a certain age from the region do it at the same time. It is real: either you survive and you return as a man or you die (Campbell, 2017). According to Asante and Mazama (2009: 343) the period of seclusion is symbolic of the lifecycle. The initiate's childhood self has to die in order to re-join the community as an adult. During the time outside you step into sacred time and space, you are between the old and the new and in many ways you encounter a symbolic death. Later in life also marriage, divorce, mid-life, loss or just a time of missing orientation are moments in life where people follow the call to a wilderness rite of passage. (Taylor, 2008: 1748)

Personally I feel a strong longing for wilderness rites of passages since I can remember; therefore I can look back on a wide experience in this regard both as "seeker" and as "holder of the space". The latest experience was a 4 day and night pilgrimage on Dartmoor in May 2017, which was not a Vision Quest¹⁰ but a vigil. I went this time to the wild to listen to the earth, to simply be there and visit different waters, streams, waterfalls and the Whitehorse hill.

Wilderness Passage Rites are for me a piece of land where Alchemy, Myth¹¹ and Amazonia come together. Taylor (2008: 1749) states that all such practices of deep psychological or spiritual work are expeditions into wild places. We walk on land where "artificial structures and demands of the ego and society have not restricted or walled off our innate guidance, aliveness, generosity, or fascination with the world." (Taylor 2008: 1749).

⁹ The previous module of the MA Ecology & Spirituality was called 'Indigeny Today'. During this module we investigated "the cosmological narratives and practices of a number of indigenous traditions around the world, particularly in regard to relationship with the natural world". (Schumacher College, 2017: MA Scheduling Announcements, Aims)

¹⁰ The School of Lost Borders in the United States is a famous institution, which trains vision quest guides (Taylor, 2008: 1748). In Switzerland you can find a diverse offer of different Vision Quests. I spent many days in the wild under the guidance of the Swiss institution nature and healing [<http://nature-and-healing.ch>] and the German uma institute [www.umainstitut.net]. Both offers are deeply rooted in the work with myths.

¹¹ Myth is understood here as something real you live in or something sacred and alive which lives you. Myth's true role is the expression of truth and reality (Heller, 2006: 213).

All the Wilderness Passage Rites have in common that you spend a certain time by yourself in the wild, with little equipment, and that they facilitate an opening to spirit. The term "wilderness" is relative. In many Western countries it became practically impossible to find and have the right to walk on 'uncivilised land', but many vision quest groups¹² have experienced that cultivated land can also support their work. The key element is exposure. You sacrifice, render yourself vulnerable¹³, "tuning in to the rhythms of the Earth". "Making intimate contact with the wild world brings us into contact with our 'wild selves', the parts of us that have not been conditioned by familial and cultural forces." (Taylor 2008: 1749).

And what Oxóssi teaches us, Taylor (2008: 1749) describes beautifully: "wilderness rites of passage cultivate and refine those qualities necessary for living in the world in a full and engaged way, knowing our own hearts and minds, tolerating ambiguity and discomfort, being autonomous, searching deeply, and staying open to new answers."

¹² See footnote 10

¹³ As I wrote in my first Reflective Journal of the module Ecology and Spirituality, Brown (2010) and Kalita (2015) ascribe the treasure of freedom, true sharing and deeper expression of love to the power of vulnerability. Through allowing us to be vulnerable doors to deep learning can open.

3 Conclusion

After plunging into the subject of wedding the wild and having written other essays about the power of vulnerability, our exposure to death and our ways of communication with the more-than-human world through ritual, wedding the wild is for me an other expression for - and the competence to bear - chaos, the notion of not being in control and surrendering to death. To be wedded to the wild means to me to live in deep acceptance of the life cycle, to endure also decay and the decreasing aspects of life and therefore to accept change in all dimensions in every moment. In order to do so we have to let go again and again, in very small and very big scales. And through letting go we express our commitment to life and our true love (Shaw, M. in Kornevall, 2017).

To wed the wild is to connect with the old wisdom, which perceives life as cooperation, beauty, love, sensuousness, communion and mystery (Kreszmeier, 2017). Wedding the wild means that sacred and profane become one. To wed the wild is to worship our ancestors.¹⁴ Freedom is one of the strongest associations with the wild. Through "uma (re)ligação com o divino" (Machado, 2012: 41), through providing sustenance to our ancestors, praying, singing and dancing, through practicing sacred art and living myth, a deep psycho-emotional bond can grow. I connect myself to thousands and thousands of years of human experience, I immerse into deep-time and I am free and no longer trapped in the very tiny box of the consumerist society of today's Western culture. This connection to the sacred means for me to be wedded to the wild.

The song and prayer for the nature deity Oxóssi teaches us that our wedding the wild can start when we are still very young, as dedication, as link, as inauguration, and by becoming part of the interconnected terrestrial interaction of all life forces.

The rituals in Candomblé, of which the song for Oxóssi could be part of, are similar to the "religare experience" which C. G. Jung described as a connection to the sacred or to the transcendent issues of the Self (Machado, 2012: 30). This is for me a point where Alchemy¹⁵, Myth and Amazonia merge together and become one.

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¹⁴ Which is in many indigenous cultures 'normal every day life'. Doubtlessly in African religion there are many reasons to worship our ancestors and a core issue is the belief, that the "ritualized propitiation and invocation of ancestors" influence directly our wellbeing. This interaction of ancestors and human being has evolved over thousands of years to a "complex and elaborated level". As the one who have gone before, ancestors have in their spiritual state the power to support those who are living. (Asante and Mazama, 2009: 47)

¹⁵ Wedding the wild in alchemist terms is for me to be true to one's own unconsciousness, to commit to its ways of communication and to be engaged in learning the unconscious' old language (e.g. through observing and working with your dreams).

¹⁶ Ritualistic salutation for the Orisha (nature deity) Oxóssi

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