

A festa dos animais (*The Animal Party*)

Vangri Kaingang

(translation by Coletivo de Tradutores Berkeley-Brasil)*



Illustration by José Alecrim.

It all started at the end of that cold winter in the Kaingáng village, the wind blew, bringing the smell of the earth and the forest to the village.

In the distance, the fog went, being broken by the sun.

The first warriors awoke and left their homes and then lit the campfires, and some children also awoke and went looking for some food while their mothers left the homes, stretching themselves.

The weather cleared up, the sun came out and the children woke up to a new day. In the center of the village there was an uproar, and the children ran and ran, waiting for the coffee.

The mothers dealt with the fires, they grabbed the food with their *kapen* (large bamboo tongs), made for this purpose. In this way, they took *emin* cakes and meat out of the fire without getting burned.

After the children ate, they disappeared; in the forest or on farmland near the village, the Kaingáng

like to grow sweet potatoes, cassava, and corn.

The children also liked to go to the big Ligeiro River, many kilometers away from the village. For the Kaingáng children, that was nothing, they walked, went and returned, without anyone knowing where they were, they were very organized.

So that day, Pefej, Nenmó, and Katir, left home in the morning, their children's eyes searched for their mother, and there she was with the food on the fire, they found her, ate *emig*, with grilled beef, *kusit*, and coffee from the embers.

Later, the mother ordered them to get corn from the fields, green corn to make cake and porridge, the mother gave their basket to each one and sent them all off, so they went off running towards the paths of the cornfield.

The children ran one in front of the other with their empty baskets being thrown on one another's backs, the children smiled!!

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Katir trying to reach Nenmó, in the race followed farther behind by the oldest daughter Pafej, who watched the brothers run behind one another, shouting nonstop, how silly those boys were.

Could it be because they are boys? Thinking about this she smiled and followed the noisy brothers. When they arrived at the field they stopped and started to harvest the best corn, Pafej observed everything and also harvested her corncobs, when she heard Nenmó starting to laugh because he had struck Katir in the head with a cob. He took off running through the cornfield smiling and messing with his brother!

Pafej shouted for him to come back, but who's to say if he heard, he had already run far away and his siblings went running, pursuing the aggressor, deeper and deeper into the large cornfield.

When Pafej, running after her brother, caught him, he signaled to her to be quiet; looking in her dark eyes, he pointed to a place farther away, where a different sound came.

The very quiet children slowly approached, step by step not to make noise, observed the movement of the animals in the center of the cornfield, where the corn had been removed by the animals, who were now there dancing, to the sound of the maraca and the voice of animals.

That sound was very inviting, very pleasing to hear, thought the children.

In the center of that place some animals lit the bonfire, and then they entered the dance circle and moved their bodies from side to side, stomping their feet on the ground to the beat of the maraca.

Nenmó observed the monkey who made movements with its arms, the armadillo and the hedgehog had unique movements to their bodies, the monkey's little step, the armadillo's and the hedgehog's dance.

Some animals only played objects which made sound, which the children did not know and the small Kaingáng observed it all with great curiosity.

It was very good to see them in that constant rhythm, to the steps of the sound, which was all creating a desire to go there, and enter that circle and dance just like the animals at that party.

Night fell and the children did not return home, they were in the cornfield.

As the children had stayed for a long time watching the animals dance, Nenmó resolved to go up to where the animals were dancing and he'd decided to dance with them, or at least try.

He decided and set off in the direction of the dance circle, of that animal party. His siblings shouted but Nenmó was determined, and when he got real close he stopped, observing everything, listening to the sound. The animals didn't stop dancing, and he went closer to the circle until he entered it.



The author, Vangri Kaingang.

When he entered the circle, in the middle of the dance with the animals, he felt very good. To the sound of the maraca flute, Nenmó followed the steps of the monkey in front of him, when suddenly he was no longer a Kaingáng boy, but a hairy monkey, dancing to the sound of the beat of the maraca in that enchanted circle.

When his siblings saw that Nenmó had joined the party they also approached, first Pafej, then Katir, very slowly. Seeing that the animals didn't stop dancing they came closer until they joined that swing of steps, spins, arms, and feet hitting the ground. The children were now a hairy armadillo and a hedgehog.

They were very happy that they had the courage to go and participate in that animal party, around the bonfire.

The children-animals danced the whole night, and at sunrise everything ended, in that enchanted place.

The bonfire went out and the animals returned to the forest. The children returned to the path home, their mother must be worried, thought the children, but if they told the truth their mother wouldn't believe it, so they found the baskets of corn harvested the day before.

When they picked up the baskets and looked inside them, there were the instruments that the animals played, the maraca, the rain stick, the flute, the same as the ones that had been used in the animals' party.

Very happy, the children shouted hurray!

On the way the children smiled, remembering the animals' little steps and movements, and they played their maraca, flute and rain stick. The sound was very pretty, and now everyone in the village would believe them.

The children went up to the elders and told them everything that had happened, showed them the presents, sang and danced so that everyone could see, like they had learned on the day they transformed into animals at the great animal party.

The elder Kaingáng liked the story, the music and the instruments, and to celebrate the presents that made sounds, the Kaingáng were also going to throw a big party like the one the children took part in, so that perhaps their animal friends would show up to dance once more!

That day was one of preparations, and at night there was a big party with food, drink, a bonfire, music, singing, and dancing in a great circle around the main fire. The other Kaingáng danced imitating the movement of the animals, and they danced for a long time, until well into the night, at midnight.

The forest animals, attracted by the sound, left the forest and went in the direction of the center of the village, where the bonfire was glowing, and

the sound of singing was very inviting. The monkey, the armadillo, and the hedgehog arrived with their instruments, and soon entered the circle of Indigenous people, repeating their steps, teaching the dance to the Kaingáng.

For a long time, the animals visited the Kaingáng's parties, along with other animals who also participated in the animal parties like the anteater, playing the flute and the maraca at the same time, who also taught their steps to the Kaingáng.

To this day the Kaingáng remember the time they danced with the animals at parties around the bonfire on full moon nights. They remember the steps that the forest animals taught them. It's a memory that persists in time, reminding us of our history.

This story was told to me by my elders around a friendly campfire, the companion of so many stories.

Illustration by José Alecrim.

