

# Review of: "Enigmatic Totems: Exploring the Intersection of Art and Belief"

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I agree that it is extremely important to make the study of religious and mystical experiences move beyond World Religions. The study of indigenous contexts is, indeed, a wonderful opportunity to extend this area. However, unless one knows this literature well, one is very likely to end up making obsolete arguments and might even contribute towards colonial paradigms. For example, while I understand the point about bringing indigenous spiritual experiences into focus, we have moved beyond thinking of these as 'primitive' peoples or experiences — well, at least, the anthropologists who have primary access to these cultures have, and for a long time. I think the title of the article is actually reinforcing the early anthropological stereotypes: 'Enigmatic Totems' refers to something unusual and mysterious, and totems are very specific culturally and not universals of indigenous cultures. Something else that deeply worries me is the comparison with perennial ideas of mysticism (e.g., Stace's model); this would be, I suggest, a form of intellectual colonialism which doesn't acknowledge how different religious experience and religious cosmologies of indigenous peoples are when compared with that of the World Religions that gave rise to mysticism.

I would recommend the authors read one single book which moves way beyond what the authors are suggesting. It is written by a Brazilian-Yanomami indigenous leader and shaman, who depicts his experience of the spiritual world as well as addressing very critically the Western way of life. It's both a very different account of indigenous religious experience than the authors convey and a poignant anti-colonial stance. The reference is: Kopenawa, D. & Albert, B. 2013. *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomani Shaman*. Harvard University Press