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From the Selected Works of Tracy Devine Guzmán

Summer July 31, 2020

Indigenous Studies in Brazil

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/tracydevineguzman/40/>

Indigenous Studies: Brazil

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Subject: Literary Theory Online Publication Date: Jul 2020

DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.987

Summary and Keywords

Indigenous Studies as a topic of scholarly inquiry in modern-day Brazil comprise over five hundred years of colonial and national history, nearly three hundred distinct peoples with a collective populace of approximately 900,000, and some 270 languages or dialects, many of which approach extinction. Official estimates of indigenous populations have varied tremendously ever since officials began making such assessments during the late 19th century, in large part because a host of political and material interests have always informed and mediated the counting process. Who is indigenous, under what circumstances, with what conditions, and according to whom, are legal and philosophical queries—unresolved and likely unresolvable—that shape not only indigenous-centered scholarship and activism, but also, most importantly, the lived experiences of Native peoples across the country and the region.

Political crises and catastrophic environmental disasters since the early 2000s have brought renewed international attention to the critical situation of indigenous Brazil. While non-indigenous peoples, beyond a doubt, also suffered tremendously from the impact of these events, the situation of Native Brazilians has been exceptional for two reasons: First, their miniscule numbers vis-à-vis the general population render them, their collective interests, and their political voices invisible or easily ignorable for the holders of power. Second, legal contradictions render their juridical condition vis-à-vis the Brazilian state unclear, resulting in a long-standing dynamic through which purported indigenous interests are represented not only by non-indigenous entities, but also by non-indigenous entities that are overtly hostile to collective indigenous interests. While distinct state mechanisms for “Indian protection” have been in place since the beginning of the 20th century, they have consistently lacked indigenous leadership or significant indigenous participation and have functioned, more often than not, to the detriment of the purportedly protected population.

Indigenous peoples from radically distinct realities have responded to this dire situation in correspondingly distinct ways. Over the past two years, for example, Brazilians saw an indigenous woman (Sonia Guajajara) run for vice-president of their country, at the same time isolated Native communities in the Amazon fled from the National Indian Foundation’s highly controversial efforts to bring them into contact with dominant society for the very first time. In light of these radical differences, any effort to generalize the in-

terests, needs, or lived experiences of Native peoples in Brazil is inherently flawed, resulting in overly simplified renderings of the past and a flattening of diverse Native subjectivities into idealized or demonized “Indianness.” Lauded or reviled, generic “Indians” and their Indianness are time-honored staples of Brazilian national identity and popular culture.

To recognize the profound heterogeneity of indigenous Brazil is not to say that Native Brazilians do not share many of the same experiences, interests, and goals. Indeed, the very articulation of an “indigenous movement” requires a strategic suspension of, and extrapolation from diverse histories and present-day circumstances so that many voices, sometimes representing conflicting perspectives and priorities, can articulate their goals as a collectivity. Brazil’s so-called indigenous movement took root during the 1970s. With a focus on creating favorable (or at least, less prejudicial) national legislation, the first wave of that movement culminated in indigenous participation in crafting the 1988 post-dictatorship Constitution of Brazil, which represented, in theory, a profound change in the way the Brazilian state would engage with indigenous peoples. It is precisely the failure of dominant society to enforce those changes that has inspired the majority of subsequent work by indigenous intellectuals, scholars, writers, artists, and other activists.

Acknowledging the profoundly antidemocratic political reality in which their voices are either muffled or ignored, indigenous peoples have not given up on politics. On the contrary, they have redoubled their political work by taking their struggles to diverse social organizations and expressing them through forms of cultural production that allow them to articulate their needs and interests to a broader audience, oftentimes with the support of social media. Demands for land rights and environmental protection measures often lie at the heart of these efforts, placing the well-being of indigenous peoples into direct conflict with multinational development interests (such as mining, agribusiness, and tourism) that operate with insufficient oversight, or even with the outright support of the Brazilian government. This dynamic has pushed indigenous peoples and organizations to seek national, regional, and global backing from Native and non-Native allies who mirror their critique of unchecked developmentalism and their concern for the shared ecological future of humanity.

Keywords: Native Brazil, indigeneity, representation, indigenous activism, indigenous writing, indigenous rights, human rights, democracy

Indigeneity and Brazil’s 21st-Century Political Landscape

On the night of September 2, 2018, Brazil’s National Museum went up in flames. Epicenter of national indigenous studies, intellectual home to hundreds of scholars and students, and depository for millions of invaluable Native objects from across the country, the Americas, and around the world, the two-hundred-year-old structure and 90 percent of its content turned to ash in a matter of hours while incredulous spectators looked on

with impotent fury. Poorly paid firefighters connected hoses to near-empty hydrants, and critics lamented decades of state neglect while irreplaceable recordings of indigenous peoples and languages already annihilated by the entrenched internal colonialism of the Brazilian state burned into oblivion, compounding erasure upon erasure.

Over the days that ensued, indignation and grief poured online and into the press, urging civic-minded readers and concerned parties at home and abroad to donate their money, time, expertise, and even personal research materials to help rebuild the devastated collection. The Museum published appeals through various forms of social media, and their headline, “*Não estamos de luto e sim na luta!*” (We are not in mourning, but in the struggle), became for a short while the most hopeful theme possible for the impossible restoration of the country’s precious cultural patrimony.¹ While the academic programs affiliated with the Museum eventually resumed operation, the museum’s website disappeared. As of late 2019, the building remains closed indefinitely.²

Nearly three months after this unspeakable loss of their collective material history, tragic for its magnitude and squandered preventability, indigenous peoples in Brazil suffered another devastating blow. On January 1, 2019, Jair Bolsonaro—admirer of Brazil’s 1964–1985 military dictatorship, advocate of torture, and opponent of social policies designed to support the well-being of indigenous and other historically disenfranchised peoples—became the country’s thirty-eighth president. Among his many campaign promises were assurances that Brazil would be for the Brazilians (and not for foreigners); that minorities would “bow down” to the will of the majority; and that no Brazilian land—“not a single centimeter”—would henceforward be designated for protected or exclusive occupation by “Indians” or descendants of the escaped 18th-century slave communities known as *quilombos*. Implicit in each of these proposals was the candidate’s highly circumscribed vision of Brazilian nationhood, according to which indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples *as such*—like any of the immigrant groups that dominant society has deemed undesirable—could never be true members of the national community, for their belonging would always be qualified, and their citizenship contingent.³ The jingoistic campaign slogan, “Brazil above everything; God above everyone,” succinctly channeled Bolsonaro’s trademark xenophobia and evangelism as key components of a governing platform that won nearly 56 percent of the popular vote in the second and final round of elections, automatically excluding the vast majority of indigenous Brazilians—oftentimes non-Christian peoples who manifest allegiance to their particular ethno-national communities, as well as to Brazil.⁴

Since the mid-20th century, the notion and ethos of this dual belonging have been problematic for ultranationalists in Brazil, whose concern over precarious northern borders has led them to string together various tales of treacherous Natives aligned with imperialist foreign powers conspiring to take over the Amazon. Such paranoia, for example, led army colonel Carlos Alberto Lima Menna Barreto to claim as late as the mid-1990s that the most numerous indigenous people in South America, the Yanomami, were the invention of a nebulous collective of communist anthropologists and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). “Turning over half of Roraima [state] to Indians who have

no fatherland is to betray Brazil,” he published in the mid-1990s, in the aftermath of an extended gold rush (and subsequent military incursion) onto Yanomami territories that had decimated over 20 percent of the population.⁵ While the intense international outcry over this genocide eventually compelled the regime of then-president Fernando Collor de Mello to demarcate Yanomami territories—a decision Bolsonaro characterized as “criminal”—those lands have been under siege ever since by illegal miners, loggers, and other natural resource pirates.⁶

Since Bolsonaro began his mandate in January 2019, domestic and international critics of his administration have voiced strident opposition not only to his anti-indigenous platform, but also to many other manifestations of his controversial views, which opponents characterize as racist, colonialist, misogynist, and classist.⁷ The massive fires that consumed the Amazon at unprecedented rates between June and August 2019 generated further outrage and opprobrium from environmental activists and human rights advocates around the globe, provoking government leaders worldwide to characterize the situation as an “international crisis.”⁸ And yet, with regard to the particular plight of Native peoples, most of Bolsonaro’s detractors fail to recognize a crucial, if inconvenient and uncomfortable truth: that the sitting president’s seemingly extreme stances represent, in manifold ways, a seamless continuation of the anti-indigenous discourses and policies that have plagued Brazil since its inception, including during extended periods of democratic rule and nominally progressive leadership. Such selective blindness and revisionist history, while oftentimes sympathetic to indigenous political priorities and other shared concerns (including environmentalism), ultimately do Native peoples a disservice, for they fail to account for how and why they face a 16th-century existential threat in the 21st century—despite the fact that coordinated global attention to indigenous welfare has perhaps never been greater. Alas, the museum did not burn down overnight; it had been on fire for a long time.

Colonial Encounters and Their Legacies

When Portuguese explorers arrived in Porto Seguro at the outset of the 16th century, somewhere between 1.5 million and eleven million people lived across the immense territory that would eventually be called “Brazil” for its valued wood—the color of which resembled *brasas*, or hot embers.⁹ That these estimates have varied so radically, even among specialized scholars, raises the ambiguous issue of population size and how it has changed over time, while pointing to the reality that all forms of “indigenous studies” are, by definition, inherently and necessarily subjective. Indeed, Native Brazilians still struggle against the regimes of power and representation that were foreshadowed by the scribe of Pedro Álvares Cabral, Pêro Vaz de Caminha, in his celebrated letter of “discovery” to Dom Manuel I at the turn of the 16th century: “. . . I do not doubt that they [Indians], according to the holy intention of Your Highness, have to become Christians and to believe in our holy faith,” he wrote in April 1500. “May it please Our Lord that it is

brought to them, because certainly these people are good, and of a good simplicity. *They will be stamped gently with whatever mark is wished upon them.*"¹⁰

The colonialist erasure of indigenous subjectivity that framed and resulted from this oft-memorialized “New World” encounter continues to play out in popular culture, official “Indian policy,” and the national imaginary in countless ways, resulting in an established sociopolitical dynamic through which Native peoples have found it virtually impossible to see their common needs and interests translated into or reflected through the public sphere. Until the late 20th century, from creative depiction in the arts to the articulation of legal discourses and political platforms, Native Brazilians had their fate spoken for and decided by others—sometimes with good intentions, and yet most often to their collective detriment. Crucially, Brazil’s official state-backed indigenist organizations—first, the Indian Protection Service (Serviço de Proteção aos Índios, 1910–1967), and later the National Indian Foundation (Fundação Nacional do Índio, 1967–present)—have never had indigenous leadership.¹¹ As of 2019, only two self-identifying indigenous Brazilians have ever served in the lower house of the National Congress.¹² The overrepresentation in the popular imaginary of romanticized Indians—distant in time, in space, or both—thus exists side by side with the gross underrepresentation of indigenous peoples in any sphere of cultural, social, political, or economic power.

The problem of indigenous representation is complicated further by legal and metaphysical questions about what it means to be indigenous in the first place—according to whom, with what conditions, and under what circumstances. The prolific if controversial Brazilian anthropologist and once government ethnographer, Darcy Ribeiro, noted in his 1970 landmark study of indigenous assimilation into dominant national society that, “the alarming discrepancies among [population] estimates, [. . .] inspire us to attempt another indirect evaluation, even though we already know it will be imprecise. We hope to achieve a better estimate of reality that can serve as a work tool, at least, until we have more reliable data.”¹³ One-half century later, however, the availability of more “reliable data” has done little to resolve the discrepancies, for the problem of imprecision is ultimately one of politics and not of accounting.¹⁴

Centuries of philosophizing and decades of public policy debates among (mostly) non-Natives have afforded no tried-and-true formula for settling the question of who counts “legitimately” as indigenous. Even after twenty years of debate, the authors of the landmark United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007) decided not to include a specific definition of indigeneity in their legislation, thereby empowering individuals and communities in Brazil and worldwide to articulate their identitarian interests with regard to local, regional, and national contexts as they deem most appropriate and necessary. Paradoxically, it is because of the power of transnational discourses, including but not limited to the UNDRIP, that the concept of indigeneity itself has taken on a politically impactful, if oftentimes contested, significance within distinct national contexts.¹⁵ As indigeneity continues to play out in Brazil and across the globe as an abstract, theoretical question, as well as a material and economic one involving land, capital, and public goods, legitimacy-cum-authenticity is increasingly contested by individuals and

groups who consider themselves net losers in a zero-sum game of identitarian politics that is intrinsically tied to resources.

Nation Building and “Indians,” Real and Imagined

By the beginning of the 20th century, following Brazil’s independence from Portugal as a sovereign empire in 1822 and the declaration of the first republic in 1889, state-backed efforts to account for the national indigenous population came about mostly as a result of militarized expansion to secure communication lines and frontiers in the northern and western regions of the country. Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, a military engineer of Bororó descent who headed a series of expeditions known as the Rondon Commission (Comissão Rondon) across Mato Grosso to lay telegraph lines from Brazil to Peru and Bolivia, and later, into the Brazilian Amazon, founded the first state-backed indigenist body—the Indian Protection Service (SPI)—in 1910.¹⁶ Having encountered dozens of isolated indigenous communities throughout his explorations whose health and well-being suffered gravely from initial or ongoing contact with outsiders moving into their territories, Rondon’s professed intention in founding the organization was to save Native lives. His permanent order to subordinates and the official SPI motto was: “Die if you must, but never kill” (*Morrer se for preciso, matar, nunca*).¹⁷

For over half a century, accounts of the Commission’s explorations and later SPI encounters with diverse indigenous communities circulated widely for a popular audience as the drama of frontier expansion played out in national media throughout the country. Photographs of Rondon and his legion of *sertanistas*, smiling benevolently alongside Bororó, Paresi, Kuikuro, Nambikwara, Tiriyo, and dozens of other Native peoples breathed new life into Brazil’s exoticist imagination, at the same time calling into question the pervasive imagery through which beloved Indianist writers, artists, and composers, ranging from Santa Rita Durão, the French writer Ferdinand Denis, and José de Alencar, to Gonçalves Dias, Vitor Meirelles, and Carlos Gomes, had romanticized “the Indian” into the national imaginary during the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁸ Responding in the early 1950s to news coverage of a “scandalous” love affair between a white SPI employee from Rio Grande do Sul and a Kalapalo teenager named Diacuí Canualo Aiute from the forests of Xingu, one disillusioned newspaper reader in fact lamented that the young woman had “killed” the Native protagonist of José de Alencar’s 1865 “foundational fiction,” *Iracema*.¹⁹ Aiute’s plodding gait and shortage of loveliness made her wholly incomparable, the editorialist worried, to Alencar’s “honey-lipped” national heroine, whose movements had evoked “moonbeams moving across the grass.”²⁰ Paradoxically, one century earlier, the romantic author had received harsh critique for deploying such idealized imagery, despite his notable efforts to incorporate “authentic” indigenous lexicon and cultural forms into a new, independent Brazilian literary tradition. Portuguese and Brazilian readers alike had found fault with Alencar’s contrived language and whitewashed Native peoples, noting that the author lacked the ethnographic experience and scientific expertise that could

have made it possible for him to escape the realm of fantasy. Significant linguistic transformation could never be forced, they concluded, and indeed would only take place over many decades.²¹

Just over a half-century later, writers Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade (no relation) also inscribed themselves into the Brazilian history of letters by famously poking fun at Indianism in the Alencarian tradition. Appearing in 1928, in the wake of São Paulo's watershed, "Week of Modern Art" (1922), the former Andrade's novel, *Macunaíma*, gave birth to the black and indigenous "hero with no character" whose tragicomic cross-country adventures highlighted the contrast of his perpetual laziness and insatiable sex drive. A member of the fictional Tapanhumas community, Andrade's protagonist embodied a cultural, social, and linguistic fusion that drew heavily on the writings of German ethnographer Theodor Koch-Grünberg as well as from the author's own research on indigenous communities.²² Also from 1928, Oswald de Andrade's surrealist "Anthropophagic Manifesto" riffed off the colonial trope of cannibalism to help establish a uniquely Brazilian modernist discourse that would valorize the "consumption" of European cultural products as an impetus for independent creation rather than an act of dependent mimesis.²³

While the real-life encounters of the Indian Protection Service bumped up against these and other key components of the nationalist literary apparatus to confront the way many Brazilians had come to think about indigenous peoples in their country, the official function of the state's indigenist entity became ever more complex. If Rondon's initial aim was to ensure that contact between non-indigenous settlers and Native peoples would not result in deadly violence, the longer-term SPI goal—after peaceable contact had been established—was to facilitate the incorporation of the same Native communities into the idea and practice of Brazilianness, primarily through patriotic schooling and compulsory agricultural work. Over the ensuing fifty years, the state would develop an immense indigenist bureaucracy to operationalize these tasks, establishing a vast network of *postos indígenas* (indigenous outposts) across the country, whereon devoted civil servants and educators would carry out the arduous labor of Indian nationalization.²⁴

It was working as an SPI functionary, in fact, that Darcy Ribeiro had the opportunity to live among several indigenous communities, to develop his theory of "ethnic transfiguration," and to hone the ethnographic sensibilities that would shape all of his subsequent efforts, ranging from anthropological fieldwork and educational theorizing to politics and, of course, writing.²⁵ Of crucial importance in Ribeiro's impactful if thorny indigenist narrative was an ability he claimed to "look at the Indians through Indian eyes."²⁶ Unable to continue producing respected social science from such a self-oriented and otherwise problematic perspective, he took up fiction and went on to publish four novels—*Maíra* (1976), *O Mulo* (1981), *Utopia Selvagem* (1982), and *Migo* (1988). Indirectly taking on the mandate of Alencar's critics from over a full century earlier, Ribeiro thus channeled his decades of ethnographic experience and cultural critique into creative writing, hoping, as he explained in his 1996 memoirs, to reach a wider and non-specialized readership on par with that of Jorge Amado.²⁷

Ribeiro's creative work in this regard exemplifies a middle-ground in the development of indigenous-centered writing from Brazil—a segue between, on the one hand, romanticized appropriation of imaginary Natives as symbols of an embryonic national identity, and on the other hand, postmodern conceptions of Native viewpoints used to promote political agendas or to critique social ills that have little or nothing to do with indigenous experience. Although they span nearly one hundred and fifty years—from the mid-19th century to end of the 20th—these dominant literary tendencies each repeat the colonialist aspiration that Vaz de Caminha heralded in his April 1500 letter: to treat Natives as empty vessels (and signifiers), the meaning of whose existence could only be explained and determined by someone other than themselves. As Ribeiro put it toward the end of his life: “I deal[t] with . . . emblematic Indians who [were] useful for discussing *civilized themes* and theses, such as Christianity and conversion, machismo and feminism, life and death, knowledge and erudition, the fatherland and militarism, socialism and freedom.”²⁸ Missing from this long list of themes, of course, were the needs and interests of indigenous peoples.

In the late 1950s, mired in irreconcilable disagreements with the state's indigenist leadership after nearly two decades of work and critical of the growing anti-indigenous violence he perceived coming from within the Service, Ribeiro saw no option but to resign his position in protest: “I couldn't bear to stay any longer, witnessing in silence the exploitation of Indians by a new generation of civil servants whose only interest in visiting indigenous outposts was to make money. The paternalism of the old SPI bureaucrats, pretending to push papers on behalf of the Indians, gave way to people who were far worse, for in addition to being ignorant, they were corrupt.”²⁹ Ribeiro's insider assessments of a highly unscrupulous indigenist state apparatus dating back over a century, alongside his fictionalized ethnographic writings, serve to remind us that the manipulation of indigenous perspectives and the power of anti-indigenous policy are nothing new. Native peoples have had to navigate such diverse forms of antagonism, whether explicit or surreptitious, since long before the growing onslaught of hostilities they have faced over the first two decades of the 21st century.

While it's certainly urgent, then, to understand and resist anti-indigenous violence and rhetoric in all of its manifestations, it is essential as well to acknowledge the tremendous harm that has been brought historically under the banner of state-sponsored “protection,” whether on behalf of unscrupulous SPI bureaucrats during the mid-20th century, or their successors in the FUNAI, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Congress, or any other non-Native entity empowered to represent Native interests. In the world of policy, as in the world of cultural production, indigenous representation in Brazil has historically meant representation by others due to “necessity.” In fact, while the Brazilian Civil Code established in 2002 that “the [legal] capacity of Indians [would] be regulated by special legislation,” the previous version (in effect from 1916 through 2001) had placed indigenous peoples into the same legal category as minors, prodigals, and the mentally deficient.³⁰

Native peoples, advocates, and even some legislators have pushed for reform to bring federal legislation into compliance with Article 231 of the 1988 Constitution, which allows indigenous peoples, in theory, to maintain their group-differentiated rights while also being fully Brazilian.³¹ The 1973 Indian Statute (Estatuto do Índio), however, remains contradictorily in place. Passed during the middle of the 1964–1985 military dictatorship, the law holds in Chapter II that:

Indians and indigenous communities not integrated into the national communion are subject to . . . tutelary power. . .” (Article 8); and that “[a]ny Indian can request discharge from the tutelary regime . . ., [thereby] inscribing [him or herself] with full civil capacity, as long as the following requirements are met: (a) minimum age of 21 years; (b) knowledge of Portuguese; (c) ability to exercise a useful activity in the national communion; (d) reasonable understanding of the use and customs of the national communion (Article 9).³²

Liberation from the condition of tutelage in these legal terms would thus mean abandoning identification with indigeneity and the rights thereof. Lacking indigenous leadership or any other empowered presence of indigenous perspectives in the enforcement or revision of these policies—in 2019 perhaps more than at any other time since the Indian Statute became law—official “protection” functions as little more than another tool of the colonialist state. What is more, when it comes to contested resource frontiers and development projects that impact indigenous well-being on indigenous territories, tutelage amounts to the proverbial fox guarding the hen house.³³

Against the backdrop of this grave situation, the remainder of this article explores some of the ways Native peoples and their allies have worked to alter the nature of indigenous representation since the beginning of the 21st century on two interrelated fronts—through the growth of indigenous political and social activism, on the one hand, and through the proliferation of indigenous-authored cultural production and other forms of creative work, on the other.³⁴ Increased access to social media has facilitated both developments, albeit with divergent results and levels of impact. That is, while the dissemination of Native perspectives for educational purposes and diverse forms of cultural consumption is often welcomed, manifesting, for example, as radio programs, literary and music festivals, and even national legislation mandating the incorporation of indigenous histories into public education, Native political interventions and socioeconomic perspectives have created less enthusiasm among the general population, for they come attached to concrete demands for inalienable rights and valuable resources that aim to shake the anti-indigenous foundations of the existing sociopolitical order.³⁵

Indigenous People Writing Indigeneity

In her landmark study of indigenist politics, *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (1998), anthropologist Alcida Rita Ramos characterized Daniel Munduruku’s 1996 collection of short stories, *Histórias do Índio* [*Indian Stories*], as “light,” “humorous,” “charming,” and “infused with candor and sweetness.”³⁶ Observing that Munduruku had intended his book

—among the first widely recognized publications in Brazil by an indigenous author—primarily for an audience of young people, and that its language had the undesirable effects of “infantiliz[ing] the Indian” and “simplifying the subject matter,” she wondered “. . . why the Indian [was] so rarely the theme of serious adult writing in Brazil.”³⁷

Over twenty years later, while one may still quibble with what qualifies as “serious” writing, what does not, and according to whom, it is undeniable that popular and scholarly writing not only *about* Indians, but more significantly, *by* indigenous peoples has flourished throughout Brazil and around the world. Munduruku’s own experience is illustrative of this broader trend: after writing *Histórias do Índio*, he completed a master’s degree and a doctorate; worked as an educator and activist; edited or authored dozens of additional books for young people, teachers, and adults; and won national and international awards for his writing. A handful of his titles have been translated into English, helping to garner an international audience and to raise awareness worldwide of the grave difficulties indigenous Brazilians face throughout the country, from violent confrontations over land and mineral resources to shoddy or scarce access to education and health care.

In light of the exceedingly high cost and insufficient circulation of print books in Brazil, Munduruku’s work as a public speaker and through social media platforms has also helped make indigenous cultural production available to an increasingly broad and diverse audience. As he explains with regard to the House of Ancestral Knowledge (Casa de Saberes Ancestrais), an educational organization and publishing house that he has directed since 2008, the ultimate goals of this work are “to promote consciousness of the presence of indigenous cultures and their importance in the formation of Brazilian national identity,” and to ensure that the state’s mandated incorporation of Native histories and cultures into public education includes indigenous-authored content and not only the work of non-indigenous scholars writing about “Indians.”³⁸ These concerns are now certainly one theme of much “serious adult writing” by Munduruku and others.

While Munduruku is among the most prolific and widely read indigenous writers in or from Brazil, many other Native authors have also penned their way into public discourse and national consciousness over the past two decades through print and a variety of digital media.³⁹ Addressing issues of local, national, and international concern, as well as individual and collective perspectives on the social and cultural practices of particular indigenous peoples, their diverse body of work serves as a complement, and oftentimes, a counterpoint to the anthropological, ethnographic, and policy-oriented analyses that still comprise the vast majority of writing about indigenous peoples in the country. It also serves as a useful set of discourses to contextualize historically and critique politically the powerful traditions of Indianist and indigenist fiction that continue to use “Indians” as symbols for someone (or something) other than themselves.

Although exceptions certainly exist, the literary and cultural movement of present-day indigenous artists and activists was borne of an urgent need for self-representation when little or no form of intervention into dominant legal, political, social, or cultural practices,

norms, or institutions has been available. Another foundational contribution to the indigenous archive is the Vídeo nas Aldeias (Video in the Villages) Project (VNA), which began facilitating Native-authored visual storytelling among the Nambiquara during the mid-1980s under the direction of the French-Brazilian anthropologist Vincent Carelli. Originally part of the Center for Indigenist Work (Centro de Trabalho Indigenista) and an independent organization since 2000, VNA has trained hundreds of indigenous filmmakers and produced dozens of films throughout the country, many of which are now available for free viewing through their website.⁴⁰ Given the glaring absence or outright exclusion of indigenous perspectives and voices from many of the organizations purported to represent their needs and interests, Native activists continue to adopt the camera along with the pen as one means of self-defense, relying on their creativity, industriousness, and when helpful, their associations with national and global networks of non-indigenous allies to advocate for their welfare and even survival.

Self-Representation and Self-Defense

As of late 2019, there is perhaps no better representative of this complex dynamic than Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa, who has served as a spokesperson for his people over many decades in national and international spheres, including during grave periods of existential threat resulting from the relentless intrusion of indigenists, missionaries, miners, loggers, ranchers, and other developmentalists into communal life and territory. His forty-year-long collaboration with the French-Moroccan anthropologist Bruce Albert resulted in the widely circulated autobiography and auto-ethnography, *The Falling Sky* (2010), which details Kopenawa's worldview in relation to an intricate system of Yanomami beliefs and recounts his efforts, alongside those of his community, to navigate threats that oftentimes proved fatal for others. Reflecting on the compendium of his work, undertaken out of sheer necessity, he acknowledges the uncomfortably foreign, highly intimate, and indisputably efficacious quality of the written word for a people who refer to the pages of books as "paper skins:"

White people don't think very far ahead. They are always too preoccupied with the things of the moment. This is why I would like them to be able to hear my words through the drawings you made. I would like these words to penetrate their minds. After they have understood my account, I would like the white people to tell themselves: "The Yanomami are other people than us, but their words are right and clear. . . .These are words of truth! Their forest is beautiful and silent. . . .Their thought follows other paths than that of merchandise. They want to live their way. . . .They want to defend their land because they want to continue to live there like they did before. Let it be so!"

I do not possess old books in which my ancestors' words have been drawn. . . . The *xapiri*'s (spirits') words are set in my thought, in the deepest part of me. . . .Today it is my turn to possess them. . . .They will always remain in our thought, even if the white people throw away the paper skins of this book on which they are

drawn. . . . When I am long gone, they will still be as new and as strong as they are now. I asked you to set them on this paper in order to give them to the white people who will be willing to know their lines. Maybe then they will finally lend an ear to the inhabitants of the forest's words and start thinking about them in a more upright manner.⁴¹

Kopenawa's account is exceptional for the insight it offers purposefully into the shaman's complex spiritual world, as well as for the singular accounts of his personal interactions over many decades with communal outsiders, ranging from indigenist bureaucrats, proselytizers, and *garimpeiros* (prospectors who work independently [and often illegally] to collect precious minerals), to presidents, human rights activists, and of course, anthropologists. As he recounts, his ability to communicate effectively with "white (non-indigenous) people" resulted from terrible tragedy: the infectious disease that Christian missionaries brought into his community during the mid-1950s decimated not only his immediate family, but also his entire origin group, setting him on a path of contact with dominant society through which, eventually, he too fell gravely ill. Extended hospitalization enabled him to learn enough Portuguese to gain employment as a FUNAI interpreter and to travel extensively—initially, throughout Yanomami territory, and later, as an advocate for his people across Brazil, in Europe, and in the United States.⁴² In this regard, Kopenawa's experience points to a wider paradoxical reality among indigenous activists and writers working in contemporary Brazil (and certainly elsewhere): that only by understanding and using the language of the society that marginalizes and the culture that oppresses can one begin to defy their imposed conditions of marginalization and oppression.

To be sure, creative and political writing and other cultural production among Native Brazilians exist in languages other than Portuguese. But considering that the country is home to over three hundred distinct indigenous peoples speaking over 270 languages or dialects, in addition to the obvious need for communication with Portuguese-speaking members of the dominant society, expediency must reign for such writing to resonate as something other than a symbolic gesture.⁴³ What is more, even indigenous Brazilians and their advocates who communicate effectively in Portuguese, but lack a working knowledge of Spanish or English, oftentimes find themselves at a relative disadvantage in the international political sphere. As a notable case in point, Kopenawa's text was translated from the original French into English and published in the United States (2013) before it was finally translated into Portuguese and distributed in Brazil (2015).⁴⁴

Writing "in the Air" . . . of the Land and the Water

In the mid-1990s, Peruvian critic Antonio Cornejo Polar's much-cited study, *Escribir en el aire* (*Writing in the Air*), examined the complex historical relationship between orality and the written word in the tradition of Latin American letters as a means to address the broad theoretical question of contact (and conflict) among peoples representing radically different ways of being in and thinking about the world. Working against the seductive

and powerful notions of *mestizaje* (in Portuguese, *mestiçagem*), transculturation, and other influential concepts meant to understand and explain the national societies and cultures of the region in terms of synthesis (successful or otherwise), Cornejo advocated instead for the explanatory power of radical heterogeneity, grounded in the presence of ontological and epistemological differences that may well coexist, but were ultimately irreconcilable. Cornejo used the notion of “writing in the air” to invoke the lyrical quality and literary potential of the spoken discourses often identified with traditional indigenous peoples (in his study, beginning with the colonial Andes) who use media other than alphabets for recording their stories and histories.⁴⁵ In this regard, Cornejo’s work helped fulfill what Argentine critic Walter Mignolo identified around the same time as the need to understand and address the “tyranny of the alphabet” with “theories of the materiality of reading and writing cultures and their relevance to . . . colonial expansions and ideologies of domination.”⁴⁶

Cornejo’s primary interest in presenting this trope was to think about the struggles generations of Latin American writers had faced to incorporate oral traditions into their literary production and the measures Latin American intellectuals and political leaders had proposed, especially in the post-independence period, to “absorb” the indigenous peoples who held those traditions into idealized nation-building projects centering on the homogenizing promise of *mestizaje-mestiçagem*. As he concluded a quarter-century ago, those desires, while creatively fruitful and politically inspiring for many artists, writers, politicians, and social leaders, were never fully realized. Furthermore, as indigenous movements in Brazil and across the region have demonstrated over the past several decades, those desires seem ever more unrealizable, for they elide an essential incommensurability between, on the one hand, traditional Native perspectives on the relationship between human and nonhuman worlds, and on the other hand, the capitalist-developmental thought that has prevailed and governed throughout the region since the mid to late 19th century. Indeed, rather than accepting this mandated absorption into dominant society or blindly adopting its cultural forms, indigenous peoples seized and adapted them to safeguard their own societies and disseminate their own forms of cultural production. Native Brazilian texts thus instantiate Mignolo’s paradoxical finding that “the [colonial] effort to introduce alphabetic writing . . . spawned the appropriation of Western writing techniques and acts of resistance [that] disrupted the expansion of Western literacy . . . and showed the limits of any attempt to universalize regional perspectives.”⁴⁷

French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss observed famously from Brazil during the late 1930s that “the Nambikwara had learned what it meant to write!”—that is, to put pen to paper in a display of power intended to control or marginalize others.⁴⁸ He confirmed through fieldwork in the Amazon (and elsewhere) his hypotheses that “the primary function of written communication [was] to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings,” and that the “struggle against illiteracy [was] indistinguishable . . . from the increased powers exerted over the individual citizen by the central authority.”⁴⁹ At the time, he perhaps did not anticipate the silver lining of the Nambikwara (and by extension, other indigenous) “learning” that would come about over the century to follow: a host of Native texts, written in indigenous and dominant languages, that would call into question both

the colonial creation of subaltern subjectivities and the colonialist regimes of power through which the dominant society would continuously seek to reinscribe that subalternity for its own benefit.

As writer and activist Eliane Potiguara, puts it:

Indigenous literature can be considered a path of awareness, strength, and freedom. . . .Such literary production should be stimulated by . . . Indigenous Education, every day, at school, so that Native Brazilians themselves become spokes[people] for their cultures, traditions, and ways of life. However . . . the oral rituals of our ancestors, shamans, and elders must not be ignored. . . .[T]his legacy . . . contains primordial values that support our traditions, and that will be the ground for our writing. . . .When a flower blooms, bees come to take its honey. Let's allow the flower that hides in our heart and soul to blossom so beautifully that Brazilian society will be able to witness our ability to live in peace, in deep harmony with our environment, and our Ancient Tradition. A fruitful dialogue may then take place, and the misunderstandings that lead to social exclusion and prejudice will cease to exist. May Indigenous Writers tell their stories and spread the honey of their Millenary wisdom to be respected, loved, and understood all over the world.⁵⁰

Categorizing broadly (though not comprehensively) for the sake of argument, and as Potiguara indicates in her narrative, the notion that humans are neither separate from nature nor superior to it is a predominant theme in indigenous cultural production and political thought. In Brazil, these ideas have continuously come up against the ruling class's mandate to harness Earth's resources for profit—destroying or exhausting them in the process, if necessary—rather than to exist alongside them in a relationship of respectful and sustainable symbiosis. While acrimonious politics and a series of tragic disasters caused primarily by ranchers, farmers, and the mining industry have brought worldwide attention to the fragile state of Brazil's ecosystem and democracy over the past several years, indigenous peoples have been pointing to the country's parallel environmental and democratic crises for many decades, calling out desperately for solutions to a host of problems that make their traditional lives unlivable and place the health of the country and the entire planet at risk.

Environmental Well-Being and Indigenous Critique

The Guarani-*mestiço* writer Olívio Jekupé reflected on this state of affairs in a book of poetry entitled, *500 Anos de Angústia (500 Years of Anguish)*, which he wrote and published in 1999 at the same time the Brazilian government under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso was preparing to commemorate the country's quincentennial anniversary of “dis-

covery” with a massive celebration, to be held in collaboration with its Portuguese counterpart, in April 2000. He called the following poem “Twenty-first Century”:

In the twenty-first century, from what
I am seeing,
perhaps those creatures,
all of them
important on the land
where we live
will exist no longer.
The trees, we will see them no longer.
We will see neither the birds
nor the animals.
The rivers, all polluted.
Who knows if the Indians
will all be exterminated.
Oh, what sadness.
How perverse, human beings.
My God,
are they all evil?
They destroy everything,
beautiful and sublime.
If they were people,
Nature would not be destroyed.⁵¹

That Jekupé wrote this despairing poem over two decades ago underscores the enduring state of siege under which Brazil’s indigenous peoples perceive themselves to live, in spite of the fact that national and international safeguards have long been in place to guarantee their physical well-being and protect their right to differentiated citizenship. Indeed, if theory were put into practice, and rights on paper were enforced on the ground, Brazil per the 1988 Constitution may have found itself among the world’s most socially progressive democracies.

Because governing officials from across the political spectrum have succeeded in ignoring or circumventing national and international pro-indigenous legislation since 1988—including that which exists under the auspices of the United Nations and the International Labor Organization—Native peoples have found themselves sidelined over and over again in the name of progress, development, and modernization.⁵² While it is imperative to acknowledge the vast diversity of Brazilian indigeneity and the fact that many indigenous Brazilians reside in urban rather than rural areas, it is equally urgent to recognize—as in the cases of Jekupé, Potiguara, and Kopenawa—the enduring environmental emphasis of indigenous political and cultural critique.⁵³ The number of indigenous Brazilians is minute relative to the overall population, but those diverse peoples occupy nearly 13 percent of national territory—predominantly in critical regions of Amazonia.

Lacking political resolve to defend the constitutionally sanctioned right of the less than 0.5 percent of the national population authorized to live as indigenous peoples on demar-

cated and protected lands, the dominant society's disregard for democratic governance when it comes to the so-called Indian question seems to go hand in hand with its widespread disregard for the environment. Collaboration with non-Native allies at home and abroad will continue to be necessary and critical because the tiny indigenous population vis-à-vis the rest of Brazil translates into zero power at the polls. Nonetheless, for co-founder of the Union of Indigenous Peoples (União dos Povos Indígenas) and lifelong political activist Ailton Krenak, Native individuals and communities must place themselves at the forefront of efforts to rectify this situation. He explains: ". . .the whites 'discovered' Brazil in 1500, [but] the Indians discovered Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s. . . .They discovered [through their activism] that even though, symbolically, they are the 'original owners' of Brazil, they do not have a place to live in this country. They have to make that place exist, day after day."⁵⁴

Tragically, Ailton Krenak spoke these words even before his entire community—the Krenak (or Borun) people residing alongside the Rio Doce in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais—would find themselves at ground zero of dominant society's unending assault on indigenous and environmental well-being.⁵⁵ On November 5, 2015, sixty million cubic meters of iron ore waste from a failed mining dam owned by the Brazilian-Australian joint venture Samarco crashed over the small towns of Bento Rodrigues and Paracatu de Baixo, taking the lives of at least nineteen people. The tons of toxic sludge then engulfed the Rio Doce, "killing" the river, as the Krenak people describe it, before pushing its way to the Atlantic Coast. As a result, the "People of the River" (as the Borun name translates) have since been entirely unable to access the waters that occupy the very center of their physical and spiritual existence.

Thinking about the disaster and the still "dead" river more than two years later, teenage spokesperson Kathy Krenak explained: "The Rio Doce is like our mother. It's where we practice our rituals and our culture, everything we are. If you lose your mother, you're finished inside." Then, referring perhaps to Samarco's compensation payments to those who, like the Krenak, had lost their homes and livelihoods, he added, ". . .Money is not going to bring back our river or our culture as it used to be."⁵⁶ Rather than swimming, fishing, drinking, praying, and otherwise coexisting in and with the river, the Krenak now live with water tanks and massive deliveries of plastic water bottles that serve the dual purpose of turning a profit for someone else while further destroying the environment.⁵⁷

Like Brazil's National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, the Rio Doce died from a confluence of neglect, greed, and gross disrespect for indigenous peoples that are linked historically to similar human and environmental tragedies across the country. Reflecting on the unclear path forward for his community in light of their seemingly hopeless situation, the thirteen-year-old Kathy Krenak seemed to find courage in recognizing that their lives post-colonization have only ever known struggle: "My people have been fighting for our lands for more than 500 years," he observed matter-of-factly. Then, pointing sagaciously to the age-old Brazilian tradition of gleefully "playing Indian" while simultaneously killing off indigenous peoples with anti-indigenous policy or out-and-out violence, he concluded: "Being Indian is not a game; it's a responsibility. . . .We have to fight for our rights, and do it

for ourselves.”⁵⁸ Indigenous Studies in and of Brazil have little purpose if not working to draw attention to and support for those efforts.

Discussion of the Literature

While the health of the Amazon, its peoples, and related measures of ecological well-being have been of concern in Brazil for over a century, heightened national and international awareness of climate change, sea-level rise, and the global importance of the rainforest has shed new light on the country's long track record of shoddy environmental stewardship since the turn of the millennium. As Olívio Jekupé put it starkly in his year 2000 poetic assessment of the country's quincennial commemoration, the pristine lands that Pêro Vaz de Caminha depicted in his letter to el Rei Dom Manuel as rich and ripe for the taking have been in utter peril ever since. The Brazilian Amazon began shrinking well before the state began accounting for deforestation, with some 709,165 square kilometers of natural forest cover having disappeared between 1970 and 2018.⁵⁹ And while scientists worldwide have taught us over the last half-century that all living beings across the planet will eventually face the consequences of this steady devastation, Eliane Potiguara, Davi Kopenawa, Kathy Krenak, and many other indigenous voices from Brazil have made it clear that those residing in close proximity to the ongoing ruin have long suffered irreparable harm to their personal and collective well-being, if they have not already—like the Krenak “mother,” Rio Doce—met their demise.

Accounting for this grim situation, scholars must also acknowledge that we live in what many scientists and other scholars call the Anthropocene—the geological time-interval in which Earth-system components such as climate, biodiversity, and biogeography have come to be more influenced by human forces than by nonhuman ones.⁶⁰ While the onset of the Anthropocene is up for debate, with some researchers marking its beginning thousands of years ago with the development of agriculture and sedentary cultures, others with the Industrial Revolution, and still others in the mid-20th century, the fact of human-driven change itself has inspired broad consensus among the scientific community worldwide.⁶¹ If they are right, of course, then the shared fate of all Earth beings rests not only in their hands and our hands, but also, precariously, in the hands of strident and politically powerful climate-change deniers like Presidents Bolsonaro and Trump (and millions of their supporters). In this light, the confluence of indigenous interests and broad environmental concerns is, quite literally, of incalculable strategic importance for the future of Native and non-Native peoples in Brazil and worldwide.

Indigenous critics of environmental destruction by dominant societies thus face a particularly difficult double bind: On the one hand, their critique occurs in the context of a Western tradition dating to the early colonial period of questioning the very humanity of indigenous peoples and conflating them with nature—disappearing “Indians” through what Mary Louise Pratt famously called “imperial eyes,” into vast and “empty landscapes.”⁶² On the other hand, as each of the indigenous writers and activists mentioned in this article makes clear, many Native individuals and communities do maintain a respectful, sym-

biotic relationship with nonhuman beings, including land, plants, and animals, that differs radically from that held by most members of modern industrial societies. Jekupé's deceptively simple observation that "if they were people, Nature would not be destroyed" thus provides an inroad into this complex relationship, for presumably, said people would not willingly destroy themselves.

Of course, indigenous voices are not necessarily in agreement by dint of their indigeneity, and as US anthropologist David Stoll argued controversially in the much-commented case of Maya-Quiché activist and writer Rigoberta Menchú, any notion of indigenous "legitimacy" is infinitely subjective. Any Native person may be "picked out to make misleading statements about [Native peoples]," Stoll cautioned in the aftermath of Guatemala's devastating civil war (1960–1996), and thus put in a position to "tell . . . academics what they want to hear."⁶³ Students and scholars of indigenous Brazil would do well to heed this warning, particularly when forced to navigate the divided and rancorous political environment of the early 21st century.

Offering a very different assessment of the nature–culture relationship and the historically contingent task of anthropology, Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has argued for decades that Native individuals and communities in Brazil (and elsewhere) share and partake in what he calls "Amerindian perspectivism." As he explains: "In this absolute discourse, each kind of being appears to itself—as human—even as it already acts by manifesting its distinct and definitive animal, plant, or spirit nature."⁶⁴ Thus presuming "an epistemology that remains constant and variable ontologies," perspectivism holds that diverse "existents"—animals, plants, spirits land formations, bodies of water, and so on—are "persons" who present distinct, nonhuman body types.⁶⁵ Furthermore, because other-than-human persons have the capacity to regard themselves in this way, they are endowed with culture, and like human persons, formulate and hold particular cultural perceptions. Recognizing this fact thus destabilizes long-standing Western categorical divisions between nature and culture and helps "not so much in classifying cosmologies that appear exotic to us, but in counter-analyzing those anthropologies that have become far too familiar."⁶⁶ If acknowledgment of the Anthropocene forces us to reevaluate the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman histories for our own survival, Amerindian perspectivism holds, along with many of the thinkers represented in this article, that human and other-than-human histories have always been and will always be, in essence, one in the same. "All beings see . . . the world in the same way," as Viveiros puts it. "[W]hat changes is the world that they see."⁶⁷

Whether or not the concepts of the Anthropocene and Amerindian perspectivism may help non-specialized audiences reconsider the existing and possible connections between people and the planet that we all call home remains to be seen. In the meantime, those who already care about these questions for any multitude of reasons are left to face a minefield of identity politics grounded in infinite sources of always relative "legitimacy" and to wonder how best to support the inalienable rights of indigenous peoples without relegating them to the past, exoticizing them, or undercutting the fundamental personhood of nature, animals, and other-than-human beings. If there are no easy answers to

these questions, one thing at least seems clear: Whereas just a quarter-century ago, the controversial anthropologist, critic, and writer Antônio Risério published a genealogy of Indian poetics in Brazil without citing any indigenous voices, the poetic and political presence of self-identifying Native voices in 2020 is so varied and so powerful that one could not possibly account for it in a single article.⁶⁸ In the arts, in politics, and in a vast array of social and cultural movements, Native Brazilians are researching, redocumenting, and reinterpreting their own histories to create a new indigenous archive—individually, communally, nationally, and transnationally. If the Museum ever reopens, it can and should be only on their terms.

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Notes:

(1.) “Como ajudar o Museu Nacional?” Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

(2.) For a brief overview of the funding crisis leading up to the fire, see the website of the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology (PPGASMN) of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro founded in the late 1960s.

(3.) Brazil has a long history of discouraging or prohibiting entry to potential immigrants deemed undesirable because of their “race” and national origin—a practice that went hand in hand with eugenic thought and social policies aimed to “whiten” and otherwise “improve” national society. For recent historical perspectives on this question, see Leonardo Dallacqua de Carvalho, *Os Traços da Hereditariedade: Cor, Raça e Eugenia no Brasil* (Curitiba, Brazil: Editora Prismas, 2015); and Ana Paulina Lee, *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). On the

Brazilianness of immigrant communities and their descendants as perceived by themselves and others, see Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

(4.) For an elaboration of this argument, see Devine Guzmán, *Native and National in Brazil: Indigeneity After Independence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

(5.) See Menna Barreto, *A Farsa Ianomâmi* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca do Exército, 1995), 21; and “Yanomami Timeline,” *Survival International*.

(6.) See interview with Marcelo Godoy, “Sem tiro de advertência, o primeiro na testa,” April 2, 2017; See chaps. 15 and 16 of Davi Yanomami, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

(7.) For an overview of these positions, see Tracy Devine Guzmán, “Brazil 2018: Divided Electorate Faces Second Round of Presidential Elections,” *News@TheU*, October 24, 2018.

(8.) Compared to one year earlier, deforestation was 88 percent higher in June 2019 and 278 percent higher in July 2019. In August 2019, Bolsonaro fired lead scientist of the INPE (the National Institute for Space Research) Richard Galvão for defending satellite data to substantiate these data. Responding to the Bolsonaro administration’s inability or unwillingness to address the crisis, European leaders first offered aid before proposing embargos on Brazilian beef and urging G7 countries to address the catastrophic fires during their August 2019 summit. Bolsonaro responded by decrying the “colonialist mentality” of his international counterparts, claiming without evidence that the fires had been started by environmentalist nongovernmental organizations seeking to discredit his government. See Jim Daley, “Brazil’s Sacked Space Director Speaks Out on Attacks on Science,” *Scientific American*, August 7, 2019; and “Amazon Fires: President Jair Bolsonaro Suggests NGOs to Blame,” *BBC*, August 21, 2019.

(9.) Differing scholarly accounts of the precolonial population size include Darcy Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996 [1970]), 284–293; John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Mércio Gomes, *The Indians and Brazil* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 33–34; and “Brazilian Indians,” *Survival International*.

(10.) See “Carta de Pêro Vaz de Caminha,” *História do Brasil* (author’s emphasis; all translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted).

(11.) FUNAI replaced the SPI in 1967 during the early years of the dictatorship when a report compiled by prosecutor Jader de Figueiredo Correia (the Relatório Figueiredo) detailed decades of horrific abuse of indigenous Brazilians by SPI employees. The document had reportedly burned in a fire at the Ministry of Agriculture and disappeared until 2013,

when it turned up at the Museu do Índio in Rio de Janeiro (which houses the majority of the SPI archive).

(12.) Mario Juruna, a.k.a. Mario Dzuruna Butsé (Xavante), served as a member of the Partido Democrático Trabalhista from September 1983 through January 1987. Joênia Batista de Carvalho (Wapixana), a lawyer who argued successfully before the Supreme Court in 2008 to protect the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Territory in Roraima, was elected to Congress in 2018 and is the first indigenous woman to serve.

(13.) Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 286–288.

(14.) The “Diretoria Geral de Estatística” (DGE) conducted Brazil’s first national census in 1872, labeling the Native population “*caboclo*”—a Tupi-derived term indicating mixture of indigenous and European ancestry. Of the 9.93 million people counted that year, only 3.8 percent fell into this category, indicating that the DGE failed to include many Native individuals and communities for logistical as well as for political reasons. The category “Indian” (*índio*) would not appear on the census until 1991. See João Pacheco de Oliveira, “Mensurando alteridades, estabelecendo direitos: práticas e saberes governamentais na criação de fronteiras étnicas,” *Dados: Revista de Ciências Sociais* 55, no. 4 (2012): 1055–1088.

(15.) See United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, *Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Human Rights System*, Fact Sheet no. 9/Rev. 2 (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations, 2013).

(16.) The original name of the organization was the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios e Localização de Trabalhadores Nacionais—SPILTN, later shortened to SPI.

(17.) On Rondon and the Commission, see Todd Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation: Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon and the Construction of a Modern Brazil, 1906–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); and Larry Rohter, *Rondon: Uma Biografia* (São Paulo: Objetiva, 2019).

(18.) See, e.g., David Treece, *Exiles, Allies, Rebels: Brazil’s Indianist Movement, Indianist Politics, and the Imperial Nation State* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); David Miller Driver, *The Indian in Brazilian Literature* (New York: The Hispanic Institute in the United States, 1942); and Antônio Risério, “A ‘Capacidade Poética’ dos Índios,” in *Textos e Tribos: Poéticas Extraocidentais nos Trópicos Brasileiros* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1993).

(19.) See Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

(20.) “A nossa opinião: Diacuí matou Iracema,” *Diário Carioca* [Rio de Janeiro], November 23, 1951. N.p. Sector de Documentação/Museu do Índio. Microfilm 384. For an extended study of this case, see Devine Guzmán, *Native and National in Brazil*, 131–157.

(21.) See, e.g., Alencar's "Letter to Jaguaribe," included as an appendix to most modern editions of *Iracema*. For analysis of critiques made by Pinheiro Chagas, Antônio Henriques Leal, and Franklin Távora, see Manoel Carlos Fonseca de Alencar, "José de Alencar: O indígena e o popular na formação da nacionalidade," in *III Encontro Internacional História, Memória, Oralidade e Culturas*, Fortaleza, Brazil, 2016.

(22.) For detailed analysis of the novel, see Lucia Sá, *Rainforest Literatures: Amazonian Texts and Latin American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). For a reworking of Andrade's ideas from an indigenous perspective, see the work of Macuxi writer Jaider Esbell, *Terreiro de Makunaima* (Belém, Brazil: Cromos, 2012).

(23.) See Oswald de Andrade, "O manifesto antropófago," in *Vanguarda européia e modernismo brasileiro: apresentação e crítica dos principais manifestos vanguardistas*, ed. Gilberto Mendonça Teles, 3rd ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1976).

(24.) Important critiques of the SPI include Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, *Um Grande Cerco de Paz: Poder tutelar, indianidade e formação do estado no Brasil* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1995); Seth Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1937–1988* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Alcida Ramos, *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

(25.) According to Ribeiro's theory of ethnic transfiguration, indigenous peoples confronting pressures to assimilate into dominant society would transform their behaviors and customs, as had been predicted and desired by SPI leadership since the early 20th century, but would never cease to be "tribal" indigenous peoples. See Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 241–283.

(26.) Darcy Ribeiro, *Confissões* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996), 155.

(27.) Ribeiro, *Confissões*, 515. More recently, anthropologist Pedro Cesarino, who conducted his doctoral fieldwork among the Marubo, has continued this line of work with his 2016 novel, *Rio Acima*, a fictionalized account of an anthropologist's quest to understand the myths of an Amazonian indigenous community.

(28.) Ribeiro, *Confissões*, 514–515 (author's emphasis).

(29.) Ribeiro, *Confissões*, 197.

(30.) Law No. 10.406. Civil Code of 2002.

(31.) In contradistinction to "special rights," which arise from particular relations or exchanges, and "general rights," which arise from the basic supposition of equal treatment to human beings under the law regardless of their entrance into particular relations or exchanges, "group-differentiated rights" are those pertaining to members of a specific group by dint of their membership to said group. For a detailed historical and philosophical analysis of the concept of group-differentiated rights, see Eric J. Mitnick, *Rights*,

Groups, and Self-Invention: Group Differentiated Rights in Liberal Theory (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

(32.) Law No. 6.001. Indian Statute of 1973.

(33.) Despite the (theoretical) safeguards provided by Article 213 of the Brazilian Constitution and International Labor Organization Convention 169, to which Brazil is signatory, “tutelage” has repeatedly failed to respect the integrity of traditional indigenous lands, perhaps most infamously in recent years in the case of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam, which was completed in the state of Pará in late 2019.

(34.) As space does not permit a comprehensive treatment of all the impactful work that indigenous peoples and their allies are carrying out on these fronts, this article addresses a subset of particularly impactful actors whose efforts speak to shared problems and potential interventions that are relevant across different time periods and geographies. These questions are explored more fully in the references listed in “Further Reading.”

(35.) On indigenous radio in Brazil, see, e.g., Rádio Yandê. Law No. 11.645 (2008) obliged public schools throughout the country to teach indigenous and Afro-Brazilian histories and cultures as part of their regular curricula. However, as the law included no stipulation for indigenous or Afro-Brazilian authorship of the materials used for this purpose, some indigenous authors began advocating for a categorical distinction between “indigenous literatures” (about indigenous peoples), on the one hand, and “Native literatures” (by indigenous peoples, whether written or oral), on the other. Guaraní-metizo writer Olívio Jekupé has been an important advocate for prioritizing indigenous-authored materials in response to Law No. 11.645. On these debates, see, e.g., Olívio Jekupé, *Literatura escrita pelos povos indígenas* (São Paulo: Scortecci, 2009); and Tarsilla Couto de Britto, Sinval Martins de Sousa Filho, and Gláucia Viera Cândido, “O avesso do direito à literatura: por uma definição de literatura indígena,” in *Estudos de literatura brasileira contemporânea* 53 (2018): 177–197.

(36.) Alcida Rita Ramos, *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 22.

(37.) Ramos, *Indigenism*, 22.

(38.) See: Instituto Uka: Casa dos Saberes Ancestrais (blog), May 7, 2020.

(39.) Lacking space to address the work of each writer, this article examines key contributions of several protagonists in the burgeoning indigenous literary movement. For recent analyses of this growing corpus by indigenous and non-indigenous critics, see Daniel Munduruku, “A Literatura Indígena Não é Subalterna,” *Itaú Cultural*, March 3, 2018; Daniel Munduruku (ed.), *Brazilian Indigenous Writers Catalogue* (Rio de Janeiro: NEARIN/INBRAPI, n.d.), 34–35; Devair Fiorotti and Pedro Mandagará (eds.), *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, special issue on “Contemporaneidades ameríndias” 53 (2018); Julie Dorrico, Leno Francisco Danner, Heloisa Helena Siqueira Correia, and Fernando Danner (eds.), *Literatura Indígena Brasileira Contemporânea: Criação Crítica e*

Recepção (Porto Alegre, Brazil: Editora Fi, 2018); Eliane Potiguara (ed.), *Sol do Pensamento* (Rio de Janeiro: INBRAPI/GRUMIN, 2005).

(40.) For the history of the organization, complete catalogue, and a sampling of its collective work, see the VNA website: <http://videonasaldeias.org.br/2009/vna.php?p=1>.

(41.) Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, trans. Nicholas Elliot and Alison Dundy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 12–13.

(42.) Kopenawa and Albert, *The Falling Sky*, 3.

(43.) Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, “2010 Census.”

(44.) As Albert explains, the conversations and testimony on which the book is based were in Yanomami, with a limited use of words and concepts in Portuguese. The book includes two glossaries (for geography and ethnobiological terms) as well as extended commentary on strategies of translation and the use of language more generally. See, e.g., Kopenawa and Albert, *The Falling Sky*, 8–10.

(45.) Cornejo borrowed the turn of phrase from a 1937 poem by César Vallejo about the Spanish Civil War. See *Obra poética*, ed. Américo Ferrari (Madrid: ALLCA, 1997), 460–462.

(46.) Walter D. Mignolo, “On the Colonization of Amerindian Languages and Memories: Renaissance Theories of Writing and the Discontinuity of the Classical Tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 2 (1992): 315; “Writing and Recorded Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Situations,” *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, eds. Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter D. Mignolo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 309.

(47.) Mignolo, “On the Colonization,” 303.

(48.) Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans., John Russel (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 290.

(49.) Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 292–293.

(50.) Eliane Potiguara, “Indigenous Literature: Reading as a Path to Awareness,” *Brazilian Indigenous Writers Catalogue*, ed. Daniel Munduruku (n.p.: NEARIN/INBRAPI, n.d.), 34–35.

(51.) Olívio Jekupé, *500 Anos de Angústia* (São Paulo: Self-published, 1999). For a detailed analysis of this poem and Jekupé’s work, see, Tracy Devine Guzmán, “Beyond the “Nação Mestiça”: Post-Racial Performance, Native Sovereignty, and Political Community in Contemporary Brazil.” *In the Balance: Indigeneity, Performance, Globalization*. eds. Helen

Gilbert, J. D. Phillipson, and Michel Raheja (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 45–64.

(52.) In addition to supporting the UNDRIP (2007), Brazil is signatory to Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (1989), which guarantees, among many other provisions, that indigenous peoples “shall be consulted whenever consideration is being given to their capacity to alienate their lands or otherwise transmit their rights outside their own community” (Article 17).

(53.) According to the most recent census from 2010, 38.53 percent of the indigenous population resided in urban areas while 61.47 percent resided in rural areas. Of the latter group, 48.6 percent resided in the north. While protected indigenous territories exist throughout Brazil, the vast majority are inside the Legal Amazon. See Ricardo Ventura Santos et al., “The Identification of the Indigenous Population in Brazil’s Official Statistics, with an Emphasis on Demographic Censuses,” *Statistical Journal of the International Association for Official Statistics* 35, no. 1 (2019): 29–46.

(54.) Ailton Krenak, *Encontros*, eds. Amélia Cohn and Sergio Cohn (Rio de Janeiro: Azougue Editorial, 2015), 248.

(55.) The Krenak community has a contentious and violent historical relationship with its colonizers, both Portuguese and Brazilian, dating to the 16th century. It has been re-named and forcefully relocated multiple times, including by the SPI in the early 20th century. Contested land ownership and a series of indigenist interventions have fractured the community, which comprises fewer than 500 people, only a subset of whom speak Borun. For a detailed account of this trajectory, see “Povos Indígenas do Brasil: Krenak,” *Instituto Socioambiental*.

(56.) Kathy Krenak, “Indigenous Krenak Youth Reflects on the Rio Doce Disaster,” *If Not Us, Who?* May 3, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akEAsdM4vmA&feature=youtu.be>.

(57.) Ailton Krenak, “Separados para sempre.” Presentation to the Brazilian Studies Association. Rio de Janeiro. July 28, 2018.

(58.) Krenak, “Indigenous Krenak Youth Reflects on the Rio Doce Disaster.”

(59.) See Rhett A. Butler, “Calculating Deforestation in the Amazon,” *Mongabay*, April 24, 2018.

(60.) For diverse disciplinary approaches to the Anthropocene, see, e.g., Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17; Michel Meybeck, “Global Analysis of River Systems: From Earth System Controls to Anthropocene Syndromes,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 358, no. 1440 (2003): 1935–1955; Naomi Oreskes, “Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change,” *Science* 306, no. 5702 (2004): 1686; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 197–222; Noah Hering-

man, "Deep Time at the Dawn of the Anthropocene," *Representations* 129, no. 1 (2015): 56–85; and Nicholas C. Kawa, *Amazonia in the Anthropocene: People, Soils, Plants, Forests* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

(61.) For an excellent overview and critical bibliography, see the 2019 report of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy's Working Group on the Anthropocene. See also the 2019 special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): Climate Change and Land.

(62.) See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

(63.) David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008 [1999]), 247.

(64.) Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, trans. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014), 68.

(65.) Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 74.

(66.) Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 78.

(67.) Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 71. For an extended analysis of Viveiros's concept in relation to the Anthropocene, see Idelber Avelar, "Amerindian Perspectivism and Non-Human Rights," *Alternativas* 1 (2013): 1–21.

(68.) See Antônio Risério, *Textos e Tribos: Poéticas Extraocidentais nos Trópicos Brasileiros* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora, 1993), esp. chap. 4, "A capacidade 'poética' dos Índios," 55–67.

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