Counterfoundational Histories from Native Brazil: On Violence and the Aesthetics of Memory

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“Declare Our Collective Death and... Bury Us All Right Here”

In October 2012, an indigenous community of some 170 people, having just been ordered to vacate their ancestral lands in the border state of Mato Grosso do Sul, long besieged by agro-busi-

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1 Brazil’s 2010 census, drawing for the first time on self-identification, counted some 896,000 people nationwide as indigenous, among them, nearly 80,000 who also considered themselves to be of another color or “race” (and mostly pardo, or brown). These individuals identified with 305 different ethnicities and 274 languages – hugely increased and controversial numbers relative to previous surveys based on criteria other than self-identification. Approximately two dozen indigenous languages have more than 5,000 speakers, among them: Guajá, Sateré-Mawé, Xavante, Yanomami, Terena, Macushi, Kaingang, Téena, and Guarani. Hundreds more have fewer than 400 speakers and thus are at constant risk of extinction. Although the national Constitution identifies Portuguese as Brazil’s only official language, Article 231 guarantees indigenous peoples the right to maintain their Native languages, social organizations, beliefs, traditions, and lands. However, these Constitutional promises have never been met adequately by the Brazilian state. See: IBGE, “2010 Census” (http://www.ibge.gov.br/pt-br/comunicados-e-estatisticas/censo/2010/ibge2010.html) and IBGE, “Os indígenas no Censo Demográfico 2010, primeiras considerações.” (http://www12.ibge.gov.br/noticias/2010/01/31/ibge_noticia_1612_01.pdf). For an assessment of recent issues related to indigenous languages and a brief history of language policies in Brazil, see Instituto Socioambiental. http://bib.socioambiental.org/pt/c/no-brazil-atual/linguas/introducao.
country and around the world: the addition of the words “Guaraní Kaiowá” to personal profiles online—not unlike those used on social media like Orkut and Facebook. In other words, as a collective reaction to the horror of the open letter, people from various places and walks of life—some of whom had been intimately involved in indigenous life and politics for decades, and others who had never paid them any attention whatsoever, added the “Guaraní Kaiowá” to their own names in a gesture of professed solidarity.

There are, of course, many ways to try to make sense of the letter and the public reaction to it, and I confess to having deeply mixed feelings about the events of October 2012 and how the politics surrounding them have continued to play out since. Nevertheless, to a longtime student of indigenist politics and indigenous history and cultural production, two particular lines of interpretation stand out: On the one hand, we might look at this series of events as just one more example of the Brazilian state’s historic complicity in the exclusion of “its” Native peoples from the national community and the national polity, and the appropriation of Native subalternity by members of the dominant majority for political ends that are mostly unrelated to Native lives or livelihoods. This position would hold a logical view—one certainly corroborated by the past—but also, perhaps, an unduly cynical one. On the other hand, we might instead choose to see the unprecedented public outcry over the injustices so long endured by indigenous communities of Mato Grosso do Sul,

4 I use the term “indigenism” to refer to the widest possible range of discourse about indigenous peoples and to “indigenistas” as sources or practitioners of that discourse. Although indigenism in Brazil is a discourse mostly about, not by indigenous peoples, some indigenous people do call themselves indigenist. Indigenism should not be confused with Indianism, however, which in my work refers to two distinct phenomena: first and foremost, a romantic literary and cultural movement of the mid-to-late nineteenth century in Brazil (and elsewhere in Latin America); and second, the indigenous-led political movements that are afoot in the Andes (especially Bolivia and Ecuador). For my purposes, both forms of Indianism are strains of the broader, inherently contradictory phenomenon of indigenist discourse. Although the term indigenism is now recognized in Brazil, it was not widely used until after the foundation of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano (Interamerican Indianist Institute) in Mexico in the 1940s. During the early years of Brazil’s Indian Protection Service, the common term to describe professionals dedicated to the “indigenous” cause was indigenista (one who works in the sertão or “interiorlands”). Classic studies of Brazil’s indigenist discourse include Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, Um grande cerco de pau: Shelton Davis, Victims of the Miracle; and Alcida Ramos, Indigenismo: Ethnic Politics in Brazil.
and the widespread, if relatively newfound public interest in working, in ways small and large, in support (or at the very least, not to the detriment) of their collective well-being, as evidence of a new era of national and transnational political consciousness—perhaps even social solidarity. There are many reasons why, considering the plausibility of both views in the larger historical and political context at hand, I opt for the second one. Not least is the not-so-simple fact that the task of chronicling a slow and inevitable defeat necessarily posits the actions of those working to avoid it as, if not without meaning, ultimately hopeless, and thus always already a failure to and for itself. In such an endeavor, I wish—perhaps unsurprisingly—to take no part.

So, then, what to make of this second possibility—the possibility that despite tremendous odds and great obstacles, a post-indegenist politics is finally on the horizon in Latin America’s largest country, with a national indigenous community comprising less than one half of one percent of the overall Brazilian population of some 200 million people? Let me back up and widen the scope of the story to lay out how we have arrived at this moment, what is now at stake, and my sense—a halting and tentative one—of what it might mean to people who find themselves many thousands of miles away from Mato Grosso do Sul. My cautious answer is that it has to do with sovereignty, with the inherent violence of its dominant forms, and with the need to consider it anew in light of our shared humanity, if indeed—as we might be tempted to believe on dark days like those of last October 2012—there is little else that we can share. Indigenous peoples in Brazil—and the Guarani-Kaiowá, in particular—remind us once again that the violent manifestations of dominant sovereignty threaten not only their lives and livelihoods, but also the integrity of Brazil’s still fragile democracy. Native engagements with that violence, now and in the past, force us to question those dominant forms, as well as the ways of remembering and recording history—particularly, history imagined as national, to paraphrase Anderson—through which they continue to be privileged. The aesthetics of memory in contemporary Native discourses of sovereignty is then, I submit, an essentially political one that cannot be understood independently from how it inheres in the present.

**Undoing Indianist Hegemony**

Although it came about in the wake, over several years, of hundreds of deaths by suicide among young indigenous people in Mato Grosso do Sul, the violent declaration of the Guarani-Kaiowá open letter—the promise of mass suicide—reversed, at least rhetorically, the uneven power relations that have contributed to the devastation of Native communities in Brazil since the sixteenth century. By placing charge of their lives—and deaths—into their own hands, the letter’s authors drew quick attention to a situation of long standing crisis while, at the same time, placing into question the whitewashed lore of benevolent colonialism and pacific miscegenation that continues to inform and shape the ways dominant Brazilian society prefers to imagine and portray itself. Indeed, faced with the enduring centrality of romanticized “Indians” in dominant histories and cultural production, Native peoples have for decades worked to counter official and unofficial erasures of the foundational violence that has manipulated their bodies, ideas, and images since well before the declaration of national independence in 1822. From state-sponsored de-Indianization programs to the ongoing “development” of the Amazon, the fiction of Brazil’s “racial democracy” has long manifested that violence, which rests on a multi-tiered notion of citizenship that situates Native peoples forever on the threshold of national belonging, as prospective citizen-subjects who are included in the polity only by dint of their perpetual exclusion (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 18; *State of Exception* 2-31). Until the approval of the 1988 (post-dictatorship) Constitution, it was, in fact, impossible for Native peoples to be both Brazilian and indigenous, for the process of achieving citizenship meant “emancipation” from the condition of one’s “Indianness” and the rights pertaining thereto—perhaps most importantly, the right to live on protected lands (Ramos, *Indigenism 80-81*).

Although touted by generations of hyper-nationalist, ufaniesta governments and representatives of their official, indigenous apparatus as a painstakingly pacific enterprise,5 real and symbolic violence has always inhered in the state’s proffering of Brazilian-

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5 This claim was measured against the infamously genocidal “Indian policies” of other American countries, from the distant United States to neighboring Argentina. The motto of Brazil’s Indian Protection Service, was “die if necessary, but never kill” [morrer se preciso for, matar nunca], meaning that, in theory, SPI workers
ness, stripping individuals and groups targeted by such endeavors, if not of their lives (from disease or conflicts that are only now being documented), then of their very place in space and in time. That is, the modernizing discourses and policies that have dislocated Native peoples like the Guarani-Kaiowá from their territories since the outset of Brazil's republican project have also functioned consistently to dislocate them from the present — either by condemning them to "archaic utopias" of pre-colonial nostalgia (Vargas Llosa), or by projecting them into fanciful futures of de-Indianization, "mestiçagem" oneness that are still oftentimes invoked as the "Brazilian race." Whether relegated to the past and its chains of "authenticity" or placed on the fast track to national belonging and "neo-Brazilianness," then, self-identifying indigenous peoples have found the presumably simple venture of being oneself and inhabiting the present to be an exasperatingly elusive goal.

In contrast to this displacement, both temporal and physical, Brazil's most recent national census revealed a remarkable and controversial trajectory in the growth of the official indigenous population: over the course of nearly two decades, from 1991 to 2010, the number of indigenous peoples across the country climbed from some 306,000 individuals to 896,617—an increase of over 293%.

While the explanations for this increase vary widely and are laden with conflicting political motives, it is impossible to attribute such tremendous growth to reproduction alone. Changing perceptions of indigeneity, state legislation with regard to racial and ethnic classification, affirmative action policies, and, perhaps most significantly, new possibilities for self-identification among census participants, have also had a tremendous impact. The consequences of these changes for particular communities and the national Native population as a whole have been mixed. On the one hand, drastically increasing population numbers and the recent boom in social media have coalesced to heighten awareness of indigenous peoples and some of their major, collective concerns—from education and health care to intellectual property rights, land tenure, and environmental protection—among civil society and the national and international media. On the other hand, the state’s relentless developmental assault, along with a heightened competition for public resources, mean that non-traditional Native peoples, and particularly those residing in urban areas, are increasingly subject to scrutiny by self-appointed guardians of "authenticity."

Thus faced with a formidable network of colonialist power—both institutionalized and informal—Native intellectuals and activists have had to act simultaneously on personal and political fronts to square two central arguments that might appear irreconcilable at face value: First, that within present-day articulations of indigeneity there is an instrumental identification and continuity with the past. And second, that present-day indigeneity is neither fixed in nor oriented toward the past, but rather, forward-looking and well practiced at navigating the exigencies of "progress." For writer and educator Juvenal Payaya (among others), these two claims are inextricable, for as he puts it: "[Recognizing] our cultural legacies is the first step [we] indigenous peoples need to take in order to keep on existing" (39). Countering the old indigeneist desire to rupture Native links to a collective history and curtail traditional forms of life and thought, Payaya makes it clear that there is no way forward for Native peoples as such in the absence of those links and those forms. After all, dominant conceptions of time, and occidental binaries of self and Other function poorly as life's chief organizing principles for those whose foremost ways of being and knowing are, to the contrary, and according to Daniel Munduruku, "holistic, circular, [and] integral" ("A corrupção do conhecimento ancestral" 23).

Comprising a fraction of the Brazilian population, virtually absent from local, state, and national governing bodies, lacking meaningful access to public institutions and modes of education, and legally subject to the tutelary power of an indigenist apparatus that even in the 21st century is headed by non-Natives, Brazil's in-

7 This longstanding initiative manifested over the past decade in the Programa pela Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC)—initiated by the Lula da Silva administration and continued into the present by the government of Dilma Rousseff. The lynchpin of the plan is the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam.

8 In early 2012, embattled FUNAI director Márcio Meira was replaced by Martha Azevedo. Although many welcomed Meira’s departure, his replacement with another non-indigenous anthropologist was disappointing to those who had campaigned for indigenous leadership of FUNAI for many years. Azevedo stepped down for health reasons in June 2015 amid great controversy over indigenous land
indigenous peoples have had few channels of, and scarce resources for, self-representation in the public sphere. These considerable obstacles hinder communication not only with the non-indigenous majority, whose exposure to Native peoples and issues still comes in large part from a combination of nineteenth-century fiction and Globo TV, but also among hundreds of indigenous peoples who speak hundreds of different languages and are spread out over a massive and diverse national territory that spans from the second-largest city in the Americas (São Paulo) to the outermost reaches of the Amazonian rainforest (IBGE, Censo demográfico 2010).

In light of such challenges, the use of Portuguese as an indigenous language and the production and dissemination of diverse forms of Native cultural production —production that ranges from film, music, new media, and journalism to creative writing, artisanship, and the tourist industry— have become indispensable to the nation-wide Brazilian indigenous movement and to the project of self-representation more generally. Unitig much of this diverse body of work is a politicized aesthetics of memory—sometimes individual, oftentimes collective—that grounds the production of counter-foundational national histories by interjecting indigenous philosophies, cultural practices, and remembrances into renderings of the past that are still heavily burdened by Indianist romanticism and its erasures and denial of the foundational violence of dominant sovereignty.

Including through Exclusion

Like the Guarani-Kaiowá, longtime indigenous activist M. Marcos Terena hails from the border state of Mato Grosso do Sul, where in 1954 he was born into a community (aldeia) called Taunay. He entered the public sphere in the late seventies as a founding member of the Union of Indigenous Nations (União das Nações Indígenas)—an organization that worked against great odds to guarantee for the first time in national history the Constitutional right to be simultaneously indigenous and Brazilian. Over a varied professional trajectory, Terena worked in various capacities to chip away at the colonialist relationship that the Brazilian state initiated with indigenous peoples in the post-independence period and institutionalized one century later through its Indian Protection Service. Alongside indigenous organizations INBRAPI, Núcleo de Escritores e Artistas Indígenas, and Rede GRUMIN; and the collaborative Video nas Aldeias project, which has been producing indigenous video in Brazil for over two decades. Recent secondary references include Grácia, “Literatura indígena no Brasil contemporâneo”; Devine Guzmán, Native and National; and a collection of indigenous writers edited by Leda Rita Chitara: Escritos indígenas: uma antologia (São Paulo, Editora Caminhos, 2013). Along with the digital volume Sol do Pensamento (2005), edited by Eliane Pottiguar and prefaced by Daniel Munduruku, Escritos indígenas marks an early step toward the formation of an indigenous “canon” in Brazil.

The community is named for Alfredo Maria Adriano d’Escagnolha Taunay (the Viscount of Taunay).


On Rondonian indigenism, see also: Souza Lima, Um grande erro; Seth Garfield, Indigenous Struggle: John Hemming, Die If You Must; and Mércio Gomes, The Indians and Brazil; and O índio na história.
leaders from across the country, he has sought to expand the spaces of autonomy from which Native Brazilians can represent themselves in every sense of the word, and particularly through national politics and diverse forms of cultural production. Where Indigenous intellectuals and indigenist bureaucrats once spoke uncontested on behalf of their Native compatriots on everything from the arts to state policy, indigenous Brazilians increasingly challenge such efforts, struggling to surmount tremendous political, social, cultural, geographic, and linguistic obstacles to debate and disseminate their own images and political platforms—even if these often go unnoticed by the dominant majority.

Traditional forms of indigenous knowledge, once passed orally from generation to generation, and now shared through a variety of old and new media, derive customarily from lived experience (as opposed to the abstract accounts transmitted in a classroom environment), and tend to be grounded in the notion that the natural world is sacred. In this light, Terena’s dedication to the cause of Native representation within the context of national democratic rule is closely tied to his experience with misrepresentation—or with the lack of representation altogether—by and in Brazilian society (Provedello). As a pilot for the National Indian Foundation during the final years of the military dictatorship, from 1964 to 1985, Terena made a living flying airplanes to allegedly hostile and dangerous Native territories that other pilots were unwilling to visit (Terena and Feijó; Terena). Paradoxically, in order to receive training from the Brazilian Air Force and to fulfill this role, he was compelled to deny his indigeneity for over a decade. To circumvent the restrictions of the 1973 Indian Statute, which categorizes all indigeneous peoples as relatively incompetent before the law, he acquiesced to misidentification as “Japanese” (Terena).

Terena’s experience is at once extraordinary and exceedingly common. On the one hand, he is one of the few Native Brazilians to hold a position of relative power in the state’s indigenist bureaucracy or at any level of government. On the other hand, his confrontation with the widely held conviction that being indigenous is incompatible with professional training and work, and thus unsuitable for the demands of “civilized” life epitomizes the conundrum of lived indigeneity in Brazil at the outset of the new millennium. Indeed, his experience speaks to that of millions worldwide who still face the perception that “Indianness” is something one must abandon or overcome to deserve the full rights of national belonging or fulfill a useful role in modern society.

The ambiguities of “differentiated” indigenous citizenship laid out in Brazil’s 1973 Indian Statute and subsequent indigenist legislation recall what philosopher Giorgio Agamben, drawing on the work of Carl Schmitt, theorized as the state of exception—the condition, marked by perpetual violence, through which an “accursed” man is included in the state’s juridical order precisely through his permanent condition of exclusion from that order. Considering this notion in light of the case at hand, we might say that the Indian’s inclusion in Brazil as both an “imagined” nation and a legal-political order has always been contingent, imperfect, and incomplete—a status reiterated euphemistically in a century’s worth of state-backed indigenist discourse with terms like “neo-citizenship” and “neo-Brazilianism.” Institutionalized, anti-indigenous discrimination was weakened by the 1988 constitutional proviso that Native peoples would no longer have to cease being “Indians” in order also to be Brazilian in the eyes of the state. But the formal existence of ostensibly more “progressive” policies has had negligible impact on the colonialist mindset and violence that still frame

15 In addition to the efforts of the individuals and groups mentioned above, I have been inspired particularly by the work of Ailton Krenak, Arão de Providência Guajajara, Lúcio Xavante, Márcio Xavante, Megaron Txucarramãe, Raoni Metuktire, Valdeice Veron, and Yseai Kalapalo.

16 For different perspectives on this notion from Brazil, the Americas, and the Pacific, see R. Barnhardt and A. O. Kawagley, “Indigenous Knowledge Systems”; Víbora Deloria Jr., “Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples”; Daniel Munduruku, Coisas de índio; Eliane Potiguar, Metade Cara, Metade Máscara; Linda Tuhini Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies; and Dale Turner, “Oral Traditions and the Politics of (Mis)Recognition.” Several scholars and activists in Latin and Latino/a America (indigenous and not), have aimed to theorize the epistemological and political positions of those for whom traditional forms of knowledge and dominant (Western) knowledge overlap. See for example Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands, José María Ar- güedas, El sonro de arriba and el sonro de abajo, Los rios profundos, and “Yo no soy un aculturado”; Rodolfo Kusch, Indigenous and Popular Thinking in America; Walter Mignolo, Local Histories, Global Designs; and Darcy Ribeiro, Mára.

17 This terminology has been used frequently since the height of racist populism under Getúlio Vargas in the early 1930s, including by generations of “pro-indigenous” and indigenist thinkers. See for example the work of the prolific anthropologist and educator Darcy Ribeiro.

18 Chapter VIII of the Constitution ("Dos indios") is dedicated to indigenous rights and related matters.
and undergird the state’s indigenist practice in the twenty-first century.

The 1988 Constitution, for instance, called for the demarcation of national indigenous territories within five years. Now, more than a quarter-century later, the promise has not been met, and across the country Native peoples like the Guarani-Kaiowá find themselves increasingly under siege. Despite Brazil’s widely noted success in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction during recent years of Worker’s Party governance, the collective situation of indigenous peoples remains dismal or dire. The embrace of agrobusiness and the revival of dictatorship-era development projects present major threats to indigenous lives and livelihoods because they present, among other things, a major threat to indigenous lands—including lands that are already supposed to be protected.

The lynchpin of Brazil’s twenty-first century colonialism is the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam, first proposed for construction in the state of Pará during the 1970s by the military government, who called their project “Kararao” — a name appropriated from the Kayapó people who, with haunting echoes of the Guarani-Kaiowá, pledged their lives to stop it. During the decade that followed, massive outpourings of indigenous, national, and international protests forced the regime to shelve its plans to divert the flow of the Xingu River and flood Native and riverine communities—actions that critics argued would cripple the local fishing industry, destroy rare plant and animal species, pollute the environment with methane gas, and bring to the region thousands of migrant families

19 The November 2011 murder of Guarani-Kaiowá leader Niseo Gomes over a land dispute in Mato Grosso do Sul is another example.
20 James Anaya, "Report of Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples," U.N. Human Rights Council, 55th session, agenda item 3, 15 Sep. 2010, 31-36. Recent prejudicial measures include Ministerial Directive 303 (Portaria 303), which would permit military and government incursion into Indigenous territories without prior consultation with their indigenous occupants and lays the groundwork for the revision of already demarcated lands; and proposed constitutional amendment 215, which would transfer the exclusive authority to demarcate indigenous lands from the executive (via FUNAI) to Congress.
21 The name, stolen from the Kayapó people who have opposed the project for decades, was changed after the 1989 Encontro dos Povos Indígenas do Xingu, which led to the cancellation of international financing and forced the regime to table their initiative. See L.A.O. Santos, et al., Hydroelectric Dams and Brazil’s Xingu River; and Devine Guzmán, “Whence Amazonian Studies.”

who would subsequently have no place to live or work. Arguments against the new, allegedly less prejudicial Belo Monte—in four years in the works—raise the same objections and involve, once again, a variety of indigenous, national, and international organizations—a coalition complicated by the fact that the dam project is no longer the brain child of a military dictatorship but the pet project of what was, until 2013, a popular and nominally “progressive” government.

Clearly such “progress” benefits some at the expense of others. Indigenous activists who began strengthening their opposition to Belo Monte during the 2010 centenary of state-backed indigenism have characterized it as not only prejudicial to their communities, but also as a symbol of all gone wrong with national indigenist policy, the development goals of the Workers’ Party, and the state’s embrace of global capital in some of its most culture-razing forms. Native activist Kretá Kaingang hence reminds us that the political left in Brazil has been alongside the political right—a relentless exploiter of Native peoples: “What kind of progress does this syndicalist administration want for us?” he asks. “We believed... in this administration... Many of us... put those people in power, and now they have come out against us” (Cercueil). The struggles on the horizon are, however, not just over Belo Monte or the hundreds of other modernization projects in the works or on the books. They also raise the urgent goals of how to keep Native ways of being, knowing, and remembering alive in the face of a state-sponsored development agenda that has been around in various forms for nearly two centuries, and has only relatively recently morphed into

22 On the environmental and social effects of the project and other hydroelectric dam projects in the region see Korolff, No Rain in the Amazon.
23 Initiatives like “Pontos de Cultura,” a Ministry of Culture program to support local cultural production, might have been considered a counterpoint to the state’s role in the destruction of indigenous peoples, cultures, and languages. However, considering the state’s historic failure to protect indigenous lands and the ongoing dismantlement and privatization of the indigenist bureaucracy, such support has been palliative, at best.
24 The Miskito-Sandinista conflict in Nicaragua during the 1980s is one well-known case, but other examples abound. On Bolivia, see Mignolo, “The Communal and the Decolonial.” For a recent instance in Peru, consider the record of Alan Garcia’s APRA government with Native Amazonian communities (Hearns, “The Bagua Movement”). On the “Indian policies” of his first government, see Devine Guzmán “Rimanakuy ’86.”
the Accelerated Growth Program (Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento, or PAC).²⁵  

Indigenous political leaders and activists who share with Marcos Terena and Kretá Kaingang the desire for meaningful representation and participation in state politics do so from within a double bind, knowing that any intervention they make in that system—and already against great odds and at great cost—reinscribes to some degree the erasures, exclusions, and de-legitimations that have characterized the indigenous-state relationship since its inception.²⁶ Their efforts to participate in national governance and international political bodies despite these circumstances might be framed as the least-worst option available to individuals and communities whose ways of being, knowing, and remembering are at risk of disappearing. Or, they might be the groundwork for realist, postindigenist politics. Anishinaabe political theorist Dale Turner reminds us that “the relationship between [...] indigenous peoples] and the [...] government is [...] political, not metaphysical” (he paraphrases John Rawls). “[Natives] must use a foreign language to explain the content of their rights,” he goes on, “have...little to say about shaping its philosophical worth, and engage...institutions that enforce the decisions created by these discourses. Why?”—he wonders, and then answers his own question—“to survive” (Turner 231-232; Rawls).

But what does this survival mean, we must ask—thinking particularly of the Guarani-Kaiowá—for those implicated directly in such debates? What is the desirable horizon of state-indigenous relations? What can we conclude, reflecting on a century of state-backed indigenism, about the relationship between indigeneity, representation, and belonging? Unlike many of their counterparts elsewhere in the Americas, indigenous academics, activists, writers, and artists in Brazil continue to work for survival in predominantly national terms, recognizing the opportunities for self-representation that are afforded by their double bind even as they work to loosen themselves from it. At the same time, they participate in an intensifying dialogue about indigenous rights that extends beyond national borders and turns the premise of a traditional indigenist politics—representation through state tutelage, or in Agamben’s formulation, “inclusion by exclusion”—on its head. The alternative sovereignty claims expressed through their assertion of multiple, co-existing, overlapping, ways of being, belonging, and remembering destabilize dominant practices of administering states and chronicling the past, and indeed bring new meaning to the concept of Brazilianness itself.

The Violent Erasures of Sovereignty

Sovereignty in the post-Westphalian tradition has a complex and, of course, still unfolding history that begins for our purposes with the 1493 Inter caetera—the papal bull signed by Alexander VI to claim American territories for the Spanish monarchy—and leads us into the twenty-first century, with hosts of unsettled Native land claims from Maine to Oaxaca to the Patagonia, and annual petitions to the pope by indigenous groups worldwide to repudiate the Church’s complicity in their historical subjugation. Where the prevailing concept of nation-state rests on “European models of political and social organization whose dominant defining characteristics are exclusivity of territorial domain and hierarchical, centralized authority,” legal scholar James Anaya points out, “indigenous peoples...have organized primarily through kinship ties and decentralized political structures with shared or overlapping spheres of control” (15). Dominant (Western) notions of sovereignty thus run counter to the traditions, needs, and interests of many self-identifying Native peoples and have been employed historically by state actors to their detriment—most often through violent means and, as we are now reminded constantly by the Guarani-Kaiowá, with fatal consequences. In Weber’s classic formulation, the sovereign state defends the use of the violence deemed “necessary” for its preservation, and that preservation, in turn, undergirds the state’s ability and “right” to use such violence with legitimacy, whether against other states or against its own subjects (78-81). The necessary violence of dominant sovereignty hence reproduces the conditions of its own necessity, and those who fail to recognize the legitimacy of such violence, or to accept the corollary claim that “it is not true that good can follow only from good, and evil only from evil” are reduced, in Weber’s view, to political “infancy” (123).
Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari proposed during the mid-twentieth century that the state manifests the violence of sovereignty as an "apparatus of capture" that serves to organize and police human life. In Brazil, this "capture" could refer to the state's "right" to seize and control indigenous territories by "capturing," as the philosophers put it, "while simultaneously constituting a right to capture" (448).27 The so-called "primitive" exists only in the always incomplete process of becoming something else ("civilized"), or in relation to his or her degree of interaction with the non-primitive ("the civilized") (Deleuze and Guattari 430). History thus "translates" different forms of being, knowing, and remembering into dominant paradigms of succession and evolution that give rise to the tautological argument—still wildly popular in Brazil—that "real" Indians belong to the past, and "modern" Indians are not "real."

The state imperative to expand and fix the frontiers of order, progress, and civilization fashions the violence of sovereignty as legitimate, if not inevitable, while attributing the primary responsibility for the violence to its victims.28 The state is continually erected through violent inclusions and exclusions to generate the collective subjectivity of a community that imagines itself in national terms while simultaneously articulating its Other: the "primitive" whose backwardness must be contained, forced outside the limits of the sovereign state, or erased altogether. As anthropologist Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima puts it, the state's historical initiative for Indian "protection" can then be characterized as a massive "siege of peace" wherein the question of territorial occupation is forever at stake (119-158).

What might be the consequences for national and international politics, though, if the state were not to serve as the primary vehicle for the "capitalist axiomatic"29 and the inevitable homogenization of human experience, but rather, as a critical purveyor of heterogeneity and difference? What if, rather than occupying the "uncivilized" fringes of the national community, either to be ignored as irrelevant or seized into recycled "modernization" initiatives, Native ways of being, knowing, and remembering could hold a place at the center of a "new social and political reality?" (Alfred 33). What if indigenous representations of the past could be, as Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith proposes, means of "healing and transformation" (146) for Native peoples in the present, rather than fodder for their continued folklorization, mythification, and erasure vis-à-vis the dominant majority and its prevailing historical narratives?

**Native Critiques of Sovereignty**

Native intellectuals in Brazil (and elsewhere) have proposed numerous philosophical and political alternatives to the violent workings of the sovereignty that rests at the heart of dominant politics. While these proposals are specific to particular times and places, common ground continues to expand through indigenous/nonindigenous legal and political collaborations at national and international levels. Although the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples makes no statement with regard to sovereignty other than to reaffirm that of the signatory states,30 nine of the Declaration's forty-six articles (8, 10, 25-30, 31) uphold Native rights with reference to traditional "lands, territories, and resources," pointing to the centrality of land rights to indigenous political initiatives worldwide.

Unlike dominant renderings of sovereignty, which are derived from a colonialist impulse, grounded in histories of violence, and sustained by the overt or implicit threat of additional violence, contemporary indigenous notions of sovereignty stem from a basic principle of mutual respect, non-coercive forms of authority, and the conviction that human society and the natural world can coexist in a partnership where value is expressed in terms of longevity and equilibrium rather than extraction, surplus, or profit. As Mohawk theorist Taliacle Alfred puts it, the "primary goals of a tradi-

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27 See also Shaw, *Indigeneity*, 167-168.
28 On "productions" of sovereignty see Shaw, 168-169.
29 I refer to Deleuze and Guattari's explanation in Thousand Plateaus: "It is the flow of naked labor that makes the people, just as it is the flow of Capital that makes the land and its industrial base. In short, the nation is the very operation of a collective subjection, to which the modern State corresponds as a process of subjection. It is in the form of the nation-state, with all its possible variations, that the State becomes the model of realization for the capitalist axiomatic" (504).
30 Article 46 reads: "Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, people, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations or construed as authorizing or encouraging any nation which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States."
indigenous economy are the sustainability of the earth and the health and well-being of the people" (46). One alternative to sovereignty as a necessarily "violent production" — a social construction representing the inevitable "triumph of some ideas over others" — is, he explains, a "nonintrusive," "regime of respect" that "builds frameworks of coexistence by acknowledging the integrity and autonomy of the...constituent elements of the relationship" (Alfred 46, my emphasis). These principles resonate with those expressed by Native activists and scholars in Brazil who are now engaged in a two-tiered struggle for the demarcation of indigenous territories and legal representation vis-à-vis the state.

That the "Indian problem" is a "problem of the land," as José Carlos Mariátegui wrote famously in his *Siete ensayos* (1928) in the early twentieth century, is indeed still the case, although not only for the reasons he imagined when contemplating the urgency of agrarian and political reform in the Andes. Yet contemporary indigenous theorists in Brazil share with the father of Peruvian socialism a critique of capitalist modes of production, land title, and material labor. As Native organizers put it to me during their 2010 protests of FUNAI leadership and national indigenist policy, "the Indian is land, and from it cannot be separated" (AIR, "Quem Somos."). The gamble inherent in this assertion is twofold: On the one hand, it could validate the dangerously common perception that urban and other "post-traditional" Native peoples are somehow less indigenous than their counterparts who live in rural, more "traditional" areas. On the other hand, it risks disappearing Native peoples into the rainforests and subsuming their needs and interests into competing discourses of environmental protection and development.

It has long been the case, of course, that for any number of reasons, some people choose to disassociate themselves from indigenous ways of life and leave their communities indefinitely. But those who do self-identify with indigeneity in political terms, regardless of where and how they live and work, do tend to prioritize the land and its protection — some in terms of the sacred; some in terms of the environment; some who argue both positions and see them as indivisible. In Brazil, this association provides key linkages to growing inter-American and global indigenous movements, and serves as one common ground for the indigenous/nonindigenous alliances that will continue to be necessary if those movements are to project indigeneity into the future as a form of self-identification, a politics, or an ethics of which non-Natives might also partake.

In an effort to offset romanticized perceptions of his community and introduce non-Native audiences to basic tenets of Terena spirituality, religious scholar Lúcio Paiva Flores underscores the diversity among the indigenous peoples living inside Brazilian borders and emphasizes the varying degrees to which they have embraced dominant religious forms (and particularly, Christianity) and melded them with Native beliefs and practices. He emphasizes the importance of working toward a harmonious relationship with the natural environment, and observes that, "this practice is increasingly discovered and lived by...[non-Native] peoples" (Flores 15, 2003). Certainly, one does not have to live in or near Amazonia in order to respect the earth, but "it is in the forests, in rivers, and alongside the animals," Flores suggests, that indigenous peoples replenish their dreams and construct their utopias to bring about "harmony between humans and nature so that they can develop into one sole being" (15-16). Such harmony, in his view, requires and produces social sustainability and equilibrium:

Complete order is not ideal; [but] neither is disorder. It is a dual principle of complementarity, unlike [in] occidental philosophy, which sees [humans] as antagonists in a constant battle that someone has to win.... From that kind of [dualistic] thinking derives the scheme of salvation that is absent from indigenous thought. Without the never-ending struggle between heaven and hell, who is there to save? And from what? (30)

Flores goes on to explain how the balance at work in the natural world also exists, ideally, in the human world, thus transforming human qualities and experiences into an undivided continuum rather than a series of opposing forces and interests that can only be folded into life as a zero-sum game and realized at one another's expense:

The eternal struggle for the side of good is a human tendency that, in turn, condemns that which is evil. The difficulty, perhaps, rests on the boundary where one ends and the other begins.... In indigenous thought, evil is not so evil, and... life without it would not need to be tipped in the other direction on the scale [because] there would be no such scale. 'Balance' would not be necessary,
because everything would already be on just one of the two plates, with no counterweight (40).

Like other indigenous activists and intellectuals in Brazil, then, Flores suggests that the inevitable connectedness of human experience makes social enmity nonsensical, for to harm others is to harm oneself. Reciprocal consideration, on the other hand, is a social, cultural, and political duty without which community as an abstract concept is meaningless, and community as a lived project will always be destined to failure. As Alfred writes: “indigenous conceptions and the politics that flow from them maintain in a tangible way the distinction between various political communities and contain an imperative of respect that precludes the need for homogenization” (48). Without the “assimilative impulse” of Western sovereignty, coexistence can be achieved without violence and without the whole host of political, legal, social, and cultural structures through which violence is either realized or held in abeyance as a hegemonic impulse toward compulsory cohesion. Flores’s proposal resonates with a belief broadly held and articulated strategically by Native Brazilians that self and Other are inextricably bound, and that in order to rethink dominant sovereignty to achieve peace among human communities, and between humankind and the natural world, indigenous knowledge must be acknowledged as much more than a “cultural artifact” (Alfred 49).

A Political Aesthetics of Memory

Writer and activist Eliane Potiguara, who founded the Grupo de Mulheres Indígenas in 1979 and participated in the discussions that culminated in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, has been at the forefront of this initiative. Her efforts exemplify how creative cultural production has become a vital mechanism through which Native Brazilians are working to reshape mainstream political debates, rethink the past, and remake the national imaginary on more democratic terms. I shall give her the last word.

In her 2005 book, Metade cara, metade máscara, Potiguara intersperses historical narrative, political commentary, and policy suggestions with short stories and poetry. A mythical Native couple, Cunhataí and Jurupiranga, appears at several junctures in the text as a reminder of the rootedness of indigenous politics in Native cosmologies and renderings of the past. In the penultimate chapter, Jurupiranga sets off in search of his partner, who has been enslaved by colonizers. I cite briefly from a very long passage:

He crossed rivers, mountains, valleys, and saw hundreds of peoples brought down by ... war: entire villages destroyed; ... erstfallen communities working for the Jesuits; Natives ... farming cotton, coffee, corn, rice, ... and millions of cadavers. ... He saw Natives working in the mines of Potosí; colonization due to ... gold, silver, coal, marcasite, sugar cane, wood, and ... latex. He saw hundreds of peoples fall to the bayonets of the neo-Americans, English, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, even the Brazilians. ... He travelled through the present, past, and future. He ... fell ill with the worst diseases of the invaders: tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria, scarlet fever, luesy. ... Across the centuries, Ju-rupiranga, armed with his lance, fought the enemies. ... He had but one objective: to find his community and rebuild it to last ... in peace and love (127-128).

Thus Potiguara renders the post-Conquest indigenous experience in a few pages. Born of this mournful rendering of Brazil’s “Indian” past, however, is also the protagonist’s dream:

He... heard... warriors speak and be ... respected. ... He saw tables covered with maps of self-defined indigenous territories and negotiations ... to achieve ... peace. White men ... honored the decisions of the Natives because there were statutes, laws, international mechanisms, treaties, and articles in the Constitution that had been labored over, by Natives, for centuries ... He saw the indigenuous university full of young people ... —writers of their own history. ... Indigenuous women were respected. ... The elderly were venerated; ... He dreamt of all the legends, songs, hymns; all the techniques of artisanship, cooking, agriculture; all the rules and ethics, life origins, spiritual principles; all the forgotten dreams of the shamans of all times, and the indigenous intellectual property encompassing the most noble biodiversity of nature. [Then] ... Jurupiranga ... awoke. ... [R]eborn, ... he managed to find the road from which he had departed five hundred years earlier. Like a divine wind...he continued steadily into his village—his indigenous nation—remade ... with ... the consciousness of the people (128-130, original emphasis).

And so, in Jurupiranga’s dream —and for now, only there— Potiguara can realize the alternative sovereignty claims through
which Brazil’s Native peoples are empowered vis-à-vis the dominant society in the realms of cultural practice, philosophy, education, law, and politics by strengthening a vision of indigeneity through which past and future, tradition and modernity, spirit and body, self and Other coexist for the well-being of indigenous and nonindigenous peoples alike.

Potiguara’s politicized aesthetics of memory may seem conservative in light of the challenges faced today by Native peoples in Brazil. But her directive to consider the value of indigenous knowledge to reframe and confront those challenges is, in fact, rather revolutionary. The task she places before us is not to transform prophecy into policy, as if there were some simple correspondence between the two, but to reassess the political and understandings of the past that shape it from perspectives that value the reciprocity and deference inherent in non-hegemonic notions of sovereignty. Potiguara’s work resonates with that of Native communities across the Americas who impel us to understand that, as Turner puts it, “indigenous ways of understanding the world are valuable...for the survival of all people” (237). And departing from this premise, we might well appreciate that not every identification with subaltern difference is a colonizer’s one; and we might well find it appropriate, especially on the darkest of days, to think that we all are, indeed, Guarani-Kaiowà.

Bibliography


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**Tortillas, Rights**

In 2010 the Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán (INDEMAYA) conducted what it called its “Tortipack Campaign.” Printed on eco-friendly paper and distributed to tortillerias throughout the state as paper in which to package tortillas or “tortipacks,” these bilingual Maya/Spanish documents intervened in regional, national, and international discourses on human rights through their elaboration of seventeen rights possessed by Yucatec Maya women. As opposed to other methods, INDEMAYA deemed the tortipack an effective method of disseminating these rights due to the fact that purchasing tortillas is a daily activity for most Maya women (“Proteger”). Given that tortilla production or acquisition in Yucatán is an almost exclusively female endeavor, it goes without saying that through the tortipacks, INDEMAYA sought to place these rights directly into the hands of Maya women, and to this end the group distributed over 700,000 tortipacks from March to October.

As described in the tortipack, the seventeen rights of Maya women are:

1. The rights were later reproduced in a brochure and distributed at the Feria del libro maya on December 19, 2012.