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Voices from the Indigenous Brazilian Literature in the New Global World

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Abstract

This article explores certain characteristics and dynamics typical of the contemporary irruption of indigenous literature in Brazil. It analyzes the emergence of indigenous writers in Brazil in the last two decades from the works of European travelers such as Ermanno Stradelli and Theodor Koch-Grünberg, the indigenous collector Maximiano José Roberto and the Brazilian novelist Mário de Andrade. This article studies the “Crônicas de São Paulo, um Olhar Indígena” (Chronicles of São Paulo, an indigenous look) (2004) of Daniel Munduruku and gives an indigenous view of the land even before its foundation, where more than a thousand people already lived. It explores the past and compares it with the present world. Some central themes in this study are the online dissemination of these indigenous literatures, the pedagogical interest of the authors, and the complex relationships.

Keywords: *Indigenous literature, modernity, identity, post-colonialism, injustice, global village, Daniel Munduruku.*

In the year 1922, Brazil experienced a change in its history. “The week of Modern Art of São Paulo exposed a group of five artists, who with their works transformed the vision that the country had” (Gotlib, 2000, p.11). The group of five artists consisted of painters like Tarsila do Amaral and Anita Malfatti, poets like Oswald de Andrade and Menotti del Picchia, and finally it consisted of a poet and narrator Mário de Andrade, whose novel *Macunaíma* (1928) consists of elements from the indigenous mythology of Amazon. This novel reflected a different Brazilian character. Thus, there was a change in the attitude of understanding Brazil i.e a shift towards indigenous origins.

Brazil that began to be drawn by the treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 is considered by many as arbitrary separation of South America between the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. “At Tordesillas in 1494, representatives of the two monarchs agreed to divide the world”(Burns,1970,p.19). Tordesillas can be considered one of the first distributions of the so-called western world along with the "Conferences" of Berlin that took place in 1884 and 1885, when the European powers decided to distribute Africa like a chocolate cake.

Since the official arrival of Pedro Alvares Cabral in April 1500, and with the subsequent colonizing expeditions of the sixteenth century, Brazil began to take shape as an empire by settlements on the coasts, a country with the largest river and forest systems on the Earth. Brazil looked at Portugal and turned its back on the Amazon. The head was Portugal, the body was Brazil, and the Amazon was that internal part of the body that could not be seen. In this Amazon, where there was plenty of water and trees beneath the sky, hundreds of indigenous languages and cultures were hidden for centuries that were exploited, decimated, sometimes absorbed, and often rejected.

Yurupary: It is a legendary landmark of Colombia and Brazil. In 1890 Count Ermanno Stradelli, an Italian geographer and photographer, published in Rome '*Leggenda dell Jurupary*'. "The *Yurupary* is a mythical text based on the ritual oral tradition of Arawak, Tukano and Tupi-Guaraní" (Artocchini, 1985, p.43). It is among the other ethnicities located along the current Colombian-Brazilian border besides the Vaupés River in Colombia or the Uaupés River in Brazil. The literary version by Stradelli apparently was collected and written originally in ñengatú (a general language of the northwestern Amazon at the end XIX) by Maximiano Jose Roberto, a Brazilian mestizo. The *Yurupary* text is considered a similar text to that of Popol Vuh of South American. In Brazil, the *Yurupary* aroused interest and controversy among intellectuals, but in Colombia, the work seems to have gained interest in anthropological material. In fact, everything indicated that Roberto collected and wrote various fragments of the *Yurupary* in ñengatú which was translated and reorganized by Stradelli. It was later published in the Bulletin of the Italian Geographical Society with the name of '*Leggenda dell Jurupary*'. Much of the mythical sequences are associated with places currently located in Colombia.

The *Yurupary* is one of the inaugural milestones of the ethno-literary period in the border area between Brazil and Colombia. It is one of the most celebrated texts based on a preliminary compendium of mythical literary traditions. At the same time, it has an attitude and technique that continues till today i.e writing with an ethnographic perspective. This type of writing anticipates what will be the future work of indigenous writers, characterized by the vision of their communities.

Von Koch-Grünberg zu Andrade: Theodor Koch-Grünberg was an German ethnologist and explorer who participated in expeditions to rivers such as the Xingú, Negro, Yapura, Ventuari and Orinoco in the early 20th century. "His explorations in the Amazonian territories between Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia made him in contact with indigenous people like Pemón and Baniwa".(Candido, 1959,p.135) He photographed these tribes and informed the European readers about them. His first two ethnological reports were published in the year 1910 and 1911 in Germany: '*Zwei Jahre unter den Indianern, Reisen in Nord West Brasilien, 1903-1905*' (Two years among the Indians, Journey through the northwest Brazil, 1903-1905). However, his most recognized and most important book in Brazil was published in Germany in 1917: '*Vom Roroima zum Orinoco, Ergebnisse einer Reise in Nordbrasilien und Venezuela in den haine 1911-1913*' (From Roroima to the Orinoco, outcome of the journey through the northwest Brazil and Venezuela in the years

1911-1913). These two expeditions of 1903-05 and 1911-13, and their respective ethnological works, marked an exploratory milestone in the unknown territory of Brazil. These explorations also exposed unknown and surprising narrative traditions. The poet and novelist Mário de Andrade nourished in particular volume II of *Vom Roroima zum Orinoco*, in whose pages Koch-Grünberg presented myths and legends of the Taulipang and Arekuná Indians. The traditional narratives collected by the German ethnographer served as a symbolic basis for the creation of a character of indigenous origin. *Macunaíma*, a hero without a character in the novel *Macunaíma*, who migrates from the jungle to the city in the company of his brothers is often considered as a representation of the Brazilian personality. In the film version adapted in 1969 by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, *Macunaíma* is played by an Afro-Brazilian actor, who on the way to the city magically becomes a white man, and when he arrives in São Paulo, he initially dazzles with "civilization".

Crônicas de São Paulo, um Olhar Indígena: In the book *Crônicas de São Paulo, um Olhar Indígena* (Chronicles of São Paulo, an indigenous look) (2004), Daniel Munduruku refreshes the memory of the paulistas, the Brazilians and the Latin Americans in general, by sharing the experiences of tours with indigenous names of one of the most populous cities of the hemisphere. Already in, "*Histórias de Índio*"(1996), Munduruku was surprised at his encounter with a citizen approaching him and asking if he was a Japanese, and then if he was Chilean. While it is true that São Paulo concentrates one of the Japanese colonies outside Japan, and that there are Chileans Living in Brazil, the fact of being approached as a stranger in his own country, astonished the indigenous writer whose work is among the most published and recognized one in Brazil. The self-exotism of the indigenous phenotype in Brazil made it clear that ignorance remained the same. In fact, it has been stated many times that: "Os indígenas sempre foram ocultados pelo sistema político, sobretudo militar. Nossa condifao era urna vengonha e era bom que permanecéssemos longe do cenário político. Oficialmente éramos inúteis" ("The Indians have always been hidden by the political system, especially military. Our condition was a revenge and it was good that we remain far from the political arena. Officially we were of no use"; Pinto y Zilberman, 2010, p. 221).

In *Chronicles of São Paulo*, the city becomes a mirror of the original village, a scene of the remembrances of the migrant writer. Munduruku imagines how these urban places used to be, and what the indigenous names they carry mean, although no one questions it. Reflecting on the original names of one of the biggest South American cities, means giving them voice and power to think about their past and predecessors. In fact, Munduruku feels going back towards their ancestors. This is how certain sectors of the city becomes mirrors of memory where the style of Indian settlement, currently circular according to Munduruku, contrasts with the squared, rather squared style of modernity dressed in shopping centers, buildings, tunnels, etc. Over the stone city, Munduruku wants a glimpse from the shadows of those who once inhabited it.

Homens e mulheres desmanchavam suas barracas, anunciando que mais um dia de trabalho estava chegando ao final. Seus movimentos bruscos projetavam suas

sombras em direfáio aos prédios, criando urna sinfonia de luz e sombra que lembrava fantasmas soltos no ar. "São os fantasmas dos nossos antepassados", pensei e voltei meu olhar para os carros que entravam e saíam do túnel como canoas modernas a transportar gente de um lado para o outro. ("Men and women dismantled their tents, announcing that one more day of work was coming to an end. Their sudden movements projected their shadows to the buildings, creating a symphony of light and shadow that he remembered as ghosts in the air. "They are the ghosts of our ancestors," I thought and turned my gaze towards the cars that came in and out of the tunnel like modern canoes carrying people"; Munduruku, 2004, p.21).

In 2008, Munduruku published a Portuguese version of a message from Seattle, a native American who wrote a letter to the President of the United States in 1855: "*A palavra do grande*". Over there the Munduruku perspective coincides with that of the indigenous criticism of Seattle about the cities "of the so-called the white man". However, what differentiates the chronicler's approach from the Munduruku village is the way it reapproves São Paulo, to turn it into its village, a large village of strangers, where the Canoes have been replaced by cars, where there is a subway, and in whose framework, he like a serpent of the forest goes in search of his food. Appropriate the city is to appropriate their indigenous names, interpret them, imagine them, interpellate them, interpose them between the worlds of before and now.

Many of the large words of Munduruku, and other indigenous writers came from rivers and jungles as well as from a pre-Brazilian country. The countries that were isolated by the noise of the invasion and hasty modernity. In Munduruku, an Indian look, the big city becomes a global village. The Chronicler is engaged in removing the veil of the present and to see what was before, to imagine how they were there, how was the nature before it was fenced, and how it was covered later with the heavy clothing of the modernity.

In the urban margins of the Tieté river, the chronicler imagines. He tells us that his own village was near a river. He tells that the amazonian indigenous life was around the water where people saw the cycles of flood and drought. He says that the walk along the banks of the Tieté river would help one to imagine the old times.

Imagino a movimentação das crianças brincando e correndo atrás urnas das outras, fazendo a alegria do avó que a tudo assistia, impassível mas feliz. Quantas aldeias havia em suas margens? Quantas pessoas ele alimentava? Quantas historias já ouviu? Quantos casais de jovens namoravam as suas margens? Quantas confissões já guardara para si? Quantos corpos tombaram ao seu redor? ("I imagine the movement of the children playing and running after each other, making them full of joy and the grandmother who watched everything not impassively but happily. How many villages were there on its banks? How many people did it feed? How many stories did you hear? How many young couples dated on the banks? How many

confessions have you kept for yourself? How many bodies have fallen around you?"; Munduruku, 2004, p.48)

Tatuapé is another indigenous name that awakens the imagination of Munduruku. In its concept Tatuapé means the way of the tatu, a kind of armadillo. The São Paulo metro proves to be a metallic tatu. The metro knows where it is going, transporting people from one place to another. The tatu, however, does not know the destination itself but knows where it wants arrive. It is the image of the man of the forest, accustomed according to the chronicler, the silence of the forest, the song of the birds and the flow of the river. The tatu of the jungle can be hunted and eaten, while the metallic tatu is used to transport the people so that they can search for food in the city. In total, the chronicler traces two different worlds and scales them with the same basic needs to be met.

One of the most poignant moments of the book occurs in *Jabaquara*, a Guarani name that Munduruku interprets as the place of the escaped slaves. There he imagines how the enslaved people were brought from Africa to Brazil. He puts himself in the place of his brothers who were exploited and were unable to return to their own home.

De um lado havia seus senhores que nao davam tregua e os massacravam e exauriam de tanto trabalhar. De outro lado havia os indigenas, que os olhavam con estranheza e encanto, mas nao compreendiam urna só palavra do que diziam. E á sua frente? O mar, esse gigante que lhes lembrava a impossibilidade de voltar para casa. O que lhes restava? ("On one side there were masters who did not give a truce and massacred them and as they worked so hard. On the other hand, there were the Indians, who listened them with strangeness and charm, but they could not understand a word of what they said. And at other end? The sea, this giant sea reminded them of the impossibility of returning their home. What else remained?"; Munduruku, 2004, p.28)

The indigenous people harassed and exterminated along the history of Brazil was against the humanity. Munduruku insists on ending the distance that separates the Brazilian people of the indigenous people, since according to him, the Indian is Brazilian and the Brazilian is also an Indian. They should create a brotherhood ending the differences and ignorance that prevails in the society with respect to the indigenous people, who are an important counterpart to the kind of power that reigns in Brazil.

Conclusion: Literature plays an important role in the discussion at various levels. In the beginning we had narratives from a colonizer perspective, but overtime we seek to recognize the indigenous literature by listening to their experiences. Literature provides the discussion of the social reality to understand the injustices that occurred with the colonization in Brazil. This work is fundamental in representing the claim of indigenous language and culture and of its importance for Brazil. In this process it also questions history related with alienation and exploitation of people. Munduruku and many of these organic intellectuals, writers and indigenous artists, have grown up in a world in which the struggles of their ancestors have opened roads. They lived and studied in large Latin

American capitals and have appropriated the languages and knowledge of the powers that dominated them. They have faced the challenges of the globalized world, where the canoes have been replaced by cars, where there is a subway and yet there are men who go to the forest in search of food. They are fighting for their survival, for their existence and for their identity as very often they are asked in their own country if they were a Chilean or a Japanese. By its differences and its historical and cultural legacies, these tensions are noticed in the work of Daniel Munduruku, where particular elements of his culture of origin are combined with a frequent appeal to the Indian as a generic being. This runs the risk of erasing the cultural diversity, one of the objectives that have always been with colonialism both external and internal.

Need of hour is to assert the literary function by giving voice to what is "hidden" in the history. Let us hope that with time and reflection, as well as awareness of these challenges, these organic intellectuals face them successfully and not succumb before political co-optation and cultural standardization.

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