To Speak from the Heart

While in Minas Gerais filming *Iracema (de Questembert)*—a video for the Lyon Biennale based on the fictional narrative of an indigenous woman in Brazil who inherits an estate in France and founds an Institute for Art and Science—the actress's brother, Tam Krenak, gave me a copy of the *Krenak/German Dictionary* by Bruno Rudolph, a German apothecary who lived in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century.

Tam asked if I could translate the Krenak-German dictionary into Krenak-Portuguese so that the Krenaks could study it. The 500-plus years of Portuguese and continued Brazilian colonisation of indigenous peoples resulted in the decimation of the Krenak language due to drastic loss of population from genocide. Concurrently, repression of the language and culture of the Krenaks was to such an extent that in the nineteen-seventies, a Krenak speaking her own language could be beaten, arrested, imprisoned, killed or exiled. Yet at the same time, in present day Brazil it is often insinuated that indigenous peoples have "forgotten or lost" their language; insinuations that refuse to acknowledge the deliberate physical and cultural policies of premeditated genocide implemented both by the Portuguese and Brazilian Governments.

Recent democratic times have encouraged the Krenaks to use their language without fear of repression, though repressive colonial policies are still existant. Tam says that the Krenak dictionary by Rudolph will contribute to the Krenak community's hopes for the regeneration of the language given that it contains words currently unknown to contemporary Krenak speakers.

Strangely, the process whereby indigenous peoples are deliberately forced to loose their culture is—due to rampant racism in Brazil—called "acculturation." The only culture in the Americas is that of the indigenous nations; everyone else has flimsy constructions of forgotten assemblies and attempts to imitate Europe, while others struggle to reconstruct an African identity.

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