

Maria Thereza Alves – August 2016

“Namé stá”

On the first day in Rio Branco, the capital of the state of Acre, as I left the breakfast restaurant to return to the hotel, a youngish man came up to me and said "Namé stá" and broke into a beautifully sweet smile. I asked what that meant, he said, "That God be with you." I would later find out that perhaps he was a native Pano speaker.

I was in Rio Branco to begin, *A Possible Reversal of Missed Opportunities*, a new work for the 32nd São Paulo Bienal. This work has as its starting point the consistent exclusion of the indigenous voice in contemporary society in Brazil thereby denying agency to indigenous communities in contributing to the making of a truly multi-ethnic society. Only in the last decade or so have indigenous students been welcomed (perhaps that is too strong a word), let me be more clear, have not been prevented from attending institutes of higher education although indigenous languages remain officially unrecognized and excluded. *A Possible Reversal of Missed Opportunities* began with a workshop where the indigenous participants proposed to develop a series of hypothetical conferences on various subjects which are of current interest to them. The conferences are hypothetical because they will never take place within the contemporary context of colonial Brazil.

As indigenous thinkers in Brazil are not visible we read texts and saw artworks by indigenous thinkers and artists from Mexico, Canada and the USA. The workshop began with a text by the art writer and curator, Richard Hill (Cree), "10 Indigenous Artworks that Changed How We Imagine Ourselves" with each participant reading about one contemporary artwork. A presentation followed on works by Minerva Cuevas (Mixteca), Shelly Niro (Mohawk), Cheryl L'Hirondelle (Cree) and Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit/Aleut). We saw videos by militant indigenous hip-hop groups: A Tribe Called Red, Tolteka, Tall Paul and Los Nin. We then looked at 15 texts by contemporary indigenous thinkers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi, author of "Decolonizing Methodologies"), Jimmie Durham (Cherokee, artist and writer, "A Certain Lack of Coherence"), Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish, curator and writer (with Jeff Derksen, "An Indian Shooting the Indian Act")), Vine Deloria Jr. (Sioux, writer, "The Metaphysics of Modern Existence") and Janell Navarro (Chicana, "Word: Hip Hop, Language, and Indigeneity in the Americas). Participants then broke up into small groups to organize the conference which will actually never take place and discuss the titles of their talks, which would never be given.

The end result of this work is a series of posters advertising the conferences. The posters are back-dated a week before they are put up to give the impression that the event has already occurred. The posters will be distributed throughout the city in which this workshop takes place and displayed in universities, institutions and public spaces.

The posters place the conferences as an “accomplished fact” allowing Brazilian society to notice the immense possibilities of discourse and exchange which are not taking place due to the exclusion of indigenous voices in all fields of contemporary thought in Brazil. It is hoped that the public will see indigenous thinkers and their particular knowledge as essential to the making of Brazil. In the workshop held at the Federal University of Acre campus facilitated by Professor Enoch Pessoa of the Center of Philosophy and Human Sciences, was Soleane Manchineri, studying history, a single-mother of two children who holds two jobs and would like to get a doctoral degree on archeology in Mexico City. If so, she would be the first indigenous person to hold such a degree. Her brother, Wendel Manchineri, is waiting to get into a masters program, also in history. During our talks he became interested in Giorgio Agamben. Pamela Manchineri, their cousin, studies in the Social Services Department and her brother, theater design. She had thought to perhaps study theater. She auditioned for a television program and although she had done well, the producers did not call her back. There was Eldo Shanenawá who is an activist and is studying education: responsibilities which he juggles with early morning trips to Brasilia to lobby for indigenous rights. Edilene Shanenawá, his wife is a teacher who drives a scooter, under a relentless sun, to her give her classes way up on kilometer 19 of the Transacreeana Highway. They came with their daughter, Maria Eduardo, who wants to study law but who is not quite convinced that she is Shanenawá like her parents. (In Mexico, I once met an architect whose four grandparents were indigenous but he was not, he explained, because he wore glasses...the Americas does that to you.) Antônio Ferreira Apurinã from OPIARA (Organization of Indigenous Peoples from Acre, Rondonia and the Amazon) and Valcleber Apurinã from OPIAJAM (Organization of the Apurinã and Jamamadi Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon), both are activists. Valcleber wants to take care of the forest and hopes to become a forest agent. He is from a reservation near the town of Boca do Acre. The cab driver who took me to and fro from the university is from there and said on one trip, "How can a half dozen Indians stop progress by refusing that the highway pass through their lands? So for the last 40 kilometers to get into town it is a dirt road." There are many after-the-fact studies of the detrimental effects of highways on or near indigenous land: upscale of conflicts

resulting from land usurpation, massive destruction of forest area, and onslaught of epidemics and diseases.

The following day our workshop continued with participants discussing texts and working on the conference. Here are some of their titles: Wendel was thinking perhaps to speak on hip-hop but finally decided on "Reframing the Manchineri in the Resistance Against the Quotidian Erasure of Indigenous Contemporary Memory in the Urban Space of Rio Branco, Acre". His cousin, Pamela would speak on "Decolonizing Encounters in the Euro-Brazilian Campus of the Federal University of Acre". Edilene wanted to address "Integrating Systems of Indigenous Knowledge in Higher Education in Acre", and Soleane on "Contextualizing Contemporary Brazilian Eurocentric Narratives about Indigenous History in Acre".

After the workshop some went to the conference that was taking place. Indigenous peoples were present to participate in a round table of the seminar, "Possibilities and challenges to Indigenous Interaction in the triple frontier of Peru-Brazil-Bolivia". There were maybe 15 of us in the audience. I arrived late and did not hear the speeches and caught only the moderator, a Euro-Brazilian lawyer who said that it was the indigenous people themselves who had to fight for their rights and land! (We were all stunned. 500 years of resistance had not been noticed and the indigenous speakers were being publically criticized for "being lazy" (an entrenched racist view on indigenous peoples throughout the Americas). For the rest of the seminar indigenous peoples were not slated to speak on topics such as "New Tendencies in History in Brazil", and "Sociocultural Trans-frontier Relations". On the last day of the seminar, I went to the library and could not find books on indigenous peoples in Acre.

Soleane Manchineri invited me to visit her where she works at the CPI (Pro-Indian Commission) which lies on property purchased from a Brazilian rancher who had totally destroyed the land (like every other rancher in the area) by raising cattle.

Since the 1980s, CPI offers workshops for indigenous instructors to teach in their native languages in local schools and slowly a small library of books by indigenous peoples is growing on the history of the indigenous peoples of the state of Acre, of the Manchineri, of the Huni Kui, etc.. The chapters end with questions to actively encourage historical research by students on their local community. The book on indigenous peoples in Acre begins with creation stories by different ethnicities in Acre, and also an African and Jewish one. A timeline is proposed to counteract the traditional European-Brazilian one which begins in Brazil with the "Discovery". The indigenous one begins Tempo da

Malocas (The Time of the Long Houses (of native design)), Tempo da Correrias (Time of Running), Tempo do Cativoiro (Time of Captivity), Tempo dos Direitos (Time of Rights) and now in the present, Tempo do Governo dos Índios (Time of the Indian Government).

I then left for Mato Grosso do Sul. To return to the towns of Aquidauana and Dourados was fraught for me. I had last been there in 1980 to speak with Marçal Tupã-y, the great Guarani leader, who was assassinated in 1983. Since then four hundred indigenous peoples have been killed in Mato Grosso do Sul. Not one Brazilian person has been put in prison for killing an indigenous person in Mato Grosso do Sul.

First, I arrived in the capital, Campo Grande, and spent a day wandering about and came to the Urban Reservation of Marçal Tupã-y. On that Saturday, there was a crowd in front of the cultural center and it turned out to be for a government program that gives away energy efficient refrigerators for low-income families. The houses in the reservation were built by the government with what I imagine to be a Euro-Brazilian architect's idea of an "Indian house", but made with sad grey cinder blocks topped with a round "Indian" roof and a patch of earth around the house. The culture center had a few photographs hanging up of "Indian" people and some facts about them and craftwork for sale. It is truly miraculous that any crafts exist with the continuous genocide campaign waged against indigenous peoples in Brazil. Every necklace or clay pot is a symbol of cultural resistance.

The town of Aquidauana is just a few hours away from Campo Grande. A small town of *ruralistas*, wealthy landowners whose principal job is to destroy the land in one way or another. I was picked up by the husband of one of the participants in the workshop, he is a Terena studying engineering at the local university. Rosinette Barbosa Pedro, his wife, a Guarani/Kaiowá, teaches math at school and is a computer wiz. All of the participants in the workshop were women as the men were working in the fields and most were Terena. Naine Terena who had helped organize the workshop is one of the first indigenous people with a doctorate, hers in education from the prestigious PUC university in São Paulo. Naine is an activist on land struggles in her state which has the highest rate of assassinations of indigenous people and the highest rate of suicide in Brazil. Naine also runs a small company working with indigenous craft workers and has two children. Her mother is a healer and a magnificent singer. She sang at the end of the workshop a song to protect me from enemies. Naine had suggested that the hypothetical conference we were to organize in Aquidauana be on "Decolonization". I was immensely pleased when I heard her suggestion. I have written on the need to decolonize Brazil but non-indigenous

Brazilians insist that we are actually 'Post-Colonial'. Bobbi Sykes, an indigenous activist, has stated about the 'post-colonial nomenclature', 'What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?' In Brazil, clearly they have not left and instead insist that they are the voice of authenticity for all cultures and histories in Brazil.

The participants discussed decolonization for schools, literature, history, technology and society. As our main guest speaker for our hypothetical conference, the group chose Linda Tuhiwai Smith based on a summary I made of her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. As we read Smith's description of Maori-oriented research, Valdirene Souza Cardoso who studies biology at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, decided the title of her speech for the conference would be: "Vemo'u: Vexokeovo Kueku ūti (Terena-oriented Research)". Arrieth Dias Alonso Samaniego, a school teacher, after reading Jimmie Durham's essay on "Cowboys and ..." chose to speak on, "The Role of the Reservation in Decolonizing the Narrative of the Cowboy in Mato Grosso do Sul". And Naine would speak on "Made in the Reservation: the Human Being through Indigenous Eyes".

We then thought about a venue, as the local university had not agreed to hold the workshop there, the women were wondering where we could hold our hypothetical conference. They decided that best would be to found their own university, Universidade Federal Kopénoti Tonó'iti Limaum in the Limão Verde Reservation. We then decided to apply the same creative spirit to the list of sponsors and thus was born the Terena Postdoctoral Association, the Guarani/Kaiowá Postdoctoral Association, Association of Indigenous Women Scientists, Tumune Vono (Association of Terena Women Warriors) and Rosinette suggested the Tupã-y Front for the Liberation of Guarani/Kaiowá Lands. Naine and the other participants were pleased and said that the workshop offered them different and new ways to think. As Smith said, our responsibility is to "demystify and decolonize".

I went back to Campo Grande to catch a bus for Dourados. The municipality of Dourados has a homicide rate of 145 per 100,000 higher than Iraq's at 93 per 100,000. There is one death of an indigenous person every 12 days and 1 suicide of an indigenous person every 7 days. (These statistics are from CIMI, Indigenist Missionary Consul.) When I arrived in Brazil, yet another Kaiowá activist, Clodioli Aquileu Rodrigues de Souza, from the Tey'i jusu Reservation had been killed. On local TV there is no mention of any conflicts amidst programs on cooking - all participants were Caucasian, several channels of evangelical groups, a country channel, news and more news, soap operas etc.

I came into Dourados in the early evening. As in Aquidauana, there were many families squatting along the thin edge of land between large fenced in ranches or plantations and the highway. Most were indigenous families waiting for several years on these edges for court decisions on lands which rightfully are theirs but have been stolen. In 1980 these lands were mostly cattle ranches cleared of most trees except for one here or there. Now in 2016 even these few trees posed a problem to the new production model of genetically modified soy and maize plantations and these few remaining trees have been removed by placing a chain between two large vehicles which then sweep the fields depositing the fallen trees in the center where they are then set on fire. Large silos work into the night with trucks pulling in to remove or bring produce. There is a particularly desolate area called Aqua Branca where sand is harvested for sale.

The workshop in Dourados was to be held in the corridor of the local theater but we were able negotiate a small music room instead. The participants were Guarani/Kaiowá organized by Tatiane Kaiowá. Before the workshop would begin, Maximino Rodrigues, a Guarani schoolteacher came to pick me up to take me on a tour of the Jaguapirú Reservation which was originally demarcated in 1930 by Marechal Rondon, a military officer of Terena and Bororo descent, and in between mapping and the legal transfer to the community, several hundred hectares were stolen by the head of the land register office. These stolen hectares are in much need today as the population is increasing – presently each resident of the reservation has the equivalent of 30 square meters. The reservation was called Jaguapirú which means skinny dogs, a name given by the Bororos to the Guarani at the time.

The Guarani/Kaiowá have begun *retomadas* or retakings of their lands. A lonely and dangerous and desperate act. A family marks off a piece of land which has been stolen and builds a small hut out of whatever wood sticks can be found with plastic to cover it. A well is dug but the water causes diarrhea, vomiting, coryza and stomach problems. The families begins the long process of waiting for the Brazilian judicial system to decide about their stolen lands.

Maximino, then took me to meet with Édina de Souza, Marçal Tupã-y's daughter, a retired school teacher who resides in her father's modest house. She has a pack of small barking dogs to warn her if thieves are trying to break in. A more common occurrence now, she says, since drugs has become a growing problem. She explained that they particularly attack the elderly who pose no threat to them. She wants to start up CUIA, (Indigenous Culture and the Environment) but she says sometimes she feels and sees no hope for her

people and she wants to give up. Maximino also feels the same desperation. The next day, Édina came to the workshop as did two of her nephews, Jerry Jerônimo de Souza and Kenedi de Souza Morais.

Anishinaabe cultural theorist, Gerald Vizenor's use of the term survivance as a living and active survival rather than one of subsisting on the ruins of culture, along with other interpretations of survivance as a junction of survival and resistance, described the contemporary situation of the Guarani/Kaiowá in Dourados and this became the workshop conference title. As in previous workshops we struggled with terms which were new to us while working on conference titles in areas which traditionally indigenous speakers are not invited to participate. Jerry Jerônimo Souza, studying education titled his conference: "Guarani Survivance and the Resulting Reinvention of Contemporary Art in Mato Grosso do Sul". Júnior Alziro Jorge, a student of physics, would want to speak on "Integrating New Physics in Contemporary Colonial Brazil". Michely Vargas Rodrigues, a schoolteacher in math decided on "Decolonizing Western Epistemic Dominance: Mita Kuna Apuku'e in Dourados". And Maximino Rodrigues, school teacher and activist on "Decolonizing the Body in Colonial Space: Retaking the Land and Ko'e pepy pira jaka'ira e mbojegua"

At the moment of deciding the conference venue, the participants opted also for creating their own university, the Intercultural Indigenous Marçal Tupã-y, the Man with the Lips of Honey, University at the Jaguapirú Reservation. And celebratorily founded the Association of Guarani/Kaiowá Cultural Theorists and the Association of Guarani/Kaiowá Physicists.

Michely and Maximino asked if I could give a talk on contemporary art to a group of teens at the reservation. About a dozen teens, mostly young women, showed up along with the hosts of the house where we were to meet. The hip-hop videos, of course, proved successful but also Shelley Niro's T-Shirt work, Jimmie Durham's "smashings" with rocks, large and small and my video, "Male Display Among European Populations", of a Krenak anthropologist studying the phenomenon of European men constantly touching their testicles.

One of the hosts asked if a special education was required to be able to make contemporary art. I replied that none was but that it was important to join the discourse and be part of it. Michely and Maximino asked if I could come back and give some classes about contemporary art at the schools on the reservation.