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Keywords: *letters; Indigenouspeoples; authorship.*

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Indigenous Authorship in Fifteen Years of Letters

Suzane Lima Costa [α] & Rafael Xucuru Kariri [σ]

Abstract- **There are many studies that analyze letters about indigenous peoples for a critical understanding of Brazil's political and literary history. In these analyzes, the epistles are treated as valuable archives for the creative processes of their authors, testimonies of notorious identity and political situations or historical/biographical documents foundational to understand our history. However, there is a significant gap in these researches and approaches when the indigenous becomes the sender of the letters, the author of this type of text, that is, when the biography, testimony or historical document was produced by the indigenous himself. In 2013, we prepared the project The Letters of Indigenous Peoples to Brazil to discuss this gap and to create the first virtual and physical archive of these correspondences - fundamental for the presentation of another view from Brazil, narrated and created by authorship of indigenous peoples. In this article we will analyze the specificities of some of these correspondences, discussing the letter as a support used by the natives for a conversation with Brazil, Brazil itself as the recipient of these correspondences and the ways of constructing collective authorship among the natives.**

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I. Introduction

For over a decade indigenous peoples have written letters to Brazil. Letters about their dead, their political and identity issues, their lands, their enemies, letters about their lives (COSTA, 2018). Today we have an inventory of 664 letters, signed both collectively and individually by indigenous peoples. Letters that were produced in the last fifteen years and made available on websites of non-governmental organizations and in social media platforms, besides the letters in collections belonging to the FUNAI and in other archives. The other in these letters is Brazil, the recipient of the correspondence. The Indians address their writings to presidents, the judiciary or to Brazilians. Brazil is the vocative present in the Indian's desire to talk, but 'absent' in the answer, in the potential interlocution pact that, often, epistolary writing requires. But why writing letters as a way to a conversation with Brazil? What is the content of the indigenous epistolary dialogues? What is it about making Brazil the recipient of these letters?

These questions are part of a larger set of thoughts that we have cultivated since the beginning of 2012, with the development of the research project "The Letters of the Indigenous Peoples to Brazil". At the end of 2013, we began to research the compositions of this type of writing and developed the research subproject entitled "Indigenous Autobiographies in thirty years of letters" [1] .The intention was to circulate the correspondence and to discuss the issue of authorship and the formation of the indigenous autobiographical space. To our surprise, we found a high number of letters written annually by the Indians, mostly in Portuguese, that were spread on websites of non-governmental organizations and social media networks during the period 2000-2015. We realized that these letters had a particular temporal agency, as they followed the way the natives understood and responded to legal and historical imperatives that the Brazilian State imprinted on their bodies. Not to mention that there was also a constant defense of the indigenous identity and territory, which reverberated in writings that called for the recognition of a differentiated citizenship for the peoples.

In addition to the issues raised during the first stage of the gathering of the letters, we were also particularly struck by the collective authorship of the indigenous peoples, registered in the signatures and compositions of more than three hundred letters. In these letters, we see in prominence, varying only the name of each ethnic group, the collective signature of the people, and in the body of the text the argument that the indigenous people is the true author of the writing. This puts in evidence not only the process of creation of these texts, but also the collaborative praxis developed among the Indians themselves for their preparation. Albert Braz, in his article "Collaborative Authorship and Indigenous Literatures", discusses the issue of author collaboration in indigenous literature, emphasizing that one of the defining characteristics of this literature is the incidence of the indeterminacy of a single writer (BRAZ, 2011). Long before Braz, in the late 1980s, Arnold Krupat (1989) discusses the same issue in *For Those Who Came After*: A Study of Native American Autobiography, analyzing who would be allowed to attach a single author name to the indigenous voice that always had in the anonymity, and in the no ownership condition, the base and foundation of its literature.

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[1] Project funded by CNPq, with the main goal of assembling the archive of indigenous peoples' letters, which are now circulating with broad repercussion on social networks and news portals inside and outside Brazil, as well as letters outside the virtual space sent by indigenous leaders to international organizations and to the Federal Government of Brazil, from the enactment of indigenous rights in the 1988 Constitution until 2015.

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More recent thoughts on the indigenous authorship, such as those elaborated by Jane Stanford (2016), in her book *Colonial Literature and the Native Author*: Indigeneity and Empire, extend the discussion presented by Krupat (1989) by asking what happens when the romanticized subject of colonial literature becomes author of the writing work that has always been considered characteristic of the language of the colonizer. Stanford questions whether a new type of writing is produced or if the indigenous author repeats the same models as the colonizer.

In order to deal with these issues recurring all along the research process, we decided to organize the correspondence produced by the Indians as follow: 1) Letters to the 500 years (correspondence that comprise the mark of the 500 years of Brazil and that were addressed to President Fernando Henrique Cardoso); 2) Letters to Presidents Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (correspondence that mark the arrival of the Workers' Party to the Presidency of Brazil); 3) Letters to the dead and denunciation letters (correspondence that denounces crimes against indigenous peoples, suicides among indigenous people occurred in the processes land 'retake'); 4) The letters of the indigenous women (correspondence in which women repudiate the action of the State and of the farmers); 5) Letters of recognition or letters about the land (correspondence that communicate the self-demarcation of the indigenous territories). In this article, we will analyse the specificities of some of these correspondences. We will discuss the reason for the use of the letter as support for the conversation with Brazil, Brazil itself as the recipient of these letters and the ways of collective authorship construction among the indigenous.

II. Why Writing Letters to Brazil?

Barthes said that a letter is an encounter of knowledges between two subjects, a knowledge that acts simultaneously in who writes and in who reads (Barthes, 2008). For Foucault (2004), a letter is the very exercise of otherness, for the writer is made present to the one with whom they wish to speak. For Lejeune (2008), a letter is, by definition, a sharing that involves several people and has several aspects: "it is an object (that is exchanged), an act (that can be published)" (LEJEUNE, 2008, p. 252), that is, a way of talking closely - although the subjects of the conversation are in different temporalities. In this process of sharing, the two subjects of the indigenous letters are a collective of actors. The senders sign it as plural - the people - and who receives the letter does it for a collective - Brazil. The two collectives of this way of conversation also have their ways of writing and of making themselves absent / present in the dialogical practice.

This dialogism, somehow, has always been present in the history of Brazil, from the Tupi correspondences of the "Camaroes" in the seventeenth century to the letter of Sonia Guajajara launching her pre-candidacy for Presidency in the twenty-first century. These writings are the result of complex schooling processes that some indigenous ethnic groups have undergone throughout our history - processes that, given the due differences of temporalities, are now part of the indigenous own political organization. The letters written by these peoples are an extension of some of these modes of organization. Therefore, to present the collective authorship of indigenous peoples, it is fundamental to understand the ways in which these authors write in their groups, collectives and associations.

Some of these organizations began with indigenous assemblies in the 1970s, supported by allies of the indigenous movement[2]. These gatherings were attended by indigenous ethnic groups from different regions of the country who met to discuss the state of their traditional territories and the policy of forced integration to non-indigenous society promoted by the Military Government[3]. After the 1988 Constitution, these meetings began to be organized at local, regional and national level, by indigenous leaders, teachers, women, elders and writers, gathered to deal with situations recurrently experienced by communities: the struggle for land, the assassination of leaders and the denunciation of other abuses and violence.

The outputs of these discussions found in the object / act letter its ideal format of diffusion and sharing. In 2014, we attended some of these meetings and recorded the ways in which from the ability to translate orality to literacy, dialogues, decisions and discussions were agreed upon and produced collectively by members of the community. At the end of each collective meeting a letter was written and forwarded to the recipient, collectivized or singled out as 'Brazil'. At those moments, the letter-object was becoming a letter-performative act of presence and agency before the Other - the recipient of the correspondence - and before the sender himself who produced it.

Usually, indigenous correspondence is produced in Portuguese and contains a summary of the group's discussion, including an introduction about the place, a description of indigenous ethnic peoples present at the time of writing, the purpose and the

[2] Partnership with anthropologists, indigenists, linguists and other members of civil societyorganizations. It is worth mentioning the partnership with the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), linked to the Catholic Church.

[3] The official project foresaw that indigenous people, as a group that was evolutionarily inferior to the ideal civilized model, should "evolve" into the general Brazilian status by means of forced integration, using instruments such as the imposition of the use of the Portuguese language, expulsion from the traditional lands and labour market insertion.

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issues raised for the conversation. Sometimes this sequence is interspersed by personal stories, situations experienced with other indigenous and non-indigenous actors, and by mythical images and metaphors to explain their feelings to the interlocutor. We perceived that each people elaborates a different way of promoting this translatability, one of the most recurrent being the choice of one or more translators, generally younger natives, who had the necessary literacies to reproduce in writing the demands presented orally by the group.

The contours of this translatability demand an understanding of the role of the translator in the process of elaborating / assembling the collective letters. This is because the translator is also an editor of the text, but not with complete freedom to elaborate it, since his work is under the evaluation of the other Indians present in the discussion. Thus, words, expressions, images and metaphors undergo a continuous process of negotiation during the transcription, besides the fact that, at the end of the writing, it is necessary that the translator presents orally the letter for the acceptance of the other natives. On the other hand, it is the translator who execute the process of performative production of the text, he is the performer of the act of writing. The Indians do not simply choose the Indian who has schooling or who dominates the writing regulations, besides these attributes, it is necessary to have the body that transits between the knowledge of themselves, their village, their culture and the knowledge of the other with whom they are willing to talk.

In defining the translator, when referring to indigenous oral traditions, Lynn Mario de Souza (2006) draws a slight differentiation between the acts of writing and transcribing, noting that several elements of oral performativity do not appear in the written forms of some practices of transcription of indigenous narratives. Thus, Souzastates, "the performativity of the oral tradition (...) is totally lost, making what was born as an oral process or performance becomes a mere written product" (SOUZA, 2006: 204). Souza is referring to the translations of oral practices of cultures with no written languages, in which storytellers choose some performative practices to present the narrative to an audience. "So, the authors who say they are simply writing (registering on paper) indigenous narratives as they were told are actually leaving out all the complexity and dynamics of the performative process of orally narrating" (SOUZA, 2006, p. 203)

Unlike the translator's practice on these oral literatures, the letter translator is a 'transcriador' of the writing process; a plural 'transcriador', not only because they are not alone in the act of writing, but because they must be present in the active listening of the other voices that dictate and interact orally with the text at the same moment of its construction. The 'transcriador' is not alien to the demands of the community, on the contrary, shares the same collective desire of the group, is its own extension, and therefore translates the artifices of the oral performativity of its belonging to the letter. In this performance, the authorship is at the intersections of orality to writing, in the possible condition of their non-separation. Perhaps for this reason it is possible to say that the natives who write letters perform this writing all the time, precisely to guarantee the authorial validity of the text.

We have selected two excerpts from epistles that exemplify this type of performance and which illustrate how a letter can be a collective act of resistance. The first of them was taken from the letter written in 2014 by the Munduruku of the Village Sawré Muybu that was sent to Brazilians to say why they decided to undertake the processes of demarcation of their lands themselves:

Indigenous Village Sawré Muybu – Itaituba/PA, November 17, 2014 de novembro de 2014.

Brazil, Our ancestors told us that the anteater is calm and quiet, stays at its place, does not mess with anyone, but when it feels threatened it kills with a hug and its nails.

We are like this. Quiet, calm, like the anteater. It is the government that is taking away our peace, it is the government that is messing with our mother earth - our wife (MUNDURUKU, 2014).

To be the anteater is to place oneself as a participant in the representation that is being presented, not to affirm a representation of itself - a Munduruku identity - as a value of its own authorship, but to produce a re-presentation, which calls into question their own body, because it relies on everything that exists as represent able. And if this is true, the performance also rehearses a critique to the notions of representation and of the subject of the writing.

Another example of this is in the letter written on January 31, 2011 by the Kaiowá to congratulate President Dilma on her election and once again ask for the returning of their ancestral territory, their Tekohá:

Dourados, January 31, 2011.

President Dilma

How nice that you have assumed the presidency of Brazil. You are the first mother who assumes this responsibility and power. But we Guarani Kaiowá wish to remind you that for us the first mother is the mother earth, of which we are part and who sustained us for thousands of years. President Dilma, they stole our mother. They mistreated her, bled her veins, tore her skin, broke her bones. (...) President Dilma, the issue of our land was supposed to have been resolved decades ago. But all governments washed their hands and were letting the situation worsen. (KAIOWA, 2011).

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Here it is the recipient who is exposed to a radical extension / distinction of herself - not to a representation. The set of being mother, land and being Brazil itself is what builds the paradoxical sense of this dialogism constituted to express the absence of the recipient, in the same proportion in which it makes it present in the temporality and in the context of the narrative. Whois writing performs its own condition of sender, not to guarantee the possibility of the encounter, but to say, even as a final alternative to the willingness to converse, that who is there is much more the person than the character of the writing. With a little correction: the person does not have a noun - it is an ethnic people, a village, a community.

The collective authorship of the letters also presents a way of understanding that "we are all many when we write, even alone, even our own life" (LEJEUNE, 2008, 118). The principle of authorship between indigenous people allows such collaborative practices and, as Lejeune himself advocated, allows not to legitimize the idea of a divided self, but to express "the articulation of the phases of a writing work that presupposes different attitudes and links who writes both to the field of texts already written and to the demand that he has chosen to satisfy "(LEJEUNE, 2008, 118).

III. The Individual Recipient / Interlocutor Brazil

A significant part of the collective letters written by natives were elaborated in the aforementioned meetings as authorial manifestos of the people to demand of Brazil and the Brazilians acknowledgement and responses to the situations of abandonment, violence and death suffered by indigenous in their villages. The constant addressing of letters to Brazil directed our research to the selection of this recipient as the first methodological principle for the creation of the virtual archive of the letters of the indigenous peoples. An emblematic letter of this selection was written by the Mehinaku and Xavante ethnic peoples on April 22, 2000 and addressed to the Presidents of Brazil and Portugal, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Jorge Sampaio respectively:

> We are here with all truth of our tradition.
>
> No rancour, no anger. But we're not celebrating anything either.
>
> This is not our celebration.
>
> Despite all the distance and difficulty, we came because we have to talk to you.

We are here to make a new contact. Our ancestors, our grandparents accepted the "gifts" that you left to bewitch our people and thought it was an attitude of true friendship. They believed that by accepting the presents you would respect us, that we would be protected. But this story repeats itself. The attraction fronts continue to use this same tactic to attract and deceive our relatives who do not even know that Brazil exists. (XAVANTE; MEHINAKU, 2000).

Writing to a Brazil that is not even known to exist to make a new contact is to rely on the letter not as a text that forces correspondence, reciprocity, but as an act that mobilizes those who write towards their own self-care. This is because the exchange itself is not the main action that defines the purpose of the letter for the natives, but rather the need to create meanings for their relationship with their interlocutor, even in the absence of answers. Liz Stanley tells us about this necessity when defining the 'letter intention' as an essential characteristic of the genre letter, because it says of "the intention to communicate [...] to another person who is 'not there', because removed in time / space from the writer, and doing so with the hope or expectation of a response " (STANLEY, 2015, p. 03).[4]

In writing a letter as self-care and / or willingness to say, a correspondence can be addressed to a whole society, people or community, who can also be the senders of a letter, although for that, respectively, one has to personalised the receiver as the president, or if the place of the translator is performed in the name of the People. On the other hand, although a continuum of reciprocity exists even in those who only intend to communicate, the letters are still social practices that involve a specific type of encounter between who writes them and who reads them.

This is what we observed in our second selection of letters to Brazil sent by the Yanomami, Terena and other indigenous peoples to presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff:

> Watoriki, January8, 2003.
>
> Mr. President:
>
> We, Yanomami, are happy because you were elected president. You promised to improve Brazil, so we, Yanomami, are also expecting this.[...]
>
> Although you have not sent us a letter, we want you to be aware of our thoughts and support us. When you were a candidate, we sent you a first document and we have not received a response[5], we hope now you can respond. (YANOMAMI, 2003).
>
> Porto Alegre RS, January 28, 2005.
>
> Lula, the omission defeats the hope!
>
> We, Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, participants in the Puxirum of Arts and Knowledges Indigenous

[4]The intention to communicate [...] to another person who is 'not there' because removed in time/ space from the writer and doing so with the hope or expectation of a response.

[5] Letter dated September 16, 2002: "Very well, now we, Yanomami, want to hear your words. You leaders of the Whites write a letter to us Yanomami leaders, because we also want to hear your words. We look forward to your letter here [in the forest] " (YANOMAMI, 2002).

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people at the 5th World Social Forum[6] raised our voice to denounce the continuity of the process of forced colonization that has been reproduced today in our country. We are tired of sending documents and knocking on the doors of government offices and not receiving any answers to solve the serious problems we face (INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF BRAZIL, 2005).

Honourable Ms. Mother of the Brazilian Nation - Dilma Rousseff,

We, Terena mothers from Mato Grosso do Sul, relatives of the murdered indigenous Oziel Gabriel[7] and mothers of other Terena Warriors, who at this historical moment risk their lives in the retake of our lands, feeling powerless in the face of the gravity of the situation and fearing new deaths among our children, poor and rich, Indians and non-Indians; but we are watching our children being massacred by the public force commanded by this same mother of the nation. Instead of protecting us, she closes her eyes so as not to see our suffering and covers her ears so as not to hear our cries of pain and mourning, refusing to solve the issue and not even sympathizing with the indigenous cause or becoming sensible to the slaughter of our people in our state. What kind of mother is this that hugs the strong and kills the weak? (TERENA MOTHERS, 2013).

Considering that the Yanomami explicitly request the continuity of the dialogue, or that the different indigenous peoples gathered at the World Social Forum continue to write letters with no answers from their interlocutors, or that the Terena mothers narrate the murders of their children and appeal to the conversation, we could say that the notion of correspondence among the Indians surpasses the very idea of interlocution that we constructed throughout this article. The Brazil-recipient, represented by its Presidents, is absent in responding and solving the problems presented, but he is the actor of an unanswered reciprocity, because the absence of responses does not interfere in the process of continuing the conversation, since the epistolary intention will always be present. This idea is at the basis of Sarah Poustie's argument that the letter does not lose its characteristics when it does not express an intention of exchange or possibility of reciprocity. For the author, "The paradox here is that, by referring to unsent letters in sent letters, they are in effect sent and reciprocity, exchange and communication concerning them follows." (POUSTIE, 2010, p. 27)

However, the lack of response is a stimulus to writing of more letters, as is made clear by the indigenous peoples gathered at the World Social Forum, stating that the lack of resolution to the problems presented in the correspondence with the Government has become the motivation for the writing of a letter denouncing the colonization processes. Thus, the absence of the Brazil recipient does not mean the absence of the characteristics of a letter or a discouragement to writing; on the contrary, the Indians exploit the recipient's silence as a metaphor for their relationship with the Brazilian society, which makes the letters of the indigenous promoters of new configurations for the epistolary genre.

IV. Indigenous Epistles and the Contours of the Research

Epistolary writing has always been present in the history of Brazilian literature. From the earliest colonial writings to the contemporary ways of writing letters, the conversations between writer and recipient present us biographical pacts, and temporal and intellectual landscapes of our own history.

In Brazil, many studies analyse letters produced about indigenous peoples for a critical understanding of our political and literary history. In these analyses, the epistles are treated as valuable archives of the creative processes of their authors, testimonies of notorious political situations and / or as historical / biographical documents fundamental to the understanding of our history. However, there is a significant gap in these studies and approaches when the Indian becomes the writer of the letters, the author of this type of text, that is, when the biography, testimony or historical document was produced by the Indian himself. There is even doubt about the authorship of the text and the immediate association with the idea that it would not be possible for natives in Brazil to write letters (or any other type of text), especially when writing is directly linked to the 'Brazil' prior to the "New Republic".

However, this genre of writing has been among natives since the seventeenth century with the introduction of alphabetic writing by the European colonization. Some of these letters were translated in 1912 by the historian Pedro Souto Maior (MAIOR, 1913), others are still untranslated and available in the Archives of the Royal Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) of the Netherlands in The Hague (Nationale Bibliotheek van Nederland), as is the case of letters from the indigenous Antonio Paraopeba, Pedro Poty and Felipe Camarão. These correspondences find in the contemporaneity of the correspondences produced by Marcos Terena, Gabriel Gentil, Azilene Kaingang and Sônia Guajajara, Brazil in another version of its own history, safeguarding the due temporal distance.

In the new stage of the project The Letters of the Indigenous Peoples to Brazil, we decided to invest in the selection and analysis of the individual letters written

[6] The World Social Forum is an alter-globalization event organized by social movements, with the main goal of developing alternatives for a global social transformation whose motto *is another world is possible*. The fifth Forum was hosted in the city of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul.

[7] Oziel Gabriel, 36, was shot dead during a land repossession action of the Buriti farm in Sidrolândia, state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

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in different periods of the Brazilian history in order to analyse the ways in which different indigenous leaders, by biographing their own lives, tell another story of Brazil. In order to do so, we decided to search for indigenous letters in three important periods of our literary and political history: 1630-1680 (before Brazil), 1888-1930 (in the nation Brazil) and between 2015-2018 (in current Brazil).

From this new focus, we intend to create a file of these letters on a digital platform - a space for other studies on epistolary writing in Brazil, as well as for the diffusion of another version of Brazil narrated and created by indigenous peoples. This platform will contribute to the dissemination of a previously undisclosed literary and historical material that can be freely accessed by public school teachers, university researchers, linguists and historians belonging to national and international research and teaching institutions.

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