

**Amerindian Perspectivism and (De)Coloniality in  
*Oré awé roiru'a ma—Todas as vezes que dissemos adeus* (2002)**

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*Introduction*

*Oré awé roiru'a ma—Todas as vezes que dissemos adeus*, first published in 1992<sup>1</sup>, chronicles the life of Kaká Werá Jecupé from birth to his days of activism in the 1980s and 1990s. The novel is part coming of age tale for Kaká Werá and part travelogue, recalling his formative years as an activist and culminating with the organization of the *Anhangabaú-Opá*, an event in which “Guarani, Xavante, and Quechua Indians, along with priests of African Brazilian religions, Hindus, Arabs, Yoga gurus, Zen Buddhists, and members of the New Age Rainbow Order” came together in the heart of São Paulo, in September of 1992 (Sá 2004, 277-8). *Anhangabaú-Opá* serves as counterpoint to the history of displacement and epistemic injustice experienced by Kaká Werá, his family, and his wider indigenous community. With the culmination of the text in this event that

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<sup>1</sup> This article includes citations from the original 1992 version and the 2002 bilingual, Portuguese-English publication, translated by Lance F. Gaddy. Translations from the 2002 text are my translations.

demonstrated the diversity of Brazil and sought to reconcile and connect the experiences of multiple minority populations, *Oré avé roiru'a ma* leaves readers with a model for decolonial action. As recounted by Kaká Werá, the *Anhangabaú-Opá* ceremony, which acknowledged varied forms of oppression and aided in intercultural coalition building, begins in an event that suggests the possibility of pluriversal<sup>2</sup> ways of knowing and being.

Kaká Werá's textual persona and activist efforts challenge and critique long-standing prejudices and stereotypes while expressing a unique point of view to build connections and seek solutions to the social and environmental ills that he and other indigenous peoples have witnessed since the age of colonization. *Oré avé roiru'a ma* offers varied approaches to the crises of coloniality through its perspectivist worldview that underscores the profound connection between human and non-human worlds. His varied written projects and more recent political campaign<sup>3</sup> clearly stem from the cosmological orientation and formative years of intercultural connections that are related in his autobiographical account. Kaká Werá offers his readers intimate perspectives on the continued ills of colonialist systems in Brazil while also exploring how perspectivism, activism, and intercultural coalition building offer solutions that seek to create a more humane and sustainable society.

This essay examines *Oré avé roiru'a ma* as an autobiographical account of coloniality and the struggle of a young indigenous person to overcome its power structures while navigating life between diverse communities in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazil. Throughout the text, Kaká Werá employs Amerindian perspectivism<sup>4</sup> in which the “the

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of the pluriverse appears throughout writings of decolonial thinkers and stems from the Zapatista notion of a world in which many worlds coexist or, “un mundo en que quepan muchos mundos”. See Walter D. Mignolo’s “On Pluriversity and Multipolarity” (*Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*. Ed Bernd Reiter. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018. ix-xvi).

<sup>3</sup> Kaká Werá has run for Deputado Federal de São Paulo two times, once in 2014 with the Partido Verde, and once with the Rede Sustentabilidade Party. Though unsuccessful, on his Facebook page there remain descriptions of his candidacy and policy goals: “Kaká is working with a collaborative candidacy at the behest of various minority groups in São Paulo, including representing and receiving the support of more than 15 indigenous groups and their respective leaders throughout Brazil. He will defend the formation of a platform of peace through an integrative policy of social inclusion and sustainable humane development” [“KAKÁ está trabalhando com uma candidatura colaborativa a pedido de diversos grupos de minorias em SP, além de representar e receber apoio de mais de 15 etnias indígenas e suas respectivas lideranças em todo Brasil. Irá defender a construção da bancada da paz, através de uma política integrativa de inclusão social com desenvolvimento humano e sustentável”]. See Kaká Werá. 2019. “Kaká Werá’s Facebook Page.” Facebook, October 28, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/pg/kakawera/about/>

<sup>4</sup> My reading of “Amerindian perspectivism,” an anthropological theory developed in numerous works by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, is based primarily on *Cannibal Metaphysics*

classic distinction between Nature and Culture” (Viveiros do Castro 1998, 469) is ruptured in Kaká Werá’s critique of cultural and ecological devastation, rooted in the experience of coloniality (Mignolo, 2005). Below, I open this essay with a brief background on the reception of *Oré* and developments in literature by indigenous authors in Brazil. Next, my analysis draws principally on the positioning of the text by Kaká Werá in its prologues. Subsequently, I address the early chapters devoted to Kaká Werá’s formative years, where he shares ancestral knowledge and the history of his people and his family, as he constructs an identity through his experiences from birth to adolescence. I then conclude with a brief discussion of the organization of *Anhangabaí-Opá* in the book’s final sections.

*Indigenous Authorship: Inroad’s and Controversies*

Kaká Werá’s written work of the 1990s reflects early experiences and efforts by indigenous authors in Brazil to work through Western mediums of cultural production in Portuguese in order to disseminate indigenous epistemologies and ontologies to wider publics with the goal of countering oppression and coloniality. Yet, Brazilian scholar Lucia Sá has noted the suspicion and hostility with which *Oré ané roiru’a ma* and the *Anhangabaí-Opá* were received by some of her colleagues. They critiqued *Oré* for its “hodgepodge of ideas” and questioned Kaká Werá’s legitimacy as a representative of indigenous peoples in Brazil (Sá 2004, 278). Despite such critiques, Sá underscores the importance of Kaká Werá’s work as the “first major statement of its kind in Brazil” where the “hostility it has provoked there exposes an especially deep and long-standing prejudice, whereby Indians can only be Indians insofar as they conform to the stereotype of tribal, scantily clad, and illiterate” (Sá 2004, 279).

Thankfully, increasingly widespread production by indigenous authors in Brazil seems to suggest that broad skepticism towards indigenous authors and literature seems to have abated.<sup>5</sup> Now, with greater perspective, *Oré* and Kaká Werá’s *A terra dos mil povos*

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(2014) where Viveiros de Castro critiques the field of anthropology, noting that it is “nearing the end of its karmic cycle” and calls for a radical reconstitution of the discipline (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 40). He argues: “Anthropology is ready to assume its new mission of being the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought” through Amerindian perspectivism and its critique of the Western/colonial distinction between nature and culture. As Viveiros de Castro states: “the nature/culture distinction—that first article of the Constitution of anthropology, whereby it pledges allegiance to the ancient matrix of Western metaphysics—cannot be used to describe certain dimensions or domains internal to non-occidental cosmologies” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 55).

<sup>5</sup> For additional analysis on developments of this indigenous literary production see Graça Graúna’s *Contrapontos da literatura indígena contemporânea* (São Paulo: Mazza, 2013) and Janice

(1998) emerge as key texts in a corpus<sup>6</sup> of trailblazing literary production in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by individual authors that offer diverse indigenous perspectives on contemporary colonial struggles.<sup>7</sup>

Kaká Werá's autobiographical text serves to chronicle coloniality's innumerable effects and therefore can be read as an effort to reassert epistemic control through cultural production. Kaká Werá's book represents a fusion of indigenous perspectives and the Western textual medium in both its physical form and in languages of publication.<sup>8</sup> Here I seek to expand upon Sá's consideration of Kaká Werá's pioneering work, and examine it as one of prescient decolonialization intersecting with decolonial theory, multinatural perspectivism, and anti-anthropocentrism.

Like other vanguard texts by indigenous authors in Brazil, *Oré* translates the effects of coloniality for readers through Kaká Werá's narrative style and infusion of the text with an alternative epistemological and ontological orientation to the world. It is through this effort at translation and expression of Amerindian perspectivism that Kaká Werá ties, as Julie Dorrico writes, "ancestry/ tradition/ memory, through the medium of writing...revealing how these two cultures [Western and non-Western] intersect, mix, and are redefined" (Dorrico 2018, 131). Through an exploration of Amerindian perspectivism, the prologues, early chapters, and concluding sections concerning *Anhangabaí-Opá*, we can clearly perceive Kaká Werá's effort to critique coloniality and envision new modes of thinking and being.

#### *Front Matter*

*Oré avé roiru'a ma* opens with a set of prologues that situate the text in dialogue with the Western medium and the representation of indigenous thought by non-

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Théil's *Pele Silenciosa, Pele Sonora: A literatura indígena em destaque* (São Paulo: Autêntica Editora, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Listed chronologically here are some key publications within this corpus of early works by individual indigenous authors from the 1990s: Kumu, Umúsin Panlôn and Kenhiri, Tolamã. 1980. *Antes o mundo não existia: a mitologia heróica dos índios Desana*. 1. ed. São Paulo: Livraria Cultura; Potiguara, Eliane. 1989. *A terra é a mãe do índio*. Rio de Janeiro: GRUMIM; Terena, Marcos. 1992. *Cidadãos da selva: a história contada pelo outro lado*. Rio de Janeiro: Secretaria de Educação.; Munduruku, Daniel. 1996. *Histórias de índio*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letrinhas.; Pataxó, Anghichay et. al. 1997. *O povo pataxó e suas histórias*. São Paulo: Global.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the few authors listed in note four, important indigenous writers in Brazil include, but are not limited to, Ailton Krenak, Elaine Potiguara, Olívio Jekupé, Davi Kopenawa, Márcia Kambeba, Christino Wapichana, and Auritha Gomes. Their publications span genres, target numerous age groups, and reflect the increasing accessibility of indigenous voices in the literary market.

<sup>8</sup> The 1992 edition was published in Portuguese. In 2002 a bilingual Portuguese-English edition was published by Editora Triom.

indigenous peoples. Additionally, these prefaces serve to introduce major themes of coloniality and offer early examples of perspectivist thought to readers.

The first preface consists of a passage by French anthropologist Pierre Clastres; it is taken from his 1974 work *Le Grand Parler: Mythes et chants sacrés des Indiens Guaraní* (*The Oral Treasury: Myths and Sacred Song of the Guaraní Indians*). Considering the influence of anthropological theory on this essay, it is useful to highlight how the preface situates *Oré avé roiru'a ma* in relation to anthropology as a discipline and its dominance over representation of indigenous peoples in the Western intellectual and cultural imaginaries. The text from Clastres' work focuses on *as belas palavras e linguagem* of the Guaraní as representative of their intense devotion to their cosmology. Clastres writes, "Few people experience such intense spirituality, such intense connection with the traditional cults, such a strong willpower to keep their sacred beings secret. To the thrusts of the missionaries, whether unsuccessful, whether brutal, they always resist with the same refusal. 'Keep your God' We have ours" ["Poucos povos testemunham uma religiosidade tão intensamente, vínculos tão profundos aos cultos tradicionais, vontade tão férrea de manter em segredo a parte sagrada de seu ser. Às investidas ora malsucedidas, ora brutais dos missionários opõem sempre uma recusa: 'Guardem seu Deus! Temos os nossos!'" (Werá 2002, 6). Likely before any Tupi-Guarani individual was able to access the resources necessary to publish, as Kara Werá has done with this text, Clastres recognized the resistance and decolonial practices of the Guaraní. Clastres passed away in 1977, and I have been unable to discern any direct relationship between him and Kaká Werá. This suggests that Kaká Werá selected Clastres' work to connect his text to past anthropological traditions. I do not wish to judge Clastres' work as colonial or decolonial; rather, Kaká Werá's selection of Clastres—a white, Western anthropologist—underscores the aim of the narrative to present Guaraní culture to readers and to place it in dialogue with past representations dominated by Western disciplines.

The second prologue is written by Kaká Werá himself. It opens with the following, "I am Kaka Wera Jecupe, a Txukarramae that follows the sun's trail, according to the urucum painting, written in this body, that guards our people ancientstory, since the first Tubaguaçu, since the first Coroados, the first" ["Eu sou Kaká Werá, um txucarramae que percorre o caminho do Sol, de acordo com a pintura do urucum nesse corpo guarda a história milenar do nosso povo, desde os Tubaguaçu primeiros, desde os Coroados primeiros, os primeiros Tupinambás"] (8). In these opening lines, he establishes himself as the subject of the text and his heritage in relation

to a diverse lineage of other indigenous peoples, suggesting his aim in writing not only his personal history, but also, in part, contemplating wider experiences of indigenous peoples throughout Brazil. Iarima Nunes Redü's article on the testimonial aspects of the text highlights the importance of this act in Kaká Werá's work. She writes, "Reclaiming the past serves, in the case of indigenous writers, as a way not only to take the voice and narrate their history always silenced by the official discourse, but also as a way of affirming this history and constituting an identity" ["Retomar o passado funciona, no caso dos escritores indígenas, como uma maneira não só de tomar a voz e narrar sua história sempre silenciada pelo discurso oficial, mas também como forma de afirmar essa história e constituir uma identidade"] (Redü 2015, 4). Though Redü doesn't frame her argument in terms of coloniality, her analysis can also be read as a reflection of the decolonial potentiality in Kaká Werá's work. Her reading, alongside the prologues themselves, underscores how the text works against dominant Western visions of indigenous populations. Kaká Werá continues: "I was named by the Guaranis from the Krukutu and the Morro da Saudade villages, in Sao Paulo... My father and forefathers' tribe was settled in the North of the country; they dispersed throughout Minas Gerais cities, starting on the banks of the Sao Francisco river, becoming farm hands that sprouted in the cerrados vegetation like plague urchins" ["Fui criado e nomeado entre os guaranis da aldeia de Krukutu, em São Paulo; após minha tribo ter sido massacrada ao norte do país, restando poucos, que se espalharam pelos cantos. Graças á proteção dos Espíritos Ancestrais, e a nossa luta através da resistência cultural, temos nos mantido"] (Werá 2002, 8). Kaká Werá highlights the impact of coloniality on his ancestors and asserts that his existence and the subsequent writing of this text represents cultural resistance, further underscoring the challenge to the colonial order and its historical limitation of indigenous subjectivities and epistemologies.

Additionally, the prologue also provides early parallels with perspectivist thought: "My Spirit Instructors (the Tamai), as a challenge, I believe, pushed me through the Jaguar mouth, this *yuarète* called metropolis, in order to learn and eat from that stone-and-steel language and culture. Thus, I ate the bread that was baked by civilisation. I survived. To achieve this, I had to devour the city's brain" ["Meus Espíritos Instrutores (os Tamãï) empurraram-me na boca do jaguar, essa yuarête chamada metrópole, como prova, para que aprendesse e comesse de vossa língua e cultura; se viesse a resistir"] (Werá 2002, 8). In this passage, the metropolis becomes a jaguar; yet, Kaká Werá also takes on aspects of the jaguar as he comes to eat our language and culture. This perspective of the metropolis and Kaká Werá's relationship

to its culture and language illustrates his understanding of the West's growing impact on his community through an Amerindian perspective that emphasizes the animality and humanity of both himself and the city. By referring to the metropolis, a human constructed entity as a jaguar, Kaká Werá captures the inherent relationship between the violence of nature and man, echoing a shared human origin of the trait. Yet, Kaká Werá also adopts characteristics of the predator through his own consumption of Western language and culture to survive and resist coloniality and avoid the permanent destruction of himself and his heritage.

For Kaká Werá his approach to the Western world and its predatory nature is best explored in the shared relationship between humans and animals. This type of description echoes Viveiros de Castro's call for an alternative perspective, which is needed to understand how diverse Amerindian persons interpret the world around them. He writes:

*The common condition of humans and animals is not animality but humanity.* The great mythic division shows less culture distinguished from nature than nature estranged from itself by culture: the myths recount how animals lost certain attributes humans inherited or conserved. Nonhumans [animals] are ex-humans and—not humans [spirits, plants, rocks, water, etc.] are ex-nonhumans. So where our popular anthropology regards humanity as standing upon animal foundations ordinarily occluded by culture—having once been entirely animal, we remain, at bottom, animals—indigenous thought instead concludes that having formerly been human, animals and other cosmic existents continue to be so even if in a way scarcely obvious to us. (Author's emphasis, Viveiros de Castro 2014, 68-69)

Kaká Werá's writing here echoes Viveiros de Castro's understanding of Amerindian thought. For both Kaká Werá and Viveiros de Castro Amerindian perspectivism challenges the colonial/Western divisions of nature and culture by ascribing a form of humanity to all "human," "nonhuman," and "not human" beings. Viveiros de Castro understands Amerindian perspectivism as "anthropomorphic," in opposition to the "anthropocentric" worldview of Western philosophies. "When everything is human," he writes "the human becomes a wholly other thing" (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 63).

The implication of Amerindian perspective theoretically across disciplines, for cultural critic Idelber Avelar, lies in its potential "anti-anthropocentrism." Engaging the work of Chakrabarty, Foucault, Agamben and Ludueña<sup>9</sup>, Avelar's understanding of

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<sup>9</sup> See: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Trans. Graham Bucknell (New York: Palgrave, 2008); Fabián Javier Ludueña Romandini, *La comunidad de los espectros I. Antropotecnia* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2010);

anthropocentrism is defined in the subject-object relation of West to the natural world wherein humans remain the subject and all non-humans/not humans are objects that can be quantified as property/resources to be exploited. In contrast, within Amerindian Perspectivism, the “subject position itself is variable and can be occupied by humans, animals, plants, the Earth, and so forth” (Avelar 2013, 114)<sup>10</sup>. Throughout Kaká Werá’s text we see how his anti-anthropocentric notion of the human predominates as he offers an alternative, decolonial world view, which is capable of explaining and correcting the failings of residual colonial oppressions of the modern/Western world.

Continuing in the prologue, Kaká Werá further describes the aim of his text and his call for an anti-anthropocentrism through a succinct analysis of Western culture’s subject/object relationship with the natural world:

I came for us to unclothe. For us to discover the existing Brazils. To discover the Brazilians. For us to tajk together by the fireside. Unfortunately, in pressing tone, appealing tones. That is the meaning of relating what I have to recount. The beings of nature and the Great Mother fear, they lighten our eyes and whisper to our ears in urgency. The ancient tradition that moulded my spirit has kept my own survival as well as my people's. Now, however, neither my life nor my people's is at stake. It is everyone's (Werá 2002, 8-9).

[Eu vim para nos despirmos. Para descobrirmos os brasís. Para descobrirmos os brasileiros. Para conversarmos juntos ao pé do fogo. Infelizmente, em tom de emergência, de apelo. É esse o sentido de contar o que tenho pra contar. Os seres de natureza e a Grande Mãe temem e sopram aos nossos olhos e ouvidos uma urgência...Agora, porém, não é a minha vida nem a de meu povo que está em jogo. É a de todos (Werá 2002, 8-9)].

Kaká Werá explains the urgency with which he writes this text, compelling readers to understand the past, present, and future perils of the Anthropocene. The passage also parallels concepts of Mother Earth/Gaia/Pachamama discussed by Avelar, as Kaká Werá expresses the fear and threats suffered by the non-human beings and *Grande Mãe* (Avelar 2013, 117). Kaká Werá continues, offering hope for a path towards resolution: “I offer the tribe's ancient wisdom, even though not all of it is herein contained, in exchange for the knowledge that received from you. I ate from your brain. Now, as

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Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009): 197-222.

<sup>10</sup> Avelar, notes, for example how Latin American governments (Bolivia and Ecuador) have provided constitutional rights to non-human subjects, providing foundations for considering the subjectivity of “not only animals but also nature itself” (Avelar 2013, 117). Yet, Avelar clarifies, “it is not enough to make of nature a juridical subject if we do not question how much of it has entered into our own concept of property. That is, we must rethink the very understanding of the natural world as an object in a relation of ownership in which humans are always subjects” (Avelar 2013, 118).



tradition requires, I offer my spirit.” [“Ofereço a sabedoria milenar da tribo, embora ela não esteja toda aqui, como troca do conhecimento que de vós recebi. Comi de vosso cérebro, agora, como manda a tradição, ofereço meu espírito”] (Werá 2002, 9). The prologues thus work together to establish the text as one of action whereby Kaká Werá presents the culture of his ancestors, challenges the dominance of Western visions of his heritage, and documents the effects of Western culture on his life, nature, and other peoples.

### *Colonized Childhood*

In the opening narrative section, “Antes do tempo tecer sua plumagem,” Kaká Werá chronicles the origins of his name, his life, the experiences of his tribe before he was born, and his education. The first chapter “A alma do nome” Kaká Werá recalls his earliest experience of colonial violence: “When I was intoned music in my mother's womb, our village was attacked. Men, holding small steel thunders, made a great tempest, throwing themselves at us from all sides, making rain of fires. Curumim, cunha, tijari, tieti, mita, menononure, aymeri, tuja, tuja-i; bodies belonging to these names on the ground, as in a lugubrious Indian Summer” [“Quando eu era música na barriga da mãe a nossa aldeia foi atacada. Homens empunhados de pequenos trovões de aço fizeram uma grande tempestade; lançando-se contra nós de todos os lados, fazendo chuva e chamas. Curumim, cunhã, tijary, tieti, mitã, menonoure, aymeri, tujá, tujá-i; os corpos ao chão, o estio”] (Kaká Werá 2002, 16). Regarding this passage Sá notes: “The intrusive guns are defined in appropriately child-like terms which of course cannot but remind us of how amused Europeans were by the first reactions to the firearms they brought to America. By this means the invasion then, in the sixteenth century is directly connected with the continuing invasion in Kaká Werá's day” (Sá 2004, 279). Drawing these connections further illustrates the continued impact of coloniality in the life of Kaká Werá and his fellow indigenous peoples centuries after conquest, and reflects the nature of the modern, Western world. Kaká Werá also describes the reaction to the *tempestade* by his people, “Even as the moons passed, the reason for the storm could not be understood within the logic of the peoples of the forest. And the shamans had to contemplate the Knowledge, had to search in the songs, in the silence and in the deities of the earth, the water, the air and the fire: the reason” [“Mesmo com o passar das luas não se entendia, dentro da lógica dos povos da floresta, a razão da tempestade. E os pajés tiveram que contemplar o Conhecimento, tiveram que buscar nos cantos, no silêncio e nas divindades da terra, da água, do ar e do fogo:

a razão”] (Werá 2002, 16). For the remaining members of his parent’s *povo* and Kaká Werá, still inside his mother’s womb, the turn to non-human, perspectivist explanations provides incomplete understanding. No *tempestade* could ever result in such tragedy for the *aldeia*. Rather, the logic behind the actions of those who displaced Kaká Werá’s parents and community is what Mignolo calls the “logic of coloniality” (Mignolo 2005, 10). The logic of coloniality, as Kaká Werá explains elsewhere, shares most in common with the jaguar. He notes how the *pajés*, religious leaders or shamans, come to understand that, “there were large jaguars among trees and long concrete and steel trails that licked at sweet taste of greed” [“existiam grandes jaguares por entre árvores e largas trilhas de concreto e aço que se lambiam do sabor doce da ganância”] (Werá 2002, 16). The *sabor doce de ganância* (sweet flavor of greed) that compels the actions of the firearm-bearing assailants reflects the subject/object relationship between the Western world and all non-Western humans and not-humans that stand in the way of consumption and capital. It is greed that compels control over spatial, political, and economic domains of human existence by which the logic of coloniality maintains power over land, labor, and finance (Mignolo 2005, 11). Kaká Werá aims to reveal what drives the logic of coloniality and its myth of progress as distilled through the experiences of indigenous peoples in Brazil and the perspectivist explanations of the *pajés* in his community.

Forced to relocate to the Guarani *aldeia* of Krukutu on the outskirts of São Paulo, Kaká Werá and his family are thrust into the Western world, resulting in a disconnect between their traditions and culture. Kaká Werá expresses this disconnect in his description of the link between name and place, “The old paje says that when we receive our name, we learn that the timber that sustains the 'mother hut' between the sun and the sky is called ‘Wisdom,’ the root where this timber is rammed is the heart. When the root is cut, the timber becomes rotten and everything falls down. It is why all named must be zealous warriors and wisdom raisers, especially of that seeded by the ancients” [“Quando recebemos o nome aprendemos o ensinamento de que o pau que sustenta a oca mãe, entre o chão e o céu, chama-se Sabedoria; raiz onde esse pau é fincado é o coração. Quando se corta a raiz, o pau apodrece, e tudo cai. Por isso todo nomeado deve ser um guerreiro zelador e cultivador da sabedoria, principalmente a que os anciãos semeiam”] (Werá 2002, 16). The use of *raiz* and subsequent putrefaction (*apodrecer*) of the *pau* (wood) that sustains *oca mãe* (literally, mother house) exposes the cultural hardships resulting from forced relocation, a common experience among indigenous peoples of the Americas. Though attitudes, policies, and detrimental effects of racism and relocation have been documented in anthropological, cultural studies,

and historical works<sup>11</sup>, Kaká Werá's intervention in their description through a perspectivist lens that draws the reader's attention to Amerindian modes of knowing and being that underscore the epistemic violence of coloniality:

Today, many are born and grow up without names or with imposed names, called civilised names, 'names-numbers', who then do not accomplish their personal dance, their own painting, their own song, the jaguars interfering so much that they chew their memory and their ancestral roots....

When we arrived and began to live among the Guarani in Sao Paulo, the town started asking for the names of the father and of the Guarani in exchange for survival. They said that without a civilised name and number, one didn't exist. Then, what were we? We Just were, we didn't exist. We remained without existing for a long time, until water and forest resources became scarce and we had to trade with the civilised ones to survive. One of the traded items was the name.

[Hoje, muitos nascem e crescem sem nome ou com nomes impostos, acabam não realizando a sua dança pessoal, a sua pintura própria, o seu canto próprio, porque os jaguares interferem tanto que mascam-lhes a memória e a raiz. Ao chegarmos e habitarmos entre os guaranis, em São Paulo, a cidade acabou pedindo o nome do pai e dos guaranis em troca de sobrevivência. Disseram que sem nome e número civilizado não se existia. Então, o que éramos?; éramos apenas, não existíamos. Ficamos muito tempo sem existir até faltar água e recursos da mata e precisarmos trocar com os civilizados meios para sobreviver] (Kaká Werá 2002, 16-17).

The interference of Western society illustrated here reveals how the bureaucratic naming and numbering processes of the dominant society impede cultural practices of Kaká Werá and his adopted Guarani community. For Kaká Werá, the effect is two-fold in the negation of memory and existence itself, where indigenous peoples are relegated to non-existence, recalling Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "wasted lives" (2013) and Giorgio Agamben's "homo sacer" (1998). As Tracy Devine Guzmán suggests, "Agamben's study of 'nativity and nationality' speaks to the paradox of indigenous citizenship where the state's desire to 'save' and regulate the spaces and bodies of indigenous peoples relegates them to a space continually 'outside the polis'" (Devine Guzmán 2013, 51).

Per Kaká Werá, the West, once again embodied as a jaguar, continues to disconnect contemporary indigenous peoples from the naming practices as it "chews

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<sup>11</sup> See Alcida Rita Ramos, *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Tracy Devine Guzmán, *Native and national in Brazil: Indigeneity after independence* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Darcy Ribeiro, *O povo brasileiro: a formação e o sentido do Brasil* (Sao Paulo: Global Editora e Distribuidora Ltda, 2015).

up” (*mascam*) their memory and roots, and ultimately denies their subjectivity within the Western bureaucratic system of names and numbers. The fact that their adopted Guarani communities and their members do not “exist” in dominant Brazilian society illustrates colonial power over the “epistemic” domain of human existence, in which the colonizer controls knowledge production and subjectivity (Mignolo 2005, 11). In the absence of “existence” the relocated, previously “nameless” indigenous individual becomes yet another object or resource with which the Western state must contend—a process that requires a Western name. Colonial control over the epistemic importance of naming—defined by the desire of the state to provide arbitrary names that are easily recorded and read on official documents—negates the cultural importance and spiritual processes that Kaká Werá explored in earlier chapters. The colonization of thought seeks to destroy the memory of indigenous peoples and their ties to tradition, yet, Kaká Werá’s text itself and his narrative reveal how indigenous peoples can remain conscious of this affront and persist in their challenge to Western control of the epistemic (Kaká Werá 2002, 16).

#### *Education and Writing in-between Worlds*

As Kaká Werá grows older and as his father wishes to send him to school, the West’s control over the knowledge production becomes a central issue for his family. Sá notes that the “public reduction through naming” as described above “marks the beginning of what he [Kaká Werá] calls ‘soul loss,’ a process that intensifies when he is made to go to school” (Sá 2004, 280). Though Kaká Werá’s father wishes to send him to school, his mother initially refuses, citing the many things for him to learn, thereby highlighting the Amerindian perspective of knowledge and the importance of the natural world: “There were fish to be caught, the tasty heart-of-palms and the blue butterflies to be followed through the forest endless trails, to show us were the magic head was in which they dived and painted their wings. Many important things to learn To weave, to hackle and to understand the spacing and the right time to harvest leaves or plant seeds, to paint” [“Havia os peixes para serem apanhados, os bons palmitos, as borboletas azuis para serem seguidas pelas trilhas sem-fim da mata para que nos mostrassem onde ficava a cabeça mágica em que mergulhavam e tingiam as asas. Muitas coisas importantes para aprender! Trançar, talhar, compreender o espaço e o tempo certo para colher folhas ou plantar sementes pintar”] (Kaká Werá 2002, 21).

Despite his mother’s protest, Kaká Werá begins attending the school named, ironically, for Manuel Borba Gato, a famous *bandeirante*, “one of Brazil’s most notorious

Indian killers” (Sá 2004, 281). At school, Kaká Werá describes the process of slowly being clothed in the school uniform, participating in the ritual of singing the national anthem, and learning Portuguese. His integration into the school system culminates in the creation of a school identification paper that elicits a strong response from his mother and community: “When my mother took notice, my soul had been stolen. It was locked in a piece of paper, divided in black and white and without sun, in a document called school register” [“Quando a mãe se deu conta, tinham roubado a minha alma. Ficara presa no pedaço de papel, dividida, preta e branca sem sol, em um documento chamado caderneta escolar”] (Werá 2002, 22). Kaká Werá explains to his parents how they took the photograph and the *cacique* reacts to the photo saying, “Spirit thieves, store the boy’s soul in order to kill it” [“Espíritos ladrões, roubaram a alma do menino para matá-la”] (Werá 2002, 22). Adding insult to injury, Kaká Werá’s parents soon realize that the teacher had also taken Kaká Werá to create a birth certificate on which, instead of the family name Kaká-txai-jé Txukarramãe, the teacher placed the name of her deceased, newborn son: “My mother took me out of school and beat father with the hunting staff and made him go there to ask for my spirit back. The teacher cried a lot, but those documents were marked with the soul of her stillborn child [“A mãe tirou-me da escola e bateu no pai com borduna de caçar cateto e fez ele ir até lá pedir meu espírito de volta. A professora chorou muito, mas aqueles documentos ficaram marcados com a alma do nome de seu filho recém-nascido e morto”] (Werá 2002, 22). The creation of official documents once again portrays bureaucratic naming and the resulting cultural conflict between the colonizer and the colonized. Kaká Werá’s parents and the *cacique* remain fearful for Kaká Werá’s name and soul, and are concerned that the actions by the school and its representatives negate their memory and culture. This fear is exemplified by his mother’s wish for Kaká Werá to learn traditional practices of his community, and learn about the subsequent trauma caused to her and their community through the production of official documents without consent.

However, while school serves as a traumatic point of contact with the Western bureaucratic, paternalist treatment of indigenous peoples and the exercise of epistemic dominance, the book itself serves as a paradoxical marker of Kaká Werá’s relative acceptance of Western media. Kaká Werá’s adoption of Portuguese and the written word reflect at once the effects of coloniality and Kaká Werá’s ability and willingness to use Western modes of knowledge production for decolonial aims. Both Sá and Redü also note the importance of writing and its paradoxical relationship for Kaká Werá and indigenous authors more broadly. Redü sees Kaká Werá’s writing in Portuguese as an

essential facet of the work and its ability to gain a wider audience in an effort to counteract the dominance of visions of indigenous peoples typically provided by white, Western anthropologists (Redü 2015, 2). Yet, Sá reminds readers of the violence of literacy as a tool meant to differentiate “humans from ‘nature’”—echoing the division of Nature and Culture that also guides my reading—legitimizing the role of the colonizer over the colonized (Sá 2004, 238-9). For Kaká Werá, writing remains part of a series of traumatic interactions with Western life, resulting in “soul loss.” His description of writing in the prologue uses language that highlights it as a physical and spiritual process as much as an intellectual one. He writes “pledged to translate from my body the red 'painting-writing' to the white body of this 'writing-painting'. Accomplishing the task in this account, to dye what in the world, until now, was 'undyable', the mixture of the red upon the white, resulting in the colour of life” [“Firmei o compromisso traduzir da vermelha escrita-pintura de meu corpo para o branco corpo desta pintura escrita... a mistura do vermelho sobre o branco resultando na cor da vida”] (Werá 2002, 8). The traumatic description of education and writing used by both Kaká Werá himself and Sá in her reading echo what Mignolo, also using physical language, calls the “colonial wound,” a broad term that recalls physical, psychological, political, economic, and epistemic effects of racism (Mignolo 2007, 8). Kaká Werá’s description echoes the epistemic trauma in physical terms. However, Kaká Werá also takes solace in his role as translator and mediator in the lines that immediately follow the above passage. Here he defines his mission and draws on perspectivism and his ties to non-human world(s):

And in this account, I am the spirit of each leaf, each plant and each whispered breeze. I am each stone in the path and each wind, each sunny day and each moonlit night, and each breeze, and the light of each star. In this account, I am the waterfall and the river's limpid flow and the flow of all the water that fills the great sea. I am the voice of the crushed land as well as the touched earth. (Werá 2002, 16).

[E nesse cantar eu sou o espírito de cada folha, cada planta, cada brisa pronunciada. Eu sou cada pedra no caminho e cada vento, cada dia de sol e cada noite de lua e cada brisa; e cada brilho de cada estrela. Nesse contar eu sou o fluxo límpido da cachoeira do rio, e de toda água que preenche o grande mar. Eu sou a voz da terra pisada assim como da terra tocada...] (Werá 2002, 8).

Despite the colonial trauma that marks education and writing’s relation to indigenous peoples, Kaká Werá employs the epistemic ways of the colonizer to subvert their traditionally oppressive roles. Through this exploration of Amerindian perspectivism in the language and technology of the West, Kaká Werá shares his connection to his

ancestral culture with his readers, offering Western speakers of Portuguese and English the opportunity to understand the effects of coloniality from his point of view. In later chapters, that I can only discuss briefly below, this effort becomes increasingly important to Kaká Werá's activism as he narrates a series of encounters with fellow indigenous activists and various non-indigenous ethnic and religious groups.

*Intercultural Activism and Decolonial Options*

In the middle and latter chapters, *Oré* becomes more of a travelogue, where Kaká Werá details his search for his ancestral roots in places like Minas Gerais, Bahia, and Florianópolis, before eventually returning to São Paulo where he explores shared concerns and potential partnerships with representatives from diverse faith traditions. The personal connections established in his travels and life in São Paulo result in a winding path that results in the organization of *Anhangabaú-Opá*.<sup>12</sup> In the chapter named after this event, Kaká Werá briefly describes every encounter as a separate *passo*, each with its own lesson, as representatives from these different faiths begin to plan what Kaká Werá calls “a primeria missa do Brasil” (Werá 2002, 78). The gathering of *Anhangabaú-Opá* occurs in São Paulo's Cathedral do Sé where Kaká Werá presents a manifesto to the audience in denouncing once more the effects of coloniality:

I am Kaka Werá Jecupé. Um txucarramãe. A warrior without weapons. We of the indigenous nations are the guardians of the Earth. Years ago, my tribe was decimated by beings seeking gold and territory. That left me and my grandmother. And all this time there have been acts like this in many parts of the country. And even beyond my people, beyond those times, many others were decimated. If we were to respond with the same ignorance, the earth would no longer exist. The so-called conquerors exterminated Inca, enslaved blacks and produced holocausts. (Werá 1992, 78; my translation).

[Eu sou Kaká Werá Jecupé. Um txucarramãe. Um guerreiro sem armas. Nós, das nações indígenas, somos os guardiães da Terra. Anos atrás, minha tribo foi dizimada por seres em busca de ouro e território. Restou eu e minha avó. E durante todo esse tempo tem havido em muitos lugares do país gestos iguais a esse. E mesmo além de meu povo, além desses tempos, muitos outros foram dizimados. Se nós fôssemos responder com a mesma ignorância, a Terra não existiria mais. Os chamados conquistadores exterminaram incas, escravizaram negros e produziram holocaustos] (Werá 2002, 78).

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<sup>12</sup> *Anhangabaú-Opá* was an inclusive, multi-faith peace gathering that occurred in 1992 in the Cathedral do Sé in São Paulo. Kaká Werá describes the participation of representatives from Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu religions as well as that of the Incan *Ordem do Arco Íris*, Afro-Brazilian traditions, and representatives from other Indigenous peoples throughout Brazil (Kaká Werá, 78-80). Lucia Sá describes the event as “all inclusive in New Age fashion” and discusses the resulting identarian complexities of Kaká Werá's “New Age Indian-ness” (285-6).

Kaká Werá states his name and relates the plight of his people to that of the oppressed throughout history, claiming that if it were not for these peoples, the earth would cease to exist.

The Great Mother feels civilization treading upon her. An Indian does not tread on the earth. An Indian touches the earth. An Indian dances on the ground thanking all beings of the land, water, air and fire... The so-called civilized society believes itself so intelligent and yearly repeats its worst steps, its worst dances. No more ignorance! No more holocausts! No more massacres! (Werá 1992, 78-9; my translation).

[A Grande Mãe sente a civilização pisando sobre ela. Um índio não pisa na terra. Um índio toca a terra. Um índio dança sobre o chão agradecendo a todos os seres da terra, da água, do ar e do fogo...A sociedade chamada civilizada se acha tão inteligente e repete milenarmente seus piores passos, suas piores danças. Chega de ignorância! Chega de holocaustos! Chega de massacres!] (Werá 1992, 78-9)

After finishing, Kaká Werá looks around the room and sees the emotional reactions of his newfound friends and the community who came together for the event. The *primeira missa do Brasil* taking place at one of Brazil's most important Catholic holy sites is the decolonial act in which his narrative culminates. In a Western holy site, an indigenous person declares the persistence of Amerindian perspectivism and its value and necessity in the modern age. Standing together with diverse faiths with roots in the Global North and South, Kaká Werá and other leaders present an alternative position, seeking peace and searching for syncretism between differing modes of knowing and being.

The gathering of *Anhangabaú-Opá* underscores the pluriversal potentialities of intercultural communication and mutual respect between cosmologies. As Mignolo notes:

Pluriversality as a universal project is aimed not at changing the world (ontology) but at changing the beliefs and the understanding of the world (gnoseology)...viewing the world as an interconnected diversity instead, sets us free to inhabit the pluriverse rather than the universe. And it sets us free to think decolonially about the pluriversality of the world rather than its universality. (Mignolo 2018, x)

In this formative moment for Kaká Werá, he, the organizing partners, and attendees are working towards the decolonial pluriversal project. At the gathering Kaká Werá rejects the non-existence ascribed to his peoples in their forced relocation, education, and non-consensual documentation. He also declares the subjectivity of all beings through his perspectivist assertions that make them subjects unto themselves, not objects to be exploited by Western civilization. When he declares, "*Chega de ignorância /*



*holocaustos / massacres?*”, he is not calling only for an end to the mistreatment of indigenous peoples or other oppressed human populations, but also for an end to the ongoing exploitation of *a Grande Mãe* and its pluriverse of inhabitants, including all forms of perspectivist conceptions of the human.

### *Conclusion*

In his critique of Anthropocentrism, Avelar writes: “Amerindian societies have, in fact, a wealth of knowledge accumulated in what we might call a non-anthropocentric understanding of the world. My firm belief is that one of the inalienable ethical tasks for Latin American intellectuals today is to come to terms with that knowledge to the fullest extent possible” (Avelar 2014, 111). Though the work of Viveiros do Castro approximates this knowledge from the realm of anthropology, contemporary indigenous literatures also reveal practices and the relevance of Amerindian perspectivism as they seek to share it with a wider audience. Through the narratives of Kaká Werá and other contemporary indigenous authors in Brazil we find varied examples of how Amerindian perspectivism challenges Western, colonial, and anthropocentric worldviews that have dominated the political, economic, and epistemic domains of human life since the age of colonization. Through the challenge to Western worldviews and efforts to expose the cruel logic of coloniality, Kaká Werá’s *Oré ané roiru’a ma—Todas as vezes que dissemos adeus* represents a critical and prescient invitation for readers to partake in the grander project of the “decolonization of thought” sought by Avelar, Viveiros do Castro, and other decolonial theorists across disciplines today.

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