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**Writing Indigenous Activism in Brazil:
Belo Monte and the Acampamento Indígena Revolucionário**

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We are here fighting for our people, for our lands, for our forests, for our rivers, for our children, and in honor of our ancestors. We are also fighting for the future of the world. ... We do not want Belo Monte. (Open letter to the Brazilian people by Bet Kamati Kayapó, Raoni Kayapó, and Yakareti Juruna, on behalf of 62 indigenous leaders from the Xingu River Basin).

The art of prose is bound up with the only regime in which prose has meaning: democracy. When one is threatened the other is, too. And it is not enough to defend them with the pen. ... [H]owever you might have come to it...literature throws you into battle. Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are engaged, willy-nilly. (Sartre, *What is Literature?*)

In early January 2010, more than 500 men, women, and children representing various indigenous peoples from across Brazil organized a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Justice in the capital city of Brasília—"making a mess of the Esplanade,"¹ as some of them put it with irony—and baptizing themselves the Revolutionary Indigenous Camp (Acampamento Indígena Revolucionário, or AIR). The demands of the protestors were multiple and complex, including, foremost, the resignation

¹ *bagunçando a Esplanada*.

of Márcio Augusto Freitas de Meira, president of the state-run National Indian Foundation (FUNAI); his replacement with an indigenous president elected by indigenous voters; and the immediate revocation of Decreto Nº 7.056, or the so-called “FUNAI Statute.” The Decree, signed by former President Luís Inácio (Lula) da Silva just days earlier, on December 28, 2009, had effectively dismantled the basic structure of the state’s indigenist body in one fell swoop by closing more than 350 indigenous posts and two dozen regional FUNAI offices and support centers nationwide.

Although leaders of the Brazilian Indigenous Movement and many of their non-indigenous allies and collaborators had long sought a major restructuring of the FUNAI bureaucracy to make it less “tutelary, authoritarian, dependency assistant, and paternalistic” (CIMI), the December 2009 statute had come as an unexpected and unwelcome surprise. What is more, despite the fact that Brazil is a signatory to Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which mandates prior consultation with indigenous communities regarding the implementation of legal measures that directly impact their lives or livelihoods, no such consultation was ever made.² As indigenous advocate

² Article 6 of the Convention states that signatory governments shall: “(a) consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly; (b) establish means by which these peoples can freely participate, to at least the same extent as other sectors of the population, at all levels of decision-making in elective institutions and administrative and other bodies responsible for policies and programmes which concern them; (c) establish means for the full development of these peoples’ own institutions and initiatives, and in appropriate cases provide the resources necessary for this purpose.” Although it is not mandated that an agreement be reached, these consultations are to be “undertaken, in good faith and in a form appropriate to the circumstances, with the objective of achieving agreement or consent to the proposed measures” (Convention 169). Article 7 declares: “The peoples concerned...shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly” (Convention 169). In his study of “best practices” for the implementation of the Convention in different national contexts, John Henriksen provides a breakdown of the indigenous rights to representation and participation as outlined in other articles of the document, most of which were not respected in the December 2009 restructuring of FUNAI: the right to participation (articles 2, 5, 6, 7, 15, 22, 23); the right to be ‘consulted’ (articles 6, 15, 17, 22, 27, 28); the obligation to cooperate with indigenous peoples (articles 7, 20, 22, 25, 27, 33); the right for indigenous peoples to decide their own priorities (article 7); the obligation not to take measures contrary to the freely-expressed wishes of indigenous peoples (article 4); the obligation to seek ‘agreement or consent’ from indigenous peoples (article 6); the obligation to seek

and former FUNAI president, Mércio Gomes, put it: “The decree...exploded like a bomb inside the indigenist world.”

The founding and function of the AIR in 2010—on the centenary of Brazil’s state-backed indigenism³—marked a symbolic turning point in the trajectory of Native Brazilian representation, not only because of the key protagonism of indigenous communities and leaders, but also because of the ways in which protest organizers “armed” with cameras and computers adopted the Internet as an essential battleground on which to advance carefully crafted ideas and images in support of their cause. On the one hand, this work is but one contemporary manifestation of the ancient tradition of indigenous writing both with and “without words” (Boone and Mignolo), which in the Americas predates the colonial encounter by two thousand years (Houston). On the other hand, the use of the Internet by Native Brazilians who write predominantly, if not exclusively, in Portuguese raises a series of complex questions about the value and efficacy of the written word—and particular, the word written in a dominant and colonial language—as a tool of decolonization.

Indigenous writing in Portuguese challenges the tautological premise of traditional indigenist discourse that those individuals who write “correctly” in a dominant or colonial language “inevitably” distinguish and distance themselves from “real Indians” who lack that same ability (Escajadillo 47).⁴ At the same time, however, indigenous intellectuals have long expressed the concern that any form of knowledge or cultural production that adopts a colonizing tongue as its primary medium

‘free and informed consent’ from indigenous peoples (article 16); the right to ‘exercise control’ (article 7); and right to ‘effective representation’ (articles 6, 16) (“Key Principles” 21).

³ The state’s first official indigenist body, the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios e Localização de Trabalhadores Nacionais (SPIILTN) was founded in 1910 by a military engineer of Bororo descent named Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon. Later shortened to SPI, the organization was in place until after the 1964 military coup that brought twenty years of right-wing dictatorship to the country. The military regime dissolved the SPI in 1967 and replaced it with the Fundação Nacional do Índio (National Indian Foundation or FUNAI), which remains in place.

⁴ Thus literary scholar Tomás Escajadillo disqualified Peruvian novelist José María Arguedas, who self-identified as a “modern Quechua man,” from being a “proper Indian” or from being capable of writing “indigenous” rather than “indigenist” fiction.

inevitably reproduces some form of colonized thought.⁵ Native scholars from across the Americas have argued that traditional forms of knowledge are contained and transmitted precisely in and through indigenous languages, and as such, are ultimately inseparable from them. The fact that “Natives are created in words,” as Gerald Vizenor put it, makes narrating and storytelling inherently political acts of “literary sovereignty” with the potential to transform words into “arms,” or what he called “wordarrows” (vii).⁶ For Mohawk political theorist Taiaiake Alfred, “Native languages embody indigenous peoples’ identity and are the most important element in their culture” (*Peace, Power, Righteousness* 172). Finally, as Teme-Augama Anishnabai scholar Dale Turner explains: “language does more than secure a sense of belonging; it also provides the philosophical framework for indigenous ways of knowing the world” (46).

Although similar claims might be made regarding the languages of other marginalized and discriminated peoples, the stakes of such choices clearly change when the languages in question are constantly at risk of slipping into oblivion.⁷ Hence, M. Marcos Terena, co-founder of the Union of Indigenous Nations (União das Nações Indígenas or UNI), and one of the most influential voices of the transnational indigenous movement has observed: “In Brazil, we are 230 peoples speaking 180 languages, yet there is no government acknowledgement of this fact. The role of indigenous intellectuals and writers, and the use of new information and knowledge technologies are of the utmost importance.”⁸

How, then, to reconcile acute concern over the peril of language disappearance with the fact that Portuguese has become in recent years the first (and in some cases, the only) language of thousands of indigenous Brazilians—particularly among the “remnant” communities (*comunidades remanescentes*) of the urban south and rural northeast?⁹ What shall be the role of indigenous intellectuals and activists working and writing mainly or

⁵ On this question see Tuhiwai Smith 19–41.

⁶ Vizenor draws on ideas expressed by N. Scott Momaday at the First Convention of American Indian Scholars. See *Wordarrows*, vii–xvii.

⁷ For a comprehensive (if now somewhat outdated) account of the number of speakers of these languages, see M. Gomes, *The Indians and Brazil*.

⁸ (*Facebook* 19 February 2011).

⁹ On these communities, see Arruti; Hoffman French; and Warren.

exclusively in Portuguese in the future of Brazil's indigenous movement, and in the future of Brazil? Bilingual and intercultural education programs and other indigenous language revival initiatives continue to spread throughout the country, forming a pillar of the contemporary intellectual and political activism of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples alike. At the same time, the use of Portuguese as an indigenous language is also a key component of indigenous political and intellectual activism, and as such, goes hand in hand with the broader goals of making the national political system more democratic, re-conceptualizing sovereignty from an indigenous perspective, and redefining in personal and collective terms what means to be at the same time indigenous and Brazilian—Native and national—in the twenty-first century.¹⁰

From real and virtual spaces of contemporary indigenous discourse, the leaders of the Acampamento Indígena Revolucionário and their collaborators have advanced these goals by calling into question colonialist notions of “Indianness,” democracy, and writing, as well as the many possible relationships that exist among these concepts. Akin to Dale Turner’s “word warriors”—Native intellectuals with profound knowledge of dominant legal and political discourses, as well as traditional indigenous philosophies and histories (79; 118-211)—the AIR has demonstrated that just as the indigenous movement is not only about indigenous peoples, neither is indigenous thought or writing only for indigenous audiences. If, as Turner argues, “only indigenous peoples can protect their ways of knowing the world” (119), then the struggles of the AIR and the Brazilian Indigenous Movement reveal that non-indigenous peoples also have an unequivocal stake in the defense and dissemination of indigenous forms of knowledge, regardless of the languages in which they might be held or relayed.

¹⁰ Native Brazilian intellectuals are, of course, also engaged in a wide range of other writing projects, both aesthetic and political. See for example the work of Daniel Munduruku, Eliana Potiguara, Olivio Jekupé, Lúcio Flores, Juvenal Payayá, and the *Literaturas Indígenas* webpage maintained by Eliane Potiguara. Though I cannot engage this body of work here in detail, I do so in several other scholarly writings noted in the bibliography.

*“Weapons of the Weak” in the Digital Age*¹¹

The AIR website went on-line after two months of physical occupation of the Esplanade of State Ministries (Esplanada dos Ministérios)—an area intended by its designers in the 1950s as a space for public gathering, whether in celebration or in protest, located in the very heart of Brazil’s three branches of government.¹² Following the mandate of President Juscelino Kubitschek, who sought to realize a nineteenth-century Constitutional directive to relocate the nation’s capital from the southern coast to the physical center of Brazil, urban planner Lúcio Costa and architect Oscar Niemeyer had collaborated, at least in design, with a longstanding desire to make government more accessible to a wider swath of the Brazilian populace than in decades (and centuries) past. That “Indians” would one day self-identify as Brazilians and adopt that space as their own, however, was not likely part of the plan in 1891, when the first Republican Constitution was adopted, or in 1956, when Kubitschek ordered that construction finally begin.

The first post of the AIR members was called “Who are we?” (*Quem Somos?*), and appeared on-line on 28 March 2010. It stated:

We warrior men and women of Pankararu, Korubu, Mundurucu, Krahô-Canela, and Fulni-ô ethnicities have been camped out in front of the National Congress in Brasília for more than seventy days with the objectives of revoking FUNAI’s Decree 7.056, expelling the *mafioso* leadership of FUNAI, CNPI, ISA,¹³ and the other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aiming to exterminate the indigenous peoples of Brazil. Decree 7.056 was published on December 28, 2009 in an authoritarian manner that did not allow for [indigenous] leaders to be heard. The President of FUNAI and the [collaborating] NGOs ignored indigenous rights and international law, including article [*sic*] 169 of the ILO, which states that indigenous peoples must be heard regarding any [legal] decision pertaining to them.

¹¹ The phrase names James Scott’s classic study of “everyday forms of peasant resistance” to authoritarianism, exploitation, oppression in a 1970s Malaysian village, which he posited as a counterpoint to the Gramscian notion of hegemony.

¹² For an explanation and critique of their project, see Holston, especially 310-312.

¹³ Conselho Nacional de Política Indigenista (CNPI); Instituto Socioambiental (ISA).

Two days later, the bloggers posted a photograph of a stout man wearing shorts, a grass skirt, and a feather headdress aiming a bow and arrow at the National Congress. His curious combination of Native and Western dress against the background of a building complex recognized worldwide for its hypermodern design served as a jolting visual reminder of the complex negotiation of past and present at play in Brazil's contemporary "indigenous question." The post's caption read: "In the struggle for an Indigenous Party!" and in subsequent weeks, the enigmatic image would become one of the banners of the AIR website.



"Na Luta por um Partido Indígena!" (Image by AIR, 30 March 2010).

Over the weeks that followed, AIR posts and supporting images became increasingly elaborate, incorporating multi-point manifestos of the group's demands, announcing statements of encouragement from politicians and indigenous leaders from throughout the country and across the Americas, and chronicling the day-to-day victories and setbacks of the protestors occupying the Esplanade. Never forsaking their primary objection to non-indigenous leadership of FUNAI and the policy changes associated with Decree 7.056, the AIR also took a stand on several other contentious issues, ranging from the state's failure to demarcate indigenous territories in accordance with the promises of the 1988 Constitution, to environmental policies, mining, education, healthcare, and most importantly, the imminent groundbreaking for the construction of the highly controversial Belo Monte hydroelectric barrier on the Xingu River in the northern state of Pará. Resurrected with new impetus from the Amazonian development frenzy of the 1964-1985 military regime by the Lula da Silva administration

as the very cornerstone of its Growth Acceleration Program (Programa pela Aceleração do Crescimento, or PAC), the massive project promised (and promises) to be the third-largest such dam in the world, with a correspondingly massive environmental impact that indigenous and other local populations lament vociferously, as they have unremittingly for over two decades.¹⁴

On 28 April 2010, after more than three months of denied requests, a public hearing (*audiência pública*) was finally held in the House of Representatives (Câmara dos Deputados)¹⁵ so that AIR representatives might have an opportunity to discuss Decree 7.056 and its implications with FUNAI representatives and other federal authorities.¹⁶ Failing during and after the hearing to make significant headway in having their requests met, AIR representatives attempted a few weeks later to occupy the National Congress. After agreeing to turn over their bows, arrows, sticks, and rocks in exchange for entry and dialogue, the group was again turned away—this time by police and guards bearing weapons. Violent confrontation ensued, involving congressmen, their staff members, security forces, and some 250 indigenous protestors, approximately fifty of whom claimed to have been injured in the melee. The row was caught on camera by members and supporters of the AIR, and resulted in a small but

¹⁴ Although the original dam project was modified to be “less detrimental” to the environment and local populations, it will nonetheless divert the flow of the Xingu River, flood the lands of riverbed communities, and destroy the livelihood of thousands of people (some of whom self-identify as indigenous) who depend on fishing and related industries for survival. Since this essay was written in early 2011, construction on the dam has begun amid great controversy, not only for its enormous impact on the environment and colossal price tag (more than seventeen billion dollars), but also for the atrocious working conditions provided to the thousands of laborers who have been transported into the region to carry out the construction project. As of early April 2012, workers had declared a strike, complaining of unfair wages, intolerable food, unsafe procedures, and a lack of protective equipment. For an introduction to some of the opposing views on the initiative, see for example: Instituto Socioambiental (www.socioambiental.org/esp/bm/index.asp); Xingu Vivo para Sempre (<http://xingu-vivo.blogspot.com/>), and the administration’s PAC website (www.brasil.gov.br/pac).

¹⁵ The meeting was convened by federal deputy Luis Carlos Hauly (PSDB-PR).

¹⁶ Albeit *post facto*, as the law had officially gone into effect when it was signed. The embattled president of FUNAI (Márcio Meira) failed to attend the hearing, sending in his stead his *procurador*—state attorney Antônio Salmeirão (“Vitória dos Índigenas”).

significant indigenous victory: the National Council of Indigenist Politics (CNPI), which had been formed by Decree Nº 7.056, and was to be voted into law later that evening (secretively and, like the decree itself, without any notice to or consultation with indigenous leaders and communities) was defeated by a vote of twelve to one (“A Batalha do Congresso Nacional”). In mid-June 2010, the AIR secured yet another minor victory when several indigenous leaders managed to meet with then Minister of Justice Luiz Paulo Barreto, who allegedly agreed to revoke Decree 7.056 and renegotiate the conditions under which the reorganization of FUNAI could take place, including the re-opening of administrative offices in or near Curitiba, Recife, and São Luís (Gomes, “Vitória do Acampamento”). The tenuous agreement fell through soon thereafter, however, when a



AIR protestor offers a gift at FUNAI headquarters.
(Photo by AIR, April 2010).

subsequent memo to FUNAI President Mário Meira—made public by AIR supporters who posted it on-line—failed to reflect any intention to revoke the Decree or even to address its potential renegotiation (Barreto). Physical and virtual protest resumed soon thereafter, and repeated attempts to occupy FUNAI headquarters and engage government representatives in an evenhanded and productive dialogue were repeatedly thwarted, eventually bringing AIR negotiation efforts to a screeching halt (AIR, “Jogo Sujo”). When FUNAI officials and a handful of local journalists accused the AIR

repeatedly of working to sabotage the incumbent Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) during an election year, the indigenous protestors refuted the charges and issued several public statements to reiterate their original demands and attest to the political autonomy of their organization ("As 11 Reivindicações"; "Carta Aberta"). Adjacent to the banner of their web page they published a new disclaimer: "The Acampamento Indígena Revolucionário receives no support from the government or from any non-governmental organization. We need donations!" ("Campanha de Solidariedade").

It would only be through grassroots organizing and small-scale contributions of money, food, clothes, supplies, talent, and time, in fact, that the AIR would be able to maintain the physical occupation of the Esplanade and their virtual protest on-line. In a few months' time, they managed to garner the support of hundreds of supporters—not only locally and nationally, from all over Brazil, but also internationally. Visitors to the camp hailed from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Mexico, Suriname, the United States, and Uruguay (AIR, "Resistência"; Sepezi Viera). During my short visit to the camp in July 2010—days after military police had moved in to destroy and dismantle its precarious lodgings, expulse its inhabitants, and destroy or confiscate their meager belongings—CNN International, TV Globo, and two university affiliated film crews turned up to interview remaining and returning AIR protestors for news reports and documentary films. One such film, paradoxically, purported to examine the role of the Brazilian Constitution in the protection of indigenous rights.

All of these collaborations—among distinct peoples; among Native and non-Native activists; and among national and international advocacy networks—as well as their virtual dissemination through the AIR website, were possible due to the protestors' careful and strategic embrace of Portuguese alongside and in conjunction with their Native languages as a legitimate and necessary mode of indigenous expression.

Challenges to Indigenous Representation

Despite the protestors' shared goals and extended collaboration to secure indigenous leadership of FUNAI and reform indigenist legislation radically at the national level, AIR relations became tense and contentious as days and weeks turned into month after month of living in precarious physical conditions and with no desirable outcome in sight. Within days after state authorities destroyed the physical camp—illegally and with violence—several dozen demonstrators returned to the Esplanade to resume their protest. But irreparable damage had been done. Competing power interests among some of the camp leadership and inconsistent and uneven communications between them and state authorities had already managed to divide the camp deeply. Some participants accused others of caving in and “selling out” to FUNAI by agreeing to disperse, thus betraying not only the AIR, but also the entire indigenous cause. Indignant over such acts of “disloyalty,” some camp leaders insisted publically that FUNAI and some indigenist NGOs had been collaborating with government officials behind the scenes to end to their movement altogether—pitting “ethnic group against ethnic group, community against community, neighbor against neighbor, father against son, and brother against brother” (“Carta Aberta”). Similar tactics, they noted, had been used to turn Native peoples against one another since the sixteenth-century War of the Tamoios.¹⁷ Refuting popular and journalistic accusations of indigenous cooptation by the state, one Cacique José Dias Guajajara affirmed: “From FUNAI—from *this* FUNAI—we would not accept as much as a cup of coffee” (“Carta Aberta”).

Local and national news outlets hostile to the indigenous movement and skeptical of the “authenticity” of any political articulation of Native self-representation seized the opportunity to exploit the schism within the AIR and alleged offers of pay-offs to protestors in exchange for closing down the camp. Journalists in Brasília went a step further in reviling the Acampamento's leadership, accusing them of demanding over half a

¹⁷ Wars fought between 1540 and 1560 in which several indigenous nations allied with different European colonial powers against one another. See Quintiliano.

million *reais*¹⁸ to abandon the Esplanade after their camp had already been destroyed and dismantled by the police at the orders of FUNAI leadership (Brito). According to AIR representatives, on the other hand, dozens of protestors had been coerced by indigenist officials to leave the protest site and subsequently stranded at a hotel on the outskirts of town, where they stayed for two weeks before being sent to the curb because the state officials who brought them there refused to pay the bill (“Carta Aberta”).

Facing the widespread circulation of these allegations, the departure from the Acampamento of large numbers of supporters, and the breakdown in relations with many of the indigenist organizations that have served historically as key interlocutors and advocates for indigenous peoples,¹⁹ as well as intermediaries between them, the state, and dominant national society, remaining AIR participants were forced to reorganize and redefine their message. Their virtual “campsite,” which had never ceased operation,²⁰ became very heart of that endeavor, providing a public forum through which participants could respond to erroneous communications and offer their own interpretations of those events, both in words and in images. One AIR occupant was tasked with buying local and national newspapers each day and circulating reports on the Acampamento and related news to other members, and in particular, to those who were unable to read the papers for themselves. When coverage was not favorable, as was often the case with the local *Jornal de Brasília*, a pointed response with supporting documentation and images would appear soon afterward on the AIR website. These retorts were never signed by any one individual, but rather, appeared with collective AIR endorsement as intimate, eye-witness accounts of a grassroots initiative that sought to set the record straight by offering a more legitimate version of events than the ones presented by either the state representatives or by the mainstream press.

¹⁸ Approximately US \$285,000.

¹⁹ Relations between AIR members and several of the major indigenist organizations (e.g. Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira—COLAB; Conselho Indigenista Missionário—CIMI; Associação Nacional de Ação Indigenista—ANAI; Centro de Trabalho Indigenista—CTI) became strained because those organizations failed to adopt a critical posture regarding Decreto N° 7.056, opting instead to suggest that FUNAI needed simply to do a better job explaining the restructuring process to national indigenous leaders.

²⁰ As of mid-2012 (a year after I wrote this essay), the AIR website remains active, but few posts have appeared since late 2011.

As renewed talks with FUNAI leadership failed to materialize and relations between AIR protestors and the government continued to deteriorate, accusations flew with renewed acrimony from both sides. Journalists and editorialists favorable to the government's uncompromising position vis-à-vis the Acampamento and the future of the "indigenous question" in general spewed charges against "dirty," "lazy" and generally unworthy "pseudo-Indians" out to milk the state for benefits they did not deserve. AIR protestors and their supporters, on the other hand, lobbied both physically and virtually against "racist" and "arrogant" reporters who felt entitled to condemn the initiative and its goals despite the fact they had never stepped foot on the campsite or spoken with its participants regarding the nature or scope of their claims. Inasmuch as this tension exemplified both a nationwide indigenous movement seeking to shed its colonialist-indigenist chains, and the far-from-settled political terrain of indigenous political autonomy and territorial sovereignty, the AIR protest—and the website, in particular—would become a microcosm of the never-ending battle over indigenous representation, in nearly every sense of the word.

In the aftermath of the physical destruction of the AIR, Arão de Providência—a Guajajara lawyer and "president-elect" of FUNAI according to the popular vote of some 400 indigenous AIR supporters²¹—made a public statement regarding the unflinching determination of the remaining protestors and the long-term platform of their movement:

We ask for the immediate dismissal of the president of FUNAI [and] the nomination of an indigenous president—one who defends the patrimony of indigenous rights. If we are speaking of an indigenous body of defense, of the protection of indigenous patrimony, it must be led by an indigenous person. We don't want a council of political advisors or indigenists. We don't need a nanny. We have capacity for self-affirmation, administration, and [the ability] to defend our own patrimony. (Declaração)

²¹ The "vote" was taken on 26 May 2010 and announced on the AIR website one day later. The decision was not without controversy, however, and some critics identifying as indigenous expressed their hesitation to embrace a new FUNAI president who "lived the life of a white person in the city," even if he was indigenous. See: Pini'ayaka's comments on "Os 15 pontos do AIR" from 2 Aug. 2010.

By making this assertion in an atmosphere marred not only by violent state-indigenous conflict, but also by profound disagreement among participants in the indigenous movement with regard to the best way forward, Providência as AIR spokesman would have to walk a delicate line between discourses of legitimacy and authenticity. He and the Acampamento were bound, in other words, by the double constraint of speaking in the name of self-identifying indigenous peoples while at the same time having to acknowledge and respect the diverse and sometimes times diverging needs, interests, and priorities of hundreds of Native communities and hundreds of thousands of Native Brazilians across the country. What is more, they worked with the knowledge that securing and ensuring self-representation for indigenous peoples in the governance of the Brazilian state, and in dominant Brazilian society, more generally, could alone do little to alter the widespread and deeply entrenched configurations of colonialist power in which FUNAI and its president—whether indigenous or not—are ultimately two more cogs in the wheel. And yet, as they (and we) must acknowledge, social transformation has to begin somewhere, and with someone. As Sartre put it in his famous essay: “... I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others in order to change it. (...) [W]ith every word I utter, I involve myself a little more in the world, and by the same token, I emerge from it a little more, since I go beyond it toward the future” (23).

On the one hand, then, the contentious existence of the AIR must be considered in the context of the longer trajectory of indigenous representation vis-à-vis the Brazilian state and its dominant majority from the post-independence period of the mid-nineteenth century to the founding of the Indian Protection Service in 1910, and the ongoing institution of its replacement, FUNAI, since 1967. At the same time, however, we must consider how a variety of contemporary social, cultural, and political actors have invoked and interpreted questions of “race” and “nation” through the particular lens of the AIR (in both its physical and virtual renderings), and ask what the significance of those invocations and interpretations might be for the Brazilian indigenous movement, for Brazilian society, for Native peoples across the Americas, and for the future

of democratic politics. In light of this recent history, what can the trials and tribulations of the AIR teach us about the future relationship between of indigeneity, writing, and democracy?

As of early 2012, the Rousseff administration's steadfast dedication to maintaining non-indigenous FUNAI leadership²² and dismantling state-run indigenous posts while plowing ahead with the Belo Monte dam project in spite of all opposition suggests that a positive answer to this question will remain out of reach for the foreseeable future. Emerging from this cauldron of individual and collective power struggles and interests, however, are not merely new challenges to old questions of dominant sovereignty and the "necessary" and "inherent" state violence that keeps it in place (Weber), but also the lived reality that being indigenous in twenty-first century Brazil means—and more importantly, can mean—no one, definitive thing.²³

It is for these reasons, perhaps, that some leaders of the Brazilian Indigenous Movement, many of whom have been working for indigenous self-representation in national government and dominant society for well over three decades, articulate the need to characterize Brazilian indigeneity with adaptation, flexibility, and *permanence in change* (Payayá; Potiguara; M. Terena; Vaz). As Terena scholar Lúcio Flores puts it: "Our cultures are dynamic and necessarily transcend immobility and calcification" (31). Juvenal Payayá elaborates: "Destruction stems precisely from isolation. (...) No people has remained outside the decision-making processes and technological domain of their era and survived. If we fail to understand this, we will not have the means we need to fight for our preservation" (40). Both positions emphasize the argument and practice made famous in an indigenous context by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) and their advocates in the mid-1990s, and reiterated by indigenous intellectuals and social movements throughout the region ever since, that

²² In mid-March 2012, news circulated that the President had chosen, in collaboration with Márcio Meira and Justice Minister José Eduardo Cardoso, and to the disappointment and outrage of indigenous activists, the anthropologist and demographer Marta do Amaral Azevedo to be Meira's successor (Angelo and Sadi). The official change of post took place on April 20.

²³ Debates over who is indigenous and why of course change through space and over time, and thus far exceed the space dedicated to this essay. I have sought to engage these questions and the large body of interdisciplinary scholarship they involve in a trans-American context in other published work (please see bibliography).

postmodern communication technologies, including the Internet, can provide critical resources for the collective project of archiving traditional indigenous knowledge and sharing it among other indigenous peoples and communities as well as with a wide variety of non-indigenous audiences (INBRAPI; Potiguara, “A informação” 8).

The desire to place modern technologies and the Portuguese language at the service of traditional indigenous knowledge, however, offers no guarantee with regard to the directionality of power and influence at work in such alliances. Author and educational scholar Daniel Munduruku thus warns against the uncritical embrace of modern technologies—particularly those forms that appropriate indigenous knowledge for the pleasure and profit of non-indigenous peoples and enterprises:

[T]he idea of technological knowledge is hypocritical... It's for some. For all are the taxes and the gadgets created by technology. The knowledge is not for everyone; if it were, there would be no need for patents. (...) The university is an accomplice to the theft of knowledge, for it believes that science, above all else, must 'evolve.' (...) Biotechnology is a farce, as is the thesis that sustains it with the argument that it will improve peoples' lives. They forget, however, to specify who those people are. (22-23)

Such debates among intellectuals and activists, like the schism within the indigenous community represented by the AIR in 2010, reveal not only a series of fundamental changes in the nature of indigenous representation—i.e., the fact that Native peoples are increasingly empowered to communicate without filters and intermediaries to non-indigenous audiences—but also, just as crucially, that there is no automatic consensus regarding how this should be done or to what ends. Contrary to the dominant notion that “Indianness” can and should be, above all, one thing—“authentic”—these schisms create opportunities for dialogue and alliance among indigenous peoples and communities who might otherwise never have occasion to collaborate, as well as with non-indigenous individuals and groups who, for any number of reasons, share overlapping priorities and goals.

Such has been the case in the popular organization against Belo Monte, where many indigenous organizations (including the AIR) and

peoples (most notably, the Kayapó) have worked alongside and in collaboration with local communities, fisherman, scientists, legal scholars, environmentalists, university students, artists, religious groups, and national and international human rights groups to oppose the project (Cerqueira; CIMI; ISA; Kamati et al; Leitão; Melo; Movimento Gota D'água; Salm; Xingu Vivo). This coalition impels a radical reformulation of the base of indigenous/non-indigenous relations, and thus of all indigenist politics, from the condition of tutelage long at work in the state's official indigenist bureaucracy to one of partnership and mutually beneficial exchange. What is more, the growth of Native/non-Native political alliances outside the realm of traditional indigenist discourse points to an era in which any form of "identity politics," indigenous or otherwise, must speak not only of where we come from but of where we want to go, and perhaps most importantly, of how we propose to get there. The use of Portuguese as an indigenous language—the Brazilian *lingua franca* in all such collaborations—has been indispensable in the coordination of these efforts on the ground and to their dissemination on-line through the AIR and numerous other indigenous media platforms.

Indigenous Agency and its Skeptics

For critics and antagonists of the Brazilian Indigenous Movement—whether those who occupy positions of power in the state's indigenist bureaucracy or those who do not—authenticity has always been a primordial concern (or target) in discussions of national and international indigenous rights.²⁴ Federal and state programs for "affirmative action" to benefit indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants have long been the source of ferocious contention and debate, and as years of virulent public debate have demonstrated, popular antipathy toward such initiatives grows significantly when the legitimacy of a beneficiary or group of beneficiaries is placed in doubt.²⁵ The question of authenticity is especially noxious when

²⁴ After nearly twenty years of deliberation among hundreds of indigenous and non-indigenous delegates from around the world, the United Nations chose not to define "indigeneity" or "indigenous" in the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. See the Declaration and related documents at www.un.org.

²⁵ After seven years of debate, a watered-down version of the controversial "Statute for Racial Equality" was passed by the Brazilian Congress and signed into

Native peoples and communities are involved, since the fastest and easiest way to take the wind out of the sail of an indigenous cause in Brazil is to point to an “Indian huckster” on the scene or raise the specter of a malevolent, foreign NGO as “Indian puppeteer” in order to seize all agency, initiative, and capacity for organization away from indigenous actors, themselves.²⁶

Public reaction to the AIR and the organized efforts to oppose the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam again provide a case in point. On the one hand, political agents ranging from newspaper commentators to top government officials worked to attribute the impetus for protest against the initiative to everything and everyone—ranging from Greenpeace activists and Hollywood movie stars, to unspecified “demonic forces” (Lima)—except for the people whose lives would be most irreparably altered by its realization. As President Lula put it in a fiery address to the annual Conference on Brazilian Steel in March 2010: “[T]here are a lot of NGOs coming from various corners of the world, renting boats to go to Belém to try to prevent us from building the dam” (Da Silva). Bolstered by an uncanny alliance of left-wing journalists, international commercial interests, and passionate advocates of “national development,” the well-known columnist Paulo Henrique Admorim admired Lula’s unshakable dedication to the project in the face of intense national and international criticism: “When the PiG²⁷ brayed the loudest in defense of catfish and buggers [*dos bagres e dos bugres*], President Lula announced that he would build Belo Monte in the Xingu, or be damned” (“Belo Monte já tem os sócios”).

law by President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva on July 20, 2010. This legislation, which was formulated initially to address the economic and social marginalization of indigenous as well as Afro-descended peoples, was revised to include only a subset of the latter group, “negros” which refers to self-identifying *pardos* and *pretos* (brown and black-skinned people). Unlike the original version of the legislation, the Statue includes no provisions for “racial” quotas in institutions of higher education, public sector employment, or television programming. See: Lei N° 12,288.

²⁶ On “Indian hucksterism” in the Brazilian context, see Warren, *Racial Revolutions*.

²⁷ Admorim uses this acronym to refer (pejoratively) to the so-called “Partido da Imprensa Golpista”—the mainstream media and outlets of mass communication.

In keeping with this defensive nationalist rhetoric, other public supporters of the dam initiative criticized the contact that indigenous leaders, communities, and advocates looking to draw the world's attention to their cause had established with well-known international political and cultural figures, ranging from French president Nicolas Sarkozy, and former president Jacques Chirac, to science-fiction actress Sigourney Weaver, and Canadian film director James Cameron, whose 2009 film *Avatar* was used to highlight contemporary struggles of indigenous peoples from the Amazon to South Asia (Knight; "Tribal People"). Reacting to this news, adamant supporters of the dam project like Mauro Santayana argued that contact between Brazilian Natives and prominent foreigners represented nothing less than a dangerous attack on national sovereignty and honor. The veteran journalist, who credits himself with facilitating Brazil's transition to democracy in 1985 as friend and advisor to Tancredo Neves,²⁸ suggested that those who found themselves in the eye of the Belo Monte "storm" were not real "Indians" at all:

It has been alleged that the Indians' culture is being threatened. But there is, strictly speaking, no more indigenous culture in the region, which is occupied by whites, infested by fake actors who continue to covet Amazonian riches. The problem is of a different nature; it's one of vital space (the same "vital space" that gave birth to German Nazism). The Nordic countries [*sic*] have secular projects to occupy the south of the world – the two great continents of Africa and South America. In light of the probability that intense volcanic activity in the north hemisphere makes a large part of Europe and North America uninhabitable, this project is now coming back to life. We cannot give in and become colonies once again. ("Belo Monte e a Soberania")

Thus borrowing the age-old tactic of indigenists who employ the threat of foreign imperialism in order to appropriate "authentic" Native subalternity as their own, Santayana went a step further by wiping "real Indians" from the map entirely. The fact that indigenous culture had already suffered the negative impact of "white invasion," he surmised, indicated that whatever—or whoever—the remnants of indigenous cultures might have been, they would not be worthy of interest in light of the menace posed by "Nordic" countries aiming to escape volcanic disaster by taking over the global south.

²⁸ See Santayana's website: <http://maurosantayana.blogspot.com/>.

This mental gymnastics led Santayana and his sympathizers to the conclusion that indigenous peoples out to defend their lands and constitutional rights had not only become the “colonizers,” but indeed, colonizers inspired and backed by “Nazi-like” impulses.

At the same time, back in Brasília, FUNAI officials working to shut down the AIR and disgruntled citizens seeking to delegitimize indigenous manifestations in Brasília and across the country launched accusations of racial hucksterism at protestors who failed to substantiate their status as bona fide “Indians”—including many whose legal status was indeed backed by state-issued indigenous identity cards, or RANI.²⁹ Offensive signs of “false Indianness” ranged the gamut, from donning Western dress, driving trucks, and using cell phones, to living in urban areas, chasing white women, and otherwise acting “non-Indian.” As one unhappy editorialist responded to the AIR’s violent removal by military police: “It was about time! [The NGOs] affirm that the Indians are civilized and know what they do. Sic the law on them!” (Vedovo A). The writer conveniently ignored the fact that the indigenous protesters were, of course, exercising their legal right to assembly and free speech in defense of the promises of the 1988 Constitution—among them, land demarcation, and differentiated citizenship.

In keeping with Peruvian Tomás Escajadillo’s characterization of “proper” Indians as necessarily illiterate in a dominant language,³⁰ the notion that “civilized” status would invalidate the rights of indigenous peoples *as such* harks back to indigenist legislation of the early-twentieth century, which in Brazil tied legitimate Indian status to monolingualism in an indigenous language. Article 6 of the 1919 Civil Code hence read: “The jungle dwellers will be subject to the tutelary regime established by law with special regulations, which will terminate in accordance with their

²⁹ Certidão do Registro Administrativo de Nascimento e Óbito de Índio (Certificate of Administrative Record of Indian Birth and Death). This register was established by the Chapter 3, Article 13 of the 1973 Indian Statute (Law 6.001) and regulated on 14 January 2002. Chapter VIII, Article 17 of the 2002 amendment to the 1973 legislation states that any documentation failing to conform to the necessary “legal formalities,” or signed by an “unauthorized person” has no legal status. Article 18 then clarifies that the duty of designating an anthropologist to certify the indigeneity “in cases of doubt regarding the indigenous condition of the individual” falls to FUNAI’s “Diretoria de Assistência” (Assistance Directory).

³⁰ See note 4.

adaptation to the civilization of the country.” For well-intentioned indigenist officials working at the time under the constraints of this vague legislation, the question of language became central when policies intended to “protect” Native peoples were invoked, instead, to justify or facilitate their enslavement. Many a willing judge found that knowledge of Portuguese, “however rudimentary or perfunctory” was enough evidence of the “Indian’s” progress toward “adaptation to the civilized life of the nation” in order to justify his or her transfer to a “tutor” who would, at least in theory, finish the job. In practice, however, the Code gave legal sanction to a system of “manorial domain” (Ministério da Agricultura 333), that has yet to be extinguished and indeed lies at the heart of the AIR and other forms of contemporary indigenous protest across the country.

Along with the popular complaints flung at “fake Indians” supposedly led or brainwashed into their political positions by “foreign” influences and interests, AIR detractors joined the local media fray by condemning the indigenous activists, mocking their manifestation, and dismissing all possible validity of a twenty-first century movement for Native Brazilian rights. The gist of their published attacks on the AIR and their movement was an overwhelming sense that “modern Indians” living in cities, wearing jeans, speaking fluent Portuguese (or English!), and defending their own rights could only pertain to the realm of guile and deceit. As Renato Rezende observed:

A lot of people have no idea that the Indian is shameless and a deadbeat, so as not to say a bum. We are all sons of this land [and] sustainable development is the best thing for all of us. I was in the Amazon this year and there are lots of Indians with cell phones, antennas... [they have] all that stuff in the tribe [sic].

One Hermes Tosta reiterated the well-worn image of indolent, Native “tricksters” out to dupe the government into handing out resources in order to avoid performing any “real work”:

The Indian is clever. When the white man is nearby, he says, “Indians want to hunt and plant manioc.” When he’s gone, he contacts diamond buyers, juggles two SUVs, white women, lots of 51 [a brand of *cachaça*], and many kilos of meat. “If you want to laugh at those [white] fools, call [me] on the cell, because drums are only for in the movies!” [sic]

Another concerned citizen named Roni Vodovo expressed deep discomfort over the protesters' audacity in questioning choices made for them by their rulers:

There was no police invasion of an indigenous area. Quite to the contrary, the Indians, backed by FOREIGN ngo-workers had invaded the Esplanade—Brazilian public territory—to camp out and try to interfere in the decisions of the government. (Vodovo [B]; original emphasis)

Finally, an exasperated Maria Sabino complained that the media coverage had actually been slanted in favor of the AIR protestors:

The press is so hypocritical. Where's the police version [of the story]? Is anyone going to believe the version of those bums? Whoever reads [that report] would think that there had been a massacre. That bunch of bums who do nothing in life. Ruining the landscape of Brasília. About time they got those bums out of there. My congratulations to the police.

Over nearly nine months, hundreds of comments such as these would pepper the local and national news surrounding the AIR. Occasionally, they expressed some solidarity with the indigenous protestors and their critique of FUNAI. Janderson Cruz, for example, argued that “worse than Indians on the Esplanade is the bunch of bloodsuckers from the Ministries, the President of the Republic, and the National Congress—those who hold public office. Those are the real bums...”. The majority of those who bothered to write, however, were in line with the anti-indigenous rhetoric cited here, most of which stems from two basic premises: First, “they” are not real Indians (“anyone who goes by the Esplanade *can see* that they are nothing like Indians”); and second, even if they *were* real Indians, they would have no business protesting in Brasília—or for that matter, being in Brasília at all, for as Sr. Delmiro Portilho put it: the natural HABITAT of Indians is the RESERVATION, NOT THE...ESPLANADE...” (original emphasis).

As in decades and centuries past, such impassioned debates over the role of Native peoples in Brazilian society and the Brazilian imaginary cannot be circumscribed to knee-jerk, anti-Indian rhetoric, to the complex workings of political, social, and cultural power, or even to deep and sometimes thoughtful anxieties over the specificities of human difference. Alas, racism is but the lowest common denominator of such phenomena, all

of which are doubtless at play in our times. Whether at the level of state policy or popular discourse, then, existing tensions over the so-called “indigenous question” cannot be addressed meaningfully without also invoking the issue of resources. As I have tried to show here, a key question thus remains at the heart of the Brazilian Indigenous Movement: How might an economy driven in sizable part on the commodification and utility of natural resources be made reconcilable with a democratic order wherein some groups—including but not limited to Native peoples—confer upon them values that can never be quantified in terms of exports or megawatts?

Freedom from Authenticity: “We are not international NGOs”

Indigenous groups have responded to popular renderings of their political activism in many ways and on varied fronts, ranging from collective appeals through traditional media outlets for national and international support, to editorial columns in on-line newspapers, blogs, and list-serves, and open letters to local and national government officials, including President Dilma and former President Lula. Among this collection of diverse voices, one recurring message that has long been articulated by Native peoples throughout the Americas and around the world stands out as the cornerstone of an ever-expanding movement for recognition and rights: “we exist!” Post-conquest indigenous texts ranging from Guaman Poma’s “Prólogo al Letor Cristiano” to José María Arguedas’ fraught prayer to Tupac Amaru (*iKachkaniraqmi: Aquí estamos, todavía somos!*),³¹ have communicated variations on this claim for centuries. The ongoing work of indigenous activists and advocates in the Legal Amazon (and elsewhere) to “prove” the existence of relatively “un-contacted” peoples on the Peruvian-Brazilian border (ISA), and, as in the case of the Acampamento Revolucionário Indígena, to defend the “integrity” of their own indigeneity vis-à-vis a skeptical, non-indigenous majority, continues to build and transform this movement with the benefit of digital media and the Internet. As in Sartre’s rendering, literary engagement and the “battle”

³¹ In contrast to Dr. Escajadillo, I read José María Arguedas as an indigenous writer despite the fact that he was literate in the Spanish language and “biologically” a light-skinned *mestizo*.

for freedom are not only inseparable, but have become, in many ways, one in the same.

In April 2010, in response to the deteriorating situation regarding the Belo Monte dam and then President Lula's declaration that he would proceed with the development initiative at all costs, *Caciques* Bet Kamati Kayapó, Raoni Kayapó, and Yakareti Juruna published an open letter in the name of over five dozen indigenous leaders from the Amazon that circulated through the indigenous and indigenist blogosphere, but received virtually no attention from the mainstream press. The document exemplifies several of the arguments made here, and is worth quoting at length:

President Lula said last week that he is concerned about the Indians and the Amazon, and that he does not want international NGOs speaking out against Belo Monte. We are not international NGOs. We, 62 indigenous leaders from the communities of Bacajá, Mrotidjam, Kararaô, Terra-Wagna, Boa Vista Km 17, Tukamã Kapoto, Moikarako, Aykre, Kiketrum, Potikro, Tukaia, Mentutire, Omekrankum, Cakamkubem, and Pokaimone have already suffered many invasions and threats. (...) We do not accept the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam because we know... [it] is only going to bring more destruction to our region. (...) We ask: what more does the government want? Why more energy with such destruction? We have already had many ... large demonstrations against Belo Monte, like in 1989 and 2008 in Altamira (Pará), and in 2009, in the community of Piaraçu.... We have already told President Lula personally that we do not want this dam, and he promised us that the plant would not be shoved down our throats. We also spoke to Eletronorte and Eletrobrás, with FUNAI and with IBAMA.³² We informed the government that if the dam goes forward, there will be war. (...) For these reasons, we, the indigenous communities of the Xingu region, invited back James Cameron and his team, representatives of the Movimento Xingu Vivo para Sempre (along with the women's movement, ISA and CIMI, Amazon Watch and other organizations). We want them to help us carry our message to the entire world and to Brazilians who are unfamiliar with Xingu and don't know what is happening here. (...) We are here fighting for our people, for our lands, for our forests, for our rivers, for our children, and in honor of our ancestors. (...) [T]hese forests benefit not only Indians, but also the people of Brazil and the entire world. (...) Everything is connected, like the blood that unites a family. The world has to know what is happening here, to see that by destroying forests and indigenous peoples, they are destroying the entire

³² Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e Dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis (Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources).

world. (...) We declare, in closing, that we are ready, strong, unyielding and ready to fight, and we recall part of a letter that a [North] American indigenous relative sent to their president long ago: “Only when the white man destroys the forest, kills all the fish, kills all the animals, and does away with the rivers, will they understand that no one can eat money.”

The interests expressed in this letter point us back to the political double bind of Brazil’s Native peoples, who like other underrepresented (and unrepresented) populations, participate primarily, if not exclusively, as voices of dissent or opposition in the nominally democratic governance of the states that hold the ultimate authority to administer their lives. The critique of FUNAI and Brazilian “Indian policy” as articulated by these leaders, like the *Acampamento Indígena Revolucionário*, thus puts a new face on an old problem: that “Indian protection” led by non-Indians who are appointed by other non-Indians and articulated exclusively under the auspices of the state do not and cannot protect indigenous peoples from the state. As a century of Brazilian indigenism lays bare,³³ such “protection” ultimately re-inscribes an intrinsically Hobbesian form of sovereignty whereby Native lives will be forever held hostage to the false enlightenment and spurious benevolence of the sovereign alone (Alfred 41-49; Barker 24-26). As the AIR has articulated in harmony with generations of indigenous political activists before them, placing non-Indians at the helm of a state-backed indigenist apparatus deemed responsible for the safekeeping of Native lands and wellbeing is akin to “appointing a fox to guard the chicken coop” (Deloria Jr. 37). There is no more fitting example of this historical injustice than the government’s December 2009 administrative “reorganization” of FUNAI, and the FUNAI leadership’s acquiescence to the government’s prioritization of Belo Monte despite the sustained outpouring of indigenous and other opposition to the initiative since the era of military dictatorship.³⁴

³³ See, for example, Davis, Hemming, Lima, Martins, and Ramos.

³⁴ In November 2011, Kayapó *Cacique* Megaron Txucarramãe was dismissed from his longstanding FUNAI post without explanation. While FUNAI head Mércio Meira refused to comment, Megaron attributed the firing to his outspoken criticism of Belo Monte and the myriad other hydroelectric dam initiatives now being projected into the rainforest.



Indigenous/non-indigenous protest against Belo Monte in São Paulo
(Photo by the author, August 20, 2011).

The indigenous struggle in Brazil is, among these many other things, a battle of words and images on the page and on the computer screen. Despite decades of concerted opposition to the hydroelectric dam by and on behalf of Native leaders, communities, and their national and international supporters, the political desire and discourse of the dominant majority has continually sought to transform indigenous activism into yet another instance of foreign meddling in the affairs of a sovereign nation hard at work to advance the interests of its people. Deploying the message and methods of anti-imperialist imperialism against the interests of indigenous peoples in Brazil (and elsewhere) however, is nothing new. The power of this enduring rhetoric, which stems insidiously from its undeniable historical truth in so many other contexts, means that indigenous writers and other activists are obliged to perform a difficult balancing act: On the one hand, they remind their potential readers that they are not, in fact, “foreign NGOs.” On the other hand, they reserve the right to consult or collaborate with foreign NGOs (and with whomever else they deem fit) should they find it in their interest to do so. What is more, although some indigenous activists and intellectuals have expressed enthusiasm for the NGO-speak of “sustainable progress” and “modernization” (often characterized as “*eco-desenvolvimento*”), their motives for pursuing such options cannot be neatly circumscribed to the realm of economic self-interest. Rather, against the comfortable cost-benefit analyses of such presumably “rational” behavior (Popkin), and against expedient representations of individuals looking to “de-Indianize”

as quickly and completely as possible—“adopting the culture of their ancient masters,” as Mario Vargas Llosa once wrote of his native Peruvian compatriots; or “cut[ting] down the last forest” and moving to LA, as David Stoll commented unsympathetically on young Maya in postwar Guatemala (247)—they remind us that massive influxes of foreign capital and upward trends in international “development” indicators will not necessarily sustain life as it is worth living.

In response to narratives of foreigners usurping indigenous agency and conspiring to unleash imperialist schemes on the rainforest, these intellectuals and activists have sought recourse through writing to develop national and global alliances in support of predominantly non-economic interests that they characterize as a positive, life-giving force for themselves and for “all of humanity.” Claiming the authority to adopt the pen (and the laptop) on behalf of their communities and in the interest of the “whole world,” Native writers call into question the patriotic rhetoric, colonialist rationale, and neoliberal math that have been used by the state and propped up by its dominant majority to justify anti-indigenous initiatives in the name of Brazilian sovereignty and progress. In doing so, they speak and write from beyond the realm of “authenticity” with a strategic embrace of Portuguese as an indigenous language; with careful study of the Brazilian Constitution and international law; and with a post-national appeal to the value of peace, justice, reciprocity, and sustainability that they share with Native and non-Native peoples from across the Americas and around the globe.

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