

From the Lands of *Makunaîmî* to the World: a decolonizing path¹

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Introduction

Social fights are also pedagogical scenarios where the participants act by their learning, unlearning, re-learning, reflection and action models. Recognizing that frequently the actions aiming to change the order of colonial power start with the identification and recognition of a problem, expressing dissatisfaction and opposition to the condition of domination and oppression, organizing the intervention with the aim of overthrowing the current situation and making something different possible (Walsh, 2013, p. 29).

Today, as a professor and researcher at the Federal University of Roraima, I feel *Roraimada*, experiencing *Makunaîmî*'s territory and motivated to write about stories that have crossed my mind since 2008, when I first set my foot here. I walked through the *Makushi* territory, saw their markings in the painting we call cave paintings, learned the *pantonkon* (stories) of the felling of *Wazaka'ye* (tree of all fruits), which started everything that exists here: streams and rocks, that emerged from the deeds of *Makunaîmî*. We write here the word *Makunaîmî/Macunaîma* and with other spellings, following what each author uses, but we prioritize the spelling in the *Makushi* language.

In order to construct transformative texts and proposals that contribute to the defense of indigenous, linguistic and cultural rights, it is necessary to use "[...] methodologies developed in contexts of struggle, marginalization and resistance [...] insurgent practices that destabilize modernity/coloniality and enable alternatives for distinct ways of being, thinking, knowing,

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feeling, existing and living together" (Walsh, 2013, p. 19). Thus, our approach here is pedagogical and seeks to value insurgent languages-cultures and practices (Walsh, 2013). We assume that one of the most important decolonial pedagogies today is the one that reconnects languages and knowledge.

Before coming to Roraima, I read *Macunaíma, o herói sem nenhum caráter* (1928), by Mário de Andrade, and watched the film *Macunaíma* (1969), starring Grande Otelo. However, it was only from the top of Mount Roraima that I was able to visualize the path of *Makunaîmî*, when José, a *Taurepeng* indigenous person, showed us the route that starts in Venezuela and crosses Brazil. I paid attention, because it seemed that his route passed right by *Pedra Pintada* and continued in the direction of other archaeological sites in Roraima.

But it was when I began to study the *Makushi* language that I truly understood that in this life I might not be able to understand the many meanings of *Makunaîmî*. There are countless narratives about him and more may emerge every day, since *Makunaîmî* continues to live in the *Makushi* territory and has been an inspiration for literary works, analyses, and many other arts and existences. So, his path continues, since his children and grandchildren continue the *Makushi* territorialization right here in the Circum Roraima and around the world.

It is worth remembering that *Makunaîmî* is not only *Makushi*. There is the *Taurepang* bilingual book *Panton Pia' A história do Macunaima*, published by Wei Editora in 2019. And, since the *Makushi* and *Taurepang* are Karibe peoples, it is not surprising that they have similar and common references. However, among the *Aruak*, Kamu Dan recently wrote *Makunaimã Taanii Presente de Makunaimã* (2020) and the writer Cristino Wapichana also told us that he dreams of writing about him, having started with *Tomoromu a Árvore do Mundo* (2021). Non-indigenous people, like me, in collaboration with the native peoples, continue to study and publish about him, as happens in the two-act play: *Makunaimã: o mito através do tempo* (2019).

In addition to *Makunaîmî*'s travels, many *Makushi*, for various reasons, move and, thus, expand the territorialization of these people in other Brazilian states, and even outside the country.

Without intending to exhaust the discussions, we divide this chapter into three parts: the first refers to the language that is engraved in the body and is a bridge to memory; the second covers times, epistemologies and spaces; and the third focuses on the literatures, translations and ethnographies of *Makunaîmî*.

Language that is engraved in the body and is a bridge to memory

This title is based on the ideas of indigenous writer Fernanda Vieira de Sant' Anna, for whom each word learned in the originary languages strengthens her and fills her spirit with a "magic capable of (re)creating possible worlds". She remembers the language that is engraved on her body, thus being, for her, a "bridge of memory" (2021, p.118). We recognize this powerful movement of bodies that are the continuity of an ancient indigenous ancestry.

The language/memory that unites us lives in each *Makushi* body. And remembrance can be compared to the remembrance and reassembly of the limbs of a body. We need, then, together to "remember our broken, silenced and interrupted stories" (Sant' Anna, 2021, p. 153). And we feel that resuming the use of the *Makushi* language can help in this direction.

In some indigenous communities in Roraima, colonization was so violent that the use of the *Makushi* language began to occur on small islands, with difficulty in regaining the strength it once had. In many cases, even without being spoken, this language is still present in the bodies. It lives inside the bodies of the "passive speakers"/listeners of the *Makushi* language.

For many years, indigenous populations in Brazil have experienced the erasure of their collective memory. Invaders have tried, with the cross and the sword, to erase their memory and prohibit the use of indigenous languages, but they have not been able to silence these voices. Studies of indigenous history and indigenous literature have been highlighting the protagonism of these populations, even in the face of so much violence and attempts at erasure.

There are repeated attempts to delegitimize indigenous cyclical time, but Glissant reminds us that History is a highly functional fantasy of the Western world, contemporary to the time when the West claimed to be the only one that "made" the history of the World (Glissant, 1999). And many scholars still call indigenous history/literature a myth, discrediting aspects that are part of the *pantonkon* and the lives of these people.

The past to which we have been subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is nevertheless obsessively present. The writer's duty is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in an ongoing way for the immediate present. This exploration, therefore, is related neither to a schematic chronology nor to a nostalgic lament. It leads to the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection into the future, without the help of those plateaus in time from which the West benefited, without the help of that collective density given in advance by an ancestral cultural context. This is what I call a prophetic vision of the past (Glissant, 1999, pp. 63-64, author's emphasis).

This invitation to look at the past, in a prophetic way, is quite interesting and moves in the direction of healing and, who knows, even curing the scars on bodies, spirits and territories,

beyond an imposed temporality, which oppresses cries of denunciation and prevents possible connections.

In the book *Eu sou Makushi e outras histórias*, Julie Dorrico, an indigenous author who currently calls herself *Trudruá*, in the direction we dare to call a prophetic past, states: “my grandmother speaks the language of *Makunaima* [...] *Inglexi* and *Macuxês* because it is certain that my world - the world - needs to be created every day. And it is by transforming my words that I present my voice [...]” (2019, pp. 19-21). The author wrote that it was *Makunaima* who created *Raposa Serra do Sol*. “Grandma says that in the past, in the time of *Piatai Datai*, the *Makushi* sang the *erenkon*, the songs of *Makunaima*, *Anikê* and *Insikiran*” (Dorrico, 2019, p. 33). And so we dialogue with these times, epistemologies and spaces.

Many times, epistemologies and spaces

When we hear from Ailton Krenak that it is possible to postpone the end of the world by telling one more story, we feel that each word sung in the *Makushi* language and the rhythmic beating of the *Kewei* on the ground help to sustain life on Earth. The West has difficulty conceiving that “there are multiple temporalities, epistemologies and different worlds coexisting simultaneously – at diverse times – without destroying each other” (Sant’ Anna, 2021, p. 151).

When we refer to the violence and impositions of the cross and the sword, we continue to draw attention to the need to respect culture and values, instead of imposing, anesthetizing and dominating minds. But unfortunately, we see that this happens in *Makushi* communities, with priests and pastors often competing with the power of *pajés* (shaman).

We seek, in our words, “to move beyond linear views of time and space, which is important when examining Western ideas about history” (Smith, 2012, p. 57). This proposal can also include literature, linguistics and other fields of knowledge that deserve to be decolonized.

We believe that, in order to build cognitive justice, hegemonic ideas need to dialogue with other forms, re-educating the way we examine. It is urgent to open our ears to ancestrality and contemporaneity, to their other perspectives/ideas, daring new repositionings in different spaces and temporalities (Sant’ Anna, 2021). In this context, cultural and linguistic translation is fundamental, revealing to the world other times, classification systems, new and powerful

epistemologies, and differentiated ways of relating to places. For Graça Graúna (2013, p. 15), “contemporary indigenous literature is a utopian place (of survival)”.

Here we take *Makunaîmî* as a being that in its episteme already carries many meanings: in the *Makushi* language, some say that the origin of this name comes from *Oma’ Kanaimî* (bogeyman, devil, satan) and from *makui* (devil). However, not everyone considers *Makunaîmî* a hero, perceiving him as an evil being who, out of revenge, transforms people into animals, stones or objects. In this case, he would be responsible for the evil that still happens in the communities today. In an oral testimony, *Makushi* language teacher Vitor Francisco Juvêncio explained to us:

In the time of the angels, we had *Ani’ke* and *Insikiran*, the older brother who was married and had a mistress, and he worked. *Ani’ke* had spiritual powers and through magic he transformed and brought food such as bananas. He began to covet his brother’s wife and abused her. From this betrayal, *Makunaîmî* was born, the fruit of evil. He became powerful, everything he touches is transformed. I have heard people tell that *Ani’ke* and *Insikiran* are the sons of *Makunaîmî*, but it is the opposite. For those who practice healing, at no time will *Makunaîmî* be called upon in prayers (Juvêncio, 2021).

While for the teacher, who is also a catechist, *Makunaîmî* brings these meanings, for Jaider Esbell, *Makuanima* is one of the children of the Sun, very different from the definitions above and also from the understanding and literature of the hero of Mário de Andrade. The *Makushi* artist exhibited, at the 34th São Paulo Biennial (2020), the series he called *A Guerra dos Kanaimés*, recognizing the presence of these feared and powerful spirits in *Makushi* territory.

For the writer Kamu Dan, a name that means Son of the Sun in the *Wapichana* language, *Makunaimã* is a “sacred deity of the indigenous peoples of Roraima” (2020, p. 23). In his recent book, *Makunaimã*’s corn begins to be replaced by diseased seeds that “had no spirit” (Wapichana, 2020, p. 16). When the community heard the shaman’s prediction, they returned to “cultivating the seeds that *Mukunaimã* had given them as a gift” (Wapichana, 2020, p. 21).

Thus, the character goes from *Poranduba Amazonense* (1890), by Barbosa Rodrigues, to *Vom Roraima zum Orinoco*, by the ethnologist Koch-Grünberg (1911), to *Kaikusiyamî*, *Wairayamî moroopai Maikanyamî*, *Makuxi* texts recorded by the Benedictine monk Dom Alcuíno Meyer, between 1926 and 1948, and published by the Diocese of Roraima, in 2011, which, from pages 93 to 128, speak of *Makunaîmî*. And, thus, *Makunaîmî* continues to follow its path.

Literatures, translations and ethnographies that cross Makunaîmî

I understand that literature is more than writing, it is more than a means of drawing memory and remembrance, it is a doing, it is creating narratives that can act in the (re)creation of realities, in filling the historical rupture into which we were thrown by colonial domination (Sant' Anna, 2021, p. 145).

Based on expanded and utopian ideas of literature, translation and ethnography, I will engage in dialogue with the attempts to break the domination that has plagued *Terreiro de Makunaima*³ since the colonial period.

To introduce the reader to the *Makunaîmî* territories, I will begin by showing a map of the *Makushi* indigenous lands, and where the language of this people and other indigenous languages are spoken in Roraima. The majority of the *Makushi* live in the *Raposa Serra do Sol* Indigenous Land and those who speak the language live in the communities that are in what is now called the municipality of *Uiramutã*.

For Sant' Anna (2021), maps are specialized narratives, social artifacts with meanings loaded with intentionality. These narratives are marked by the perspectives of those who produced them and for whom they were produced. Literature also works with the representation and interpretation of a given context, with cartographic reading being an interpretation and rewriting of a view of the world. Thus, indigenous cartographies, which were excluded, as happened with official history, did not cease to exist. They were silenced by coloniality, but, like indigenous literatures, they have always existed.

Furthermore, the indigenous author proposes the idea of recaptures. "The cartography of belonging involves redrawing the maps of our physical and emotional geographies. Recaptures are part of the processes for decolonizing thought" (Sant' Anna, 2021, p. 89). We believe that it is high time to redo the maps that perpetuate injustices. We worked with some indigenous leaders to include the names of the streams and mountains in indigenous languages, to expand the meanings associated with these important places. In an attempt to think about recaptures, we then mapped some *Makushi* displacements, from those forced to those desired and consented to.

³ Title of the book: *Terreiro de Makunaima: Mitos, Lendas e Estórias em Vivências*, de Jaider Esbell (2012).

Makushi Diaspora

In the arts, the meaning that Sant' Anna gives to the retakes has been strongly present. *Por onde anda Makunaíma?* - a film by Rodrigo Séllos, released in 2020⁴ - tries to answer this question, highlighting the circulation of this figure that even appears in the plots of samba schools. This projection could bring hope that the world could reflect on the needs of the native peoples and their descendants.

The film *Nas trilhas de Makunaima*, by Thiago Briglia (2005), allows us to hear the *Makushi* language with several indigenous people talking about who he was, considering him as “God”, “healer”, “shaman”, “a character who walked this territory”, “a man who walked the world”. There are even those who use *Macunaíma* to talk about other subjects, such as Célio Turino, in the book *Na trilha de Macunaíma ócio e trabalho na cidade* (2005). Thus, *Macunaíma*'s name really became known worldwide.

For Graúna (2013, pp. 171-172), the indigenous diaspora “exists and has been expanding as indigenous lands are invaded”. And there are countless works that speak of these forced displacements. Art and literature by indigenous authors have boldly transformed galleries and cities around the world with their ancestral/contemporary epistemologies.

If the idea of territory can be understood as the union of nature and culture, deterritorialization means redefining space and separating culture/nature, people/land. And this can happen even without physical removal, “there is a displacement of affections and sociocultural displacement. Historical landmarks become chronological illusions of invented times, projecting a new time onto space” (Sant' Anna, 2021, p. 51). In many cases, forced displacements have created traumas and wounds that are difficult to heal.

And when we think of diaspora, we include the displacement of the indigenous community to the city, since, outside of indigenous lands, the *Makushi* often have their identities denied. And this lack of acceptance also frequently occurs with those who try to return to their communities of origin.

There is still a general lack of knowledge regarding the indigenous presence in Brazil. I remember that when I visited Angra dos Reis/RJ, I saw indigenous people selling art on the

⁴ Available for rental at: https://curtaon.com.br/filme/default.aspx?name=por_onde_anda_makunaima. Access 29/07/2023.

street and speaking another language. I thought they were Bolivian. It was only in 2005 that I learned about the existence of the *Guarani* and their communities in Rio de Janeiro (Angra and Parati).

This relationship shows our ignorance regarding the subjects of the diaspora – “those who are physically and/or socially displaced, such as the native peoples who “remained” but became strangers in their own lands” (Minh-Ha, 1991, p. 261). We can understand it as diaspora, but in fact, what we call Brazil today was entirely indigenous land. We see cases like this, of non-recognition and interpretation of displacement as diaspora systematically happening, every time institutions deny an indigenous self-declaration.

Considering the Indigenous diaspora, ethnocide and forced assimilation policies, many Indigenous people have had the collective aspects of their identities interrupted. The Indigenous diaspora consists of a forced displacement of identities that is not only of the order of spatial geography, but also of social and cultural geographies given the rupture of social and cultural ties with the territory that promotes a displacement of collective identities and that does not always imply a displacement of physical space, leading to the foreignization of Indigenous populations in their own territories (Sant’ Anna, 2021, p. 154).

Often, the *Makushi* were born outside of the Indigenous Lands and even far from Roraima and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, far from these places where the majority of *Makushi* territory is located.

Makushi writer and researcher Trudrua Dorrico was able to reconnect with her people in her 20s, when she began to reclaim her identity and took the distance learning course “*Senupanto’ Aminkanpe: Instrumental Makushi Language*”, in Professor Ivo Makushi’s class. She was in Roraima as a CAPES scholarship holder in the Emerging and Consolidating Graduate Development Program and a postdoctoral student in the Graduate Program in Literature (PPGL-UFRR). She discusses this place of literary and theoretical authorship:

From the ethnographic record to literary creation, then, we can affirm a political aesthetic movement that unites voice and letter, historical and collective subjects, ancestral tradition and formal education in favor of rescuing the image of the indigenous in literary representations and, also, for the protagonism of indigenous men, women, and culture (Dorrico, 2018, p. 239).

This way of writing based on what we could call an autoethnography is interesting. Dorrico, author of *Eu sou Makushi e outras histórias*, published in 2019, also tells her vision

of the history of her people and her family. She identified herself as *Makushi* at the age of 26, understanding the meaning of her indigenous traits. She was born in Guajará Mirim (RO) and grew up on the banks of the Madeira River, where she listened to her mother tell her stories, until one day she went to meet her relatives in Boa Vista, Bonfim and Lethen (Guyana). She made this journey in childhood, through her great-grandmother, which led to her encounter with *Makunaimê* and the *Makushi pantonkon* (Dorrigo, 2019). The first part of her book is called “*Eu sou Makushi, filha de Makunaima*” and the third “*Makunaima e os manos deuses*”. She holds a PhD in Literary Theory from the Postgraduate Program in Literature at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul.

The writer and graduate of the in-person *Makushi* language classes, through extension at the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR), Jaider Esbell, was born in the *Raposa Serra do Sol* Indigenous Land, in the municipality of Normandia (RR), and was a *Makushi* artist who conquered the world. He worked as the curator of the exhibition “*Moquéem-Surari*” at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo/ MAM (2021). In March of the same year, he continued his leading role at *Anexo Millan* (Vila Madalena/SP), with Presentation: *Ruku*. We found it interesting the way he included words in his language in his curations, works and exhibitions. He also presented his exhibition of Indigenous Arts *Véxoá - Nós sabe* (2020-2021), at the Pinacoteca in São Paulo.

He left, but returned in December 2020. He was in Boa Vista with *Marupiarte Indígena*: an exhibition and fair of fiber crafts, clay pots and *Parixara*. During the pandemic, he participated in live events such as the curation *Tepi Teatro e os Povos Indígenas*, thoughts on creation as a possibility for life (2020), among many other participations and leading roles.

Of those who have departed to another plane, we recall that there are also the stories of Ely Makushi, who, on the back cover of his book *Ipaty o curumim da selva* (2010), is presented as a descendant of *Makushi*. He completed a master's degree in Society and Culture in the Amazon and a specialization in Ethnodevelopment Management, both at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). He was a teacher in the public school system and an advisor to the Coordination for the Promotion of Indigenous Rights, at the Municipal Secretariat for Human Rights in Manaus. The book *Ipaty* tells of a *Makushi curumim* and describes the geography of Roraima, the ways of living, stories and games of these people and their community.

However, unfortunately, historical reparations have not yet occurred, and indigenous peoples continue to systematically suffer what Célia Xakriabá calls “legislated genocide,” when the State pursues the colonial project through the government apparatus, whether with

legislation and public policies or without them (Xakriabá, 2020). See the pressure from the Temporal Framework that continues to demand constant mobilization of organized indigenous movements.

A farewell so the paths can flow

One day, Koch-Grünberg looked at indigenous souls, considering them as open books in front of him. So I continue too, trying to open my soul to so many shared learnings and feeling a deep gratitude for so many that have opened up on my path.

We are constantly fighting to allow indigenous peoples to live in peace. Acquired rights cannot be changed, and the law must be enforced. Enough is enough with the indigenous population suffering so many violent attacks and invasions.

I began writing this chapter during the Covid-19 pandemic, when, absurdly, the Brazilian government threatened and backtracked, trying to modify and relax indigenous legislation in favor of agribusiness and mining. It was very cowardly to do this in the middle of a pandemic, forcing indigenous leaders to go to Brasília and gather approximately 6,000 people to fight against these announced aberrations. Today, as I submit the chapter, Law 14.701/2023 is being voted on, which reinstates the temporal framework. We fight for an end to the setbacks, for racism to decrease, and for historical reparations to actually happen. We will continue the initiatives of *Makushi* language classes, spreading these powerful multilingual, oral and written literatures through which *Makunaîmî* permeates us.

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XAKRIABÁ, Célia. “Atualmente nós vivemos um momento do genocídio legislado, é pela caneta que está nos matando.” - Célia Xakriabá. A #MPdaGrilagem é mais uma faceta do “genocídio legislado”: é um enorme perigo às terras e às vidas indígenas. Vamos pressionar por #MP910Nao! 11 maio 2020. Twitter: @SurvivalBrasil. Disponível em: <https://twitter.com/SurvivalBrasil/status/1259892213766590464>.