

## INK, THE SPOKEN WORD IN ORAL TRADITION, AND WRITING IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES<sup>1</sup>

### *A TINTA, A PALAVRA NA TRADIÇÃO ORAL E A ESCRITA EM LÍNGUA INDÍGENA*

Eliane Potiguara<sup>2</sup>

Translation: Patrick Rezende

#### **Abstract**

Indigenous peoples in Brazil employ diverse strategies—from digital activism to cultural revitalization—to combat historical marginalization and assert their rights. Through community media, linguistic preservation, and political mobilization, they challenge dominant narratives while protecting traditional knowledge and territories. Cases like Panama's Kuna people demonstrate how technology can amplify Indigenous voices without eroding cultural identity, turning art like the Mola into nationally recognized heritage. In Brazil, initiatives such as Indigenous Games and literature reflect this dual engagement with tradition and innovation. However, threats persist, including intellectual property violations, environmental destruction, and systemic discrimination, as seen in crises like the suicides in Mato Grosso do Sul. The text argues for Indigenous-led public policies that bridge ancestral wisdom and modern tools, emphasizing education and media as key to self-representation. By centering Indigenous cosmologies in dialogues about development, Brazil can address historical inequities and foster a pluralistic society where Indigenous knowledge is valued as a collective contribution rather than appropriated or erased.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Rights; Cultural Preservation; Decolonization; Intellectual Property.

#### **Resumo**

Os povos indígenas no Brasil empregam estratégias diversas – do ativismo digital à revitalização cultural – para combater a marginalização histórica e afirmar seus direitos. Através de mídias comunitárias, preservação linguística e mobilização política, desafiam narrativas dominantes enquanto protegem saberes tradicionais e territórios. Casos como o do povo Kuna, no Panamá, demonstram como a tecnologia pode amplificar vozes indígenas sem diluir identidades, transformando expressões como a arte *Mola* em patrimônio nacionalmente reconhecido. No Brasil, iniciativas como os Jogos dos Povos Indígenas e a literatura autóctone refletem essa dupla articulação entre tradição e inovação. Contudo, ameaças persistem, desde violações de propriedade intelectual até discriminação sistêmica, evidenciada em crises como os suicídios no Mato Grosso do Sul. O texto defende políticas públicas indígenas que conciliem saberes ancestrais e ferramentas modernas, destacando educação e comunicação como eixos para a autorrepresentação. Ao centrar cosmologias indígenas nos debates sobre desenvolvimento, o Brasil pode superar desigualdades históricas e construir uma sociedade plural, onde esses conhecimentos sejam valorizados como contribuições coletivas – não apropriados ou apagados.

**Palavras-chave:** Direitos Indígenas; Preservação Cultural; Descolonização; Propriedade Intelectual.

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<sup>2</sup> She was nominated in 2005 for the international project "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize." She is a writer, poet, and teacher, with degrees in Portuguese Literature and Education. She is the founder of GRUMIN – Indigenous Women's Education Group – and a member of Inbrapi, Nearin, the Intertribal Committee, Ashoka (social entrepreneurs), the Peace Association, and Consul of Poets of the World. She worked on the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in Geneva. She received awards from the PEN Club of England and the Free Expression Fund, USA.

Books: *Metade Cara, Metade Máscara* (Half Face, Half Mask - a memoir book), *O coco que guardava a noite* (The Coconut That Held the Night - short stories), among others.

Indigenous peoples have always been pushed to the margins of Brazilian cultural norms, due to the intolerance and social and racial discrimination of the dominant culture—which, of course, dictates the rules of information and communication. In the recent past, when Indigenous Peoples in Pará rose up against the construction of the Kararaô dam, or when today, leaders—however precariously—share information through radio, video, and community television, challenging the “global villages,” or when they create literacy booklets in their mother tongues, or websites to promote healing practices or to sell *guaraná*<sup>3</sup>, for instance, they are doing so in an attempt to step out of cultural invisibility. Their aim is to strengthen their people and culture, and to express themselves—whether in the fight for human rights or in the effort to bring their contributions to light within official, scientific, academic, and religious knowledge systems. In essence, they are asserting their traditional knowledge—their intellectual property. This must be respected and amplified!

When Indigenous midwives resist government sterilization programs targeting women, when shamans and healers gather in the mountains, or when leaders block roads in defense of their territories—they are all raising their voices to protect their traditions and their environment. This is voice!

When Indigenous peoples form dance groups, theater troupes, children’s choirs, promote written media on the Internet, or elevate Indigenous literature, they do so with the full intent of disseminating information and communication that they are often denied, due to the ongoing devaluation of their millenary culture. This devaluation—rooted in historical and ethical issues—must, at last, be recognized and respected in practice. And why not also addressed through compensatory policies, by means of affirmative actions implemented within public policies?

All of these expressions are part of Indigenous culture and are intertwined within a single cosmology: the ancestral territory, the ethical, mythical, mystical, magical, and sacred space of ancestry—strengthened by the elders and carried forward by the youth through informal and natural education, further reinforced by formal education. Hence the importance of establishing an Indigenous University to support a differentiated educational approach.

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<sup>3</sup> Translator’s note: a climbing plant native to the Amazon rainforest, easily found in Brazil. Its seeds are renowned for their high caffeine content and have been used for centuries by Indigenous peoples.

This Indigenous worldview is a profound contribution to Brazilian society—one that must be encouraged as a step toward respecting cultural diversity, in which Indigenous culture also stands as a vital exponent.

The information and communication society plays a crucial role in the dissemination of Indigenous culture. However, we are aware that advanced technologies are not traditionally part of Indigenous ways of life. Still, consider this case: the International Indian Treaty Council, over 30 years ago, was one of the first Indigenous organizations in the United States to carve out political space within the United Nations Human Rights Commission. It fought for the creation of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ultimately leading to the establishment of a Permanent Forum within the UN. Following its lead, hundreds of Indigenous organizations emerged—including many from Brazil.

The Treaty Council was among the first to use the Internet as a tool to uphold Indigenous rights. Publications, dances, and demonstrations were other powerful forms of communication within the information society, helping to secure the recognition of treaties with the government. Canada's First Nations managed to change the country's Constitution, gaining societal support through the media's diffusion of their culture. A major fishing-related project, for instance, was supported by the Canadian government as a result of the partnership between Indigenous peoples and the information society.

The Kuna people of Panama, through their cultural expression promoted in the information society, now have clearly defined territories and their art literally present in the streets. As we can see, respect is born when understanding blossoms. The beautiful fabric handicraft called "*Mola*", woven with infinite colors, is now a national symbol—a design instantly recognized and respected by both society and the world as Indigenous art, and therefore, deeply valued.

Thus, our medicinal herbs, our *Marajoara* Amazonian pottery of Indigenous origin, our traditional foods, our *guaraná*, *cupuaçu*<sup>4</sup>, our sacred places, our lands, our cemeteries, our songs, stories and legends, our prayers, our sacred chants, our hunting, our fishing, our

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<sup>4</sup> Translator's note: *cupuaçu* is a tropical fruit native to the Amazon rainforest, particularly in Brazil, and is considered a delicacy in Pará's regional cuisine. It has a large, brown, fuzzy outer shell and a creamy, white pulp with a unique and fragrant flavor. *Cupuaçu* is consumed in a variety of ways depending on the region of Brazil, including as part of lunch dishes, in juices, or as a dessert ingredient. In addition to its culinary uses, it is also widely employed in the cosmetics industry due to its high nutritional value and moisturizing properties.

education, health and agriculture must all receive this same kind of recognition and treatment. In short, countless elements can be shared within the information society, strengthened by Indigenous Communication Networks, community radio stations, websites, television channels, and even Indigenous conferences and seminars—whether in person or virtual—not in the precarious way we've been doing, but instead through technological, scientific, educational, and systematic means, supported by the government through public policies discussed at the grassroots level of Indigenous communities.

What kind of development do we seek? The inclusion of Brazilian Indigenous peoples in the information society is indeed a challenge, especially given the fragile protection of their intellectual rights and their intellectual property. But it is a challenge that must be met—through awareness, technical training, capacity building, and the creation of Indigenous databases to safeguard their historical heritage and ensure the protection of their patents. Traditional culture undergoes changes in the face of modernity and technology. These technologies must be used as tools in the defense of Indigenous rights.

Development for Indigenous peoples must be a process that aligns traditional culture with new technologies and new hopes—and this is something the Kuna people of Panama have done with great distinction: they unite Indigenous tradition with new technological concepts and their information society, without losing their cosmovision. For this reason, they are pioneers of Indigenous press and literature, just as many Indigenous peoples of Mexico are as well. Indigenous peoples should look to these models of challenge, development, and technological innovation—models that do not destroy Indigenous biodiversity and territoriality.

The Commission on Education, Culture, and Sports has the potential to take a significant political and historical step by recognizing, supporting, and investing in the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the information and communication society through programs created and managed by the Indigenous peoples themselves. Today in Brazil, we have several editions of the Indigenous Games, which reflect pure oral, visual, and written culture—an example of dignity!

The open veins that pour the blood of our sacrificed ancestors, the wombs of fertile mothers saddened by oppression, the most transcendent chants silenced by cultural imposition—all of these magical, yet real, elements will be replaced by children, youth, and organizations prepared for the future, through their inclusion in the information and

communication society, gradually eliminating the disparities of society and eradicating social and racial discrimination against Indigenous peoples.

Advancements in the struggle of the Brazilian Indigenous movement have taken place in tangible ways. Despite some challenges, and although there are still isolated issues—such as the lack of support from public policies—Indigenous Education in Brazil is now a reality. It is a differentiated form of education, in which the Indigenous worldview is fully embedded in its broadest sense. Within this context, Indigenous Literature must be seen as a tool of awareness, strength, and liberation.

This literature should be encouraged through Indigenous Education, integrated into the daily life of schools, so that Indigenous peoples themselves can truly be the voices of their cultures, traditions, and worldviews. However, another fundamental aspect must also be considered: the traditional oral discourse carried by the elders and shamans of the community, which must never be ignored. In fact, this oral discourse is the solid foundation—it is the conceptual framework, the core ethnic principles that sustain the tradition and will, in turn, ground the written form, based on the unique linguistic values of each Indigenous people.

In the face of the modern world and the harmful aspects of neocolonialism and globalization, it becomes even more evident that written records—produced by Indigenous peoples themselves—are a necessary measure of precaution and care. This ensures that Indigenous storytelling and historiography do not fall into the public domain or end up benefiting third parties or institutions financially, historically, or morally through unauthorized use and copyright violations.

Indigenous peoples across the globe continue to fight, in both national and international forums, for the preservation of their cosmologies—against both natural predators and imposed ones, such as bourgeois philosophies, religious doctrines, pseudo-moralistic patriotic ideologies, and colonial or imperialist philosophies. The social impoverishment of Indigenous groups also leads to the loss of cultural, spiritual, and ethical values. In such contexts, women, children, and elders bear the heaviest burdens of social and racial discrimination—as is painfully evident in the hunger and suicide crisis in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. The impoverishment and destruction of Indigenous lands are also among the highest risk factors. Hundreds of examples reflect this reality.

Indigenous literature plays a vital role in cultural recovery, preservation, and the strengthening of ethnic worldviews. Future Indigenous writers must be encouraged from an early age through bilingual and general education. The Indigenous writer is the future anthropologist—the one who sees, understands, and records. Indigenous peoples must walk on their own paths.

Centers of Indigenous thought and writing must also be supported and empowered within Indigenous organizations, just as discussions on gender, race, and ethnicity have been increasingly brought into Assembly debates. Once problems are identified, they must be promptly addressed through studies that aim to develop strategies and mechanisms to resolve difficulties, conflicts, and differences.

When the rose blooms, the bees come naturally to collect its nectar. Let the rose of our hearts, souls, and character bloom fully within Brazilian society—through testimonies of our capacity, self-management, dialogue, and ethics—so that this society may swiftly dismantle the discourse and practices that currently exclude Indigenous peoples. Respect and meaningful results will follow.

Indigenous thinkers and writers: Speak and shape the world anew!