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Brazilian indigenous peoples and the debate on authenticity and cultural change

Abstract: Debate on indigenous identity and modernization has been widespread since the 1990s. The increased use of modern means of communication by the Brazilian indigenous peoples and their active participation in society have introduced a new dynamic to this debate and brought it to the fore once again. The debate has also been stoked by the reactions of Brazil's non-indigenous society to the cultural transformations undergone by the country's various indigenous communities. The juxtaposition of traditional culture and modernization often generates processes of cultural resistance, in this case on the part of the dominant society, which continues to cultivate an old-fashioned image of the Indian. This article attempts to analyze the causes of resistance to cultural changes generated by the active participation of indigenous peoples in today's information society and the debate on cultural change, authenticity, and cultural identity.

Keywords: Indigenous Identity; Internet; Modernization; Cultural Resistance; Cultural Change; Brazil; 21st Century.

Resumo: O debate sobre o tema 'identidade indígena e modernização' ocorre de forma extensa já desde os anos 90. A intensificação do uso de modernos meios de comunicação pelos indígenas brasileiros e sua participação ativa na sociedade concebeu nova dinâmica a este debate, fazendo-o ressurgir, principalmente devido às reações da sociedade não indígena brasileira diante às transformações culturais adotadas por várias comunidades indígenas no Brasil. Processos conjuntos e paralelos de revigoração da cultura tradicional e modernização evocam muitas vezes reações de resistência cultural, principalmente existentes nos discursos da sociedade dominante. Este artigo procura analisar as causas da resistência a mudanças culturais geradas pela participação ativa de povos indígenas na sociedade da informação nos dias de hoje e debater termos como transformações culturais, autenticidade e identidade cultural.

Palavras chave: Identidade Indígena; Internet; Modernização; Resistência Cultural; Transformação Cultural; Brasil; Século XXI.

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Although debate on indigenous identity in anthropological studies has been taking place for some time (Conklin 1997; Ramos 2001; Venne 2004), renewed discussion has arisen, especially since the beginning of the new millennium when indigenous peoples in Brazil and worldwide began to take an active part in the digital age, in particular through the use of the Internet. Some indigenous communities, such as the Amônia River Ashaninka in the State of Acre or the Guarani community named Sapucaý near Rio de Janeiro, use the Internet for communication with the outside world and to keep themselves informed about things happening outside their communities. More specific uses include sending documents by e-mail, maintaining correspondence with government institutions or Non-Governmental Organizations, using real-time communication software such as Skype or Messenger to talk to relatives outside the communities, planning projects with organizations, answering journalists' questions, or using Facebook or Orkut. These communities are using the Internet in different ways.

My doctoral research focused on the use of the Internet by indigenous peoples in Brazil. It primarily investigated three Brazilian Internet projects directed at the indigenous population;¹ the presence of indigenous groups on the Internet; and the significance of this information and of communication technology for the indigenous population in Brazil. From 2004 to 2007 I travelled to Brazil several times to do my field research, concentrating my work mainly in the State of Acre, where I analyzed Internet use, especially by the Ashaninka people of the Amônia River (Fernandes Ferreira 2009). The intense debate on indigenous identity and cultural changes which occurred during my doctoral research made it necessary to examine non-indigenous resistance to 'cultural appropriation' in indigenous cultures. An example of this cultural appropriation is the embracing of the Internet as an instrument of communication and information. Analyzing how the outdated image of reality established by the non-indigenous population (a Western concept of Indianness) is constructed and supported clarified the disregard and detachment with which a great part of the Brazilian non-indigenous population addresses indigenous cultures.

An important part of this research centered on the difficulties encountered by Brazilian indigenous peoples in maintaining their identity vis-à-vis the dominant society and in gaining acceptance for the reality of their lives. Being indigenous today, in the age of Internet communication, poses additional problems – and this is the reason why I challenge the issue of 'authenticity'. The debate on indigenous identity and authenticity can be extended to the analysis of how indigenous identity or even 'Indianness' (Ramos 2001: 2) can be constructed (Conklin 1997: 722; Landzelius 2006: 18; Ramos 2001). Performance, identity construction and the involvement of different agents such as indigenous and non-indigenous ac-

1 *Rede Povos da Floresta, BAY, and Índions Online* (Eliane Fernandes Ferreira 2009).

tivists and supporters of the indigenous movement can play a role in the process of identity construction (Conklin 1997; Ramos 2001).² Yet I will limit the scope of this article to a discussion of ‘authenticity’ and the nostalgic imagery of indigenous peoples (cf. Conklin 1997) constructed and sustained mainly by non-indigenous society, even though indigenous peoples also collaborate in the construction of this nostalgic image (Conklin 1997; Prins 2002).³ By ‘authenticity’, I mean the attempts to keep the image of an ‘exotic Indian’, such as that encountered in schoolbooks or museum exhibitions, alive. The characteristics of this old-fashioned image of Indians often populate the arguments of non-indigenous people, as will be shown later in this paper.

Brazil has approximately 232 native ethnic groups and a total indigenous population of approximately 700,000 people, comprising approximately 0.4% of the nation’s 190 million inhabitants, although numbers vary according to the source of information (IBGE 2000; ISA 2010).

In order to survive under the growing pressure of the dominant society, indigenous groups in Brazil increasingly choose to adopt Western cultural ways and strategies, such as modern communication technologies, to empower and protect their groups and cultures. This often meets with critical reaction from the dominant non-indigenous society, which questions and objects to cultural variations or observes such changes with sarcasm. All too often, non-indigenous society, not only in Brazil but also worldwide, denies the right of indigenous peoples to cultural change, to strengthen and protect their own way of life and, under the current conditions, their culture. Cultural changes or adaptations on the part of the indigenous peoples often provoke reactions from members of the dominant non-indigenous society, which is accustomed to questioning the authenticity of indigenous groups’ identity in cases of deviation from cultural stereotypes. For this reason, indigenous peoples in Brazil and throughout the entire world often feel compelled to defend their indigenous identity (Greymorning 2004).

2 The construction of images can evoke primitivism, and notions of authenticity (Conklin 1997: 722). NGOs, Indian activists, journalists, and photographers take an active part in the construction or deconstruction of these exotic images (Conklin 1997: 726). Each protagonist has its own motivation or reason, such as fundraising, survival strategy, strategic adaptation (Conklin 1997: 717), empowerment strategy of their own group, etc.

3 The use of body decorations, for example, turns into a strategy of symbolic identity and also political presence, mainly during interactions with non-Indians. These acts can be interpreted as a form of identity construction, but this is also part of a political strategy, particularly when body paint and feathers can be the suit and tie of an Indian (Conklin 1997: 720). Adornments or body symbols also bring respect to the person who is wearing them, and each cultural group has its own form, signs, symbols, and political tools.

1. Being indigenous in Brazil

Indigenous peoples in Brazil still suffer greatly from the prejudices that plague their group and culture. A large section of Brazilian non-indigenous society often sees them as westernized for wearing jeans and sneakers, or for using computers and new technological equipment. By ‘a large part of non-indigenous society’, I mean members of all classes, from poor to rich.⁴ Furthermore, the general public does not recognize the effort Indians make to improve their social and political situation. Some Brazilian – mainly farmers and landowners, but also other groups of society – use arguments that have nothing to do with the authenticity debate, but with the empowerment process of the Brazilian Indians. For instance, they consider the designation of new indigenous lands a threat to Brazilian sovereignty, and claim that there is already too much land set aside for too few indigenous peoples (Ramos 1998: 3). To give another example, when indigenous leaders travel to foreign countries to talk about their culture or to participate in a congress, they are often accused by their opponents in Brazil (landowners, farmers, local politicians) of collaborating with foreign countries or non-governmental organizations interested in seizing the rich biodiversity of the Amazonian Region.

Regarding the use of the Internet, various people to whom I described my research in Brazil – whether friends of mine or people I did not know well – used to ridicule the use of satellite Internet by Brazilian indigenous groups with comments such as: “Oh, they are living very well. They live even better than me with their satellite Internet access”. Such statements should be understood against the backdrop of prejudice against Indians in Brazil, where it is not uncommon to hear them called ‘lazy’ and ‘useless’.

But in Germany, too, I noticed some resistance regarding the use of the Internet among Brazilian indigenous communities. When I explained my research to people, they were often concerned that Internet access would be a threat for the indigenous community, causing the loss of their culture by giving them too much access to Western ways and Western cultural elements. Even colleagues at the interdisciplinary graduate school “Processuality in transcultural contexts: dynamics and resistances” at the University of Bremen at first did not seem to acknowledge that cultures are constantly in movement and flux. Several times I felt myself almost forced to justify Brazilian Indians’ use of the Internet.

4 Conklin (1997: 721) quotes Brysk (1996: 46), who observes that there exists a different perception of the “Indian as Other” between Latin American policymakers and the international public. Brysk writes: “To their compatriots, Indians’ appearance made them threatening, sub-human, or simply invisible; to North Americans and Europeans, it marked them as fascinating, exotic, and romantic” (Brysk 1996: 46, quoted in Conklin 1997: 721).

As a result of the state of persistent conflict with dominant non-indigenous society and recurrent doubts about indigenous identity and contemporary lifestyle, the indigenous peoples of Brazil are practically obligated to fight to a greater extent for their rights and for their place in society, and are asked to provide evidence of their ethnic identity so that they will not be considered globalized or assimilated.

If their attempt to position themselves as a group with a culturally independent identity were not already difficult enough, having to defend and reaffirm their cultural identity (Potiguara 1992), validate it, or prove its 'authenticity' makes it all the more difficult. This Western concept of 'authenticity' imposed by non-Indians is a denial of the contemporary reality of indigenous communities in Brazil. It ignores and negates the position of the 'other', the independence and needs of indigenous peoples. In his article "Creolization, diaspora, and hybridity in the context of globalization", Stuart Hall observes that cultures are in steady motion. He writes,

Culture change as a consequence of contact zones, the movement of peoples, and transcultural communication of different types is not the exception but the norm. All cultures are in that sense permeable to cross-cultural influences (Hall 2003: 191).

Even though scholars intensively discuss cultural change or adaptation, especially in the case of indigenous cultures, a nostalgic or exotic notion of indigenous peoples still exists in the academy. And, outside the academy, a great proportion of non-indigenous society still seems hard-pressed to accept the process of cultural change or adaptation in indigenous groups. This resistance seems to be based on exotic and romantic imagery of indigenous peoples – a picture of naked Indians with feathers and jewellery, living in the jungle (Bird 1996; Conklin 1997; Venne 2004: 130-136).⁵ In view of this, it is important to extend the debate on authenticity to explain why arguments of 'cultural authenticity' generally speak

5 In her article "Body paint, feathers, and VCRs: Aesthetics and authenticity in Amazonian activism", Conklin (1997) looks intensively into this subject. On the one hand, being naked or the use of native body decorations is seen as primitive or evokes the exotic side of being Indian. But on the other hand, non-Indians often link the use of Western clothes and technologies by Indians to the process of identity loss. Conklin (1997: 716) notices that Brazilian Indians had many "motivations to reduce or abandon nudity and the use of native body styles". By interacting with non-Indians, Brazilian Indians felt the necessity to use Western clothing as "a strategy to gain greater respect and equality in face-to-face interactions" (Conklin 1997: 716). Nowadays many indigenous leaders use some decorative elements as a sign of pride when they interact with non-Indian persons. Young Ashaninka leaders from the Amônia River in the State of Acre wear their clothes and body decorations proudly. Depending on the occasion, Indians wear their native decorations as a sign of Indianness or of 'authenticity'. According to Conklin (1997: 718) the combination of native decorations with Western clothing is a strategy to "mark a distinctly indigenous identity", differentiating Indians from other non-Indians. There has been an evident renewed pride in native body styles, mostly since the 1980s, notices Conklin (1997: 718).

against the dynamics of culture, create a burden for indigenous cultures, and butt at principles of civil society, even raising human rights questions. Who is allowed to change culturally and who is not?

2. Debating ‘authenticity’

The notion of ‘authenticity’ often comes into conflict with cultural change because culture is active and in steady motion, while authenticity, in the sense of continuity, is based upon rigidity (Conklin 1997: 715). Authenticity in this sense leaves, according to Conklin (1997: 715), “little room for intercultural exchange or creative innovation, and locates ‘authentic’ indigenous actors outside global culture trends and changing ideas and technologies”. For the Dutch anthropologist Koen De Munter (2004: 94), for example, the discourse on authenticity suffocates because it delays or even breaks the dynamics of culture. In his article, “Five centuries of compelling interculturality”, De Munter points out that the Peruvian writer and anthropologist José María Arguedas

[...] warned at a very early stage that the “indigenous problem” would not be solved through, nor could be reduced to, the creation of a kind of folkloric reservation (as official politics tend to do) or authentic relic (as culturalists might defend). The whole issue was about living traditions with the right to adopt – and adapt – “strange” elements from another group [...]. The ability to adopt, communicate and transform other cultural practices can accord perfectly with the idea of continuity qua tradition (De Munter 2004: 97).

Furthermore, the question of whether annexing foreign cultural elements into indigenous cultures strengthens such cultures or leads to their ruin is discussed by both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. While cultural adaptation can be interpreted as a survival or a political strategy, some still consider it a step towards cultural assimilation. Conklin points out: “All politics are conducted by adjusting one’s discourse to the language and goals of others, selectively deploying ideas and symbolic resources to create bases for alliance” (Conklin 1997: 724). Thus, survival strategies are methods of reaching out to what is important for the group or the individual. It should not be automatically seen as assimilation, but as strategic adaptation, or adjustment to the actual situation of the politics of the group or individual (Conklin 1997: 724).

De Munter (2004: 97) emphasizes that the right to cultural change is usually permitted only to the Western world and its culture. Anthropologist Jeffrey Sissons turns against protectionist and conservative positions of the dominant non-indigenous society, writing that indigenous peoples “are thus caught [...] in a binary trap, not of their own making; they can choose to be other as hybrid or other as pure” (Sissons 2005: 58). He additionally mentions Jimmi Durham, a

Cherokee artist who says that it is very difficult for indigenous peoples to be themselves.

Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Ramos writes that, after contributing to the impoverishment of indigenous cultures, some people “proceed to lament the loss of authenticity” represented by the image of “the naked Indian with bow and arrow in hand, living off what Mother Nature alone provides” (Ramos 1998: 84). Renato Rosaldo (1989: 68-86) called this phenomenon of non-indigenous people lamenting the loss of authenticity by indigenous groups ‘imperialist nostalgia’.

Ramos criticizes the fact that non-indigenous people never connect this process of cultural change to the effects of colonial and post-colonial society and its politics:

Why Indians are now covered with clothes, often rags, why they no longer hunt with bow and arrow, or with anything else for that matter, on their badly shrunk and depleted patch of land, are questions that the nostalgic invaders hardly ask, and when they do, they never link the condition of the Indians to the effects of missionizing, land usurpation, and consequent economic dependence (Ramos 1998: 84).

This lack of self-criticism on the part of non-indigenous society is illustrated in an example given by Brazilian indigenous philosopher and anthropologist Daniel Munduruku. In his book “Histórias de Índio”, he relates a discussion that two Brazilian women had about him during a train journey in São Paulo:

- See that young man? He looks Indian, said lady A.
- Yes he does. But I’m not sure. Haven’t you noticed he is wearing jeans? He can’t be an Indian and wear white man’s clothes. I don’t think he is a real Indian, contested lady B.
- Yah, maybe. But can’t you see his hair? Straight, straight hair. Only Indians have hair like that. Yes, I think he’s an Indian, lady A said, defending me.
- Gee, I don’t know. Have you noticed he wears a watch? Indians see time by the weather. The Indian’s watch is the sun, the moon, the stars... He can’t be an Indian, argued lady B.
- But he has slit eyes, said lady A.
- And he also wears shoes and shirt, said lady B ironically.
- But his cheeks jut out. Only Indians have a face like that. No, he can’t deny it. He can only be an Indian and a pure one, it seems (Munduruku 1996: 34, quoted in Ramos 1998: 84 85).

In this conversation we can observe arguments based upon Daniel Munduruku’s visual nature or ‘body surface’, his straight hair, for instance, or the assumption that Indians tell the time from the position of the sun. Visual aspects influence the categorization of people, evoking prejudices or correspondent images. According to Conklin (1997: 714), this corresponds to a kind of “equation of non-Western cultural authenticity with visual exoticism and primitivism”. Written texts

and oral stories feed the imagination with respect to events, objects and beings. These images can be perpetuated, for instance, by old, scholarly books, old-fashioned museum exhibitions, or be ‘updated’ by modern texts, films and photography.

As I have already mentioned, many non-indigenous persons in Brazil (but also in other parts of the world), continue to hold on to the exotic image of indigenous peoples: an image that they usually learn at school and that never corresponded to the actual reality of contemporary indigenous peoples. Each deviation from this conservative stereotyped portrayal of indigenous peoples raises doubts about the ‘authenticity’ of the cultural identity of individuals or groups. Conklin (1997: 711ff.) sees it as a “Western notion of cultural authenticity” or a “simplistic equation between exotic costume and authenticity”.

Stressing the dynamics of cultures, and emphasising the difficulty of having cultures that are separated from each other, delineated, and ‘pure’, Sissons notes:

Within any post-settler state there is a huge amount of cultural sharing going on, providing fertile ground for cultural invention. But to recognize that cultures are not discrete – that they overlap and have fuzzy edges – is not to say that they are without cores or centres. Cultures have hearts (Sissons 2005: 32-33).

Cultures change permanently and this is not a modern phenomenon. It has been a process since the beginnings of culture or mankind. An Ashaninka representative from the Amônia River in the State of Acre in Brazil expressed the opinion of many of his community members when he said to me in an interview in 2005, “You whites wish us to live isolated in our forests, just like you would like us to live. We also have the right and the ability to use modern technologies, too”. And he was not the only one who criticized the nostalgic image maintained by non-indigenous society. I have also heard this view from Kaxinawá and Yawanawá activists in the Brazilian State of Acre. But the pride and existing prejudice of non-indigenous society concerning indigenous cultures seem difficult to overcome. Jeffrey Sissons places the authenticity debate or challenge on the same level as racism and hidden Primitivism, and asks the following question:

Why should first peoples be expected to have authentic identities while settlers and their descendants remain largely untroubled by their own ill-defined cultural characteristics? Why should indigeneity as opposed to migration be especially associated with cultural purity? (Sissons 2005: 37).

Sissons considers the debate about ‘authentic identities’ a poorly-resolved issue of settlers and their descendants, who keep alive racial prejudices against the indigenous part of society. This is an issue which requires deeper analysis, so that measures against existing prejudices can be better investigated.

Sharon Venne (2004: 130), a Cree-indigenous lawyer, considers the wish of non-indigenous society to freeze indigenous peoples in time, in their old image, as the attempt to construct a less threatening image of indigenous peoples in the eyes of the dominant society. Venne remarks that the wish of Western culture to stop indigenous peoples in time is a denial of their existence. She emphasizes, “If you must look, dress, and sound like their image of an Indigenous person to be accepted, then the battle has been lost” (Venne 2004: 136).⁶

To keep indigenous peoples at their old standard of living and social condition means that they can be further controlled by the dominant society. They must live as they lived for centuries, without having any rights and kept under permanent suppression. Each advance in indigenous political empowerment seems to raise fear in a part of Brazilian society. Its jurisdiction clashes with that of the indigenous peoples. The fight for land rights by indigenous groups, for instance, leads non-indigenous people to make statements such as “too much land for so few Indians” (Ramos 1998: 3). And this is a statement still frequently heard in Brazilian non-indigenous society.

Vincent Carelli, video-maker and founder of the Brazilian project called “Video nas Aldeias” (Video in the Villages)⁷ criticizes the exotic aspect of the old-fashioned image of the Indian kept alive by many:

For the great majority of people, the Indians are a fiction in which they project ideals of wisdom and balance, harmony with nature, collective living, etc. and these people would like this dream to remain untouched, the Indians preserved in a kind of human zoo or, at least, that the changes in these societies be retarded as much as possible (Carelli 2006: 4).

Trying to help change this exotic, romanticized image of Brazilian Indians in Brazilian society, Carelli pointed to the example of the Indian Program, a project

6 At the same time, some Native Amazonians proudly use headdresses, body paint and feathers to proclaim their cultural distinctiveness (Conklin 1997: 712), transforming the body surface into a kind of a “social skin” (Conklin 1997: 724), a concept propagated by Turner (1980). But this kind of “renewed pride of being Indian” (Conklin 1997: 724) can also be interpreted as an instrument of identity construction or be seen as a way of keeping or feeding the romantic image of the Indian – even if the intention of the person wearing these costumes has political roots. Conklin explains: “Reductionist constructions of Indian identity ignore inter- and intracultural diversity and distort the complexity of native Amazonian goals and relations to natural environments and national economies” (Conklin 1997: 714).

Conklin (1997: 719) adds that such high-status individuals as journalists, anthropologists, and cinematographers, who value indigenous culture, have influenced this new pride. In his article “Representing, resisting, rethinking: historical transformations of Kayapó and anthropological consciousness”, Turner mentions that contact with individuals who were interested in their culture helped the Kayapó to develop an awareness “of the political value of their ‘culture’ in their relations with the alien society” (Turner 1992: 301).

7 Project Video nas Aldeias: <<http://www.videonasaldeias.org.br/>> (10.10.2011).

born from an invitation by the University of Mato Grosso to make a video about the Indians. Carelli, instead, suggested involving the Indians in the creation of the video, which was produced between 1995 and 1996 (Carelli 2006: 5). According to Carelli, the program generated great interest among the Indians of different villages. He quotes Leonardo Tukano, a Tukano Indian from the Rio Negro:

Of all the films about Indians that we show our pupils, it was the Indian Program that generated the most interest. My pupils don't even want to hear about tradition, for them this is the incarnation of what is old-fashioned and out. Neither do the pupils' parents want their children to walk backwards (Carelli 2006: 6).

According to Carelli, this TV project, through the example of Indian presenters, reporters and cinematographers, showed natives that they could be “‘modern’, ‘civilized’, and ‘Indian’ at the same time” (Carelli 2006: 6). This kind of project also makes it possible to challenge “views that equate authenticity with purity from foreign influences”, as Conklin (1997: 715) puts it. Indigenous peoples do not want to go backwards. They want to find new ways of living their identity and culture in their own way. Their fight for social recognition and respect is a lengthy battle for most indigenous groups of Brazil. After being suppressed for centuries by colonizers and post-colonial society, indigenous cultures resisted the attempts of the majority to impose integration in countries like Brazil, Australia, the U.S., and many others. It is exactly this ‘strength’ or power-giving identity that indigenous peoples use as a strategy to protect and empower their culture and group.⁸

3. Concluding thoughts

Because cultures are permanently in motion, it becomes difficult to sustain the debate on authenticity when cultures integrate new ‘things’ into their way of life. Despite our understanding of the processes of identity construction or even deconstruction, the debate on authenticity often serves to preserve cultural stereotypes, because the Western view of the indigenous way of life is still conservative and does not correspond to the contemporary needs of indigenous culture and groups. The question need not be: When does a culture lose or transform its identity? Rather, we should talk about the agents of cultural transformation and not about identity loss. There is still much to do in relation to the debate on cultural change, authenticity, and cultural identity. Vincent Carelli (2006: 8) empha-

8 We could compare it to Manuel Castells’ concept of “Resistance identity: generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society, as Calhoun (1994: 17) proposes when explaining the emergence of identity politics” (Castells 2002: 8).

sizes that Indians must “[...] stop being a cuckoo in the nest and a stranger in their own land”. More intercultural dialogue is necessary for strangeness to lose its negative meaning and for otherness to turn into something known, no longer frightening and foreign. Indians want to be part of modernity, as Carelli points out. And access to means of communication and modern technologies is strategic for Brazilian Indians (cf. Carelli 2006; Conklin 1997; Fernandes Ferreira 2009; Turner 1992).⁹ Strengthening cultural identity by means of modernization, using the Internet and mobile phones, or producing documentary films about their own communities, seems to be the standard formula for cultural continuity adopted by many Brazilian indigenous groups like the Ashaninka community of the Amônia River in Acre, the Surui in Rondonia, and many others, although each community or group makes its own decisions with regard to its lifestyle, taking part in distinct development programs according to the necessities of each group or community. Each community is different and lives under different conditions. Therefore, the debate on authenticity cannot be carried out in the old-fashioned, romantic, exotic way. The debate has to allow for processes of change and modernization, regardless of the culture.

Alexandre Pankararu, a Pankararu Indian from the State of Pernambuco, wrote a poem about being a modern Indian, and the availability of modern communication technologies:

Índios na Visão do Mundo

O mundo imagina os índios de hoje,
Analfabetos, desnudos, moradores da selva,
Incapaz de pensar e de se adaptar as modernidades atuais,
Verdadeiros selvagens ou até bonecos folclóricos.

Mas já se passaram 507 anos de invasão,
E hoje somos de professor até doutor,
Dançamos toré e comemos morocodo,
Pois nossa tradição nunca mudou.

E com o tempo o índio se modernizou,
O telefone alguém instalou e um programa do governo nos conectou,
E a Thydewa um site nos criou,
Muita oportunidade nos doou, que maravilha ficou.

9 The use of a range of media technologies by indigenous and minority peoples is a way of “talk[ing] back’ to structures of power”, according to Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin (2002: 7). Faye Ginsburg calls this process of political agency and cultural intervention “cultural activism” (Ginsburg 1997; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin 2002: 7).

A mídia, os livros, jornais, revistas e nem enciclopédias,
 Nunca contaram nossa historia como realmente é,
 Mas através do Índios On-Line isso tudo mudou,
 Podemos contar nossas necessidades e avanços,
 A historia vivida por nós mesmos, pois só nós nos conhecemos [...] ¹⁰
 (Pankararu 2007).

Acting in opposition to this process of non-indigenous resistance, indigenous groups in Brazil increasingly strain to conquer space in society, struggling for recognition of their cultures and way of life, as well as being present in the media. Even though the image of indigenous peoples in Brazil constructed by the non-indigenous population will take time to change and evolve so that it is compatible with the day-to-day reality of these populations, this process is already underway thanks to the participation of indigenous groups in all spheres of contemporary Brazilian society.

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10 Free Translation:

The way the world sees Indians
 The world imagines Indians today,
 illiterate, naked, living in the jungle,
 unable to think, and to adapt to modernity / modern life.
 As true savages or even folk dolls.
 But it has been 507 years of invasion,
 and today we are teaching or have PhD degrees,
 dance to and eat morocodo,
 Because our tradition has never changed.
 And over the years the Indian modernized himself,
 somebody has installed the phone and a government program connected us,
 And Thydewa created us a site,
 gave us lots of opportunities, which was wonderful.
 The media, books, newspapers, magazines or even encyclopedias,
 never told our story as it really is,
 but through the Índios On-Line that has all changed,
 we can now narrate our needs and progress,
 the story lived by ourselves, because only we know ourselves.

Thydewá supports indigenous communities in northeastern Brazil. *Índios Online* is the name of the Internet project (<<http://www.indiosonline.org.br/novo/>>; 29.05.2011).

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