

Border-Listening/ Escucha-Liminal

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Ethnomedia as resistance: Indigenous Protagonism in Brazil

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"It is good not to forget that the Jesuits came here to implement schools, catechize the Indians, and teach them how to read and write. While the Indians could resist, they did not learn to read or write. So, it would be interesting for us to investigate, when Indians are reading and writing, if they have already surrendered or if they are still resisting."

Ailton Krenak

Telling the (hi)stories of the land once called *Pindorama* (land of the palm trees) first requires a long and complex untangling process. The *Povos da floresta* (people of the forest) have been in resistance mode for 520 years, since the "discovery" of Brazil. Today there are an estimated 900,000 Indigenous people in Brazil, accounting for roughly 0,5% of the country's total population. There are 305 Indigenous ethnicities living in the territory today, with over 274 languages spoken. In order to keep their cultural wealth, Indigenous people have had to defend their traditional ways of life against genocide, biological warfare, land battles and a long history of cultural assimilation. Resistance occurs in many ways; not simply a matter of passive refusal and complacency, resistance also exists in the active creation and propagation of movements for self-definition. *Programa de Índio* and Rádio Yandê are important cases of Indigenous protagonism and resistance in Brazil. Radio serves not merely as an apparatus for communication in these cases, but as a mechanism for autonomy.

Programa de Índio

Programa de Índio (Indian Program) aired between 1985-1991 on Rádio USP. A weekly, thirty minute show, it was led by Indigenous leaders Ailton Krenak, Álvaro Tukano and Biraci Yawanawá. The show broke new ground, being the first to broadcast content produced and curated by Indigenous people in Brazil. As the radio show premiered in the mid 1980's, Brazil was only just emerging from military dictatorship (1964-1985). The regime was repressive and aggressive, known for its use of torture and widespread censorship, carried out under the slogan of progress. Indigenous peoples were amongst some of the greatest victims of that regime, subjected to torture, imprisonment and use as slave labor (Demetrio and Kozicki, 2019). *Programa de Índio* began airing at a moment of great Indigenous mobility; the show would

serve as an important tool for communication between different Indigenous communities, in both rural and urban areas, and championed intercultural dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. The new constitution, rewritten in 1988, gave a special emphasis to human rights, recognizing both the cultural and territorial rights of Brazil's Indigenous peoples. For the first time, Indigenous people had a constitutional right to their own cultures, beliefs, practices and ways of life. *Programa de Índio* aired at a critical moment, and arguably contributed to the Indigenist movement by giving a space to voices which had historically been silenced.

Until 1988, Indigenous people were still considered to be in a *transitory* state, meaning that it was the job of the state to assimilate the Indigenous population into *Brazilian* society. Cultural assimilation is the process by which a minority group takes on, whether passively or through external compulsion, the behaviors, belief systems and values of a dominant culture. Forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples was a common practice during the colonial era worldwide, and still occurs today.

President Jair Bolsonaro has made racist remarks towards BIPOC people for a long time; in 2020 he was recorded saying, "the Indians are evolving, more and more they are human beings like us". Bolsonaro has openly manifested his interest in fortifying agri-business through the exploration of Indigenous lands (protected areas which account for 12% of Brazilian territory) and further exploitation of the Amazon Rainforest. His actions are anti-constitutional and a continuation of what the military regime began with the construction of the Transamazonica Highway (BR-230) in the 1960s. Bolsonaro has worked towards dismantling and discrediting institutions such as FUNAI (Brazilian Department for Indigenous Affairs) and IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), and has incentivized foul play (most notably his involvement in the increased number of fires in the Amazon) by promising perpetrators that they will remain unpunished.

Over 200 episodes were produced in the six years that *Programa de Índio* aired, with the participation of all the important Indigenous

leaders of the time. The full collection was digitized and made available online, an important repository of Indigenous-mediated memory. ‘Mediated memory’ describes the transmedial dimension of memory - a phenomenon particular to the twentieth century, as information-spread through television, radio, cinema and online impacts on the ways in which we recollect. Nearly three decades after *Programa de Índio* began broadcasting, a new Indigenous online radio station would take shape, inspired by the format of earlier decades, but with improved access to technology and a greater acceptance of plurality.

Rádio Yandê

Rádio Yandê is Brazil’s first Indigenous web radio station, and arguably its most prominent. The radio, which first aired in 2013, actively seeks the decolonization of media through its framework of *ethnomedia*. Ethnomedia strives for a horizontal and collectively-run management, through an anti-hierarchical structure that champions ideals of collective ownership. The radio station’s founders are: Anápuáka Tupinambá Hã-hã-hãe, Renata Tupinambá and Denilson Baniwa, each of their surnames denoting their Indigenous heritage. Rádio Yandê serves as a platform for Indigenous voices in Brazil and across the globe. By creating a space for individuals to become the protagonists of their own stories, the station acts not as a mediator of content, but rather as a tool to amplify Indigenous voices. Indigenous individuals shift from their historical position as the subject of colonial authors.

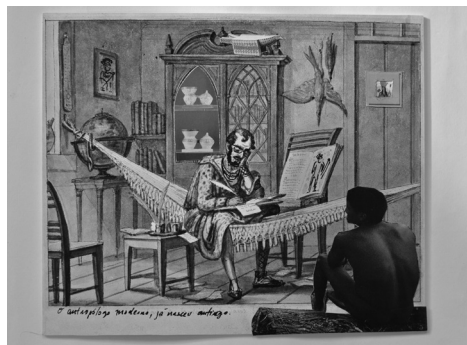


Figure 1. “O antropólogo moderno, já nasceu antigo”, Denilson Baniwa, 21x15,5 cm Niterói, 2019, Collage on print.

This is the goal of the movement for *Protagonismo Índigena* (Indigenous Protagonism). Over time, these first-person narratives produce a more pluralistic, multi-perspective view, rupturing the pre-defined, stereotypical conception of Indigenous people as infantilized, incapable, primitive and culturally outdated.

What exactly is ethnomedia beyond its conceptual framing? In a conversation I had with Anápuáka Tupinambá Hã-hã-hãe in 2019, he explained that the decolonization of communication channels happens in several different ways. By choosing to discard the traditional radio format, known as the programming format (which targets demographics based on ethnicity, household income and age), Rádio Yandê can remain more inclusive to a vast number of ethnic identities. Some communities may want to broadcast a ritual; even though rituals can often last in excess of three or four hours, the station prioritizes respecting the tradition and will broadcast without editing down or altering the content. By not excluding any community’s cultural heritage, the radio station is shaped by the submissions it receives, rather than by the imposition of a pre-defined format. Conventional radio stations rely on funding from sponsorship and marketing campaigns to stay afloat – funding which often ends up determining what is viable and what is an unfeasible use of precious air time. Throughout the years, Rádio Yandê has stayed true to its original mission, but this has come at a high cost. Anápuáka Tupinambá Hã-hã-hãe tells me that what works for the Tupinambá will not necessarily suit the Kaingang, i.e., that each Indigenous community has its own complex beliefs and worldviews, and it would be neither fair nor accurate to condense all those cultures into one category. Ethnomedia also champions language preservation, by incentivizing the production of content in each ethnicity’s mother tongue. Anápuáka tells me that when youngsters hear their mother tongue on the Internet or radio, they feel as though their language and culture is not outdated. Not only might they hear their own language, but they will also hear it in a contemporary context. In the village, a young person may first hear North American rap, but if he hears rap in his own native tongue, he sees that his culture is not necessarily static.

When you tune into Rádio Yandê, whether you are listening to music or a roundtable conversation, it is amazing to “travel” sonically, learning and listening to things that rarely find a place on conventional radio stations. Contemporary Indigenous music manifests itself within and through different genres, mixed and meshed, sometimes evoking the rawness of beat poets, free jazz or rap, and at other times evocative of *sertanejo* (country music), funk or pop tracks. As opposed to the common conception of Indigenous music, based on faded ethnographic archival tapes, its contemporary interpretation is vibrantly alive, often critical of the current moment, and disrupts many pre-defined ideas of what Indigenous culture is or should be. Rádio Yandê and the collective behind it work to support other Indigenous communities who would like to imagine, define and set up their own communication channels. Co-founder Renata Tupinambá hopes that, by spreading the concept of ethnomedia many others will follow, and that the future will boast countless Indigenous-run radio stations and television channels featuring content made by and for an Indigenous audience (Machado, 2018).

Contemporary Indigenous Culture

Indigenous contemporary culture producers are often faced with a society that recognize their heritage as static and a thing of the past. Consequently, they must find different ways to communicate their temporality. Digital technologies have been hugely important tools in facilitating the production and dissemination of content. Denilson Baniwa is a visual artist, hailing from Rio Negro in the Amazon and based in Rio de Janeiro; he is also a co-founder of Rádio Yandê; he feels that Indigenous contemporary culture producers need to actively seek out visibility. He notes that all major Brazilian cities were founded on top of Indigenous villages, in the process erasing Indigenous memory (Aratykyra, 2019); the process of decolonization should not therefore be one that attempts to time travel to the past, but one which seeks to indigenize processes, ideas and objects. To produce contemporary Indigenous culture is to recover lost memories; artists tap into their ancestry, and - equipped with non-Indigenous tools and methods (cameras, music, sculpture, painting) - tell their own (hi)stories. Baniwa notes that most Indigenous individuals have memories that go back to their great-grandparents, but artists

can go back centuries and rescue what has been lost, stolen and silenced. He suggests *re-Antropofagia* (Re-Anthropofagia) - a re-cannibalization of the arts - as both a way forward and a response to the 1920s Brazilian arts and literary movement *Antropofagia*, credited with defining Brazilian Modernism. *Antropofagia* responded to the white supremacist politics and Eurocentrism dominant in the countries policies and education at that time with “cultural cannibalism”, or the radical idea that “true” Brazilian art emerges from ingesting all of its different cultures (Roffino, 2018).



Figure 2. “Voyeurs” by Denilson Baniwa. 40x51cm Niteroi, 2019 Collage on print

Looking back at the movement, it is nonetheless clear that *Antropofagia* barely considered Indigenous perspectives, even though one of the most iconic lines in the Anthropophagic Manifesto is, “Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question”, translating Hamlet’s identity struggle into the realm of post-colonial struggle (Islam, 2011,p.166) by celebrating Brazil’s cannibalist history.

Since 2013, Rádio Yandê has amplified music in over 190 Indigenous languages, and has created a space for contemporary Indigenous music that did not exist before 2010 (Tupinambá, 2019). Last year they produced the first edition of the Yby Festival, an Indigenous music and arts festival - the first in Brazil. The same year, Renata

Tupinambá, also known as Aratykyra, launched a podcast called *Originárias*, a podcast about Indigenous artists and musicians of the 21st century. “Ethnocommunication” is on the rise in Brazil, with a steadily growing number of radio shows, podcasts and YouTube channels. One artist who stands out is rapper Katú Mirim, native to the Boe Bororo community, she is active on social media channels such as Instagram and YouTube, where she both publicizes her music and uses the free platform to educate her audience about topics like red face and cultural appropriation. On social media, Mirim has shared her struggles as a bisexual, orphaned, economically-constrained Indigenous woman, and the struggle she has with the perception that Indigenous people can neither be rappers nor covered in tattoos. She considers these topics in her music, often framed from the intersectional point of view of Indigenous feminism, while also offering an Indigenous perspective on colonisation, cultural appropriation and land demarcation rarely heard in popular music. Another artist who stands out is Brisa Flow, a Mapuche woman whose parents fled Pinochet’s military regime in Chile (1973-1990). Her track *Fique Viva* (2018) is an homage to the survival of the urban Indigenous woman. Her latest EP *Free Abya Yala* (2020) is a freestyle, improvised jazz and rap record; *Abya Yala* is the name given to Latin America in the language of the Kuna people; within the decolonial movement it is used as a way to negate both “America” and “Latin”, terms representative of the repression suffered by BIPOC communities. Gustavo Caboco, the designer of the cover of Flow’s EP, descends from the Wapichana; he is a writer, poet and artist.

Content produced by and for Indigenous communities and disseminated via YouTube, social media, podcasts and web radio contributes to the mediated memory of the community, by creating a web-based archive of individual, evolving and first-person authored culture. Present-day technologies make participation in the creation of culture much more accessible and affordable than previously. Access to more widely-available technologies, such as the internet, computers, cameras, sound equipment and software have generally impacted on the ways in which many Indigenous artists and musicians produce their work and build communities around the genre they are pioneering online. Even though many of the technical roadblocks



Figure 3. “Nós”, Denilson Baniwa. Album cover



Figure 4. “Free Abya Yala”, Gustavo Caboco. Album cover

that stood in the way of *Programa de Índio* are different today, the community at large continues its resistance, while the political landscape still incites polarization, threatens re-appropriation of Indigenous lands and the reignition of assimilationist policies. Despite all of this, Indigenous contemporary culture producers are resisting by making art, asking that their ancestry, traditions, land and beliefs be respected. Many individuals frame the process of rediscovering their identities as remembering, and remembering itself as a form of healing and self-recognition. Remembering is a form of rescue and resistance; by resisting the community refuses to surrender.

Further Listening

Brisa Flow. *Free Abya Yala*. 2020, digital stream via YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZAdPKsMDDg>

Brisa Flow. *Fique Viva*. 2018, digital stream via YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRUzUsTdW0o>

Katú Mirim. *Nós*. 2020, digital stream via YouTube.

Wera MC & Oz Guarani. ‘Pemomba Eme’ single. Unsigned. 2018, digital steam via YouTube.

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