

COME ON, SISTER.

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Resumo: As escritoras indígenas Eliane Potiguara e Janice Acoose nos apresentam, de formas diversas, o caminho do resgate da autoestima, da identidade e da cultura de seus povos de origem. Ambas partem da experiência pessoal e da história familiar para iniciar uma jornada que propõe a abertura do cânone literário euroamericano. Através da abordagem de uma já existente tradição literária de escritoras indígenas, no caso da canadense, e da mitologização, do ativismo político e da poesia, no caso da brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Escritoras indígenas, história da mulher indígena, ativismo literário.

Abstract: Indigenous writers Elaine Potiguara and Janice Acoose present us, in different ways, the path to the recovery of self-esteem, identity and the culture of their people of origin. Both depart from their personal experience and family history at the start of a journey that proposes the opening of the Euro-Canadian literary canon through the approach to an existing Indigenous women literary tradition, in the Canadian work, and through mythologizing, political activism and poetry in the case of the Brazilian work.

Keywords: Indigenous women writers, Indigenous women history, literary activism.

I sometimes feel like a foolish young grandmother armed with a teaspoon, determined to remove three mountains from the path of liberation: the mountain of racism, the mountain of sexism and the mountain of nationalist oppression.

Lee Maracle

One look at the letters about the “discovery” of the Americas or at the antialogue of the Jesuits is enough to appraise the image of the Indian woman: sin in flesh and spirit, evil incarnated.

Graça Graúna

Maracle and Graúna's unburdening is shared by most, if not all, Indigenous women writers for whom the task of regaining identity, self esteem, and a

positive ethnic recognition means treading a long, painful path. Many Indigenous women begin their journey by digging deep into their own stories and into their ethnic mythology, preserved by their “grandmothers” in traditional storytelling format. The figure of the grandmother is central in Indigenous cultures, where she represents not only experience and wisdom, but is the bearer of tribal culture. Associated to spiritual powers, she teaches, advises, protects and performs other acts that enable survival, physical, spiritual and cultural. The figure of the grandmother is also associated to that of the Earth Spirit itself and closely associated to the preservation of this planet we inhabit.²

It may be another relevant preamble to mention Arnold Krupat’s definition of Native American autobiography, “a post-contact phenomenon worth scrutinizing” (1992, p. 219). “One might perhaps instantiate an ‘i-am-we’ experience as descriptive of the native sense of self”, he says, (p. 209-210), “which accounts for Native American autobiography being “persistently synecdochic” (p. 216), unlike a metonymic sense of self, more individualistic, “that seems to mark Western autobiography” (p. 217). By extension, in migrating from the oral transmission to the written text, “a sense of the communication of the person orally, dramatically, performatively, in public,” transfers to the written text and an Indian text is “more likely to privilege the synecdochic relation of part-to-whole than the metonymic relation of part-to-part”. (p. 217). But for contemporary educated Indians, writing represents the absence of the listener and a language that is not the one related to their memories and this may account for the intersection of poetry, myth, fiction and other elements that make their works difficult to describe within the Western genres.

Eliane Potiguara and Janice Acoose choose the synecdochic reporting of experience, departing from their own, but only as a representation of a much larger scene where Indigenous women have been oppressed and silenced in all tribes up and down the American continent, across several centuries, since the colonization period. By educating themselves and educating others about these facts, they become tribal “grandmothers” themselves, even if their words come in writing in a Euro-American language.

Thus, the paths traced by Potiguara and Acoose over the mountain of prejudice and stereotype, is relevant contribution to the opening of the literary canon and an enlargement of Western genre categories, for they insert themselves into

local history and contemporary *status quo*, while keeping their feet in a non-Western mythical past misinterpreted and dismissed from the first colonial encounters.

They are both invested in the defense of Indigenous rights and in the promotion of Indigenous education, especially that of women, language and ethnic preservation, expressed in several ways: activism, writing, teaching, blogs and sites, and their own insertion in mainstream culture, in itself a sign of healthy survival of Indigenous culture into our days.

Metadecara, metade mascara (Half face, half mask, 2004), by Brazilian Potyguara native Eliane Potiguara³, and *Iskwewak - Kah 'Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak* (or All our relations, 1995), by Janice Acoose, an Anishina abekwe-Métis-Nehiowè-Canadian, are the works of women whose experience was mediated by orality, a fact that places them in an unconventional literary and linguistic venue where the past and the future are always present, where the living and the dead, the real and the mythic maintain open communication. They have a string political agenda and believe in the force of the word to build a consciousness that will eventually make amends for centuries of atrocities and neglect. For Native women the word is almighty and memory not only the mediator among the various time contexts narrated, but also the main element of cultural survival.

Eliane Potiguara (1950), a mother and a grandmother herself, starts her book with memories of her own grandmother, Maria de Lourdes, a tribal healer that told her stories about her mother, aunts, great aunts, whose husbands left or were killed, leaving them alone to raise their children in poor neighborhoods of intolerant and racist white cities. The stories told by her grandmother kept the Indian girl aware of the violent historical and political processes that expelled her family, her tribe from their original territories, but most importantly, of her spiritual and cultural heritage, her ancestral “cosmovision” (p. 25-26).

Janice Acoose (1954) composes an introduction to her book out of the history of her “relations”, where she names and recognizes the “coercive and oppressive roots of the patriarchal institutions” that made her realize the women in her family do not fit the white stereotypes of Indigenous women named in the subtitle of her book – neither Indian princesses nor easy squaws – for they were “powerful, resourceful and dynamic women [...] that ignited [her] spiritual flame” (1995, p. 10-11). She adds several family photographs of her parents, aunts,

siblings and copies of birth certificates, the archeological documentation of a repressed personal history.

Both Accose and Potiguara had to go on a journey to recover the history of their indianess, personal or collective. Acoose “reclaims herself” after a dream she had during “a journey half around the world”, brought to her by the spirits of two grandmothers who “directed her back to [her] home communities, and most importantly, [her] sense of self” (p. 17). There are photographs here too, one of them of young Acoose sitting on the grass overgrown ruins of her mother’s house, where “[her] mind wandered to her childhood” (p. 18). At the Sakimay reserve of her father’s relatives, she participated in the yearly Raindance⁴. The importance of “reconnecting to the collective consciousness of both maternal and paternal ancestors” came alongside with the painful realization that she had been deeply indoctrinated by “the power of the white european canada’s many christian patriarchal institutions” (p. 19. The use of lower case is a linguistic resistance stance she considers essential to her expression in English). After the ceremony she is renamed Nisko-Kisikàwihkwè, or Red Sky Woman, for she had been “robbed” of an Indian name at the hospital where she was born and registered. “The effacement of Indian women as individuals”, she says, “is also reflected in some old documents such as baptismal certificates” where the word “Halfbreed” erases both heritages and places Indian women at the bottom end of the country’s hierarchy (p. 22-23).

Potiguara also invokes her grandmothers:

When we can identify who are the three old Indian women who appear to us in our most critical moments or in moments of danger and understand why their hands extend to their daughters, granddaughters and great granddaughters, and together their six hands transform into snakes as in an almost hoarse warning, but grand by its symbology and warning, these ones, yes, that we are those who, like eagles, perceive the least gesture of the enemy, not only the one inside, as our enemies in every day society. We have to nourish our creative side against the veil in our minds. It is necessary to interpret the oniric messages from our old Indian women (2004, p. 88).⁵

At the age of five Acoose was sent to a residential school, where “the brainwashing disguised as education” and the spiritual, psychological and phy-

sical abuses deeply scarred her (p. 23-24). Indian residential schools in North America were a traumatic experience Brazilian Indians did not undergo. Nevertheless, this was not a blessing since Brazilian Indians did not get any formal education until well into the 20th century and then Indian children had to attend public schools where they faced discrimination and violence from other children. As a consequence Indigenous populations were further marginalized for not speaking Portuguese well, not having any formal education or training, and were maintained in marginal poverty. Indian schools are a recent institution and university access to Indians happened only in the last few decades.

For Acoose, Residential School meant a denial of Indigenous women empirical knowledge of medicinal plants and the environment, and forced them into “passive, submissive behavior” -- not found in Indigenous culture -- that reinforced stereotypes. Acoose found in education her push into activism. It was in the Department of English at the University of Saskatchewan that she realized how little biases had changed until the 20th century and how courses and assigned readings reinforced white cultural supremacy. Decided to challenge it, specifically its literary canon (p. 33), for she considers Canadian literature “an ideological instrument” (p. 34), Acoose wrote a Master’s thesis where she invokes all her literary grandmothers and also criticizes images of Indian women in literature authored by Euro-Canadians. Acoose also uses her power as an educator to construct a literary curriculum that represents Indigenous university students according to their own traditions (p. 36).

Potiguara has a degree in Portuguese and literature, another in education, and is a self-taught specialist in Indian rights. One of the first educated Indian women in Brazil and the first one in her family. She participated in the UN group that drew the Universal Declaration of Indian Rights in Geneva and was one of the Indian activists present in Brasília during the 1988 Constitutional Reform. She is among the few Brazilian Indians with such uplifting *vitae*.

There are some recent improvements in Brazil that need to be recognized: bilingual education in Indian schools and Indian school teachers; cultural collectives that educate Indians and non-Indians with publications of their myths and cosmogony; more publications of texts by Brazilian Indians, most of them for a juvenile public; more Indian history taught nationally at elementary and high schools, enforced by official educational policies that also ensures racial quotas

at universities. But it is too little too late considering five centuries of disruptive intervention in their lives.

After the 1980s, Brazilian Indian writers started to get some national recognition and about thirty Indigenous authors can currently be recognized for relevant publications. Daniel Munduruku, one of the most prolific among them, points out that “it is important to say that they are conquering space not because they are “exotic”, but because they write well” (2012, s/p).

Reflecting on Brazil’s present moment, Eurídice Figueiredo says that,

[...] there is a true battle in the field of collective memory with the appearance of writings that evoke other founding myths, other national discourses and trace a vision of a pluralized nation rather than one, as it was done in the 19th century and reinforced in the 20th. Instead of a homogeneous nation, created by the interpreters of Brazil, which excluded blacks and Indians by diluting them into a “Brazil mestizo” amalgam, what we see now is the eclosion of voices that narrativize other stories, other versions of the nation (s/d, p. 4).⁶

Larger than autofiction, Eliane Potiguara’s text is one of these narratives. Her book encompasses a multitude of voices that fabricate representation out of ancestral knowledge and history, the relation between myth and poetry, history and memory, place and nation, identity and alterity. It has been called ‘critical writing’, by Graça Graúna, in the introductory essay. Graúna calls our attention to Potiguara’s defense of Indigenous intellectual property and her aim of making native oral tradition, philosophy and rights fully known as “an important Brazilian philosophy” (2004, p. 17).

Liane Schneider points to Potiguara’s firm statement against the definition of Indians as non-Indian either due to “acculturation” or because they do not live in tribes or reservations.

She states there is a prejudice against natives who are urban, who have written books or who went to university, that is, any native who is not totally inscribed in the historical stereotype of living in the woods. Potiguara also points out the necessity of changing the academic, mainly the

anthropologic, views on natives. She wants to spread native education and post-colonial history to most Brazilian schools, since a large part of the country's population lost track of their Indian origins (2006, p. 4).⁷

Like Acoose, Potiguara tells of the journey from her urban experience to her ancestral culture. It was made through the encounter with the voices of the Kaiapó, the Munduruku, the Krenak, the Nambikwara, the Guarani, the Terena and many other Brazilian Indian peoples who recognize each other. With her husband, Taiguara, a popular Uruguayan singer of Charrua origin, she visited the poorest frontier Indian areas in South America. And she went back to her grandmother's land in the state of Paraíba. Her concern with violence against women reaches out to the Dalits in India or the genital mutilations practiced in Africa.

During the colonization of Brazil's northeast, the Potiguara were considered aggressive aboriginals by the Portuguese, a situation made worse by their commercial association with the French. Because of their hindrance to the establishment of the Portuguese in the area, they were fiercely attacked and those who survived and surrendered ended up pacified by missionaries, Christianized and absorbed by the sugar cane colonial society. However, when Marquês do Pombal ordered the expulsion of all missions from the country, the mission areas turned into villages, where the Potiguara acquired Euro-American habits, ate, dressed and talked like the colonists. They were considered extinct by the 17th century to "resurface" only in the beginning of the 20th century. Around the 1920s they brought up land claims and today are the only tribe officially recognized in the state of Paraíba. The Potiguara try to assert their ethnic legacy by learning Tupi-Guarani, keeping the Toré ritual (ironically celebrated on April 19th, the official national "Indian Day"). The movement for recognition by the so called "resurfaced"⁸ Indigenous peoples is one of Eliane's main concerns.

Another one is the environment,

The environment, the territory, Planet Earth are intrinsically linked to the womb of the Indian woman, the savage woman in both senses (first citizen of the world and intuitive) and for that reason there will be no environment defense if the influence, the millenary knowledge of the woman, the being who inhabits this environment, is not highlighted (p. 56).

Potiguara's narrative, like her life story, covers a lot of territory and incorporates a multitude of experiences. Her poetry pours from the stories and the myths of Indigenous peoples in Brazil and in the Americas, from her personal recollections of the oral tradition from her tribe, preserved in her grandmother's stories, in education for autonomy, civil rights movements and land deeds. She modeled herself after famous Indian leaders as Rigoberta Menchú; learned from the texts of Amílcar Cabral that "culture must be used as an instrument of national liberation" (p. 46); Frantz Fanon taught her that "violence, torture, repression and oppression can leave a people numb, with their heads down, sad, unhappy and even crazy" (p. 46). The black women movement and the *quilombola* movement⁹ in Brazil were also inspirations of people whose lives were disrupted by colonization and have been reorganizing successfully.

Potiguara found inspiration in other Indigenous movements in the Americas, as in New Mexico in 49th Meeting of North American Indians (1990); in Canada where she could study the New Constitution coordinated by The First Nations Organization, lead by Ovide Mercredi, where wife beating and drinking in Indigenous populations were debated, as well as the increase of value in their arts, crafts, literature, painting, music (p. 112).

She recalls the first invasions of Indian territory in modern times, the neocolonizations of cotton, strip mining, road opening, cattle farming, and the consequent violence against Indians, whose migrations separated families and exposed them to racism and intolerance, with women as the main victims (p. 43). Potiguara's grandmother was one of these migrants who, separated from the father of her children, found herself selling bananas on the street of a city to support her children. Her granddaughter was the first woman in their family to emerge from poverty and get educated. She became a schoolteacher and was seduced by Paulo Freire's concepts of popular education. Her admiration for the educator also had to do with his persecution by the Brazilian dictatorship and his exile in Chile. She makes a first transcultural move into leftist ideology through the belief in education for consciousness as a transforming tool. The other one is into political activism, for women and Indigenous causes, national and international human rights. As Acoose, Potiguara had to educate herself and walk the path of activism to be able to go back in search of her own ancestral knowledge. "The torch of ancestry must be worked inside each one of us, Indian, black, yellow or white, because it is rich in knowledge", she says (p. 82).

Unlike Acoose, Potiguara did not have a literary tradition to pull from, so she resorted to the writing of poems about Indian women she admires, creating a literary lineage of sorts out of her family history. Like her “beloved Aunt Severina, Potyguara Indian, great old warrior who encouraged me and loved me with the strength of the Indian woman”, to whom she dedicates *The Secret of Women*,

For centuries
 Mothers and grandmothers hid in their bellies
 The stories, the songs, the children.
 The house traditions,
 The feeling of the land where they were born,
 The stories of the old men
 Who got together to smoke their pipes (p. 69).

Her second strategy is mythologizing: the story of Jurupiranga and Cunha-taí, the couple separated by white interference in Indian lifestyle, stands for the anguish over the loss of their traditions across the centuries, which she tells both in verse and in prose.

Separated from his woman, Jurupiranga manages to escape slavery and starts roaming the country and the Americas, south, center and north, where he sees hundreds of people working with their heads down the fields of cotton, coffee, corn, rice, and many dead. He sees the pewter and coal, the sugar cane and wood and latex colonizations. He sees hundreds fall by the arms of neo-Americans, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Brazilians. He crosses the Arizona desert and succumbs, forgets the sounds of his flute and the rhythms of the drums. He travels through the past, the present and the future. He goes hungry and he gets ill with the worst invading diseases: tuberculosis, typhus, malaria, scarlet fever, craziness, HIV and hepatitis, and is contaminated the virus of insecurity, desperation, hopelessness. He sees the water in the planet contaminated and wasted, biodiversity destroyed. And Jurupiranga is always the landless, wandering, lonesome warrior. And he dreams of his wife and children, his family, his songs, a great interior history that gives him strength. He persists in looking for his people and for reconstruction of his life forever in peace and love (p. 128).

One day, lying under a tree and weak from his troubles, he has a dream. He dreams of many Indians dressed in ways different from his time and sitting in many chairs and many warriors using the word, listened to and respected. He hears many Indian languages and many foreign languages. He sees papers being drawn and tables covered with maps. The white men in dark clothes have to accept the Indian decisions because now there are laws and international treaties and items in the Constitution demanded for centuries by the Indian peoples. In the blink of an eye he sees the Indian University and many Indian journalists, anthropologists, historians, lawmakers, telling their own story. He sees whole libraries filled with writings by Indians. Indian women are respected when they go shopping or need medical attention, education or legal care. The elders are venerated by all. Indian lawmakers conquer them the right to be recognized in their Indian ancestry and to be reintegrated into their people. He perceives new technologies being used by young Indians who dialogue with the elders about their traditions (p. 127-29).

The title of the book and its beautiful cover, a photograph of Potiguara Indian Katyucia Sulamy Raia, photographed by writer and professor Daniel Munduruku, refer to a poetic rendering of another piece of Eliane's story included in her book as autofictional mythical narrative.

Potiguara was born with a birth mark across her right eye, so she grew up with double discrimination, for people told her she looked like someone who had been beaten by a husband or the police. But in 1979, a Kaiapó chief told her the mark was a genipap leaf¹⁰ and an ancestral mark, just like the one they painted on themselves, and called her a relative, a cousin, and hugged her and they cried together for their re-encounter. She was told the pitiguary bird, that announces the arrival of a person with a spiritual mission, sang "Eliane já vem", "Eliane já vem" (Eliane is coming), and he knew she was coming (p. 100).

The next act of recognition for the author comes when she meets the Indian militants in Brasília, in 1988, fighting to get some of their rights written into the new constitution, and where Ailton Krenak painted their faces with the purple genipap juice and impressed everyone (p.70).

The other reference to the birthmark comes from Cunhataí's mythic childhood. As an unborn baby she was able to hear the spirits of the forest, could see the mother of the waters and had the power to heal. But her mother worried about

the foreign invasions so she took a “bad herb” to kill the seed that listened. The herb did great harm to Cunhataí but the little hurt and mutilated little seed was born, sad and with a star on her right eye. The purple mark survived to hear the ancestors and old women wrinkled by time (p. 67). She was raised by the grandmother, who was stronger than the mother to raise a bird-woman who could grow wings, fly and see. And she did and suffered for a long time. But when she returned she was recognized by the “spiritual” eye – the purple mark – and by the pitiguary bird (p. 67-68)

Cunhataí has the eyes of the eagle. Cunhataí has the memory of elephants. Cunhataí has the legs of an elk, as fast as a mare’s. Cunhataí spies the new despite her anguish and she wants to know where her love is, disappeared by action of the colonizer. Cunhataí recognizes that the bases of her Indigenous traditions will be preserved only when her family is united, physical and morally. Cunhataí goes through the woods, the skies, the rocks, the mountains, rivers and lakes searching for her roots, fragmented and turned fragile by the colonizers of all times. She travels through space and perceives as in a film, the stories of other women, other warriors, children, old men and old women or widows. She is witness of land destruction, pollution of the rivers, exhaustion of mineral riches. The colored and transparent veils blacken before her eyes, animals become carrion, the tears of shamans and of old women inundate her black hair and her nudity (p. 70).

After a great feast to celebrate the reunion of Cunhataí and Jurupiranga after their century long treks, the power of her people for organizing and developing a consciousness is clear to Potiguara (p. 135) and she composes a poem “For those who could not find their village but have found its essence”.

I don’t have my village/ But I have this house
 Lighted/ Left to me as inheritance/ By the women
 Warriors/ True Indian women/Fearless
 And who do not silence their voice (p.131).

These verses are undoubtedly related to the story of the Potyguara people, their disappearance and reappearance through language and culture preserved by oral literature, to which poetry is closest.

For Acoose, the identity recovering journey is literary, as she names indigenous women writers who wrote autofiction: Emma La Rocque, Beatrice

Culleton, Jeanette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Ruby Slipperjack, Marie Anneharte Baker, Beth Cuthand, Louise Halfe... (p. 39). The list seems to prove that the stereotypical images of Indian women as romantic princesses or lewd squaws, found in Euro american literature, need to be examined critically against what Indigenous women themselves have to say. And she proceeds to examine the construction of the two stereotypes named in the title within the Canadian literary canon.

Acoose understands the stereotypes as a fundamental European Christian patriarchal ideology of the fifteenth century brought to America by the settlers that carried on into the nationalistic character even after the weakening of colonial ties. She demonstrates how Indigenous women who had relations with Christian white men had to be “elevated” beyond their status and thus became the equivalent of royalty, in the figures of “Dona Marina, the Aztec who had a *liaison* with Hernando Cortez, Pocahontas, who saved John Smith from death, for example. After the colonial period, the bad Indian woman, or squaw, justified the imperialistic expansion west and the agendas of missionaries, fur traders and explorers. Acoose displays abundant documentation from both Euro-Canadian history and literature about these stereotypes that continue to be used despite their ethnocentric views (p. 44-45). To these documents Acoose opposes an overview of the roles of Indian women inside their cultures, with examples taken from Howard Adam’s *Prison of grass* and Emma La Rocque’s *Defeathering the Indian*, both published in 1975.

Next, she demonstrates how the perpetuation of these stereotypes is damaging to Indian women as they encourage “sexual, physical, verbal or psychological violence” against them. She indicates examples of Indigenous women who fought the combination of racism and sexism, legally and politically, reclaiming the central role of “culture keepers” and the autonomy over their bodies and relations with the other they held within their cultures. And here is where Acoose calls for an appropriation of the English language to represent their experience, to re-name and redefine the original peoples (p. 58), for if it is in English (or French) that these misrepresentations are presented, it is in the same language they need to be deconstructed.

This “connectedness is represented in Native literature or philosophy, by a circle”, as Paula Gunn Allen explains in *The sacred hoop*: “Natives can heal themselves by writing themselves back into the ‘circle of life’ ” (1993, p. 19). As Potiguara, Acoose mentions Frantz Fanon and African-American critic bell

hooks (another user of lower case) to reinforce her ideas of assimilation and resistance, extending the relation status to other discriminated minorities who have written themselves into history in search of healing.

Acoose's deconstruction of literary stereotypes consists of a detailed study of Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, its analysis occupying a whole chapter. By the very reference of a book by a Métis, published in 1973, prior to, for example, Margaret Laurence's "The loons" (1985)¹¹, Acoose may be implying that the material to "educate" non-Native writers was available and was ignored by the Canadian literary culture of the time. For Campbell's text, Acoose says, "challenges existing stereotypes and images of Indigenous women by providing a vivid spiritual, social, political, and economic context of her own halfbreed (and to a limited extent Cree) way of life" (p. 90).

But the best trait of the "somewhat fictional biography" by Campbell seems to be the representation of an Indigenous women's legacy based on her female relatives: mother, grandmother and others, "as survivors of the oppressive colonial regime, abusive relationships, and systemic racism and sexism" (p.91). At the same time, the very number and variety of female personalities present in Campbell's book subverts the limited stereotypes of Indigenous women circulating in mainstream Canadian literature.

Campbell's book opened a very important path to other Indigenous women and Acoose goes on listing them: Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Marie Annharte Baker, Patricia Monture-Okanee, Monica Goulet, Marylyn Dumont, Mary Sky Blue Morin, Lee Maracle, and a long list of brave women who survived to tell their stories and find comfort and solidarity in their sisters (p.104), as well as to thwart the notion that they "are a dying race, suffering victims with no hope of survival, or "Natives" bound and determined to assimilate and make it in the white world" (p. 108).

Acoose closes her book affirming the act of writing as a redefinition of a self cut off from its own culture by colonial interferences, who explores her cultural roots and manages to "extend well beyond the Euro-Canadian experience" (p. 118).

Both works seem to end in a positive affirmation connected to activism. Potiguara claims for understanding among all races and peaceful coexistence in "villages of love". Acoose believes in the "redefinition of the self" though one's ethnic and literary inheritance that can help minimize "colonial interference".

Iskwewak has inscribed itself into an emerging “Native American critical theory” by offering alternative readings of Canadian reality and colonial experience for women of all colors and creeds. And by deconstructing a language that functions as a tool of oppression and stereotypes that have clung to our imagination for several centuries. The book also provides a valuable genealogy of literary works by Indigenous women that do not allow claims of ignorance about this co-existing experience. Moreover, it widens the vision of what constitutes womanhood in contemporary Canada, allowing the welcoming of all these “sisters” into the academic and literary families to expand and enrich them. Critical work as Acoose’s and the writers she names are essential for change, from canonic programs to book distributing policies, just to name the ends of the canonic spectrum that persists into the 21st century.

Potiguara’s book is a good example of a narrative that does not fit well any of our academic genre descriptions. It has biographical as well as mythical narrative dotted by poems: love poems, exaltation poems, activism poems. It tells of activist actions, political meetings and poignant childhood memories. Her writing transports the socio-political discussion about Brazilian Indigenous issues into a literary dimension. The book is also post-canonical because it inserts an Indian woman’s voice into the national literature and uncovers an alternative point of view quite diverse from Euro-American writers, in a country where the birth of national literature is linked to the Indian element that distinguished it from mainstream European literature.

Acoose and Potiguara are indigenous women who have managed to raise their voices through teaching, writing, film, television, as well as contemporary media, as Facebook, You Tube, blogs. Acoose’s M.A. dissertation, later published as a book is available online; she has been interviewed for a video on murdered and missing Indian women, *Finding Dawn* (2006); she was the first Native Affairs columnist for *The Saskatchewan Phoenix*, has contributed to several other newspapers and journals; she is an Associated Professor at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.

Potiguara has created GRUMIN, an association for the education of Indian women, with a page online, maintains her personal page online, *Literatura Indígena e Pensamento Brasileiro* (Indigenous Literature and Brazilian Thinking), and has issued a new book in March, a children’s book, *O coco que guardava a noite* (The coconut that guarded the night, 2012).

Their works are a general call to education about this repressed portion of American culture. But the call is special for Indigenous women, as Potiguara makes clear:

Woman!
 Come on, sister
 drink from this fountain that awaits
 my sweet and warm words
 Scream to the world
 your history
 go on and do not despair

 Come on, sister
 free your afflicted soul
 free your loving heart
 look for your own self and scream:
 I am a warrior woman!
 I am a conscious woman! (p. 76-77)

Notes

- ¹ Doutora em Literatura de Língua Inglesa pela State University of New York (at Buffalo), professora aposentada da UFRGS. pratisantos@uol.com.br
- ² For a detailed study of the grandmother figure I suggest the reading of GUANAES, Alvany. *A Presença das Grand mothers nas Temporalidades das narrativas autobiográficas de Beverly Hungry Woolf, Lee Maracle e Maria Campbell*, 2011, 207 p. Doctoral Dissertation, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo.
- ³ In Brazil it is usual that Indians use their tribe affiliation as last names, even when they are not officially registered with them. It is an affirmation and ethnic visibility tactic used by most indigenous writers in the country.
- ⁴ The Raindance ceremony is specially suited for this kind of reconnecting to one's roots because its performance rituals are passed on orally and are a symbol of resistance since the relocation of the Indian tribes in North America, in the 19th century, when many rituals were banned, including the Sun Dance, a spiritual practice feared by Christians. It was then renamed Raindance to minimize this fear and disguise it as a summer invocation for rain and good crops.
- ⁵ All translations from Potiguara's book are by the author of this essay.
- ⁶ Access to this article, part of a forthcoming book, was kindly provided by the author. The quote was translated by me.
- ⁷ Schneider is referring to a post Potiguara made available in <<http://br.groups.yahoo.com/group/literaturaindigena>>, posted November 2005.

- ⁸ "Povos ressurgidos" is the term in Portuguese.
- ⁹ During the slavery period, slaves escaped sugar cane mills or smaller properties and formed small villages, called *quilombos*, to where slave descendents kept flocking over the centuries. There around two thousand *quilombos* active in 21st century Brazil, fighting for the issuing of land deeds assigned in the 1988 Constitutional Reform.
- ¹⁰ *Genipa Americana*, a yellowish berry with pungent smell, is found all over tropical America. It can be eaten, but is mostly found in as a syrup or as a very appreciated liqueur. Its dark blue juice is used by many tribes for body painting. In Guarany genipap means "fruit good to paint".
- ¹¹ In this tale from *A bird in the house* (1985), Acoose criticizes Laurence's depicting of *métis* character Piquette Tonnerre, shown as "a victim who is always victimized" (p. 79).

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