

Cultural Practices and Language Games among the Xakriabá Peoples

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ABSTRACT - Cultural Practices and Language Games among the Xakriabá Peoples. The present article analyzes cultural practices and language games among the indigenous Xakriabá peoples of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The study was conducted using participant observation and interviews, and focused on the *Folia de Reis*, the *Samba Chula* and the *Loa*. These were characterized as multimodal forms of language that, being distanced from practices of everyday orality, make up a symbolic mosaic. This is built through reflection on the language itself and on the use of construction strategies of the senses such as rhythm, melody and the use of rhymes that allow a process of redefining their identity as Xakriabá people, besides being a reference to teachers in the development of pedagogical practices in indigenous schools.

Keywords: Indigenous Culture. Language Games. Non-Formal Education.

RESUMO – Práticas Culturais e Jogos de Linguagem entre os Povos Xakriabá. O artigo analisa práticas culturais e jogos de linguagem entre os povos indígenas Xakriabá, Minas Gerais. A pesquisa foi realizada por meio de observação participante e entrevistas e focou a Folia de Reis, o Samba Chula e a Loa, caracterizando-as como formas multimodais de linguagem que, distanciando-se das práticas de oralidade cotidianas, compõem um mosaico simbólico construído por intermédio de reflexão sobre a própria linguagem e pelo uso de estratégias de construção dos sentidos como o ritmo, a melodia e o uso de rimas que permitem um processo de ressignificação de sua identidade como povo Xakriabá, além de serem referência para os professores na elaboração de práticas pedagógicas na escola indígena.

Palavras-chave: Cultura Indígena. Jogos de Linguagem. Educação Não Formal.

Introduction

This article aims to analyze certain cultural practices and language games, such as the *Folia de Reis*, the *Samba Chula* and the *Loa*, among indigenous Xakriabá peoples, from a double perspective. First, these expressions will be considered as part of a symbolic repertoire through which participants can reflect on their own language outside of the everyday, dialogical relationships. It is considered that the experience of playful and poetic forms, that have rhythm, melody and harmony, is fundamental to the development of the memory and of the formation of concepts.

Second, we believe that the analysis of these practices can contribute to the understanding of the process of redefining *being Xakriabá*, as it gives visibility to unique modes of participation of the various members of the community, in increasingly complex relationships. The presence of the youngest ones – raised in a context of profound changes in various spheres of social life, marked by the increasing presence of writing and the school – affects the redimensioning of the rituals and, more broadly, the Xakriabá identity. The new configuration of intergenerational co-existence has implied changes in the ways of doing and inserting oneself into the rituals and other dimensions of daily life, such as meetings to address community issues, wedding parties and Catholic rituals, as well as ongoing pedagogical practices in indigenous schools. In this scenario, writing is seen by the elderly – who generally do not need it – as a way of helping young people in the process of memorizing litanies and prayers, and their engagement in the games of verses and jokes. These involve sophisticated skills of improvisation in which the subjects must perform complex cognitive tasks that involve the articulation of several higher psychological functions such as memory and the development of concepts.

The Xakriabá people, as shown below, occupy a territory of 53,075 hectares situated in the North of the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The population is approximately 8,867 inhabitants, distributed in 33 villages and sub-villages, and an economy based on family farming. The Xakriabá are predominantly Catholic although, in the last few years, they have been going through major changes in their religious experiences due to the expansion of Evangelical practices. Although they have prolonged contact with non-indigenous peoples, they have specific cultural characteristics which distinguish them from the surrounding population (Brazil, 2012; Guerra, 2010).

This article was based on a study program created with the goal of developing teaching, research and extension activities with the indigenous peoples who participate in the project of implementing indigenous schools in the state of Minas Gerais. A culturally referenced education was created to understand conceptual and methodological problems involved in the understanding of the symbolic processes related to the appropriation of the written language and other knowledge studied in

school. We were, from the beginning, faced with the challenge to know how the different actors think, feel and act in this educational process.

This article seeks to examine issues related to cultural practices not mediated by school and considered by the Xakriabá as significant in the process of acknowledging their own uniqueness, in addition to being taken as a reference for thinking about proposals for the implementation of ongoing indigenous education in the schools. The descriptions and analyses attempt to take into account aspects inherent in language games, their internal logic, the forms of articulation between oral and written language and the language of music. We aim to show the relationship between the sounds in melodies, in a harmonic field, in rhythms, scales and pitch, as well as the social relations among individuals and groups, since the musical production depends on both producers and receivers in socially defined contexts (Pinto, 2001).

The study was conducted through participant observation and interviews, carried out in Barreiro Preto village in 2006, in two moments of insertion into the field, approximately ten days each. This village was chosen because, in previous years of contact with the territory, we identified a wide variety of experiences and musical practices. In addition, in terms of logistics, the village is located in the central region of the Xakriabá indigenous land, with easy access. Finally, it was in this village that the researchers built partnership bonds, both with its leaders as well as with the young people, the women and the children.

Theoretical Problematization

In this study, we started from a theoretical reflection that pointed to a dual need. Initially, we were looking to overcome the duality between oral and written language as a way of naming the differences between cultures. This search for resilience has become a common effort in various studies conducted over the last few decades, in an attempt to link the broad conclusions reached by researchers to the first generation of studies on the subject, marked by the *great division* (Goody, 1988/1977) between orality and writing. The second need dealt with the problematization of the centrality occupied in the analyses, and even in studies subsequent to those carried out by the first generation, by only two dimensions of language: oral and written. Even when understood in neither a dual nor a dichotomous mode, they are not sufficient for analyzing complex cultural phenomena. As we approach the musical and poetic practices of the Xakriabá, we attempt to analyze the intersections and forms of articulation among different semiotic systems. We assume that the Xakriabá culture is a universe composed of different languages and forms of expression: oral, written, gestural and corporal, pictorial and sculptural.

According to Graff (2016), even in contemporaneity, studies on literacy still seek to overcome dichotomies that continue to guide and divide opinions and direct studies between the oral and the literate, the written and the printed, the printed and the electronic. In this sense,

the near absence of robust research on orality and oral literature can be seen as a mark, at the same time, both of the limits of many interdisciplinary efforts and of the “power of disciplines” (Graff, 2016, p. 243). The author proposes a reconstruction of the concepts of culture and of writing, looking to explore the relationships between them, instead of the contradictions and dichotomies.

Brockmeier (2002) states that it is not just a coincidence that a series of studies in the field of the Humanities, dealing with the relationship between speaking and writing, appeared in the early 1960s. These studies are based on the assumption that there is a strict relationship among language, thought and culture, and, therefore, there is a profound influence of the different semiotic systems on the production and sharing of knowledge. The consequence of these two ideas, according to the author, is that there was a real revolution in the ways of thinking of human beings, from the introduction and use of new semiotic systems. Oral language would be responsible for the emergence of cultural forms, characteristic of the human being; whereas, alphabetic writing would have made possible the emergence of logic and abstract thought, without which neither the building of philosophical thought nor the modern scientific revolution would be possible.

These concepts were later criticized but, what matters here, is Brockmeier’s (2002) intriguing idea that writing only becomes a central object of study in the Humanities at the time when a powerful technological revolution, whose consequences for human thinking would be deeper, was emerging. This moment would be marked by the threat, imposed by the deep emerging technological revolutions, to orality and writing. Thus, the author advocates the idea that, paradoxically, the multimodality of semiotic systems and their multiple relations with humankind’s ways of thinking and acting of has its source at the same time that writing emerges as the central object of investigation of the human disciplines.

In an even more intriguing approach, the authors state that this idea is a second turn in semiotics, that broadens and deepens the so called *linguistic spin* produced from the work of W. Humboldt (1767/1835). It had profound consequences for the consolidation of the idea that human cultures have incommensurable and unique worldviews, marked not only by linguistic differences, but by distinctive ways of seeing the world, of building knowledge and sharing it with future generations. Using other arguments, Finnegan (2006) points out an important methodological and conceptual modification in the work of Jack Goody. According to the author, Goody (2012), when re-examining his interpretations about the *Bagre Branco* (White Catfish) narrative, which is part of the ritual of initiation of the Lodagaa and consists of more than 6,000 lines of transcription, begins to understand an issue that may seem simple, but in his work represented a major theoretical transformation.

In Goody’s (1988/1972) studies from the early 1970s, the myth was understood only through the analysis of words transcribed on paper.

Anthropologists started to understand the myth, primarily through the use of tape-recorders and, more recently, through the use of still cameras and videos, as a moment much richer and more complex. First, it was possible to understand the existence, at the time of recitation, of a large number of other participants: leaders, elders, guides, first and second-degree relatives, and other assistants. Likewise, other factors such as melodies, rhythms of xylophones and drums, dances, food, drink etc., were taken into consideration. In addition, the use of new technological resources made it possible to understand that the myth changes constantly: only one recitation cannot be understood as “a unique key for the interpretation of a culture” because, for the author, the “[...] myth does not unlock a single door as it exists in the plural, changing radically over time” (Goody, 2012, p. 93). The variety of narrative versions of myths made for various audiences changed their conception about the mnemonic and cognitive limitations of the so-called predominantly oral cultures. Based on a rich description of the ceremony and the events that make up the initiation process, understanding the myth only as an oral practice is not just a simple limitation, but a misunderstanding of the meanings of the ritual for its participants. This new reading by Goody shows what Finnegan calls the multidimensionality of oral expression. For the author, orality must be understood in its multiple dimensions and not only by the word itself. These other dimensions, such as the visual, kinesthetic and acoustic aspects, involve not only forms and intonations of the oral discourse, but all the surrounding sounds. For Finnegan (2015), this approach offers a broader and more realistic perspective of all the factors involved in oral expression, than the model whose analysis focuses on strictly linguistic aspects.

The multimodal approach of oral expression and communication in this new perspective highlighted by Goody (2012) has profound consequences for all disciplines. However, above all, it implies a new conception of language as action, and not only as a system of representation and communication of thought. Oral language should not be understood as an autonomous system of signs that can be considered independently, but as a mode of social action created by the interaction of human agents in a given context (Finnegan, 2006).

Thus, this new approach questions the close links between language and cognition, between language and rationality, and understands that human communication must be grasped through multiple contextual aspects: rituals, artifacts, gestures, sounds, rhythms, customs, clothing, paintings, etc. This theoretical and methodological perspective implies a broader view of orality and its relationship with writing or, rather, with various forms of writings and, consequently, the understanding of its social, cognitive and affective effects as well as on the formation of the person. Therefore, the concept of the relationship between orality and written culture as a continuum is limited and distorted because,

[...] modes of communication comprise a variety of spectra of words and sounds, as well as multiple forms of graphical, imagistic, musical and gestural representations, besides the paralinguistic aspects that are critical to the interpretation of interlocutors' intentions, usually hidden in formal discourses or in double-meaning expressions, which are very common in all human interactions (Finnegan, 2006, p. 56).

It is in this context that we propose the analysis conducted in this paper. Although we have located a significant number of papers on *Folia de Reis*¹ in Brazil, the perspective presented here seems to focus on one aspect still not well explored in studies: the relationship between language in its various dimensions, popular culture manifestations and indigenous identities.

The study context: pointing out the historical and cultural dimensions of the Xakriabá

According to the *Instituto Socioambiental*, Brazil is the country with the largest ethnic and linguistic diversity in the world. Indigenous peoples have suffered innumerable massacres, however, since colonization. Around 270 ethnic groups, who speak about 265 different languages, live in Brazil².

The Xakriabá people, as an indigenous group, share a common history with the ethnic and historic group of the so-called *Indians of the Northeast*, who are “[...] several peoples adaptively connected with the *caatinga* and historically associated with pastoralist and the missionary standards of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Dantas; Sampaio; Carvalho, 1992, p. 433). This community was formed from the Mission of St. John of the Indians, which originated at the end of the 17th century and early 18th century, and was located in the region of the Alto São Francisco, bringing together Indians from various ethnic groups (Santos, 1997).

Having been in contact for about 300 years with the Western way of living and thinking, the understanding of their culture and forms of social organization presents many challenges to the field of anthropology. This leads to an important debate about the approaches necessary for understanding these ethnic groups, their formation process and differentiation from the surrounding society. According to Oliveira (1998, p. 69), such ethnic groups need to be thought of differently from cultures with little or negligible contact with non-indigenous peoples. For the author, it is necessary to “[...] abandon architectural images of closed systems and to start working with processes of circulation of meanings, emphasizing that the non-structural, dynamic and virtual character is constitutive of culture”.

The Xakriabá, besides being many, making the task of homogenizing them impossible, have experienced social, economic and cultural transformations since the late 1990s. They arise from the imple-

mentation of different governmental policies in the fields of education, health, social assistance and support for the implementation of projects to encourage agricultural production, which are developed and administered by their own population³, with the participation of external agents. Due to its scale, the implementation of schooling in all of the more than 30 villages, from kindergarten to high school, should be highlighted. This process of schooling demanded the training of a large number of young teachers, who became representatives of a project of political emancipation and of a literate culture that is being permanently constructed and reconstructed, in a space based, predominantly, on various semiotic systems linked to orality.

Cultural Practices and Language Games: the *Folia de Reis*, *Samba Chula* and *Loa*

Based on these reflections, how can one analyze cultural practices and musical language games, such as the *Folia de Reis*, *Samba Chula* and *Loa*, which occur among the Xakriabá?

The *Folia de Reis*, among these peoples, is an event that occurs regularly between the dates of December 25 and January 6⁴. It also occurs at other times during the year, when it is known, among the Xakriabá, as the *Reis temporão*. There are two types of *Reis temporão*. One is performed to give thanks for a received grace; and the other, during festive times. The difference between the regular *Folia de Reis* and the one that occurs out of season is that, in the first one, the revelers go from house to house⁵; while the second takes place in a specific place, as in the house of someone who made a promise, or in other places dedicated to the celebration, like the school and the community house.

The *Folia de Reis* is composed of approximately ten revelers who participate by playing and/or singing⁶. The instruments used are predominantly: accordion, guitar, *viola caipira* [a 10-string guitar], tambourine, bandeirola [a type of tambourine], and two types of handmade drums called the *caixa* and the *bumba* (or *zabumba*)⁷. The person responsible for the revelry is called the ambassador⁸, and is the person who coordinates, organizes, gathers the revelers and, also, is the keeper of the instruments. The ambassador is also the reveler guide, but the inverse is not true. The reveler guide is the person who sings the first verses of the *Folia de Reis*. Another reveler, besides the ambassador, may sing the first verse at a moment called *pull the kings*⁹.

One of the questions that can be asked about the *Folia de Reis* among the Xakriabá concerns the *modus operandi* of the ritual, the division of tasks and the social roles. The somewhat rigid and hierarchical definition of the places to be occupied by the participants, and the meanings of this organization for a group apparently governed by the horizontality between peers, friends, neighbors and close relatives stands out¹⁰. The hierarchy, here, seems dominated by generational

affiliation – the eldest are chosen to lead – and, consequently, by the greater knowledge of the traditions. Literacy and school attendance by the younger ones seems not, yet, to have altered this division of social roles¹¹. Therefore, it may be claimed that this division of places and attributions among the participants serves a function of the organization, through which the group makes the realization of the event feasible through the division of tasks and the attribution of responsibilities.

The ritual begins at the moment that the revelers sing the verses called the *entrance* and the *greeting*¹², which are a prayer they sing to the baby Jesus¹³ and ask for protection and permission of the owner of the house. This can be seen in this passage, recited by JI, ambassador of the *folia de reis* in the Riacho dos Buritis village.

*The father, the Son, the Holy Spirit
May the master of the house give permission to greet the saint
Oh, hail saint Isabel, who wrote hail holy queen
We worship baby Jesus in his crib*

Afterward, the participants sing the verses called the *column of kings*. They are 25 verses that may be sung two ways. The first way is called the *hammered kings*: the reveler guide sings a verse, and all the others repeat it¹⁴. The second way, called the *cut kings*, the reveler guide starts the third verse, and the group responds by singing the fourth, and so on, until the twenty-fifth verse. The column below is an example sung in the *Folia de Reis* of the Sumaré and Barreiro Preto villages:

*Guide: Oh receive this Honorable revelry, song of revelry, our song of revelry.
Revelers: The party of the path of Jesus our Lord, of Jesus our Lord
Guide: Oh receive this honorable revelry, the beautiful revelry, our beautiful revelry
Revelers: Receive your holy kings with a happy heart, receive heart*

Figure 1 – Music Score of the Column Sung in the Folia de Reis



Source: Elaborated by authors.

The first aesthetic and cognitive characteristic of the functioning of the rites, founded in oral and musical language observed among the Xakriabá is its dialogic structure. It is arranged among different voices that symbolize a call and response. According to Chaves (2014, p. 254), in this system of utterance, also found in the *Folia de Reis* that he studied, “[...] the margin of choice of words (lexi-

con), as well as the way of combining them (syntax), is limited, because the text sung by the first pair (question) leads to their response by the second pair.” The rhyme can also be understood as another aspect that contributes to the formalization of the language: “[...] the choice of words to be rhymed, as well as their arrangement in the frames, is fundamental to the observation of how the syntactical and semantic restrictions are combined in the formalized language of song” (Chaves, 2014, p. 256).

These voices, performed in intervals of thirds¹⁵, are organized in the *Folia de Reis* in tonal harmony, without modulation¹⁶, as it may be seen in the music score, above (Figure 1).

One of the hypotheses raised in the present study is that the interval of the third, in which the second voice always sings two notes above the first, is considered, in the field of musical language, one of the simplest structures to be perceived by the use of acoustic and harmonic perceptual strategies, helping the youngest among them to participate. In other words, it is possible, in this type of composition, *to learn by ear*. That is, to learn without the intervention of musical writing and its properties to record, among other things, intervals between sounds, the relationship among the notes of a melody, the tone in which it is performed, and the possible changes in tone. The result is the construction of musical practices that are relatively complex from the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic point of view, but which favor musical dialogue among the members of the group and their learning by the youngest ones. This way of learning resembles that found in predominantly oral societies, as Egan (1987) shows: the whole body, often with the aid of an instrument like the drum, through rhythmic movements and *nursery rhymes*, is used in the processes of memorization.

Another fundamental element that characterizes this practice consists of the rhythmic structure of the melody, composed of binary measures. This formula is maintained throughout its course, which also facilitates the participation of the youngest. Chaves (2014, p. 254) states:

Modality of vocalization which articulates sound/word, rhythm/melody, text/music, the songs of the revelry [...] are placed at the border between speech and sound, language and music. Structured rhythmically, melodically and textually, the song can be conceived as a rare and uncommon mode of speech, distinct from ordinary speech. In these, we perceive the priority of the text, ultimately determined by the speaker who has a wide range of options to choose from. These options include syntactic forms used in vocabulary, through recitation, intonation, pitch, sound, rhythm, sequencing, progress etc. In chanting, the repertoire, whose origin goes back to the beginning of the world [...] is repetitive, following preset formulas that adhere to formalized patterns and structures.

Therefore, “[...] the words are not spoken or sung freely, but should be based on a particular syntactic pattern of tempo, pitch, melody and rhythm” (CHAVES, 2014, p. 254). These findings corroborate what several studies on oral narratives have shown since the 1930s: they follow certain patterns of composition which assist in the performance of the poets, in the memorization and incorporation of themes and values by the audience. The formulas – groups of words having the same metric conditions and following the same syntactic pattern –, the rhythm and stability of certain themes and ideas facilitate the task of the poet and help the audience in the memorization. Milman Parry (1971), analyzing the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*, showed that these poems, attributed to Homer, were structured from some simple equations, strategically distributed throughout the texts, facilitating the memorization, the connections within the sequence and the repetition. The studies of Albert Lord (1960) and Eric Havelock (1996/1963) have also contributed to showing that these long epics were transmitted from generation to generation (Homer would only have recorded them 500 years after the events that they narrate), without requiring, as has long been believed, a superhuman effort of memorization: stereotyped phrases, formulas and segments of the narrative contributed to the preservation of the tradition. Havelock (1995), referring to the Parry’s work, thus understands the role of formulas in the composition and oral performance of the poets:

Their function was perceived as an aid to improvisation, filling metric gaps to allow the singer to maintain the narrative flow. [...] These conclusions were later confirmed empirically by the practice of Yugoslav singers, who also partially improvised their recitations, telling a story that included phraseology already used in previous versions (Havelock, 1995, p. 29).

At the end of the revelry, the homeowners greet the revelers, when they are given food, soda and alcoholic beverages¹⁷.

As can be seen, the *Folia de Reis* is a practice that enables the coexistence of several interests and forms of engagement. For the elders, devotion and faith in the baby Jesus is the most important factor, but this sense coexists at the same time with the celebration and the playfulness and the closer relations among the families. According to AL, an apprentice of reveler guide of Barreiro Preto village:

There are people that also use this a lot, but what do you mean, [...] people use, you know, but don’t act like they are supposed to, right? Because *folia*, there are a lot of people that see it as fun, but actually it is not supposed to be fun. It entertains, but it is more like devotion. What do you mean, a kind of prayer, right? Even today, there are many people that go in a *folia* or a prayer, and think they are there like you’re at a party, because they will help or have fun [...] one of the things that they are going to do, and they think they’re doing something well.

As indicated above, there is a strong concern, mainly on the part of its producers and older members, with the permanence of the *Folia*.

For this reason, they are concerned with encouraging the participation of young people and children, as JA told us, the revelry of the second guide of Barreiro Preto village, and JI, ambassador of the *Folia de Reis* in Riacho dos Buritis village. In the words of JA:

[...] but here we don't stop after the *folia*, no, we don't. We always work. There's something you can't finish, like my late father used to say, [...] 'you know son, in the world, whatever we find, we leave in the world'. Here there is so much that hasn't finished. Some old prayers, we still use them, they didn't change much, we use them. Even if they changed a little, but we must not change what we already know for something less certain. [...] I find it interesting, because in those days when there were only a few houses scattered, only three or four *revelries* passed by, and we didn't know whose they were. There was a *folia* here from the Brejo, from the Riachinho [...] It was such a beautiful and polite *folia*. When this one left, the other came, that's why I say: in the world, whatever we find, we leave in the world. [...] That's why I say, it can't stop, it can't. Because there are many places where the *folia* is over, because only the old folks are left, only the old folks. The young people weren't interested. We get invited to sing the *folia* in faraway places, because the old people were dying and sometimes, the young couldn't scratch or cut. [...] Then, there was no one. And here, thank God, it isn't over.

The importance of the *Folia de Reis* within the larger dynamic of the community, not only as a privileged, pedagogic practice, may be seen in the words of JI:

Someone has to show ... either you out there or us. Someone's got to show these kids that they have to learn the *Reis* to replace us, we're getting older. You have to show them that if the *Reis* finishes, it's all over, the native people are over, this thing about the indigenous area is over.

The Xakriabá, as they have an intense and long-lasting history of cultural exchanges with non-indigenous groups, need to create and recreate, permanently, a representation of their identity through which they constitute themselves as an *us* that allows them to differentiate themselves as a group, having their own history that must be shared through educational processes in and outside of school (Devereux, 1978 *apud* Schneider, 2004, p. 98). Even though the *Folia de Reis* is not specifically of the indigenous peoples, neither in its origins nor in its contemporary appearances in Brazil and in other countries, it is redefined here and has become part of *being Xakriabá*.

According to Eder (2003), in these processes of identification there should be consideration not only of a need to preserve that which is common to the members of a group, but also the relationships of interest in which the group needs to recognize a collective identity and, consequently, to differentiate itself from that which does not belong to the group. This discussion is, then, clearer if we consider the history of the constitution of the Xakriabá as an indigenous people recognized by the state, and their struggle for possession of the land.

Thus, several cultural practices of European origin, like the *Folia de Reis*, the *Via-sacra*, the *Festa de Santa Cruz* are part of the set of rituals which are recognized as part of their history and of their culture: “[...] if the revelry finishes, everything finishes, the indigenous people finish, this business of the indigenous area finishes.”

Among the Xakriabá, the *Folia de Reis* also includes a moment in which the revelers sing verses they call the *Samba Chula*¹⁸, while the people form a circle and dance. This moment occurs after they pray, sing, eat, drink and give thanks for the offerings they received, intoning verses of farewell and singing up to the next house, where everything is repeated. The Xakriabá call these verses the tenth¹⁹, and their composition or performance *taking the tenth* or *pulling the tenth*.

The verses are composed based on important events and have great repercussion, as JI, ambassador of the revelry of the Riacho dos Buritis village, told us:

OK, look, sometimes an angry guy comes around over there, there the guy makes a mess all around, a guy takes a tenth on him. He sings and takes a tenth on him. Just like M, E of M, you've heard ... of M's factory, guy, from M's cachaça. He had some trouble once over there in Januária, he was married, but he liked the bum over there. And, at that time, there was a very angry sergeant there and he went to look around there for a little while and the sergeant found him on the street, and he was rich. In Januária, he wanted to be the mayor, right? And the man arrived and gave him a career that was with the woman there, back then they found him on the street so there was no one or that, they pulled out the club, then the police gave him a career there and we went and pulled a tenth on him like this:

'I'm leaving, I'm leaving, I'm not going to leave. The police beat the poor, they beat the rich too. The rich when they get beat, don't say anything to anyone. By day he's on the farm, at night in the mill. The police beat the poor, they beat the rich too. When they see a beautiful woman, just pull a \$100 bill. The police beat the poor, they beat the rich too'.

We find someone that does something stupid, we get the tenth on him and *samba* (laughs) and he was filthy rich, owner of the M factory, which is on the other side of town there. Then, we pulled the tenth on him 'the police beat the poor and beat the rich too'. Then as he was rich, he thought that they didn't beat him, and then to hide from the guy, by day he was on the farm, so that no one would see his face, at night, he was in the mill. [...] There are several tenths of these men around, they fought somewhere, we fit in and he gets a tenth and samba. It's so that... It is all to remember the past. And so it goes on, you know?

What is seen is that the production of these verses demands a way of thinking about the semantic and phonetic aspects of their language. This results in the creation of narratives having rhythmic structures that function as formulas that are mediators of memory, and allows both the expression and learning of shared values and meanings. Feldman (1995) draws attention to the importance of these formulaic mechanisms, showing that, in addition to being important for memorization, they function as mechanisms for reflection on the language itself, contributing to the construction of new forms of abstraction and memorization. The richness and variety of these resources in predomi-

nantly oral cultures shows how, contrary to what the traditional analytical perspectives have stated, they are complex, cognitive processes inherent in the different cultural practices having a pedagogic sense in that they enable the youth to appropriate their own meanings and uses, and to participate actively in their performance.

The meanings of the verses of the *Samba Chula* can also be seen in the *Loa*, which in general is recited on special occasions, such as weddings, by older persons or community leaders. According to HI, one of the leaders of the Barreiro Preto village:

The *Loa* is a verse²⁰ that we recite on the wedding²¹ or engagement day, at the wedding party we usually say something, preferably rhyming. A talk, to give a talk speaking normally isn't very common, y'know? We often speak rhyming, y'know? It's a tradition that we always speak like this, y'know?

It is noted that HI makes a distinction between what he calls a *talk*, related to the sphere of daily life, and the rhyming language used at engagement parties and other specific moments. Among the Xakriabá, the speech is identified as a more fluid and less structured way of speaking. The *rhyming speech*, on the other hand, refers to a way of publicly declaiming the verses. It is, therefore, a more elaborate speech, including some specific metrics.

In order to understand the meanings and the forms of creating the *Loa* more properly, we describe below an excerpt from an interview with JO. He is an important orator from the Barreiro Preto village, and has no command of the written language:

Sir, HI, he learned through writing, from books he studied. He can learn too, I mean, through his idea [...] so he gives some thought and does a *Loa*. Here there are some people who sing or talk like that, think before they talk, talk and it works [...] I usually talk *Loa* as well. [...] Yes, but in times of engagement, at the engagement table [...] there are some engagement... and sometimes we... They ask us to say something and we say like that...

The first observation made by JO is that, in the creation of the *Loas*, there are people who use writing to learn how to develop them, but what prevails is the production through improvisation without the mediation of writing. It is interesting to observe that, in the ethnography conducted by Chaves (2014), the *cabeças de folia* were referred to the books, the *Horas Marianas* and the *Livro do Oriente*, that contained the principal texts that the reveler had to memorize²². The author found none of these books in the community studied, but affirms that all the *cabeças* that he met while in the field had, in their houses, notebooks filled with handwritten copies of the verses. Among the Xakriabá, the need for using the writing for memorization of the verses is associated with the younger generations, marked by attendance in school.

The examples of the *Loa*, below, collected in the field, allow us to contemplate the variability of themes present in this poetic/musical demonstration. In the first example, there is a reference to the creation

of the world. In the second, common aspects of married life, and advice regarding the attitude of the couple before the marriage can be observed. This is a very common theme in the *Loas* among the Xakriabá. In the third, a critique of the inequalities between rich and poor is seen and, in the fourth, a reference to alcohol addiction, overcome by the reciter:

Loa 1:

When God created the world and made mankind
The darkness Angel came with all its evil
Planting the seeds of malevolence within society
So we are born among the bad seed
Evil that is paid and not painful, but it is powerful
Has the mouth of a lion and the poison of a snake

Loa 2:

The Holy Spirit comes to enlighten us
Bless these grooms and all their family
Illuminate their way wherever they go
Strengthen our minds so that we won't stray
The Holy Spirit looks at those who are hungry and protects the innocent
Cure the ailing and give health to the sick
And to our needy brothers who have no land or home
Give them a house and land to work
For the sustenance of the family, the daily bread that will never lack
We thank God
First of all
The omnipotent God
Who created the firmament
Heaven Earth and sea
Created the Sun and the stars
Created the beautiful moonlight
Married life is good, unmarried is even better
But after a year and a half everything is dull
The woman drops the skirt and the man twists his jacket
His beard grows like the jaú fish and his hair thickens like a vine
But this is all a joke, it's just a daring
This is the couple that in this village will exist, if they are Joseph and Mary
Let's see if they follow the couple from Nazareth
Because in this material world only with dignity and faith

Loa 3:

Look at this people gathered
Here and everywhere
There are happy and cheerful people
There are sick people
There are people starving
Living life crying out
Because of the rulers

Who can't rule
Comfort for the poor
It is for the maharajas
They got rid of Fernando Collor
And put Itamar
Then came Fernando Henrique
To run the country
Let's see if he now
Does a job
That will please the people

Loa 4:

Cachaça is a white girl
She is the daughter of the man that's always plotting
The man drinking cachaça
Can't save money
Whoever sells pays the tax
And whoever drinks pays the stamp

It can be claimed, then, that the *Loa* and the *Samba Chula* serve as mnemonic and symbolic resources that allow the production, storage and transmission of knowledge using rhyme and rhythm. Thus, practical and moral knowledge can be preserved through the repetition of verses and transmitted at special times when the attention of the community is focused on the reciter. At the same time, it can be stated that the verses are not restricted to this pragmatic dimension, but also represent an artistic and aesthetic function.

Final Remarks

Two sets of conclusions may be discussed, based on the present study. In the first place, it can be claimed that the *Folia de Reis*, *Samba Chula* and *Loas* express multimodal forms of language that, unlike what happens in the daily oral practices, demand that when the participants (re)elaborate verses and narratives, they reflect on the language itself. The idea of some authors, like Feldman (1995), is repeated that not only writing is capable of engaging subjects in the process of metalanguage, but also other forms of expression. Starting from a theoretical reflection that points out the need to overcome the oral and written duality, as a form of identifying the differences among cultures, the present study seeks to present and discuss some elements of the cultural practices and of the musical and poetic language games that are part of the symbolic and cultural universe of the Xakriabá²³, considering the intersections and forms of articulation among different semiotic systems. The practices studied seem to contribute to people's reflection on their values, on their daily life and on their own language. This constitutes, Feldman (1995) claims, a complex and rich mnemotechnical cognitive mechanism, characteristic of cultures that do not broadly dominate the written word.

A second set of conclusions concerns the redefinition, by the Xakriabá, of the analyzed cultural practices and language games in

the permanent (re)construction of their own identity. Although it cannot be stated that the demonstrations analyzed are a specificity of this people, since they can be found in practically the entire contemporary Brazilian territory, they have become a constituent part of the Xakriabá being. To be Xakriabá implies assuming a permanent connection with ancestry, with the myths of origin, with the narratives that were constructed to explain its process of social and political construction and its everyday values. At the same time, it also implies appropriating the knowledge produced by other instances of society in a dialogical way. This appropriation is mediated by various forms of language that, recently, also include video, photography and digital media, which take on an increasingly larger and more significant dimension for younger generations.

Finally, it is important to stress that this universe, rich in the use of multiple forms of oral, musical and written language, has been used by teachers as a reference for the construction of educational practices in school. More broadly, poetic and rhyming forms of language use have become a kind of cultural signature of the Xakriabá: a singular way of presenting themselves and of being recognized by other indigenous groups and the surrounding society in public spaces. The symbolic, cognitive and cultural aspects of the *Folia de Reis*, *Samba Chula* and *Loa* studied here may be useful for Xakriabá teachers to reflect on their ways of being and living the culture, with the goal of advancing the construction of an indigenous education, differentiated and organically articulated with its culture.

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Notes

- 1 See the classic study of Brandão (1978) and also Canesin and Silva (1983), Chaves (2014), Mendes (2007).
- 2 Available at: <<http://www.socioambiental.org/pt-br>>. Accessed: 12 September 2017.
- 3 For an understanding of the relationship between the Xakriabá people and the social projects, see Escobar (2012) and Mendonça (2014), among others.
- 4 According to Van der Poel (2013), the *Folia de Reis* has its origins in the Germanic winter solstice festivals in Europe. However, over time, it has taken on a Christian significance. The *folia* celebrated in Brazil was brought by the Portuguese colonizers and was used as a catechetical resource. It was part of the processions, and was practiced within the Church. Due to the geographic, ethnic and climatic diversity of the country, other forms of celebrating this have appeared in different parts of the territory. For the author, the African religiosity played an important role in this process. Santa-Anna Nery (1992-1889) is the only folklorist consulted who records the *Folia* in the dedication to the indigenous heritage in his book. Perhaps it is for having observed it in

locations in the Amazon region. In most of Brazil, the *Folia de Reis* is celebrated between December 24 and January 6.

- 5 The *regular Folia de Reis* most strongly resembles what is found in other parts of Brazil. This is described by Van der Poel (2013, p. 441) as “[...] a procession of devout persons which, in an act of faith, goes among the houses and farms of the parish singing, playing and bringing offerings to repeat, symbolically, the journey of the Three Kings from the East to the Baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem”.
- 6 Araújo (2007/1973) claims that, in Minas Gerais, the number of singers and participants in the *revelries*, although it varies, is around 10.
- 7 The instruments used in the *Folia* among the Xakriabá are quite similar to those found in *revelries* in other parts of Brazil: caixa [a type of drum], tambourine, viola, guitar, cavaquinho and possibly an accordion” (Van Der Poel, 2013, p. 441).
- 8 Van der Poel (2013) mentions other names found, for those who play this role, in addition to the ambassador: *head of the folia*, *master*, *master of the viola*, *captain of the company*, *soloist*. Cascudo (1988, p. 336) also notes the expression *alferes* for the leader of the group. Chaves (2014) notes the terms *head*, *guide* or *captain* for the leader of the revelry and *emperor/empress* for the owner of the house. According to Van der Poel (2013, p. 441, underlined in the original), “[...] to be the master of a revelry is a task of great *responsibility*, of a true spiritual *leader*; in addition to organizing the marching and singing, s/he must know how to respond to all the questions that the people ask about the revelry and about the *birth of Jesus*”.
- 9 The expressions *take the Kings* and *take away kings* are noted by Silvio Romero (1954/1882) and by Morais Filho (s.d./1895), in studies published at the end of the 19th century.
- 10 According to Van der Poel (2013), in Brazil, many revelries are sung by people from the same family. In most of the revelries studied, the musicians are accompanied by three men or masked clowns, who lead the Magi represented in the banner. In some places, the revelers are elected each year.
- 11 In another study of the Xakriabá, Galvão and Gomes (2017) showed that even activities that demand written form, like the development of social projects, the elders are recognized as those who have the knowledge (*mental design*), although they need the youth to carry out the role of *scribes* (*the ink on the paper*).
- 12 According to Chaves (2014, p. 253), “[...] internally divided into *entrance*, *part* and *exit*, the song, using verses like “[...] my noble dweller / good news I came to give you / Saint Joseph has arrived / who came to visit you / upon arriving at this house / the banner has entered the guide / Saint Joseph has arrived / with his noble *folia*”. This is the moment in which they announce the presence of the revelers and the Saint to the homeowner.
- 13 According to Morais Filho (n.d./1895, p. 46), they are “[...] memorized verses from long ago”.
- 14 In some *revelries*, there are revelers who “[...] sing in two groups of three or four; other *revelries* have up to six voices in a group” (Van Der Poel, 2013, p. 441).
- 15 Chaves (2014, p. 254), in an ethnography from a *Folia de Reis* conducted in the north of Minas Gerais, found a similar structure: “From the vocal point of view, the song is performed with four voices, which are divided into two doubles formed, respectively, by a guide and his assistant and by the counter-guide and

- his assistant. Each pair performs the same text simultaneously at an interval that, musically, tends in parallel thirds”.
- 16 Tonal melodies are those which use only notes from a major or minor scale, which are tonal scales. There is no modulation when all the notes of the melody of the song are found in a single scale.
- 17 The offer of food and drink by the homeowners seems common to several documented revelries (Cascardo, 1988/1954; Van Der Poel, 2013).
- 18 According to Van der Poel (2013, p. 214), the *chula*, of Portuguese origin, in Brazil “[...] may indicate both a group dance and a solo song”. There is much variation in the use of the term in different states of the country, and can indicate anything from *emboladas* (Ceará) to dances like the *fandango* (Rio Grande do Sul). In several states in the northeast, the *chula* was sung to the guitar and had a malicious, sometimes erotic, meaning (Cascardo, 1988/1954). A meaning similar to that used by the Xakriabá was found by Van der Poel (2013, p. 214) in Rio de Janeiro: “[...] name given to verses recited by clowns in the *folia dos Reis*”. The relationship of the *chula* to the *folia de Reis* was also identified by Cascardo (1988/1954, p. 223), for Portugal: “[...] instrumental group, converging to groups of *Natal* and *Reis* where, in case of not welcoming the party or refusing offers, a voice was heard in a hoarse critical tone, not sung but heralded and this would be the beginning of the *Chula*, disreputable, disrespectful and mocking; then there would be dance, the stomping of the grapes, and later came the *autarchic chant*”. Morais Filho (n.d./1895) indicates the presence of the *chula* in other popular *autos* like, for example, the *bumba-meu-boi*.
- 19 According to Cascardo (1988/1954, p. 282), the *tenth* is a “[...] composition of ten octal verses, in Portugal, which was disseminated in Brazil in the last decades of the 17th century”. In the next two centuries, the *tenth* became the preferred form for “commenting the stanza” in improvised verses. The *tenth* “[...] spoke of the nobility and wisdom of the improviser, an index of courtesy, distinction and elegance”. Judging by the examples collected in the field, the Xakriabá call not only the compositions of ten verses the *tenth*, but use the expression in a broader way. Possibly, it was synonymous with rhymed verses of seven, eight or nine poetic syllables which, although based on well-known formulas, allowed for a certain degree of improvisation. They treat, therefore, the *tenth* as synonymous with verse, “[...] rhymed and rhythmic poetry. Any and all poetic composition” (Cascardo, 1988/1954, p. 789).
- 20 According to Van der Poel (2013, p. 580), the *loa*, the word originates from the Latin *laus* which means *to praise*, is any praise or accolade that introduces dramatic compositions. Cascardo (1988/1954) indicates that these verses of praise may, or may not, be improvised. Mário de Andrade (1982), in an extensive study on dramatic dances in Brazil, conducted in the 1920s, collected several *loas* found in these demonstration, like in the *cheganças* and in the *bumba-meu-boi*.
- 21 Also according to Van der Poel (2013, p. 580), wedding *loas* were found by folklorists in Januária, Minas Gerais, and in Bahia.
- 22 Van der Poel (2013) states that in many *revelries*, books were hidden from rival *revelries* so that they had no access to knowledge of the birth of Jesus.
- 23 In addition to the rituals described in the present study, there are other rituals that are part of the symbolic repertoire of the group and compose a rich and diverse scenario. These include the *Toré*, the *Festa de Santa Cruz*, some songs, verses and dances which characterize the Ariri, the dance of *São Gonçalo*, the *Batuque*, among others.

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