

## DEMOCRATIZATION OF HERITAGE PRACTICES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN TIMES OF RE(EXISTENCE)



<https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n3-231>

Submitted on: 02/22/2025

Publication date: 03/22/2025

Glacilda Nunes Cordeiro Santos<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The central theme of this article is the construction of national identities through the possibility of patrimonialization of *Maxakali* rituals, that is, the *yãmîy*-cantos that refer to the *yãmîy*-singing spirits. In a transversal way, it highlights other issues that bring into discussion the marks of the struggles for heritage in times of (re)existence, while also problematizing the commotion by images of statues and/or other heritage assets burned/vandalized in 2021. From a decolonial perspective, the objective of our reflection is to answer the question: to what extent can the poetic-musical compositions (*poemúsicas*) sung in the *yãmîyxops* of the *Maxakali* be considered as an element of meaning for the elevation and registration as Brazilian intangible heritage, considering the new forms of resistance in times of coups, attacks on heritage and dismantling of democracy? To this end, the article is divided into two topics permeated by the understanding of heritage policies in Brazil, and by reflections on the construction/deconstruction of national identities based on the ways of life of native peoples.

**Keywords:** Identities. Patrimonial Practices. *Maxakali*.

---

<sup>1</sup>Dr. and Master in Letters from the Federal University of Piauí – (PPGL-UFPI)  
Graduated in Full Degree in Letters-English from the State University of Piauí – UESPI  
Email: [glacilda.nunes@ifpi.edu.br](mailto:glacilda.nunes@ifpi.edu.br)

## INTRODUCTION

On December 9, 2022, historian Ana Flávia Magalhães Pinto published the following article: "*What makes Brazil move when statues are set on fire?*" on the portal of Geledés<sup>2</sup> - Instituto da Mulher Negra, where he problematized the "monumentalization of racism in Brazil".<sup>3</sup>

The author, also considered the first black professor to work in the Department of History at the University of Brasília – UnB, ironized the repercussion of the fact that occurred in July 2021, in which members of the Peripheral Revolution movement protested for the right to memory and history for black, indigenous, and poor people, burning tires around the statue of Borba Gato in São Paulo.

At the beginning of the article, the historian drew attention to the real silencing that occurred about the acts against images of the statue of Mãe Stella de Oxóssi, in the middle of Iansã and Santa Bárbara Day that took place on December 4, 2022 in Salvador, at the same time that intellectuals linked to universities and institutions for the preservation of the country's cultural heritage moved social networks and TV and radio programs to criticize the acts against the statue of Borba Gato. In his words,

After all, a year earlier, the reactions unleashed after the murder of African-American George Floyd by white police officer Derek Chauvin in the state of Minnesota reached a global scale. The defense of the right to life in the present involved a review of the way of dealing with the past. The questions, which led to the toppling of statues even in England and Mexico, went beyond the episode itself and made explicit the connection between the recent violent deaths of black people and an unjust structure of long-standing social organization. (PINTO, *What makes Brazil move when statues are set on fire?*, December 09, 2022)

Between public positions and gestures of resistance, Ana Flávia Magalhães Pinto's arguments are aligned with those of other intellectuals such as Antônio Gilberto Ramos Nogueira, when she argues that racism has been treated as a "monument of Brazilian culture that is quite protected" (PINTO, *What makes Brazil move when statues are set on fire?*, December 9, 2022). Controversially (or not), due to the events of depredations of statues and monuments in the United States and Mexico that took place in 2020,

<sup>2</sup> Founded on April 30, 1988, GELEDÉS - Black Women's Institute is a civil society organization that stands in defense of women and blacks because it understands that these two social segments suffer from disadvantages and discrimination in access to social opportunities due to racism and sexism in force in Brazilian society.

<sup>3</sup> PINTO, Ana Flávia Magalhães. What makes Brazil move when statues are set on fire? In: Portal Geledés Instituto da Mulher Negra, December 09, 2022. Available at: <https://www.geledes.org.br/o-que-faz-o-brasil-se-commove-quando-estatuas-sao-incendiadas/>

historians, who would perhaps be the main social professionals interested in preserving the Brazilian historical and cultural heritage, and condemning any act of destabilization of heritage and cultural assets in the country, has come together to discuss and reflect on the forged and consecrated conception of heritage marked by the dimension of coloniality.

In fact, for Antônio Gilberto Ramos Nogueira, the patrimonial issue in Brazil<sup>4</sup> has reached the social dimension and has been gaining expression as a new paradigm to guide the "re-semanticization" of the concept and the reconfiguration of the field, in which the notions of memory, identity and participation prevail, enabling the creation and recognition of various modalities of patrimonialization beyond the assets and the classic legal instruments of listing and registration (NOGUEIRA, 2022).

Especially after 2016, when return policies were installed in the country and "ideas of the past" were anchored in a present of denialism, historians, social scientists, anthropologists, educators, and other intellectuals needed to assume a politics of memory. So much so that in the first days of 2023, the revitalized Ministry of Culture has been discussing the construction of a memorial to the violence with pieces destroyed by the coup attempt carried out by Bolsonaroists in Brasília on Sunday, January 8, so that these acts are not forgotten. For the coordinator of the Memory Center of the State University of Campinas – CMU Unicamp, André Paulilo,

The initiative is more than right. Especially at this time when fake news, half-truths and a criminal historical revisionism have catalyzed the destruction of heritage in Brasília, the creation of a memorial to remember this assault against the political will of the majority of the population will be fundamental to give adequate scope to the repudiation that the actions of depredation of culture, history and politics deserve. (*'Initiative is necessary'*, says historian about the memorial project of the attack against democracy, January 16, 2023, Unicamp Notícias, Available at: <https://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/noticias/2023/01/16/iniciativa-e-necessaria-says-historian-about-the-project-of-memorial-of-the-attack>)

From this it can be inferred that the issue of preserved memory in the country involves the participation of various social actors, as well as the possibility of their practices being a stage and object of patrimonialization, so changes in the attribution of

<sup>4</sup> The first political initiatives related to National Heritage in the country date back to 1937, during the Estado Novo policy in the government of Getúlio Vargas. Although in the 1920s some intellectual articulations drew attention to the preservation of cultural assets existing in the country, the demands coming from groups concerned with the need to register heritage assets were possible after the establishment of the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (SPHAN), in 1937. For more information on the subject see: NOGUEIRA, Antônio Gilberto Ramos. *For an inventory of the senses: Mário de Andrade and the conception of patrimony and inventory*. São Paulo: HUCITEC, 2005; FONSECA, Maria Cecília Londres. *Heritage in process: trajectory of federal preservation policy in Brazil*. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ: IPHAN, 1997.

values to goods, places and cultural practices are necessary in actions of bodies such as the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage – IPHAN.

In this process, we are struck by rituals of native peoples of Brazil who, despite being considered historical subjects and being relatively inserted in research projects and/or government policies, do not have their cultural practices cataloged within the country's Intangible Heritage record books. That said, we take the *yãmîxop* rituals of the *Maxakali* with *yãmîy-cantos* that refer to the *yãmîy-singing* spirits, as a guiding thread in the reflection on ancestral memory and the issues of patrimonialization of assets of native peoples in the constitution of national identities in Brazil.

As *yãmîxop* rituals and their songs, we understand the remaining memory of the various *Tikmũ'ũn* peoples who, based on the studies of Tugny (2009) and Charles Bicalho (2004), traditionally lived in the extinct areas of the Atlantic Forest between the valley of the Jequitihonha, Buranhém, Itanhém, Mucuri and Jucuruçu rivers and today are located in the state of Minas Gerais, in the Green Village (Ladainha), Cachoeirinha Village (Teófilo Otoni) and the *Maxakali* indigenous land – Água Boa (Santa Helena de Minas) and Pradinho (Bertópolis) plots. These will be the themes of the next topics.

## THE SONG OF THE MAXAKALI

As well summarized by the doctor in state and society Ramon Rafaello Castro Souza, after accompanying a group from the Pataxó village of Coroa Vermelha, in Bahia, in April 2019, to a visit to the indigenous territory of Pradinho, in Aldeia Boa Vida, where the rituals in honor of the shaman and master of knowledge Toninho *Maxakali* took place, and an ethno-photographic record was produced that is in the collection of the Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology (MAEA) of the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), singing is considered by the *Maxakali* as a spirit that must be cared for by human beings, who must transmit their knowledge to the next generations (SOUZA, *Virtual exhibition: Yamî, singing spirits in the Maxakali village*, 2020).

The *Maxakali*, or *Tikmũ'ũn*, are an indigenous people of approximately 1,500 individuals who currently inhabit four territories in the state of Minas Gerais. Traditionally hunters and gatherers, they roamed the region that comprises the south of Bahia, the north of Espírito Santo and the northeast of Minas Gerais. They speak their ancestral language, *Maxakali*, from the Macro-Gê linguistic trunk, *Maxakali family*.

According to Charles Bicalho (2006), throughout his life a *Maxakali* individual must learn an indeterminate but significant amount of songs from his tradition. Such chants are called *yãmîy*. The same word also designates the spiritual beings of the *Maxakali* pantheon. Usually such entities are animals, plants, and other elements of nature, especially the Atlantic Forest biome, typical vegetation of the region where they traditionally lived. Ancestors and other dead relatives also become *yãmîy* spirits. Often objects are also sacralized, such as the accordion, for example, "such is the affection and admiration that the *tikmû'ûn* devote to the musical instrument". (BICALHO, 2013, p. 13)

The transmission of knowledge through poetic songs, according to Ramon Rafaello, and also researcher Charles Bicalho (2006), "has contributed to preventing cultural disappearance through forms of teaching-learning mediated by contact with the spiritual world, revitalizing and updating knowledge and practices about the fauna and flora of the territories, language, mythology, worldview and other aspects of the *Maxakali people*" (RAFAELLO, 2020).

For all these aspects, it is observed that, in addition to the preservation of the culture and knowledge of the native peoples in Brazil, the songs of the *Maxakali* and all the ritual that surrounds them can also be inserted and elevated to patrimonialization policies. By the way, betting on this discussion means entering into the issues of heritage and preservation from the decolonial key, notably reflecting on changes in paradigms and concepts that present new requirements to the theoretical and methodological tasks of cultural heritage.

Until the year 2020, the general features of the patrimonialized festivals in Brazil translate manifestations of popular religiosity, of Catholic origin and also of Candomblé, such as the ritual "Bembé do Mercado de Santo Amaro" that originated in 1888, in commemoration of the liberation of slaves. However, even though in some "ways of doing" there is the presence of native peoples, few or no cultural practices of native peoples are on IPHAN's preservation lists, as can be seen in Chart 1.

IPHAN's current policies for the inscription and cataloguing of intangible heritage assets take into account strict official protocols, which need to translate the country's historical memory, have territorial coverage and lasting and long-lasting ties to groups. The recognition of these festivals is supported by Article 216 of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, of 1988, which defines the country's tangible and immaterial cultural assets in the following terms: "Brazilian cultural heritage is the assets of a material

and immaterial nature, taken individually or together, bearers of reference to the identity, action, and memory of the different groups that form Brazilian society, which include: I – the forms of expression; II – the ways of creating, doing and living; III – scientific, artistic and technological creations.

These intangible cultural assets have their most detailed profiles in Iphan documents that followed the constitutional principles that classified cultural assets as tangible and immaterial. From this perspective, the patrimonial registration of these festivals presupposes the connection to certain groups that are the supports of their materiality, especially from their roots in the community. In addition, these representations must contemplate territorial coverage to ensure their recognition, while having the power to consolidate the country's identity.

Quadro 1: Festas registradas como patrimônio cultural imaterial brasileiro			
Nome da Celebração	Cidade/Estado	Classificação da festa pelo Iphan	Ano de registro
Círio de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré	Belém (PA)	Nacional/Patrimônio da Humanidade	5/10/2004
Festa de São Ana de Caicó	Caicó (RN)	Nacional	10/12/2010
Festa do Divino Espírito Santo em Pirenópolis	Pirenópolis (GO) Goiás	Nacional	13/05/2010
Complexo Cultural do Bumba-Meu-Boi do Maranhão	Maranhão (MA)	Nacional/Patrimônio da Humanidade	30/11/2011-2019
Festa do Divino Espírito Santo de Paraty	Paraty (RJ)	Nacional	03/04/2013
Festividades do Glorioso São Sebastião na região do Marajó	Marajó (PA)	Nacional	27/11/2013
Festa do Senhor Bom Jesus do Bonfim	Salvador (BA)	Nacional	05/06/2013
Festa do Pau de Santo Antônio de Barbalha	Barbalha (CE)	Nacional	19/09/2015
Complexo Cultural do Boi Bumbá do Médio Amazonas e Parintins	Amazonas (AM)	Nacional	13/06/2019
Procissão do Senhor Jesus dos Passos de Florianópolis	Florianópolis (SC)	Nacional	20/09/2018
Bembé do Mercado de Santo Amaro	Bahia	Nacional	13/06/2019

Fontes: IPHAN - Livro de Registro das Celebrações; Fototeca Registro de Celebrações. Lista de Registros de 2019. Acesso em: 20 mar. 2020.

Thus, we share the same doubt as Zélia Lopes da Silva in the text "*The "beat" and the meanings attributed to the Boi-Bumbá festivals of the Middle Amazon and Parintins*", which is: "how to think about the safeguarding of the rituals of [native peoples] in a context of profound transformations experienced by contemporary societies, in which significant



ruptures in human relations prevail with the increasingly accentuated cultivation of the isolation of individuals, of hedonism, and of the rupture of the various community ties?" (SILVA, 2020, p. 118).

There are many questions, few are the answers. And in the case of *the Maxakali*, proposals for the inscription of singing rituals, the *yãmîy-cantos*, as intangible heritage of Brazil will also need to deal with the issue of the territorialization of these peoples. We will address the phenomena of territorialization and the consequent process of formation of the Maxakali ethnic identity as a movement belonging to the construction of the national identity of Brazil, in the context of patrimonialization in the following topic.

## **CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN BRAZIL: THE CASE OF THE MAXAKALI**

Again in the light of Ramon Rafaello's studies, we infer that the colonial policy of compulsory settlement in the region of the current Aldeia de Barra Velha in 1861, restricted the boundaries of indigenous territoriality, and consequently acted as a factor of identity reconfiguration involving a diversity of ethnic groups, such as the members of the extensive macro-gê linguistic family, which is identified by historian Maria Hilda Paraíso (1994) with the current ethnomys; Maxakali and Pataxó.

The Kamakã-Mongoiό and the Maxakalί, already known by this name, when assessing the impossibility of continuing to confront the white settlers and the Botocudo groups advancing towards the south, simultaneously chose to accept compulsory settlement and engagement as workers and soldiers under the direction of directors of civilian and military villages and commanders of military divisions. created to promote the just, defensive and offensive war against the Botocudos decreed by the Royal Letters of 1808. (BICALHO, 2006)

From then on, the settlements of the Maxakalί groups, at that time also known as Naknenuk, a word from the language of the Botocudos and which came to be used as a synonym for "tame Indians, allies and villagers" multiplied. These villages, as a result of the advance of the dominant society, ended up being isolated in geographical terms, and the various ritual groups began to be identified in official and private documents as distinct tribes.

This differentiated identification was maintained until the end of the twentieth century, although observers emphasized that the language and social organization were

the same and that these groups always settled together, formed defensive confederations and used the same tactic of establishing alliances with the colonists in order to confront traditional enemies (SOUZA, 2020).

It is important to emphasize that what we understand by territorialization should not be understood as a process of ethnification (or imposition) directed in an externally "and homogenizing" way, since its actualization by the indigenous people leads precisely to the opposite, that is, to the construction of an individualized ethnic identity" (OLIVEIRA, 1998, p.14), that is, "ethnogenesis". In relation to the process of territorialization through the settlement that we referred to earlier, the "ethnogenesis" of the Macro-Gê groups, Maria Hilda Paraíso the author states that:

Thus, we would have that, in the moments before the compulsory settlement, there would have been a probable expansion of territory and a dispersion of subgroups (bands). Consequently, we would have a possible tendency, not materialized due to the penetration of their territories by other indigenous groups displaced by the "whites" and colonizers, of the emergence of new identities. These factors, which resulted, at first, in a growing dispersion and isolation of groups in villages (mainly during the nineteenth century) explain the multiple identifications that we know. However, compulsory settlement, confinement in restricted areas, meant that two identities predominated: Maxakali and Pataxó (PARAÍSO, 1994, p. 10).

This means that the territorialization policy that occurred from 1861 onwards reflects the historical moment in which the problem of the transfer of indigenous populations to the settlements was constant. In this way, the groups that remained in the Belo Jardim village culminated in becoming the current Pataxó, in a deep relationship of interethnic contact with other indigenous populations, while those who migrated constituted other identities through a relative cultural isolation, which can be observed, for example, among the *Maxakali* of the Pradinho territory (PARAÍSO, 1998; SOUZA, 2020).

Although the Boi-Bumbá festivals of the Middle Amazon and Parintins, for example, registered as intangible heritage of Brazil, have added the presence of native peoples, such changes, supported by tradition, have not abdicated the technological advances of the time, creating other dimensions to guarantee bonds of belonging by expanding the affective bonds and sociability between the participants.

It is therefore appropriate to take rituals of native peoples as cultural in their plural dimensions, and as resistance to patrimonialization policies. In this last aspect, we are not referring only to the forms of resistance that transformed and expanded the meanings of heritage. It is worth remembering here that resistances are multiform and, in the patrimonial sphere, are as constitutive of "profiles of actions of conquests of transformation,



as what we could dangerously call conquests of permanence, of reaction to transformations." (MARTINS, 2020, p. 33)

What we need to reflect on are the federal patrimonial practices in Brazil, which aim to transform the difficulties of investing financially and functionally in projects for the inventory and safeguarding of intangible heritage on a scale compatible with that spent on material heritage; the difficulty of registering on a scale that can balance the gigantic distance, the result of decades of precedence, of material heritage; the difficulty of combating a geography of the nation, and consequently patrimonial, which associates blacks with the Northeast, indigenous people with the Midwest and immigration to the South to the North, with only Portuguese heritage being omnipresent.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the *yãmîy-cantos* of the *Maxakali* it is perceived that the dynamics of territorial and cultural reconfiguration were profoundly important factors in the construction of the identity of these peoples. That is, the process of ethnogenesis and ethnification, which developed through the internal cultural dynamics of the *Maxakali*, were fundamental. Around the federal practices of patrimonialization and its developments around the monuments that honor characters today considered questionable and/or condemnable by various segments of the Brazilian population, it has been very important for us to reflect on the possibilities of dealing with these documents of the past, as well as the traditional practices of native peoples, for example, that can be registered as cultural heritage.

Considering that those celebratory artifacts still maintain their discursive force in our squares, streets, museums, textbooks, postcards, websites, and cell phones, two solutions are posed by Paulo César Garcez Marins (2020). Firstly, their removal and elimination, a aspect that can be seen in what happened in the monument to Borba Gato, sculpted by Júlio Guerra and located in the Santo Amaro neighborhood, which took place on July 24, 2021, in São Paulo. Secondly, the removal and placement of sculptural monuments in museums, considered by many as spaces capable of neutralizing their celebratory character and extinguishing the effects of their racist, Eurocentric, hierarchical and excluding dimension.

In their place, new monuments would be placed, for other emblematic characters that today can be considered pertinent or generalizable, as, in the past, it was thought to be, for example, the figure of the *bandeirante*. Thus, in the intention of reviewing memorial

practices, it is inescapable to realize that we always fall into the election of new heroes. And, in this case, the words of Paulo César Garcez Marins (2020) are exemplary and conclusive of the discussion raised here:

I wonder when we will finally dispense with the practice, which we inherited from the 19th century, of honoring heroes. I also wonder when we will finally dispense with the fusionist imagination inherited from the modernists and disseminated in the second quarter of the twentieth century, and which re-hierarchizes us and silences us in the face of the dramas of our past, silence – and resistance to transformation – that lays its consequences on our present. We are, therefore, between resistances – those that are more easily affectionate and that free us from the past – and those that attract us to the past, which continue to be challenges for us to continue our task of building more democratic memorial practices (MARTINS, 2020, p. 40).

## REFERENCES

1. Bicalho (2013). Metamorfose na literatura maxakali. Em Tese, 19(3), 1–12. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287940890\\_Metamorfose\\_na\\_literatura\\_maxakali](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287940890_Metamorfose_na_literatura_maxakali)
2. Bicalho, C. A. P. (2004). Narrativas orais maxakalis: Uma proposta de transcrição e análise [Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade do Novo México]. Departamento de Espanhol e Português, Albuquerque, NM.
3. Cabral, C. B. (2009). A convenção da Unesco: Inventários e salvaguarda. In P. F. da Costa (Coord.), *Museus e patrimônio imaterial: Agentes, fronteiras, identidades* (pp. XX–XX). Instituto dos Museus e da Conservação.
4. Fonseca, M. C. L. (1997). O patrimônio em processo: Trajetória da política federal de preservação no Brasil. UFRJ; IPHAN.
5. Maxakali, Povo. (1998). Mõnāyxop ‘āgtux yōg tappet: O livro que conta histórias de antigamente. Secretaria Estadual de Educação de Minas Gerais-SEE/MG; MEC.
6. Maxakali, Povo. (2005). Penãhã: Livro de Pradinho e Água Boa. Faculdade de Letras da UFMG/CGEEI/SECAD/MEC.
7. Maxakali, Povo. (2008). Hitupmã’ax: Curar. Faculdade de Letras/UFMG; Edições Cipó Voador.
8. Nogueira, A. G. R. (Org.). (2022). Patrimônio, resistência e direitos: Histórias entre trajetórias e perspectivas em rede. Editora Milfontes.
9. Nogueira, A. G. R. (2005). Por um inventário dos sentidos: Mário de Andrade e a concepção de patrimônio e inventário. Hucitec.
10. Oliveira, J. P. de. (1998). Uma etnologia dos ‘índios misturados’? Situação colonial, territorialização e fluxos culturais. *Maná: Estudos de Antropologia Social*, 4(1), 47–77.
11. Paraíso, M. H. B. (1994). Amixokori, Pataxo, Monoxo, Kumanoxo, Kutaxo, Kutatoi, Maxakali, Malali e Makoni: Povos indígenas diferenciados ou subgrupos de uma mesma nação? Uma proposta de reflexão. *Revista do Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia*, (4), 173–187.
12. Paulilo, A. (2023, 16 de janeiro). ‘Iniciativa é necessária’, diz historiador sobre o projeto de memorial do atentado contra a democracia. *Unicamp Notícias*. <https://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/noticias/2023/01/16/iniciativa-e-necessaria-diz-historiador-sobre-o-projeto-de-memorial-do-atentado>

13. Souza, (2020). Exposição virtual: Yamî, espíritos cantores na aldeia Maxakali. Centro de Formação em Artes e Comunicação, Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia – UFSB. <https://ufsb.edu.br/cfartes/noticias/305-exposicao-virtual-yami-espiritos-cantores-na-aldeia-maxakali>
14. Tugny, R. P. de. (2019, 22 de abril). Homenagem ao pajé Toninho Maxakali. Piseagrama, seção Extra!.
15. Tugny, R. P. de. (2009). Mõgmõka yõg kutex xi ãgtux: Cantos e histórias do Gavião-Espírito. [Editora não especificada].