“What About Gender Equality in the Jungle?”

– Tropes of the Unknown, Swedish Gender Exceptionalism and Indigenous Rexistence in Brazil

BY PATRICIA LORENZONI

Independent scholar, essayist and cultural critic.

ABSTRACT

This article examines tropes of the unknown and Swedish gender exceptionalism using a series of photographs taken in the Brazilian state of Acre in 2008. Upon publication, the photos sparked sensation worldwide for supposedly depicting a community ‘untouched’ by the outside world. In Sweden, they came to be particularly understood within a discourse of gender equality. Drawing on, among others, Sara Ahmed’s concept of ‘strangerness’, Alcida Ramos’ ‘hyperreal Indian’, and studies of gender exceptionalism in Sweden, the article places the photos and their reception in a wider context of colonial violence, complicity, and denial of coevalness. In an effort to widen the perspective on the continuing life of non-colonized communities, the article further argues that even while justified and necessary, critique of colonial tropes of the unknown risks reproducing a conflation of the modern with the present that keeps foreclosing the possibilities of other worlds. Instead, in a final reflection, the article turns to the mobilisation of Indigenous women in Brazil and the articulation of a politics of *rexistência.*

KEY WORDS

REXISTÊNCIA, INDIGENEITY, INDIGENOUS BRAZIL, GENDER NATIONALISM

INTRODUCTION: THE PECULIAR CASE OF A SUPPOSED HOAX

"What about gender equality in the jungle?" This question was posed in a Swedish public service radio broadcast in 2008, discussing photos from the Brazilian state of Acre near the Peruvian border. Shot by Gleilson Miranda during an overflight by Brazilian indigenist state agency Funai, the photos showed a small group of men and women standing next to a couple of longhouses, looking up at the aircraft. A press release by NGO Survival International (SI) informed that they showed one of several uncontacted Indigenous communities in the area.

The story was picked up by international media, and soon the 'uncontacted' turned into the 'unknown', 'untouched', 'newly discovered', and 'last of their kind'. Headlines included "Incredible pictures of one of Earth's last uncontacted tribes" (*Mail Online* 30/5), "Tribe Found Untouched by Civilization" (*CBS News* 30/5), "A new tribe discovered" (*El Imparcial* 30/5), and "Unknown Indian tribe found in South America" (*Aftonbladet* 30/5). While SI had stressed the vulnerability of the group in the face of illegal logging, the tropes of discovery and untouchedness soon became the narrative. British *Daily Mail* speculated on the community being "likely to think the plane [… to be a] large bird", and in Swedish *Aftonbladet* readers were informed that the people caught on camera

> are believed to be the very last that have had no contact with the surrounding world. No one knows how they build their villages, what food they eat and how their language has developed. [--- They] probably have been living a life unchanged for 10,000 years.

Despite describing the community as "the very last", the article concluded by stating that there are around "100 groups of people spread over the globe who do not know the modern world" (Berglund 2008).

The sensation lasted little more than a fortnight before the story of the 'unknown' was 'revealed' as a 'hoax'; the community had been 'discovered' already in 1910. Focus now shifted to accusations against Funai and SI for seeking to make a publicity stunt. New headlines read: "Secret of the 'lost' tribe that wasn't" (*The Observer* 22/6) and "'Unknown' Indian tribe was known" (*Dagens Nyheter* 24/6).

It was in the interval between supposed 'discovery' and 'hoax' that a Swedish public service radio show, *Science Radio Weekly Magazine*, engaged with the photos lifting the question of 'gender equality in the jungle'. In this article, I explore both the premises for this question, and the political implications of the continuing resistance of communities popularly labelled 'unknown'. In this, I will relate the colonial frontier in Amazonia to Swedish gender exceptionalism and raise questions of colonial complicity.

The aim is twofold: *Firstly*, to use this specific empirical example of the radio broadcast to explore contemporary coloniality in the intersection of contested sovereignty in Indigenous lands, Swedish gender equality nationalism, and tropes of the unknown. *Secondly*, to make a theoretical argument on how the refusal of communities such as the one depicted in the 2008 photos, points towards the need to rethink the relation between modernity, time and space. To enable this rethinking, learning from contemporary Indigenous mobilisation centred around *rexistence* is pivotal.

My article is a response to María Lugones' (2007, p. 206) call for a detailing of the workings and functions of the modern/colonial gender system, and takes the form of examining the neglected relation between Sweden and the Amazon region both as colonial imaginary and as reality.

Before presenting in detail the empirical example, I will offer a short note on situatedness and terminology, and briefly contextualize the place of modernity's 'unknown'.

ON SITUATEDNESS AND TERMINOLOGY

I write from the position of being the descendant of settlers in two colonised lands: Pindorama and Sápmi. Implicit in the construction of the Acre community as 'unknown' is, of course, that they are unknown to an imagined 'us'. This 'us' immediately includes the photographer, as well as myself. Foreclosed is any identification with the people before (or rather under) the camera.

In the original press release, however, it is made clear that Funai had previous knowledge of the Acre community. They were classified as 'isolated', the term used in Brazilian indigenist policy for communities with none or very sparse contact with colonial society (Lorenzoni & Silva 2014).

Isolating oneself from colonial contact is a strategy of survival, and not a static condition. Far from being 'untouched', thes communities might, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro emphasizes, vacillate between contact and 'isolation' over the course of history, 'disappearing' for long periods of time only to reappear at a later date (Castro 2019, pp. 10–11). Further and problematically, 'isolation' refers only to lack of contact with modern/colonial society. Even if anthropologists and NGOs in recent years have increasingly used the term 'people in voluntary isolation', I argue that this still reduces the social diversity of the Amazon region to a simplified dichotomy between the Indigenous and the modern/colonial.

I will, when referring to communities living in conditions like the Acre community, use the term 'non-colonized'. By this term I understand communities that, by refusing contact, have managed to retain autonomy in the face of colonial pressure – even as they might have had to profoundly adapt their way of life to it. These communities can be said to represent the most radical form of Indigenous resistance against those policies and practices that strive to, as stated in the Indigenous legislation, "harmoniously integrate" Indigenous populations into the nation (Law 6.001/1973). I will use the official term – 'isolated'– within quotation marks only when referring to the communities as conceptualized by colonial society.

STRANGERNESS, UNTOUCHEDNESS AND COLONIAL MOURNING

When entering into global visibility as supposedly 'unknown', non-colonized communities appear as strangers to the modern world. Sara Ahmed stresses that what constitutes the stranger, rather than lack of knowledge, is a specific kind of knowledge making the stranger recognizable as "somebody we know as not knowing". She therefore suggests a move away from investigations of 'otherness', and towards investigations of 'strangerness' (Ahmed 2000, pp. 49-51).

The reception of the 2008 photos articulated a specific kind of popularized ethnographic knowledge, handed down through decades and even centuries as stereotypes of people inhabiting a space 'outside' time. This knowledge persists in media and popular culture despite decades of critical cultural and scholarly discussion. As in the quote from Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet*, the ones 'unknown' appear as stuck in a static but rapidly vanishing past, profoundly incompatible with the modern world. Modern, in these cases, is completely identified with the present.

The trope is not new. In the opening of her classic study *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, Anna Tsing (1993) recalls another sensational 'discovery' in the early 1970s: the 'stone age' Tasaday in the Philippines, initially satisfying a colonial desire for the pristine. These too were later alleged to be a 'hoax', and not as 'pristine' as initially claimed. Tsing argues that not only do images of 'pure' and 'authentic' natives risk striking back at ongoing struggles, but they also obscure the complex histories these communities have as part of colonial modernity (Tsing 1993, pp. ix–x). In the Brazilian context of NGO activism, Alcida Ramos has made similar points. Using Jean Baudrillard's concept of 'simulacrum', Ramos criticizes the "fabrication of the perfect Indian whose virtues, sufferings, and untiring stoicism have won for him the right to be defended". A 'hyperreal Indian' takes the place of flesh-and-blood Indigenous per-

sons, who in turn risk not appearing as 'Indigenous enough' to deserve being defended (Ramos 1998, p. 276).

Such a 'hyperreal native' also enters both fine salons of art and luxurious coffee table books as a highly aestheticized 'last of its kind'. Sebastião Salgado's *Genesis* (2013) project and, even more grandiloquent, Jimmy Nelson's *Before They Pass Away* (2013) are two lavish manifestations of what Renato Rosaldo (1989) has termed 'imperialist nostalgia'; that is, the act of mourning that which one has oneself declared doomed.

"WHAT ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY IN THE JUNGLE?"

Let us now turn to the Swedish broadcast from June 2008. *The Science Radio Weekly Magazine* is a public service show popularizing academic research for a broader public. The scope is wide, topics ranging from technological innovations and medical breakthroughs to historical discoveries. In the brief time interval between the announced 'discovery' and the backpedalling revelation of a 'hoax', a special feature was broadcast on gender roles in Indigenous Amazonia. A senior professor of anthropology was invited as expert on the region's Indigenous inhabitants. As mentioned, the feature was framed by the question: "What about gender equality in the jungle?"[1]

We need to inquire into the premises that made this question appear not only as possible, but also as reasonable. The feature was introduced by two studio reporters discussing one of the newspaper articles in which the photographs were printed:

> **Reporter 1**: So here is a photo showing Indians aiming their bows at an airplane flying over them […] And this group on the photo is supposed to depict an isolated group, that is, isolated from the big world.
>
> **Reporter 2:** Yeah, and people were really fascinated by them. They received lots of attention and one came to think about how it is possible that there are still white spots on the map today. "Newly discovered Indian tribe threatened by illegal logging", the headline ran.
>
> **R1**: Yes, that was the message. […] Funai] wishes to call the world's attention to get an end to illegal devastation of the rain forest, and it is said that this is one of the biggest threats against these Indian tribes living in the protection of the jungle. But what kind of social system is it that Funai […] wants to protect? What about, for example, gender equality in the jungle?

The threat to the community is trivialised by the verifiable fact of illegal logging being summarized as a 'message' based on assumptions ("it is said"). Further, the need for, or desirability of, protection is implicitly related to level of 'gender equality'.

This dialogue is followed by an interview with the anthropologist who, it is explained, lived for several years in the 1970s and 1980s with "Indians in Amazonia", and who according to R1 "has this to say about the rigid gender roles of the jungle". Importantly, in post-production, the reporter's questions have been cut out. The interview is edited as a series of statements by the anthropologist, with added interventions in the form of interpretations, explanations, and conclusions by the reporter. Three specific themes related to gender are dwelled upon: division of labour, division of roles in public life, and sexual relations. I will quote the feature at some length, so as to allow for a reading also of the editing:

> **Anthropologist**: In Amazonia, taken as a whole, it's like this that women are farmers, they take care of the crops. They are often regarded, so to say, as the ones to carry life on […], while men tend to be hunters, fishermen, gatherers of certain fruits and so on. […] Moreover, usually, in general I think, it's the men who fulfil so to say the ritual and religious roles.
>
> **R1:** No, there does not seem to exist any equivalent to female priests nor female politicians among the isolated Indians of Amazonia.

A: Well, it's the men who hold political power, and it's usually very much based on some kind of ritual, that is, religious authority. And then, usually, as I said earlier, men have the ritual and religious roles and therefore also the political power. So in this, one could say, I think, in general, that women are not that much involved in [politics]. But this is far from saying that women don't have influence. On the contrary. […] My experience was that older women, for example, have an incredible influence, one listens to what these women say. In the community where I worked in the very eastern part of the Colombian Amazon, men spoke of the women as mothers of life. You see, there was an enormous respect for these women who had given birth to many children. But in a political process of sorts in a more conventional sense, […] that was simply the domain of men.

R1: Yes, in the jungle men formally rule. And these rather ironclad gender roles also seem to be reflected in the area of sexual relations. Marriage between men and women is rigidly regulated. […] And sexuality where women are involved seems to be hidden. At the same time, men show great tenderness towards one another.

A: In these specific Indian communities, since they are so divided between men and women, precisely because of these rather strong divisions of roles, one is struck by a much greater physical intimacy between for example young men, because they socialize all the time. And, by contrast, men and women do not socialize publicly at all. But, I mean, sexual intimacy on the whole is, in a way, an arena that's somewhat hidden. […] What one sees is often, for example, young men going around and holding each other, hugging each other, sleeping together and so on. What's interesting from my own experience of these communities is that it's, so to say, male intimacy that one sees and that is noticeable, much more than female. The women work out on the fields and come home and cook and take care of small children and so on, while the men perhaps sit and hold each other in another corner, I almost said [laughter]. But that is more or less the scene.

R1: No, gender equality among the isolated Indian groups of Amazonia doesn't seem to reach up to the ideals stated in the political constitutions, but also in practice, in many parts of the big world outside, among others the countries where the Indians live.

Although the show brings in an anthropologist, he does not appear as the real authority. Highlighting Ahmed's point on the stranger as already known, the anthropologist's experience is remodelled so as to confirm the assumptions of the reporter and enabling him to speak with an authority emerging from assumed contact with 'first-hand experience'. In line with Ramos' argument on the 'hyperreal *índio*'[2], the professional ethnographer is perceived as a phenomenon of first kind, one more accessible than Indigenous people themselves, and thus turns into an *ersatz* for the 'real native' (Ramos 1998, p. 282). The access this white and male 'informant anthropologist' has to gendered relations is taken for granted, and even extended to a community in a whole different area than the one from his fieldwork experience.[3] And yet, it is the reporter and not the anthropologist who draws the conclusions, selectively and at times contradictorily, each time beginning with a firm 'no' or 'yes'. The 'ironclad' character of female subjugation among the non-colonized of Amazonia is confirmed.

Towards the end, the discussion of gender roles speculatively enters the sphere of sexuality. The anthropologist's slightly embarrassed vagueness is underlined by the reporter's conflation of sexual relations and physical intimacy: "*Sexuality* where women are involved seems to be hidden. At the same time, men *show great tenderness* towards one another [italics mine]." In the juxtaposition of intermale tenderness with heterosexual discreetness, it is already assumed that male tenderness is sexual per definition. Further, the expression of physical tenderness between the Indigenous men in public, a striking contrast to modern Western masculinity norms, becomes in Amazonia merely more evidence of the subjugation of women. The question in the introductory dialogue

– "what is then the kind of social system that Funai […] wants to protect?" – is given its answer in the general conclusion: "gender equality […] does not seem to reach up to the ideals […] in the countries where the Indians live."

In what follows, and still part of the first aim of the article, I will relate this conclusion to two contexts that might help us to think about its premises, one Brazilian and one Swedish. The first is the colonial frontier as a zone of sovereignty in the making, and concerns the situation in which the photographs were produced. The second is Sweden's construction of itself as gender-equal, and concerns the situation in which the radio program was produced and broadcasted.

FRONTIER SOVEREIGNTY

Despite the declared intent of the photo publication to draw attention to illegal logging in Peru, I will in this section focus on Brazil. The reason is twofold; firstly, the photos were produced and published partly through a Brazilian state agency. Secondly, they refer to the situation of non-colonized people on what is internationally recognized as Brazilian territory, which means the Brazilian state is recognized as the legitimate holder of sovereignty over their land.

Giorgio Agamben's (1998; 2005) analysis of the sovereign decision/exception and biopolitics has been important for the renewed interest in sovereignty within political theory of the last decades. While related discussions have had strong focus on the paradoxical revocation of the law in order to maintain the law, less attention has been paid to liminal spaces in the process of being included in the law, that is, colonial frontiers of expansion. The presence and continuing resistance of non-colonized communities, not subsumable within the logic of the nation-state and yet inevitably caught within its realm, undermines the legitimacy of the territorial state.

Like any nation-state project whose claimed territory is inhabited by non-colonized communities, Brazil is haunted by a contradiction. Agamben observes the etymological proximity between *nation* and *birth* (*nascere*), pointing to how the one born human – *nato* – from the 18th century onward dissolves into the nation (Agamben 1998, p. 128). With *ius solis* as the foremost principle of citizenship in Brazil, national territory is the very material base of a supposed coincidence between *nascere* and *nation*. And yet, here we have people who cannot (as with the figure of the 'migrant') be understood as 'aliens'. Instead, they are both *indigenous* to the territory and utterly *strange* to the nation. With José de Souza Martins (2009, p. 21), we can see how at the colonial frontier of expansion the *nascere/nation* relation collapses in a space-time that simultaneously signals a moment of national birth and the terror of national death.

A national mythology of harmonious racial miscegenation, as well as several projects to move Portuguese speaking populations to the Indigenous inlands, are ways in which the discrepancy between nation and territory has been managed within Brazilian nation-building. With Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima (1995), I see indigenist politics as constitutive of this national project. During republican times – 1889 onward – 'national integration' became the euphemism of a continuing colonial expansion inlands, in which non-colonized people should be 'integrated' as 'national workers'. It was an enterprise guided by 'peaceful' principles, with the national flag and anthem carried out to the dense forests, and with little choice given to those not necessarily interested in becoming part of the nation. Although Brazil's first state indigenist agency *Serviço de Proteção ao Índio* (SPI, founded 1910) nominally had the task of protecting, Lima calls it a "continuation of colonial war by other means" (Lima 1995).

Mbembe (2003) problematizes Agamben's discussion of sovereignty, arguing the concept of biopolitics is inadequate in accommodating colonial warfare. For Mbembe, colonial war is an expression of absolute hostility, the colony a formation of terror and a zone of necropolitics rather than biopolitics. Brazilian miscegenation nationalism however – in which 'Indigenous blood' is claimed as a mark of the nation – calls for a yet more multifaceted understanding of colonial war. In line with Ramos (1998) and Antônio

Paulo Graça (1998), I read Brazil's relationship with Indigenous peoples as a possessive love affair. Force is rewritten as affection, reflected in the indigenist vocabulary of its own expansion front as a 'front of attraction'. Brazilian indigenism encompasses the whole spectrum from paternalistic tenderness to explicit desire to exterminate. This helps us understand as logically consistent, what might otherwise be perceived as a failure or dysfunction on behalf of the state: while SPI's goal was not only to integrate but also to protect – a task passed on to Funai when replacing SPI in 1967 – in practice its operations opened the country's interior for colonial invasion, with disastrous consequences for Indigenous communities (Baines 1991; Rodrigues 2018).

Only with the democratic constitution of 1988 did Indigenous peoples become recognized as full citizens. At about the same time, Funai changed its policy towards non-colonized communities from actively promoting integration to letting the communities themselves decide if they wanted contact. Formally, the Brazilian state thus stepped back from its ambition to actively colonize remaining non-colonized communities.

In a country where significant parts of the territory remain unregulated, the recognition of indigeneity has given rise to a paradox. The 1988 constitution defines Indigenous right to land as pre-dating the state, and thereby independent of it. And yet, only the (federal) state holds the power to guarantee this right. Land that has not yet become privately owned is governed at (non-federal) state level. when areas are settled by land investors, a first step is taken in a process of transforming public land into private property. Land ownership in Brazil thus to a large extent comes to be, as Mbembe (2003, p. 25) puts it, through the "writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations".

Yet, if the land is inhabited by Indigenous peoples, all property titles are nulled. This leads to a paradox: those who have long survived by hiding, now need to become visible. When indigeneity was still defined as a transitory stage on one's way to full citizenship, Indigenous lands were expected to eventually become privatised land. With the 1988 constitution, however, the special status of Indigenous lands has no end date. In areas where latifundia is forming, landlords might prefer to wipe out whole 'unknown' communities to secure the land for themselves, and documentation becomes a crucial tool to prevent massacres. This is the violent landscape of capital driven land expansion that constitutes the background for the decision to publish the 2008 Acre photos.

In these zones of colonial expansion, sovereignty takes on multiple and sometimes contradictory shapes. With formal state presence being weak, what is understood as 'national integration' works through both legal, illegal and extra-legal expansion of private capital (Martins 2009). Colonial entrepreneurs work alternately in cohort and conflict with public agencies. The power to declare who should live and who might die, a common definition of sovereignty, is expressed as much through state omission as through active violence.

Conflicts around Indigenous land in Brazil are as old as colonial expansion itself. We will now shift focus from the colonial expansion in Brazil, to how the colonial frontier in Amazonia is made sense of in Sweden from within an ideological framework of gender relation, modernity and 'Swedish' values. From the contextualization of the photos, we thus turn to the contextualization of the quoted radio show. Why 'ironclad gender roles'? And how does this articulation connect to the expansion of capital at the colonial frontier?

GENDER EQUALITY AS PRODUCTION OF INNOCENCE

Lugones argues hegemonic feminism equates being 'white' in the sense that it is "enmeshed in a sense of gender and gendered sexuality that issues from […] the light side of the modern/colonial gender system" (Lugones 2007, p. 187). Colonization has profoundly restructured ways of perceiving and practicing gender, enforcing new differentials and systems of subor-

dination. Lugones' argument is that this restructuring is not only a consequence of colonial dominance, but a key mode through which it functions. The transformation of colonised females into 'women' in a specific Occidental sense turns loss of traditional power into a prerequisite for a promised future of gender equality (Lugones 2007). It is in recognition of the non-reducible difference between colonial and local concepts of sex and gender, including the difficulty in conceptualizing female forms of power, that Marcia Camargo in her collaborative study of Pataxó femininity uses the Pataxohã word 'jokana' rather than the Portuguese word for 'woman' (Camargo 2024).

In the radio show, the explicit negation of women's influence in the conclusions becomes an all too clear illustration of Lugones' point. Several Nordic scholars have discussed gender equality as part of nation-building projects in the Nordic countries, connecting nation-building to colonial complicity (Mulinari et. al. 2009). Most of these studies have focused on how notions of the Nordic countries as particularly gender equal shape discourses on the 'integration' of immigrants. Jennie K. Larsson (2015, pp. 225–233) shows how Swedish integration policies in the 21st century specifically address how immigrant women should be emancipated by adopting 'Swedish' values, supposedly expressed in their willingness to become paid labour. At play is an equality nationalism that can be understood alongside Jasbir Puar's 'homonationalism' (Larsson pp. 254, 271–272). Further, Ann Towns has shown how the Swedish state, from the 1990s onward, promulgated an identity as the gender-equal country *par excellence*. Notions of modernity and secularization has been increasingly connected to gender equality, giving Sweden a particular place in the world. A government communication from 2000 even proposes Sweden has 'in fact […] come the farthest in the world' (Towns 2002). In 2014, Sweden declared itself the first country to have a 'feminist foreign politics' (Regeringskansliet, 2018).

Both Larsson's and Towns' studies discuss how the notion of gender equality as connected to specifically 'Swedish' values, becomes a way to culturalize social difference between racialized groups while turning attention away from Swedish gender *un*equal realities. Gender equality comes to signal 'Swedishness', while unequal gender relations signal 'un-Swedishness'. Much like Ahmed's stranger, the gender-unequal 'immigrant' is already known through their strangerness, and Sweden is thus absolved from responsibility for the internal production of inequality along both gendered and culturalized/racialized lines (Towns 2002, p. 167).

This helps us understand the context in which gender *in*equality becomes a preferred frame through which Swedish public radio presents the sensation of an 'unknown' community in Amazonia. Despite the apparent astonishment over "white spots on the map *today*", these unknowns seem quite well known, that is, as strangers to modern, equal gender norms. The non-colonized community is subsumed into an evolutionist narrative of modern equality, while the brutality of the colonial frontier is obscured. In what way then, does this connect to colonial complicity?

Analysing nineteenth-century travel narratives, Mary Louise Pratt discusses 'strategies of innocence', consisting of techniques through which writers of travel narratives distance themselves from the colonial system they are part of, thus absolving themselves of complicity (Pratt 1992, p. 7). Linking Pratt's discussion of colonial complicity to Towns' observation on the absolving power of the construction of gender equality, we might connect the two contexts I have sketched; that of the photographs and that of the radio feature. One way to understand this connection is through the flow of goods and capital between a growing agricultural sector in the South and a consumption market for agroindustrial products in the North. In recent decades, Brazil has become the largest producer of soybeans in the world, the grand part of which is utilized as livestock feed. Brazil is also one of the largest producers of ethanol which feeds a global market increasingly hungry for 'green' fuel. Further, Brazil is the largest exporter of beef in the world. These grand-scale environmentally destructive practices are some of the enterprises for which logging clears the ground, pushing the frontiers of agribusiness forward. Sweden has a consid-

erable import of all these products.[5] For people who keep resisting being colonized, the space is steadily shrinking.

TEMPORALITIES OF REXISTENCE

Now turning to the second aim of this article, I wish to return once again to the argument of terminology. Defining specific communities as 'non-colonized' does not imply that they are, as official terminology states, 'isolated'. Rather, these are communities resisting colonial pressure and struggling to keep their autonomy. Further, as Castro (2019) argues (although using the term 'isolation'), the relation between non-colonized and colonial society is not a static one; neither is there a discontinuity between these communities and the struggles of those who have long histories of being forcefully integrated into the state. The individuals on the 2008 Acre photographs had their bodies painted in red of annatto and black of genipap, a widespread custom in Indigenous Amazonia. These same colours were used in the campaign launched by the nationwide Indigenous organization *Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil* (APIB) in 2019, *Nenhuma gota mais* (not one more drop [of Indigenous blood]). Sílvia Guimarães and Mariana de Castilho see these paintings as a way to inscribe one's body as political; the paint symbolizing a tradition tied to the land as well as the violence suffered in the struggles for these lands (Guimarães & Castilho 2021, pp. 338–339).

The threads running between different places and different Indigenous struggles urge us to rethink the relationship between modernity, time and place. Tsing, quoted earlier, sees a poverty of imagination in the modern narratives of 'untouched' peoples. She argues that the systematic denial of the possibility of difference in any deeper sense *within* the modern world, reduces communities struggling for their integrity to a 'dying Other' (Tsing 2014, p. x; Fabian 2014). However, a construction of the 'modern world' as encompassing each and every social community, is also problematic. Such a move reproduces a conflation between the modern and the present that is, in itself, an ideological component of modernity. Modernity might understand itself as a temporal category, but its abode is spatial rather than temporal. Colonization of time and the denial of non-modern coevalness are mechanisms through which colonization of space keeps being legitimized.

We need to recognize that while non-colonized communities share the present with us, they are not part of the modern. Because they are deeply affected *by* colonial modernity, yet not subsumed *into* it, they are not easily intelligible unless reduced to Tsing's 'dying Other'. However, even critiques of the modern often appear unable to imagine a world outside the modern, thus confirming an incompatibility between non-colonized communities and the present. Therefore, I argue, there is an urgent need to listen to those liminal spaces of inside/outside colonial modernity that Indigenous people themselves have long had to navigate. Brazil is particularly interesting in this sense.

Returning to the briefly mentioned mythology of racial mixing: as several scholars have noticed, the figure of the *índio* – always placed in the past – is at the very heart of ideological national formation in Brazil. As a mythical ancestor, the *índio* is doomed to disappear with the arrival of colonial society, remaining, however, as a bloodline in the new national people (Lima 1995; Ramos 1998; Fernandes 2015; Graça 1998; Monteiro 2000). Indigenous peoples themselves, however, have shown no intention to discreetly disappear and become reduced to a bloodline. Refusing to let themselves become assimilated into the nation, and sometimes resurging as Indigenous after long periods of hiding as 'nationals', resisting Indigenous communities point to the failure of the nation to realize itself on the whole of its territory. Being at once the very heart of the nation *and* marking its outer limits, the Indigenous movement navigates an ideological space in which inside and outside coincide. For Castro, their continuing stubborn presence is a "symbol of the immanent resistance against the project of exterminating differences". Immanent, for their very existence is per definition a resistance, that is, a *rexistence*. It is, as it were, "a past that never pass-

es", and in this subversive temporality the non-colonized is decisive for what Castro calls the mobile horizon of Indigenous resistance. (Castro 2019).

Taken seriously as a political rather than a temporal phenomenon, the continuing persistence of non-colonized communities exposes a foundational flaw in the legal fiction of the legitimacy of the modern territorial state. After all, with what legitimate right can a state *today* (to paraphrase the radio reporter) claim sovereignty over 'white spots' on modernity's map? Against the poverty of imagination Tsing criticizes, these spots show that not only are other worlds possible; they exist. For those of us who are children of settlers rather than the unsettled, this existence urges us to *listen* to those living their life in rexistence.

And indeed, the dissonance is strong between articulations from female Indigenous leadership in Brazil and evolutionist narratives of promised gender equality. One of the more prominent new female leaders in Brazil, Watatakalu Yawalapiti, is often mentioned as representing an 'Indigenous feminism'. Watatakalu, from Alto Xingu in the south-eastern part of the Amazon area, played an important role in the female mobilization before and during the April 2019 *Acampamento Terra Livre* (ATL),[6] where a nationwide women's plenary decided on a motto – 'Territory: our body, our spirit' – for the march of Indigenous women later that year. While media portraits of Watatakalu tend to focus on how she, during her teens struggled to escape an arranged marriage and go to study in a 'white people school', her own voice does not subsume these events into a story of individual emancipation. Rather, she speaks of an ongoing struggle to mobilise Indigenous women around tradition, around culture. Watatakalu does not break with tradition to be free but rather navigates a hostile colonial present in order to connect, reconnect and recreate tradition. In an interview for *Museu da Pessoa* (MdP 2019)[7], the story of leaving an arranged marriage, far from signalling a break from 'ironclad' gender roles, becomes part of her assuming a birth-assigned role as leader for her people (Watatakalu & MdP 2019). For Watatakalu, preservation of culture is a dynamic process, including the building of community across cultural and linguistic diversity:

> Today we know that we are a very big people. Borders doesn't matter. It doesn't matter from where you are, if you are from another country, if you are from here, from Brazil. We are all relatives [*parentes*]. To see that we are a united people, rich in diversity, in language, in culture, and that there are a lot of non-Indigenous people who have a lot to learn with our people (Watatakalu & MdP 2019).

Since 2017, the women's plenary has been part of the program at every ATL. It was in 2019 however, during the Bolsonaro government, that the articulation of female Indigenous struggle received broader attention in the non-Indigenous world. This was reflected in the first nationwide march of Indigenous women in August 2019, and in this march uniting with the likewise nationwide march of rural women the same month. The motto of the march, mentioned above, connects the bodily experiences of Indigenous women to sufferings in a colonized land. In an embodied language of Earth as Mother, relating both to similar struggles around the planet and to local material and territorial realities lived in a situation of ongoing colonial expansion, then executive coordinator of APIB Sônia Guajajara[8], stated at the 2019 ATL:

> We always say: Your mother, you do not negotiate. Your mother, you do not sell. Your mother, you care for her. Your mother, you protect her. And we will never allow the agroindustrial companies to win this battle. We will never allow the mining companies to win this battle. We will never allow the return of colonization to win this battle (Bone Guajajara 2019).

In Sônia Guajajara's speech, a territory cut into pieces by private property acquisition, is re-embodied as Mother. The colonial imaginary which turns the female Indigenous body into a metonym for the conquered territory, is rejected at the same time as the spiritual and bodily connection between women and Earth is reaffirmed. The insistence on Earth as an embodied political subject is, as Castilho and Guimarães note, far from mere symbolism. Rather, it is oriented

towards food sovereignty, physical integrity, and the survival of all things visible and invisible (Castilho & Guimarães 2021, p. 323). It is both material and spiritual.

The stressing of women's bodily and spiritual connection to Earth as Mother sits uneasily with dominant strands of Western feminist critique. Yet, as Kena Azevedo Chaves shows, it resonates with feminist strands rooted in experiences of colonization in the Americas (Chaves 2021). Defying dichotomizations between constructivisms and essentialisms, it points to frequent blind spots in Western discourses on gender equality, in which the non-Western subject can access a promised freedom only by subjugating themselves to the logics of colonial modernity.

Conclusion

No other region on the planet is inhabited by so many non-colonized communities as Amazonia. I have used an example from Swedish Public Service radio to discuss how media coverage of such communities, even when briefly recognizing the threat against them, deploy strategies to not talk about the violence at the colonial frontier as part of a world that is also 'ours'. This avoidance is achieved through strategies of innocence that activate tropes of untouchedness, isolation, and unawareness. In the Swedish example, the construction of innocence is interwoven with the construction of a specific 'Swedish' gender equality, on the basis of which the very right to exist of cultures known as 'unknown' can be questioned. Following Lugones' argument on the central place of gender relations and their restructuring, 'gender equality' becomes both a confirmation of colonial dominance and a negation of one's own complicity in it.

What could have been made different? For one, is it far-fetched to imagine that, instead of having an anthropologist in the studio, a commentator from Sápmi would have been invited to talk from experiences of colonialism? And if this seems far-fetched, what does it say about the denial of colonial presents, and the ability to imagine Indigenous people as political agents, in Brazil *and* Sweden?

A promised emancipation from a non-modern collective into free individuals has historically been central to the ideological justification for conquest of Indigenous peoples, and has little to offer in the struggle for survival and justice. Living rexistence – *rexistência* – opens other spaces. For, as I have argued, the abode of modernity is spatial and not temporal, as evidenced by the continuing rexistance of those who have for centuries succeeded in staying at the territorial outside of the modern/colonial regime. But it is also evidenced in the struggle of those at the margins of colonial society who keep rexisting, not primarily as individual carriers of rights, but as collectives including the land itself, its humans, and its non-humans. The struggle and care for Mother Earth, painted in the red of annatto and the black of genipap, is a making of a politics of the possible, taking place in our shared present.

NOTES

[1] The archived show can be accessed at https://sverigesradio.se/vetenskapsradionsveckomagasin.

[2] I use the term índio untranslated from Portuguese whenever referring to a figure encompassed in a national mythology, rather than to people of flesh and blood.

[3] We might contrast this presupposed access with how Indigenous scholar Rosani Fernandes delicately explains her relation to a Tembé Tenetehara community, and the importance of her being both woman and a *parente* (that is, Indigenous) even if her own community (Kaingang) is geographically and linguistically distant from the Tembé Tenetehara (Fernandes 2015, p. 347)

[4] This policy of non-contact was briefly abandoned during the Bolsonaro government 2019- 2022 (Castro 2019, p. 9).

NOTES

[5] For links between the Swedish consumption market and Brazilian agribusiness, see several reports of NGO Swedwatch, all available through https://swedwatch.org/publications/.

[6] Acampamento Terra Livre (ATL) is a nation-wide Indigenous mobilization taking place every April in Brasília since 2004, and organized by the organization *Articulação de Povos Indígenas do Brasil* (APIB)

[7] Museo da Pessoa is a virtual and collaborative project of recording and archiving the lives of people from different population groups and social classes. https://museudapessoa.org/

[8] Since 2023 Sônia Guajajara is Minister of Indigenous peoples in the Lula government.

[9] The research for this article has been carried out with the support of Hilding Svahn's Foundation for Latin American Research, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, and the Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism, Uppsala University.

LITERATURE

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press.

Agamben, G. (2005). *State of Exception*, University of Chicago Press.

Ahmed, S. (2000). Who Knows? Knowing Strangers and Strangerness. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 15(31), 49–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/713611918

Baines, S. (1991). *'É a Funai que sabe': A frente de atração Waimiri-Atroari*. Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi.

Berglund, M. (2008, May 30). Okänd indianstam funnen i Sydamerika, *Aftonbladet*. https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/jPvpJL/okand-indianstam-funnen-i-sydamerika

Bone Guajajara, S. (2019, April 24-26). *Speech held at the Women's Plenary,* Acampamento Terra Livre 2019, Brasília. Brazil.

Camargo, M. (2024). *AWÊ: O Sagrado e a etnicidade das Jokanas do povo Pataxó da aldeia Barra Velha* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal de São Carlos]. BDTD. https://repositorio.ufscar.br/items/1bf33cf4-9bc0-425d-9fd3-6e2ebd5e5d72

Castilho, M. de, & Guimaraães, S. (2021). Corpo politico e crítica decolonial: a 1a Marcha das Mulheres indígenas. *PerCursos*, 22(48), 319–353. https://doi.org/10.5965/1984724622482021319

Castro, E. V. de. (2017). *Os Involuntários da Pátria: elogio do subdesenvolvimento*. Edições Chão da Feira.

Castro, E. V. de. (2019, March 14). *Brasil, país do futuro pretérito*. Aula inaugural do CTCH, PUC-Rio. https://www.academia.edu/38756036/Brasil_pa%C3%ADs_do_futuro_do_pret%C3%A9rito

Chaves, K. A. (2021). Corpo-território, reprodução social e cosmopolítica: Reflexões a partir das lutas das mulheres indígenas no Brasil. *Scripta Nova*, 25(4), 51–71. https://doi.org/10.1344/sn2021.25.32707

Fabian, J. (2014). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. Columbia University Press.

Fernandes Kaingang, R. (2015). Povos indígenas e antropologia: Novos paradigmas e demandas políticas. *Espaço Ameríndio*, 9(1), 322–354. https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-6524.53317

Graça, A. P. (1998). *Uma poética do genocídio*. Toopbooks.

Larsson, J. K. (2015). *Integrationen och arbetets marknad: Hur jämställdhet, arbete och annat 'svenskt' görs av arbetsförmedlare och privata aktörer*. Atlas Akademi.

Lima, A. C. de S. (1995). *Um grande cerco de paz: Poder tutelar, indianidade e formação do Estado no Brasil*. Vozes.

Lorenzoni, P. & Silva, C. T. de. (2014). A moldura positivista do indigenismo: A propósito do Estatuto do Índio para a proteção de povos indígenas no Brasil. In H. Trinchero, L. C. Muñoz, & S. Valverde (Esd.), *Pueblos indígenas, Estados nacionales y Fronteras: Tensiones y paradojas de los procesos de transición contemporáneos en America Latina*, vol 1 (pp. 135–174). CLACSO.

Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186–219. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x

Martins, J. de S. (2009). *Fronteira: A degradação do Outro nos confins do humano*. Contexto.

Mbembe, A, (2003). Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11–40. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11

Monteiro, J. M. (2000). The Heathen Castes of Sixteenth-Century Portuguese America: Unity, Diversity, and the Invention of the Brazilian Indians. *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 80(4), 697–719. https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-80-4-697

Mulinari, D., Keskinen, S., Irni, S., & Tuori, S. (2009). Introduction: Postcolonialism and the Nordic models of welfare and gender. In D. Mulinari et. al. (Eds.) *Complying With Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (pp. 1–16). Ashgate.

Nelson, J. (2013). *Before They Pass Away*. teNeues.

Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge.

Ramos, A. (1998). *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Regeringskansliet. (2018). Handbok: Sveriges feministiska utrikespolitik.

Rodrigues, P. de M. (2018). Marâiwatsédé: Uma tragédia anunciada. *Espaço Ameríndio*, 12(2), 181–211. https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-6524.83399

Rosaldo, R. (1989). *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Beacon Press.

Salgado, S. (2013). *Genesis*. Taschen.

Tsing, A. (1993). *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-Of-The-Way Place*. Princeton University Press.

Towns, A. (2002). Paradoxes of (In)Equality: Something is Rotten in the Gender Equal State of Sweden, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 37(2), 157–179. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836702037002975

Watatakalu Yawalapiti & J. Samaúma. (2019, April 16). *Um feminismo indígena: História de Watatakalu Yawalapiti*. Interview. Museu da Pessoa. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/Um_feminismo_indigena%2C_História_no_Museu_da_Pessoa_%28164911%29.pdf