

INDIGENOUS BRAZILIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

On constructing identity as a Potiguara woman

MARIA ELITA DO NASCIMENTO ¹¹ Federal University of Paraíba, João Pessoa, PB, Brazil**Abstract**

This essay reflects on the construction and perception of collective and individual identity by the author, a Potiguara indigenous woman from Paraíba. The analysis encompasses different levels of identification, considering the dynamics of the domestic group, its kinship-based organisation and its way of life, as well as the knowledge and experiences acquired over the course of the lives of its members in diverse environments (including the village and the city) within an occupied and utilised territory. The findings reveal that, over time, an individual and collective self-awareness has developed, consolidating a Potiguara ethnic identity. In this context, domestic identity emerges as the main axis for the construction of both individual identity and ethnic identity.

Keywords: Identity; Self-Awareness; Domestic Group; Potiguara Indigenous People.

A construção da identidade para uma indígena Potiguara

Resumo

Neste ensaio é realizada uma reflexão sobre a construção e a percepção da identidade coletiva e individual por uma indígena Potiguara da Paraíba, autora do texto. A análise abrange diferentes níveis identitários, considerando a dinâmica do grupo doméstico, sua organização baseada no parentesco, seu estilo de vida, bem como os conhecimentos e experiências adquiridos ao longo da vivência de seus membros em diferentes ambientes (como a aldeia e a cidade) de um território ocupado e utilizado. Os resultados revelam que, ao longo do tempo, desenvolveu-se uma autoconsciência individual e coletiva, consolidando-se a identidade étnica potiguara. Nesse contexto, a identidade doméstica constitui-se como o eixo principal para a construção tanto da identidade individual quanto daquela étnica.

Palavras-chave: identidade; autoconsciência; grupo doméstico; povo indígena Potiguara.

On constructing identity as a Potiguara woman

MARIA ELITA DO NASCIMENTO

INTRODUCTION

Identity is a multifaceted concept at the core of human experience. It shapes who we are and how we are perceived by ourselves and the ‘other’ through our relationships with people and with the world. Its construction is by no means simple: the process involves a dynamic intersection of historical and cultural factors of considerable analytic relevance in profound debates on authenticity, belonging and representation. Very often these debates rely solely on a collective perspective and do not probe the problematisation of self-perception and the construction of individual identification, given that the self-evaluation and the perception of ‘who am I?’ and the stages of reflection that lead to the recognition that ‘I am part of a collective!’ are not always considered when the focus is exclusively on the collective rather than the individual. Yet explaining how individual identity is constructed is highly relevant, especially when we are dealing with members of ethnic groups belonging to indigenous peoples in Brazil who have experienced, or are still experiencing, multiple *processes of territorialisation* over centuries. These processes have produced indigenous collectivities subjected to norms and regulations alien to their ways of life and constrained by a prescribed standard of *indianidade*, a state-constructed ‘Indianness,’ as Pacheco de Oliveira (1998) pointed out.

It is worth emphasising that, according to the latter author, territorialisation should be understood as the production of geographic spaces with fixed and clearly defined boundaries, resulting in a cultural and spatial reorganisation of indigenous peoples. The notion of *indianidade* likewise should not be understood as something ‘natural’ to indigenous peoples, but rather as a social construction influenced by state political actions and by power relations involving various indigenist agents and agencies. It is therefore the outcome of historical and political processes of identity construction (Pacheco de Oliveira, 1998). In this context, we must also consider indigenism itself and its ‘discourse oriented towards the invention of the “Indian,”’ as Teófilo da Silva (2009) observed.

In this way, stereotypes associated with the conduct and understanding of a constructed *indianidade* came to be internalised by non-indigenous society, shaping how this society defines, within its social imaginary, who the ‘true’ indigenous people are, how they should behave and

where they should live. Based on these identificatory processes, anyone who falls outside this prescribed pattern is considered non-indigenous until, through administrative and legal criteria, they obtain formal confirmation of an ethnic (indigenous) identity. In the case of *indianidade*, this confirmation involves diacritical elements selected by agents external to the group, at times relying on stereotypes concerning places of residence (Nascimento 2019, 2022).

To escape this state-imposed framing, it is thus essential to understand how the process of self-perception unfolds for those members of indigenous peoples who, in the past, were forced to leave their original territorial spaces and were prevented from living and practising their own ways of life and worldviews. In order to guarantee their survival, such groups came to live with the imposition of the perspective of the ‘other,’ adapting their customs to this different way of life.

The situation becomes even more complex when we turn to the construction of ethnic identity among members of indigenous groups in northeastern Brazil, whose presence in the region, according to popular understandings, is still considered non-existent owing to the ‘miscegenation’ produced by the various political, administrative and cultural configurations of the colonial period to which they were subjected.¹ These configurations continue to seek the erasure of ethnic identity and the integration of indigenous peoples into wider Brazilian society through legal mechanisms that obstruct the exercise and attainment of rights guaranteed by law, thereby perpetuating the marginalisation of these populations.

Amid this broader scenario — and especially as a consequence of its effects — it becomes essential to analyse the nuances of indigenous identity, examining how it is self-reflected, challenged and reconfigured in contemporary society, rooted in the primary context in which it is generated, namely within the ‘domestic group.’² The domestic group constitutes the first and central site for the production and reproduction of an individual’s primary collective identity, which in turn later acquires an ethnic — here, indigenous — dimension. This matches the line of reasoning found in recent studies, which increasingly point to the empirical perception that domestic groups are the social unit through which individuals reproduce themselves (Wilk 1997), forming local groups in the process. These can be understood as groups composed of three or more generations, residing in close proximity within the same physical space (Nascimento 2022).

This point is of considerable importance for the present study since it enables an analysis of how an indigenous individual perceives and constructs their identity, whether on the basis of the self-awareness proposed by Cohen (1994) and their life experiences within the *environments* in which they are situated, whether rural or urban, as highlighted by Barbosa da Silva (2007), or through their perception of their position as a member of the different

1 Here I refer to the administrative regimes of colonial domination and to the false notion of indigenous acculturation, as will be discussed in more detail below in the section on the *process of territorialisation* (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998).

2 The reference to domestic groups corresponds to Wilk’s *et al.* 1984 concept of the household, discussed in greater depth later.

domestic groups that make up their ethnic group, as observed by Nascimento (2022). The notion of environment used here echoes the formulation of Alexandra Barbosa da Silva, who understands it as a material infrastructure (physical installations: buildings, paths, fences, trees, pastures, and so forth) specific to a given context and providing subjects with resources for the development of certain activities, which, although characteristic, may not be exclusive. She defines the environment as ‘a physical space of relations, a constituent unit of a territory’ (Barbosa da Silva 2007: 95). This definition makes clear that the environment is not limited to an ecological perception alone, but also encompasses an ‘inextricable socio-ecological’ sense that takes into account ‘the interaction of people with the environment through the development of their activities and social relations’ (Barbosa da Silva 2007: 93).

These broader considerations in mind, it is important to point out — so as to situate the reader and afford a better understanding of the themes explored in this article — that the analysis focuses on the Potiguara indigenous people, located on the northern coast of Paraíba state in Brazil, of whom I am a member. The argument outlined above — namely, that the perception of indigenous identity is grounded in the notion of self-awareness (Cohen 1994) — will be exemplified through my own perception of my indigenous condition as a student on the Anthropology degree programme at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB).

Since the notion of *indianidade* (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998, Teófilo da Silva 2009), as previously noted, is fundamental to the argument developed in this article, I begin with a definition and description of how its incorporation has been used by society, by the State and even by indigenous peoples themselves, both as a form of resistance and as a means of survival in the present conjuncture. In so doing, I intend to analyse its relationship with the *process of territorialisation*.

THE NOTION OF *INDIANIDADE* AND THE PROCESS OF TERRITORIALIZATION

Any discussion of indigenous identity in northeastern Brazil must take into account João Pacheco de Oliveira’s observations regarding so-called ‘mixed Indians’ (*índios misturados*), as well as his critique of Brazilian anthropology, which at first failed to give due attention to these peoples, an oversight stemming from the belief that they had either vanished or been wholly assimilated into wider society, an ethnological approach that overlooked the historical processes they had undergone. This perspective led to a classificatory distinction between ‘mixed’ indigenous people, supposedly devoid of ‘cultural distinctiveness,’ and those considered ‘pure.’ In turn, this approach resulted in the marginalisation of the indigenous peoples of northeastern Brazil, who ceased to be recognised either as the object of indigenist political action or as a legitimate subject of ethnological inquiry at the time (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998: 56). Among these peoples, the Potiguara of Paraíba and Rio Grande do Norte stand out.

It was only at the end of the twentieth century that, despite the countless attempts at assimilation, the persistence of indigenous cultural practices among peoples previously declared

extinct came to be recognised. These groups had maintained their cultural identity, expressed in their crafts, religious rituals and forms of social organisation. This recognition kindled academic interest and placed them at the centre of a particular strand of anthropological studies. This occurred because, notwithstanding the state policies of erasure and assimilation of these peoples, dating back to the Portuguese Crown, there was, especially from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, a reassertion of ethnic identity accompanied by movements to recover their territories.

At this juncture, the work of anthropologists like Pacheco de Oliveira becomes crucial for understanding the process of sociocultural reorganisation, the social recognition of ethnic identity and the territorial claims of indigenous peoples, as well as the actions of the state throughout the lengthy process of redefining and recovering their territories. Their research is essential for grasping the transformations in these groups' modes of social and territorial organisation over time, as well as their present configuration.

It was by analysing these historical and social processes, as well as the actions of the state in this context, that Pacheco de Oliveira defined the notion of *territorialisation* as a 'political intervention that assembles a set of individuals and groups within clearly defined geographic boundaries' (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998). As an effect of territorialisation, the following would occur:

- 1) the creation of a new sociocultural unit through the establishment of a differentiating ethnic identity; 2) the formation of specialised political mechanisms; 3) the redefinition of social control over environmental resources; 4) the reworking of culture and the relationship with the past. (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998: 57)

One of the key considerations used by the author to reflect on the reorganisation of cultural elements in response to the need to demonstrate the ethnic identity of indigenous peoples of north-eastern Brazil to the state was the conception of the ethnic group proposed by Barth (1969), that is, as an 'organisational type.' This reflection led to the rejection of the idea that these peoples had been integrated into wider society and had lost their culture. Barth argued that the principal characteristics of an ethnic group lie in the maintenance of the boundary separating it from other groups. This boundary is determined not just by cultural differences, based on elements selected by the group itself, but also by ongoing interactions that, through this selective process, reinforce a distinction between groups during interethnic contact. In this dynamic, it is the groups themselves that define their identity, such that the cultural elements used for this purpose may change and adapt according to the social interactions and sociopolitical contexts involved.

By emphasising the dynamic and adaptable aspects of culture as something negotiated on the basis of the interests and needs of groups within a specific historical context, Barth's arguments displaced the idea that isolation produces the distinctiveness and cultural objectivity of an ethnic group. Distinctiveness is instead understood as defined within the dynamics of contact between groups. Consequently, it is likewise impossible to assume the existence of a 'pure' culture, especially in an intersocietal context.

According to Pacheco de Oliveira (1998), an aspect that must be considered in interethnic relations is the existence of specific and precise political arrangements, in large part guided by criteria set by the nation-state. Such arrangements, he argues, arose as a result of what he defines as two *processes of territorialisation*. Briefly, the first process was marked by different phases of ‘mixtures,’ beginning with the Jesuit mission villages, followed by their destruction and the establishment of *vilas* or small towns in accordance with Pombaline legislation in the eighteenth century. This process was subsequently shaped by the 1850 Land Law, which resulted in the enslavement of indigenous people, interethnic marriages, the prohibition on speaking native languages and the imposition of the ways of life of the surrounding society. These developments led to the rapid loss of indigenous territories to the colonisers.

The second process was marked by territorial claims arising from the political reorganisation of indigenous peoples in diverse forms of cultural and territorial resistance, supported by official indigenist agencies (the former SPI or Indian Protection Service,³ now FUNAI or the National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples), which during the twentieth century began to promote the demarcation of these territories with the aim of ‘fostering the group’s cultural development.’ However, within this dynamic, *indianidade* (state-constructed Indianness) came to be mobilised by state agents (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998: 60) and with it a standard was established to be followed by all ethnic groups seeking to recover their territories. This standard involves the performance of cultural practices and activities deemed ‘traditional’ by State agents, such as the *toré* ritual among indigenous peoples in northeastern Brazil.

According to Pacheco de Oliveira, the recognition of territory as a political act determined by agents external to the groups transformed indigenous life, which came to constitute itself as ‘an organised collectivity, formulating its own identity, instituting mechanisms of decision-making and representation, and restructuring its cultural forms (including those relating to the environment and to the religious universe)’ (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998: 56).

The significance of this action was that it allowed indigenous peoples to seek out their cultural roots, thereby strengthening their ethnic identity. It also helped disseminate the perception of these peoples of the Brazilian northeast of how they had been classified in the past and how they understand themselves today, not as ‘mixed’ indigenous people, but as ‘descendants’ or ‘branch tips’ of the ‘old trunks,’ their ancestors. Another important outcome of the actions imposed from outside the group was the definition of elements that the SPI and, later, FUNAI selected as ‘traditional.’ One example of such elements, incorporated by indigenous peoples, is the imposition of a change in the political-administrative organisation of indigenous areas which, following the criteria of the nation-state, came to include the figure of the *cacique* (chief) as political leader (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998).

3 In Portuguese, *Serviço de Proteção aos Índios*.

Another salient factor in relation to the ‘place favourable to the cultural development of the group’ was the notion of the *aldeia* or ‘village,’ which in Brazil refers to demarcated indigenous lands, as well as to the idealisation of this space as ‘the place of the Indian.’ Here, as Barbosa da Silva emphasises, it is important to note the construction of the ‘village environment,’ which is ‘a product of the colonialist logic used to designate a space of ethnic exclusivity’ (Barbosa da Silva 2007: 14). According to Vieira, this space was generated ‘on the basis of the existence of a political domain that required a political representation’ (Vieira 2010: 55), which, as we have seen, was the *cacique*. This position was instituted with the function of mediating relations between the indigenous community and the Brazilian state, via Funai and other official bodies, as Palitot (2005) observed.

It should be clear, therefore, that the notion of the *aldeia* created by the Brazilian state was designed to maintain control over indigenous peoples within the spaces it delimited and within which specifically-targeted public policies were implemented. This procedure generates conflicts when it legitimises only those indigenous people who live inside the *aldeia* and excludes those who live outside, compelling them to devise strategies to adapt to the system’s rules and thereby secure their rights (Nascimento 2022). In this sense, territorialisation, as Pacheco de Oliveira argues, reveals a complexity that cannot be reduced to the geographical dimension of land, but also involves cultural, identificatory and political issues connected to the historical context and to the determining relations of power. Here, *indianidade*, as an identity constructed amid experiences of resistance and the struggle for cultural and territorial rights, is something still being negotiated today by indigenous peoples, society and the state (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998). While Brazilian society and the state attempt to deploy this construction to control indigenous people within reserves, the latter reshape it according to their own interests, adapting it to their own survival strategies.

The above arguments become relevant to the discussion contained in this article because *indianidade*, as a form of control mobilised by society and by the state, is not only present in actions that work to obstruct the demarcation of indigenous lands especially those grounded in legal mechanisms, but also in the mobilisation and territorial claims of indigenous peoples who have successfully recovered all or part of their territory, as well as those still engaged in struggles for the demarcation of their lands. Moreover, it equally encompasses those who are reorganising themselves but do not yet possess all the elements required to prove their existence and obtain social recognition through the state. Among other factors, this is due in large measure to the distancing that has occurred, a diaspora, among members of these indigenous peoples, caused by invasions, expulsions and displacements from their traditional territories to other localities.

Finally, it also applies to those who today recognise themselves as the *pontas de ramas*, the ‘tips of the branches’ — that is, as descendants of indigenous peoples who are still in a process of ethnic self-discovery, still discovering that they are indigenous. When I say ‘dis-

covering that they are indigenous,' I refer to those people who know they are descendants and have family members who belong to the people to which they themselves belong, but who do not yet feel fully ready to assume their self-identification as they have no means of proving their ethnic identity, given that most of their relatives do not live in the *aldeia*. In such cases, collective identification — followed by social identification — is required for individual identification to be validated. This aspect is present in the conflicts generated by the perception and construction of individual identity — a point discussed later in the text.

Understanding the entire colonial process that led to the current condition of these indigenous peoples thus helps ensure that they are not affected by labels such as 'fake,' 'self-seeking' or 'lying,' terms by which they are or will be classified by society during their process of self-affirmation. Some of these labels can even lead to the criminalisation of indigenous peoples during the process of making their claims. All of these issues stem from the prejudice of those who often have no idea of how this historical, political and social process unfolded — or continues to unfold — or the wilful ignorance of those who benefit from the non-recognition of these peoples.

It is worth emphasising that much of this prejudice is a consequence of the erasure of these historical facts and/or the lack of explanation provided to the population as a whole, compounded by the absence of such clarification in most Brazilian school rooms. This reflects an educational model that follows a westernised approach, presenting the coloniser as the 'discoverer' of Brazil and indigenous peoples as the dominated population, as if they had allowed themselves to be subdued without resistance. In certain aspects, this western perspective has also manifested in universities where academic work grounded in the viewpoint of the 'other' often receives greater prominence and preference over the work produced by so-called 'native' scholars. The latter are, at times, prevented from exercising their right to speak, generating a conflict between academic and traditional knowledge, disregarding the fact that both produce understandings of the world.

Amid this discussion, we cannot fail to mention the current debate within Brazilian anthropology, particularly with regard to the presence of the 'researcher/native' within the university and in academic production, as well as the critiques directed at anthropology's traditional approach concerning the use of western references in anthropological practice.

One of the central and pioneering references in this regard is the indigenous scholar Gersen Baniwa (2019), who provides a critical analysis of the trajectory of anthropology in Brazil, historically constituted as a discipline set in a colonial framework. According to the author, knowledge production about indigenous peoples was for a long time elaborated from a Eurocentric perspective. Baniwa therefore proposes pathways for the development of an indigenous anthropology committed to the decolonisation of knowledge, capable of overcoming what he calls 'cultural, ethnic and epistemic racism' — that is, the systematic devaluation of indigenous knowledge in favour of a science regarded as universal and neutral.

Along these lines, he argues for the strengthening of an anthropology in which indigenous people themselves are the protagonists in the production of knowledge about their cultures, trajectories and lived realities.

Although recognising advances in the inclusion of indigenous people within academia, the author argues that the indigenous presence in Brazilian universities does not in itself guarantee the decolonisation of knowledge. This is because the epistemological and institutional structure, rooted in colonialism, continues to reproduce inequalities and silencing. Consequently, indigenous students are often compelled to assimilate paradigms and theories that disregard their own cosmologies and modes of knowing. Thus, the author emphasises the need for a ‘liveable interculturality’ that goes beyond discourse and is realised in concrete academic practices.

It should be stressed that, for Baniwa, the defence of interculturality does not entail rejecting the scientific knowledge already produced by anthropology, but rather expanding this corpus through the valorisation of indigenous bodies of knowledge. Only in this way will it be possible to overcome historical inequalities and produce an anthropology committed to epistemic justice.

In another geographical context, the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2018) critiqued the western concept of culture for its hierarchical discourse, which leads anthropologists to conduct research always with the idea of a ‘self’ studying an ‘other.’ This ultimately produces inequalities and insecurity among ‘native’ researchers who carry out studies *by* and *from* elements of their own culture, since such projects have not been sufficiently valued within academia. Abu-Lughod thus proposes a critique of the western model, highlighting its effects of homogenisation, forced coherence and timelessness, all of which contribute to the fictional construction of the ‘other.’ Beyond questioning the idea of ‘culture’ on theoretical grounds, Abu-Lughod proposes textual strategies that valorise the historical and contextual interconnections of whatever is being investigated. For her, ethnography must be rooted in the specificity of lived experience, breaking with the ‘us/them’ dichotomy by presenting concrete accounts of lives in particular times and places, thereby restoring discursive protagonism to research interlocutors.

As noted, this approach has been adopted by indigenous and quilombola peoples as part of the process of decolonising western thought concerning them. In this sense, we can identify a convergence here with what Wagner (1975) termed ‘reverse anthropology,’ a concept taken up by Ferrari *et al.* (2011), in which groups historically studied by anthropologists begin to develop reflections on the western world based on their own frames of reference. In this exchange, the anthropologist is drawn into dialogue with spiritual leaders, such as shamans or quilombola masters, recognising that intercultural understanding involves the articulation of different forms of creativity and meaning-making. From this perspective, the classical objectivity of the social sciences is called into question, replaced by a ‘relative objectivity’ that emerges from the interaction between distinct worldviews.

Complementing this debate, Santos (2015) offers a reflection grounded in his experience as a quilombola leader, arguing that knowledge must recognise the value of orality as a le-

gitimate source. Overcoming colonial thought, he maintains, requires the incorporation of traditional epistemologies into academic space. For this to occur, it is essential that indigenous and quilombola researchers challenge the normative, hierarchical and westernised logic of the university, thereby promoting an institutional reconfiguration. This transformation, Santos argues, will occur when universities are willing to learn from traditional peoples rather than merely speak about them. Only then will it be possible to break with the colonial structures that still guide many academic practices (Santos 2015).

POTIGUARA TERRITORY: USURPATION, ENVIRONMENTAL DEVASTATION AND INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE

Returning to the Brazilian northeast and the Potiguara people of Paraíba, it is essential to note that although coercive actions by the state and non-indigenous society are widespread and display certain similarities, the process of territorialisation — as described by Pacheco de Oliveira (1998) — did not and still does not occur in the same way for all indigenous peoples in the country as a whole, nor specifically in the northeast. Among the Potiguara, for instance, colonisation was marked by conflict and the usurpation of their territory. The initial phase was characterised by missionary settlements, intended to convert them to Christianity and make them ‘civilised.’ Interethnic marriages within these settlements produced the so-called ‘tame Indians,’ *indios mansos* or *caboclos*, destined to serve as a workforce for the Portuguese Crown (Palitot 2005).

In the eighteenth century, under Pombaline legislation (the *Diretório*), the Potiguara and other indigenous peoples were transferred to the tutelage of the Crown, which transformed the mission settlements into towns. Thus, the settlement of São Miguel in Baía da Traição became the town of São Miguel, while the settlement of Preguiça became the town of Nossa Senhora dos Prazeres de Monte-Mór. The administration of the Pombaline *Diretório* aimed to integrate indigenous people into colonial society. This situation led, on one hand, to the state later developing the municipalities and, on the other, to landowners incorporating ever more areas of indigenous territory. The continual usurpation of land by rural proprietors and by representatives of the state caused indigenous people to lose their territory, forcing them to remain in the region as wage labourers (Palitot 2005, Marques 2009, Araújo 2017).

The false claim that there were no indigenous people still living in the region, combined with the continual invasion and sale of Potiguara territory, created serious obstacles to the development of their way of life, limiting their access to the environments and resources essential to their survival. This process provoked changes in the spatial organisation of the Potiguara, who, due to the ‘territorial dispossession and the advance of patronage, found themselves forced to live alongside and compete for their lands with small farmers and large landowners’ (Palitot 2005: 29).

Another pivotal moment in the history of this people, which further altered the social and territorial organisation of the indigenous population, was the arrival of two major actors:

the Rio Tinto Textile Company (*Companhia de Tecidos Rio Tinto*: CTRT) and the Indian Protection Service (*Serviço de Proteção aos Índios*: SPI). According to Palitot:

The Company would exert a patronal and industrial iron-fisted domination over the Indians of the former Monte-Mór settlement, forcing the denial of indigenous identity in its area of operation. The SPI would establish a tutelary regime for controlling territorial and population resources in Baía da Traição, regulating private access to the lands through leases and seeking to control the indigenous population through the regime of *indianidade* (Oliveira 1998). (Palitot 2005: 30)

This iron-fisted control began when the Rio Tinto Textile Company, owned by the Lundgren family, installed its textile mill on the banks of the Mamanguape River in 1924. The construction and operation of the factory further accelerated the process of invasion and destruction of Potiguara territory through the continual extraction of timber from the forests for its activities and the construction of an urban infrastructure geared towards the development of the town of Rio Tinto (Cardoso *et al.* 2012: 16). This phase of domination exercised by the Lundgren family became known among the Potiguara as a ‘period of violence and terror’ owing to the constant surveillance to which they were subjected. Many were expelled from their lands, while those who resisted had their fields destroyed by the company’s guards and were thus forced to work in the factory to survive.

Everything in the town of Rio Tinto — from the houses, hospitals, schools and churches to the roads, among other infrastructure — was controlled by the Lundgren family who used their power to prevent indigenous people from accessing the mangroves and forests, environments that had been repurposed for the extraction of raw materials to supply the factory. Constant surveillance rendered the indigenous population hostage to threats, torture and death.⁴ This situation led many indigenous people to move to other localities, near or distant, in search of better living conditions, while others chose to resist and remain in their traditional territory.

With the bankruptcy of the CTRT, a portion of the lands previously under the Lundgren family’s control were sold to sugarcane mills in the 1970s and 1980s, used for agro-industrial production under the National Alcohol Programme launched by the Brazilian government in 1975. A new wave of territorial destruction began with the arrival of agro-industry on indigenous lands, imposing both environmental and social changes for this people through invasions conducted by sugarcane growers. These producers destroyed forests, coastal uplands (*tabuleiros*), mangroves and rivers, limiting the areas available for fruit gathering, while also damaging fishing activities due to river pollution and the death of fish, crustaceans, molluscs

4 According to Estevão Palitot’s observations (2005), ‘the Company had a corps of 12 guards. Perhaps there were more, but this is the number that stuck in people’s memory. The tortures and killings were perpetrated either in the factory facilities or out in the forest, in remote places. In the factory, it is said that indigenous people were thrown inside one of the boilers. There was a place in the Mata do Burro D’Água where, inside a pit, there were iron spikes onto which the *caboclos* were thrown. Those who remained denied or concealed their ethnic identity as a way of living under the Company’s yoke’ (Palitot 2005: 106).

and shellfish caused by the discharge of sugarcane vinasse (acidic effluent) from the mills into the region's rivers (Cardoso *et al.* 2012: 17). The social reproduction of domestic groups became increasingly compromised, as spaces for cultivating swiddens, as well as for fishing, hunting and gathering fruit, became ever scarcer. The expansion of sugarcane plantations and the depletion of natural resources forced these people to seek other means of survival.

It was then, in the 1990s, tired of living under these conditions, that the Potiguara united as an ethnic group and, in an act of resistance supported by FUNAI and the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), confronted local farmers and sugar-mill owners, initiating a process of self-demarcation and replacing sugarcane fields with manioc swiddens. This initiative, aimed at reclaiming exclusive use of their traditional territory, led the state to recognise them officially and demarcate part of their land. It is important to emphasise, however, that the self-demarcation process, begun in the late 1970s, initially resulted in the recognition of only part of the territory — the Potiguara Indigenous Land — while the remaining areas — the Jacaré de São Domingos and Monte-Mór Indigenous Lands — were only demarcated years later. Thus, the demarcation of the Potiguara territory occurred in distinct stages: the initial demarcation of the Potiguara Indigenous Land was completed in 1991 and the homologation of the Jacaré de São Domingos Indigenous Land occurred in 1993. Although previously demarcated, the Monte-Mór Indigenous Land awaited homologation for more than forty years, becoming officially ratified only on 4 December 2024.

A detailed account of this process of expropriation is essential for understanding the Potiguara's ongoing struggle for recognition and regularisation of their traditional lands, a struggle waged across different spaces and numerous decades.⁵ Although the SPI supported the claim to Potiguara territory, it nonetheless continued to exercise control over both the physical space and the indigenous people themselves, requiring the presentation of cultural elements as a means of proving their indigenous identity, based on the notion of *indianidade*.

We can thus observe that the different administrative arrangements stemming from the process of territorialisation induced major changes in the social and political organisation of the Potiguara people due to their interaction with the diverse social groups that came to occupy their lands. As occurred among the Kaiowa in Mato Grosso do Sul, this interaction taught them new ways of appropriating their traditional territory through the imposition of physical boundaries, while also proportioning economic, political and social experiences in the pursuit of resources that would ensure their survival within the built environments (villages, towns and farms) in their territory (see Barbosa da Silva 2007). The constant exchange of experiences and the new forms of learning led this people to incorporate cultural elements from the groups with whom they had contact, adapting them continuously to their own economic, political and social interests.

5 For other studies on the Potiguara people's process of reclaiming their territories, also see Marques (2009).

Thus, while the process of territorialisation (Pacheco de Oliveira, 1998) generated a social and territorial reorganisation of indigenous peoples within defined boundaries, it also assisted them in reorganising politically and socioculturally as they arranged specific elements of their culture in order to prove their ethnic identity to the state. This act instituted a collective identity that has helped them recuperate part of their traditional territory (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998).

Barth's (1969) thesis that culture is not static but is instead modified, continuously constructed and updated according to the interests of the ethnic groups themselves thus serve to challenge the popular notion that in the Brazilian northeast, including Paraíba, there are no longer any indigenous people because they do not behave like 'pure Indians,' as well as the idea of their disappearance amid 'mixtures.' Taken together with Pacheco de Oliveira's (1998) observations, these arguments help explain the changes experienced by the Potiguara indigenous people and the strategies they have utilised to ensure their existence across time and space, including in the case of those who currently reside in urban contexts (Nascimento 2019, 2022).

On this point, we shall see, therefore, how, in a particularly significant way, the maintenance and reproduction of the Potiguara indigenous people's ethnic identity has occurred through their domestic groups and their 'territorial dynamics' (Mura 2019).

DOMESTIC GROUP DYNAMICS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

The notion of domestic groups explored in this article is based on the proposal of R. Wilk *et al.* (1984, 1997) and his definition of the household, developed from his studies among the Kekchi Maya in Belize, in which he analysed their production and consumption of material goods. Wilk suggests that a group living in the same dwelling form a 'dwelling unit,' whereas a cluster of dwelling units led by a single person constitutes a 'household cluster.' This household cluster could take two forms: restricted (tight) and flexible (loose). In the restricted form, the activities performed by household members are directed towards collective work, and tasks are distributed according to age and gender. In the flexible form, although all family members cooperate for the common good, some activities are carried out autonomously by individual members. This model of organisation resembles that found among indigenous groups in Brazil, including the Potiguara, who, in addition to engaging in group fishing activities in the region's mangroves and rivers, also work autonomously in sugarcane mills, town markets and other spaces.

Despite its relevance, Wilk's proposal highlights only the economic aspects of the production and distribution of material goods. However, as Mura and Barbosa da Silva (2011) argue, it is essential to include immaterial aspects — such as knowledge, values, educational logics, emotions and so on — which also form part of the organisation of these groups. Likewise, it is essential that we pay attention to the structural formation of 'domestic groups,' which is not static and alters through alliances established among members of different families, whether

through marriage, friendship or ritual kinship, all of which also follow a kinship logic in its cooperative sense (Wilk *et al.* 1984, 1997). This cooperation occurs in economic activities and also in exchanges of favours and relations of reciprocity. The ways in which these relations influence the social and spatial organisation of the group lead them to create strategies to adapt to the economic and ecological conditions of their place of dwelling. The structure of the domestic group reflects the level of relations established on the basis of the group's needs (Araújo 2017).

Hence, by observing members of Potiguara domestic groups residing in the town of Maracá — including my own group I was able to understand that it is the domestic groups that make possible the reproduction and formation of a collective identity across space and time, reproducing experiences acquired over the course of their life trajectories in their new residential context (Nascimento 2019, 2022). For this reason, the dynamics of the domestic group and its mode of occupying space and relating to people and places — often based on the ideal of 'living together' or 'living apart' — also constitute a way of understanding Potiguara social organisation (Vieira 2010). According to this author, the act of occupying and 'organising in space, whether in a concentrated or dispersed manner in particular places, determines attempts to live, work, play and intensify bonds among people, kin and non-kin alike.' In this way, such movements, grounded in the experiences lived by family members or by those with whom one has had contact along the way, are what orient these displacements (Vieira 2010: 32).

For Fábio Mura, the circulation of domestic groups through the territory should be comprehended as a 'territorial dynamic' generated by a 'continuous movement over time, resulting from a plurality of processes that occur within a given geographic space and that lead the members of social and ethnic groups to configure and/or adjust territories in a determined way.' It is, therefore, "the result of different territorial constructions, which have as their effect different territorialities and the territorial dynamics that result from them" (Mura 2019: 153).

In his studies with the Kaiowá people in Mato Grosso do Sul, Mura (2019) emphasised that when indigenous people seek to construct a particular territory on the basis of the actions of domestic groups, they encounter the limits imposed by the environment through its fixed barriers — such as rivers, forests and spirits (both malevolent and benevolent) — which pose obstacles to territorial construction. These limits form part of what shapes territoriality, which may also be understood as a cultural expression of this process of constructing territory.

Before colonisation, these environments were open and not geographically restricted as they are today with the fences dividing up farmland. Their boundaries were constructed historically as domestic groups formed alliances with other local groups, including those that could at times be enemies. These relations enabled the expansion or reduction of occupied lands, since each residential maloca was composed of different local groups. In this context, territorial dynamics arose both from the construction of territory — whose boundaries involved other local groups capable of facilitating or preventing its expansion — and from the obstacles imposed by natural barriers, such as forests, rivers and other features of the landscape (Mura 2019).

With the arrival of colonisers, the lands traditionally occupied by the Kaiowá people were privatised and the indigenous inhabitants were expelled from these territories. As a result, the Kaiowá were prevented from moving freely across their territory as they had done in the past, owing to the fixed boundaries imposed by the territorialisation process (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998). This situation made evident two distinct types of territorial construction: the first, generated by the actions of the state and non-indigenous landowners/invaders, which seeks to territorialise indigenous people within reserves; and the second, constructed by the indigenous people themselves, based on the interests and ecology of domestic groups, in order to make use of both the delimited space and the areas beyond it — given that these barriers arose from the actions of outsiders to the group. In light of these factors, Mura asserts that ‘the result of two types of territorial construction, which produce two different or similar models of territoriality, generates a territorial dynamic’ (Mura 2019).

Thus, the territorialisation developed by the Potiguara — along with their mobility in exploiting the various environments constructed within the territory beyond the village — differs from the notion of territorialisation proposed by Pacheco de Oliveira (1998). The form developed by the Potiguara is an action initiated by the indigenous people themselves, not by the state, since this circulation involves the search for new survival strategies for the group. It also occurs when members of the domestic group explore the geographic spaces of their traditional territory in search of the resources that ensure their subsistence (Nascimento 2022). Over the course of this trajectory, the knowledge acquired (about or within the space) leads them to construct, in the territory they traverse, a place of reference, whose lived experience becomes something historically constructed — rather than a predefined structure of the kind imposed by the State (Mura 2019).

Because this remains an ongoing process, the environments of occupation and circulation (Barbosa da Silva, 2009) of members of domestic groups, as well as their specific ways of organising within these spaces, lead them to adapt to the socio-ecological/territorial context (Mura 2019) of where they live. What ensures their permanence and settlement in this or another environment are the ecological conditions and the technical and economic activities involved, together with the social, political and religious connections established by the group. Both the territorialisation enacted by members of domestic groups and the territorial dynamics this generates are outcomes, therefore, of the state’s process of territorialisation (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998) and the geographic limits it imposes. The confrontation produced by these two notions of territory reveals that the movement of circulation does not arise solely from individual or collective initiatives and desires, but stems from an interplay of divergent forces and interests (Mura 2019).

This play of forces becomes apparent when indigenous people reproduce their mode of life in spaces beyond those designated by the State, guided by the dynamics of the domestic group and by the experiences acquired in particular environments, thereby creating ‘areas of

dominion' and breaking through the barriers imposed by state-defined physical boundaries. Mura (2017) terms this process *dominialisation*, which is nothing more than the territorial construction of space and the choice of a dwelling place by the indigenous people themselves, rather than by agents outside the group. It concerns the search, by domestic groups, to produce their own areas of dominion (Mura 2017).

In analysing the domestic group of Liu, my maternal grandmother, who lives in the town of Mataraca, I observed that its members move through and occupy space on the basis of kinship dynamics, seeking to organise themselves, as far as possible, according to the ideal of 'living together' (Vieira 2010), even within an urban context (Nascimento 2022).

PERCEPTION AND CONSTRUCTION OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Although I knew that I was of indigenous descent, I had not yet perceived myself — nor been perceived by others — in this way until 2015 when I enrolled on the Anthropology programme at UFPB's Campus IV in Rio Tinto, a town with a large Potiguara population and a demarcated territory. Despite being Potiguara and participating throughout my life in a specific 'tradition of knowledge' (Barth 2000a), learned daily from members of my domestic group in the town of Mataraca where we currently live, I had still not become fully aware of my indigenous condition.

Despite moving through the environments (fields, rivers and mangroves) where my parents, uncles and grandmother circulate to engage in activities such as fishing, fruit gathering and wage labour, and frequenting the village spaces around Mataraca on visits to kin who still live in these localities, this identification was absent. This is explained by the fact that, within my primary and everyday reference group (that is, my domestic group, my relatives in the villages and my neighbourhood), this identification was never relevant. In this setting, I am simply known as 'Lourdes' daughter,' 'Liu and Zé Bento's granddaughter,' 'Antônio, João and Maria's niece.' In Mataraca, I am seen as a local resident but also as Lourdes' daughter, Maria's niece and Liu's granddaughter — hence why reflecting on identity as a member of a domestic group is so relevant to my proposed analysis in this article.

Immersed in the dynamics of Anthropology classes at UFPB, involved in discussions with lecturers and classmates, reading about and reflecting on indigenous peoples of north-eastern Brazil, often illustrated through the Potiguara villages near the University with the presence of indigenous students in the classroom itself, I found myself increasingly captivated. I began to envision myself as a researcher, wishing to work on indigenous issues, particularly on the people to whom I was beginning to understand myself to belong. Yet I also felt apprehensive. As I began to recognise myself as indigenous, I started to perceive a difference — a 'reflection of the internalisation of the standard of *indianidade*' (Pacheco de Oliveira 1998) — in relation to some relatives since I did not live in the village, nor was I so active a participant in the group as they were.

The popular idea that the ‘true Indigenous person’ is someone who lives in a village or possesses physical traits deemed characteristic (such as straight hair, slanted eyes and so on) had yet to be fully deconstructed in my mind. This notion had accompanied me since childhood, as it was a recurring theme in the comments of certain relatives, schoolmates, neighbours and friends. ‘Just because your grandparents are indigenous doesn’t mean you are too. After all, you don’t even live in the village. Your lifestyle is different. You just want to take advantage of government benefits.’ These were some of the things people would say to me.

It was also because of this way of thinking that, later on, during my field research, what I came to call the discourse of difference emerged among those of my relatives living in the town: ‘I am Indigenous, but I am different from those living in the village, because I live in the town.’ I admit that, at the beginning of my studies, the idea of identifying myself as Potiguara, as some kin did in the classroom, was something for which I did not yet feel entirely prepared. I did not even know the history of the Potiguara people and I was already feeling stigmatised by certain individuals — UFPB students who labelled me a ‘fake Indian.’ This often caused me to remain silent during events, merely observing the presentations the Potiguara performed in the University courtyard.

This was clearly a distressing situation since I knew so little about the history of my own people. Since I was still in the process of learning about the Potiguara, the idea of knowing next to nothing about the people to whom I belonged — neither possessing the physical characteristics idealised in the social imaginary, nor having the famous ‘indigenous ID card,’ the FUNAI document that certifies a person’s ethnic identity — was something that kept me silent. Yet I also received considerable support from kin, who encouraged me to obtain the documentation and apply for the scholarship reserved for indigenous students since I too was Potiguara and entitled to the award.

As I gradually came to understand through classroom discussions, the historical, political and social developments brought about by colonial domination — and the consequences faced by indigenous peoples of the Northeast, especially the Potiguara — the entire trajectory of this people up to the present day, together with the discovery of indigenous kin living in the town, dispersed in various regions beyond the village, awakened my desire to learn more about my people. I began to want to contribute, in some way, to ensuring that those relatives who live in urban areas might also be seen, understood and respected — after all, we each of us belong to the Potiguara people.

As a result of the colonial domination and the political-administrative configurations to which the Potiguara were subjected, as described earlier, exploring this process can enable us to reflect on the construction of the ethnic group’s identity from the perspective of Barth’s concept of culture (2000b). For the author, culture is comparable to a flowing current, formed by the lived experiences of individuals. Just as both material and immaterial cultural elements are distributed among individuals through flows of interaction, so too is culture disseminated

individually by members of a group, who carry specific bundles of experiences with them, accumulated over the course of their lives, in different places and with the diverse people with whom they have maintained contact.

It is this acquired knowledge that allows individuals to interpret events and social actions from new perspectives. Once interpreted, the accumulated knowledge — taught and learned — is reproduced according to each person's point of view and the position they occupy within the social space. The interdependence and interaction between individuals in their environments make possible this constant flow of knowledge (Barth 2000b. After all, culture is not static; it is in continual transformation (Barth 1969).

Consequently, when cultural elements are selected and organised by ethnic groups to establish a boundary vis-à-vis other groups, they become attributed with new meanings, actualised over time according to the organisational interests of the group itself (Barth 1969). Along similar lines, Hannerz (1997) also draws on the notion of cultural flow to reflect on culture and the production of meaning. Like Barth, he understands culture to be in constant renewal. For Hannerz, this is a continuous process of reinvention in which social actors ascribe new meanings to selected cultural material, updating it across space and time.

Building on the metaphor of the flow, Hannerz observes that flows assume specific directions, which means that the cultural materials carried within then are never the same, since their meanings are constantly transformed as they are reinterpreted and reproduced by individuals. Both authors utilize the concept of flow as an analytic tool owing to its capacity to explain how certain cultural elements, in continuous movement, acquire new meanings when organised through the situations of interaction experienced by social actors (Hannerz 1997). In this sense, one cannot assume that every Potiguara person perceives themselves in the same way. A Potiguara who lives in the town, for example, may have a different understanding of their identity from someone residing in the village. Here a question central to this reflection surfaces: how does individual perception and self-understanding unfold for someone who is a member of an indigenous people?

To address this question, I turn to Cohen's (1994) proposal, which critiques authors like Barth for focusing solely on the analysis of collective identity when studying ethnic groups and their social organisation. For Cohen, it is problematic to think of collective identity without also considering the individual and their personal consciousness. Although identity is constructed and activated in interactions with the aim of establishing boundaries between social groups, we cannot presume a homogeneous conception of identity among all members of the same ethnic group. Each individual has their own way of constructing identity, which means that they do not necessarily perceive themselves as identical to other members of the group (Cohen 1994).

In Cohen's view, Barth understands ethnicity as boundary marker between a group and its 'significant other,' using it as a strategy of cultural organisation from a collective standpoint. However, this theory tends to generalise ethnicity among group members, leading them to see themselves merely as bearers of a given ethnic identity, which ignores the symbolic expres-

sion of identity (Cohen 1994: 78). According to the author, culture manifests itself through self-awareness and through the existence of a variety of possible ‘selves’ within individuals, which emerge from the questions ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who am I not?’

This self-awareness is built through reflection on the self and the other in a process of self-reflection that takes place within the ethnic group itself, leading the individual to confront two perspectives: the one they hold of themselves and the one the group holds of the individual (Cohen 1994). The symbolic expression of ethnicity, therefore, allows for multiple interpretations, permitting the individual to preserve their internal diversity even while symbolically sharing the various external statuses of the groups with which they interact and with which they identify (Cohen 1994).

When my Potiguara identity is questioned, therefore, it does not mean that I am similar to other Potiguara kin — just as I can choose to identify as Potiguara only at moments when it makes sense to me and when I feel comfortable doing so. Barth (1969) already pointed out that, in unfavourable situations, an individual may resort to one of their multiple possible identities. In this way, I can choose to be identified simply as a resident of Mataraca or as Lourdes’ daughter, Maria’s niece and Liu’s granddaughter, as I mentioned earlier. I highlight these possibilities to clarify that, as an individual, I possess multiple identities and that, in certain situations, the specific ethnic identity may not be activated, assuming a situational use, invoked only at opportune moments (as Eriksen 2010 also highlighted).

It is important to explain, however, that the choice to make use of an ethnic identity is not a simple matter, since the affirmation — or the ‘shift in the affirmation of my ethnic identity’ — depends on the situation and on my perception of it (Okamura 1981). When I activate an identity situationally, I also incorporate cognitive and structural aspects into the composition of my identity. The attribution of ethnic identity functions to organise the meaning of relations in particular social situations. Yet, based on the structure of this attribution, the organising principle of relations and conditions sets limits on my behaviour and my choices. At a cognitive level, however, such attribution leads me to perceive my ethnic identity and recognise the relevance of the conditions for making use of it in a given social situation (Okamura 1981).

According to Barth, Eriksen and especially Okamura, like any individual I may choose to activate my ethnic or social identity. However, this choice depends on the environment in which I am situated and on the specific circumstances involved, since when I mobilise my ethnic identity, my behaviours and social roles become delimited (and no longer multiple). In this sense, the desire to activate identity on the basis of personal or collective interests is conditioned by the scenario established by the structure of the ethnic group itself and by its way of relating to the ‘other,’ as Okamura suggests.

However, ethnic identity is not predominant in most of my everyday interactions. Within the context of my domestic group, it is activated primarily for purposes of social recognition, establishing alliances with other Potiguara families and accessing public policies aimed at indigenous peoples. The cultural elements mobilised in this process are the so-called diacritic signs — such as

lifestyle, beliefs and kinship ties — in addition to the moral guidelines shared by the ethnic group, which together constitute the relational structure of ethnic groups (Barth 2000b) Okamura 1981).

Ethnic identity, in turn, has little influence on the establishment of relations with other social groups in the local context, where it is more common to use locally defined social identity, which facilitates such connections. Situational ethnicity thus allows for ‘changes in the behaviour of the person who employs it when it operates as a regulating principle of social relations’ (Okamura 1981). In Eriksen’s view, ‘individuals may have several statuses and numerous possible identities and it is an empirical question when and how ethnic identities become the most relevant’ (Eriksen 2010: 37).

This can be illustrated by the fact that, at the start of my undergraduate studies, I still did not feel prepared to self-identify as indigenous and access the public policy provisions that some kin encouraged me to seek. At that moment, I lacked any document signed by the *cacique* or by Funai that could confirm my self-affirmation as a member of the Potiguara people. I thus set out from the concrete perception that my self-identification also depended on formal recognition by an official state body: only then could I attain social recognition and join the group of beneficiaries of public policies aimed at indigenous peoples.

Returning to Cohen (1994), he observed that the meaning of Barth’s notion of boundary required deeper analysis, so as to avoid difficulties in discerning personally significant boundaries. In an effort to pursue this deeper examination, Cohen, drawing on geographical scholarship, proposes three concepts — frontier zone, border line and boundary — as stages that may assist in understanding how individuals construct their personal boundaries and identities. He explains that, in anthropological discourse, the border line is used in a more general sense, referring to demarcation and claims associated with experience. The boundary designates a specific situation: a physical, acquired, limited, and defined line. The frontier zone relates to political applications and is likewise limited and defined. As Cohen writes: ‘Borders and frontiers seem to me to have something in common with the taxonomic absoluteness of anthropological categories; boundaries, with the blurriness and elusiveness of symbols’ (Cohen 1994: 70).

According to the author, although the frontier has the objective function of establishing difference between groups, in the mind of the individual it is not yet defined. It is at this point that the distinctions between border line, boundary and frontier zone can be marked. As this process unfolds, the absorption of knowledge by an individual — generated through contact with the other — triggers a perception of the self as a person and leads into a zone of indeterminacy, prompting questions such as: Who are we? Who are the others? The need to belong to the group produces the experience of crossing from one status to another, thereby generating an identification and defining of difference. Thus, we first perceive the boundary that takes shape through lived experience of individuals as persons and only after this moment of awareness is it marked. After all, cultural boundaries cannot be understood without first observing the interests and perceptions of the individuals who produce this discourse (Cohen 1994).

Accordingly, Cohen argues:

The ethnic group is an aggregate of selves each of whom produces ethnicity for itself. What these various productions have in common may well be more a matter of formal appearance than of meaningful reality. It is the self consciousness which has primacy in the creation of ethnicity, in rendering boundaries meaningful, in the interpretation of ethnic identity. This self consciousness is the obvious point at which to begin. (Cohen 1994: 76).

It is important to emphasise that, in taking Cohen's proposal as a basis to reflect on the local group of Liu — my maternal grandmother — and on the domestic ecology (Wilk 1997) of the Potiguara people, as developed by my own domestic group in its particular mode of spatial organisation in the urban setting of Mataraca, we can perceive that Cohen (1994) does not consider the individual's perception of identity — as part of the construction of identity — to be exclusively individual. Instead, it depends on interactions within the individual's primary and local groups, as previously mentioned. The ethnic group itself is the outcome of the dynamics of domestic groups, which give shape and expression to an ethnic identity (Mura and Barbosa da Silva 2011). For a domestic group to sustain itself, it must reproduce and transform. This change occurs through experiential choices, which mutually shape the identity of both the individual and the group.

The dynamics of relations within the domestic group are imperative and morally more salient for its members (Nascimento 2022). The identity constructed in the domestic group is both the first identity acquired by individuals from the moment they recognise themselves as self-aware beings — that is, as children or grandchildren of members belonging to an extended family — and the identity that demands the greatest degree of reciprocity for the group to exist and maintain itself. The identification of a member of a domestic group linked to the head of a local group is different from the identification of a member belonging to another domestic group from another local group, whether resident in Mataraca or a Potiguara village. The construction and situational selection of individual identity are shaped by a collective identity that is, first and foremost, domestic and, in this case, also ethnic.

In this way, then, the identity of a domestic group becomes more morally salient than individual identity since it leads its members to structure themselves politically, morally and socially. For example, some time ago an incident occurred within my domestic group that led to the separation of some members — who left the Aldeia Silva da Estrada to form local groups in Mataraca — which resulted in the construction of political autonomy. Initially, this new organisation consisted of just my aunt and mother. It later reformed as a domestic group spanning three generations, with exchanges of goods and cooperation between the siblings (my maternal uncles) as well as the establishment of relations with other indigenous people residing in the villages. Today, with the birth of the latest children, this group is composed of five generations.

In this sense, it becomes clear that both ethnic identity and individual identity will always be connected to domestic identity as their principal point of reference, since it is the domestic group that defines not only an individual's situational choice — regarding what ought to be expressed

in ethnic terms — but also the individual choices available to members of the domestic group (Nascimento 2022). Thus, I may choose to say or not say that I am Potiguara when in a village, and I may choose to express or not express that I am a resident of Mataraca. However, before my domestic group, I cannot claim that I do not belong to this extended set of five generations, especially the specific group formed by my grandmother Liu, my mother, my uncles and aunt, my sister, and my nephews and nieces, since we all constitute a group bound by reciprocal obligations.

What I mean is that, from an ethnic viewpoint, there is an individual situational choice about whether or not to define myself as Potiguara. However, as a member of a domestic group, this choice does not exist, since in being part of the group I am subject to its moral and organisational authority, especially that of the older members. My personal concerns and interests become secondary to those of the group. Taking as an example the Local Group headed by my grandmother Liu (I understand Local Group here as the domestic group formed by four or more generations), it is possible to observe that, although situated in the town of Mataraca, the group is located close to several Potiguara villages. This proximity makes it possible for relatives and friends who still live in those villages to visit, as well as enabling the exchange of goods among its members.

Furthermore, Mataraca lies close to rivers, mangroves and lands utilised both by members of the domestic group to which I belong and by people residing in the surrounding villages for fishing, hunting, gathering and swidden cultivation. This proximity also enables many to combine wage labour in the nearby mills with these other activities. This clearly characterises the group as a ‘flexible aggregate’ domestic group, following Wilk *et al.*’s (1984) definition of types, in which members undertake diverse tasks whose results are organised and distributed within the group.

Living in the town, some members of Liu’s domestic group try, as far as possible, to continue the style of life they learnt when still living in the Silva da Estrada village. Some have devoted themselves to working the swiddens, others to fishing and one became a *rezador*, a healer, assisting in the treatment of ailments affecting members of their domestic group and Potiguara kin living in the town.

Some have learnt a new skill: making *samburá* (baskets for carrying fish) out of internet cables and crafting *puçá* (fish traps) from raffia sacks, using a car to reach more distant areas. This takes place alongside exchanges of materials with people who maintain a similar way of life in terms of their subsistence activities, including borrowing canoes for fishing in the rivers — an essential tool since without them they would be unable to fish owing to the river’s length and depth.

FINAL REMARKS: DOMESTIC ECOLOGY, IDENTITY AND SELF-AWARENESS

Based on the above discussion, a few final considerations can be sketched. First, it is essential to emphasise the importance of the lived experience obtained through the diverse activities for the emergence of self-awareness and the shaping of identity. We have seen that both self-awareness and identity can be multiple, arising from an individual’s experiences as

they engage in activities and, in so doing, develop the knowledge needed to perform them. The exploration of territory and the activities conducted by members of a domestic group — whether in the villages or nearby areas or localities some distance from Mataraca (such as the sugarcane mills) — breathe life into a domestic ecology (Wilk 1997) that requires detailed and context-appropriate knowledge for interacting in both the village environment and the urban environment, as Barbosa da Silva (2009) points out.

Immersion in activities in the forests, mangroves and rivers — fundamental to securing the elements that ensure the group's subsistence — as well as the conscious way of relating to these environments in order to access their elements and resources, comprise part of a way of life inherited from the trajectories of the ancestors. The knowledge and practices held in the memory of their descendants enable the reproduction and adaptation of this knowledge to the new place of residence and to the new materials that have become part of everyday life. As each environment is divided into various spaces with specific meanings for different domestic groups (Araújo 2017), this leads the groups to act in particular ways and to possess specific knowledge concerning use of the environment and its resources. My aunt Maria knows how to plant crops, Uncle Elias makes charcoal and Uncle Antônio is a master of fishing — demonstrating that just as the group transforms the place, it is also transformed by adapting to the spatial context in order to make use of its resources (Araújo 2017: 61).

Among the members of Liu's domestic group, teachings about cosmological dimensions are passed on to younger generations in backyard spaces, on the rivers or in the swidden. This transmission takes place through practices and through accounts of the protective entities that inhabit these environments, whose narratives are accompanied by descriptions of lived experiences in these places. All of this is done so that everyone respects, understands and adopts a moral posture consistent with belief in these entities, which not only enable success in fishing and hunting activities but are also capable of punishing those who disregard these moral rules. One example is when someone obtains more fish than they require and fails to share the surplus with kin — an attitude considered an improper use of the environment's resources.

These rules and beliefs also inform the behaviour that should be followed, revealing how belief in the environment's protective entities is reconciled with Christian religious beliefs learnt during the colonial period. An example is the requirement that a child be baptised in the Catholic Church while still young, so that they are not caught by the spell of the Mother of the Water when going down to the river, or so that they do not transform into a ball of fire should they die without being baptised.

The behaviours required of members of my grandmother Liu's group are imposed on everyone, including those who have become part of the family through marriage. Complaints and expectations, such as the baptism of children and respect for the protective entities of the environment, are directed by elders at the younger members during moments of everyday interaction. Grandma Liu, to whom we all owe respect and obedience, holds the most

extensive knowledge and shares it with us in backyard conversations, transmitting what she learnt from her parents and over the course of her life. It is through these conversations and through the practices carried out in subsistence and leisure spaces that the knowledge traditions and the transmission of learning are passed on to younger generations. Moreover, this does not occur in an abstract way but through lived experience in the different environments, in a process of educating attention (Ingold 2012).

In terms of the distribution of tasks during the exploration of the territory, someone who goes to the swidden but does not work directly in cultivating the crops is responsible for preparing lunch or performing another task. Anyone who joins the fishing group but does not catch fish helps clean them while the others continue fishing. Someone who did not go to harvest beans contributes by helping to shell them. If a mother goes fishing and her child stays home, it is their responsibility to look after the house and/or prepare the food for when she returns. If a relative is in need and another could help but does not do so, this person becomes poorly regarded and avoided by others. Conversely, when a member harvests produce from the swidden to sell for extra income, the others assist by buying part of the produce. Those who do not possess a swidden can obtain part of the harvest by helping shell the beans, pull up the manioc tubers and so on. In other words, there is always a way to cooperate and, through this, to gain access to the produce — whether as repayment for assistance or through small donations to particular members. These moments illustrate how situations of solidarity are constructed between group members and how the feeling of identity as a domestic group is strengthened.

This is why I understand the domestic group to be the primary agent in the reproduction and construction of ethnic identity. It is the domestic group that enables a specific tradition of knowledge (Barth 2000b) to be learned, adapted and reproduced daily in diverse environments. These forms of knowledge, activities and experiences shape an identity that is simultaneously domestic and ethnic, developing alongside an emergent self-awareness. This entire ensemble of knowledge and lived experience, cultivated locally within the different environments of their territory by the Potiguara over time, has given rise to a self-awareness that is both individual and collective — and that ultimately gives form to Potiguara ethnic identity.

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MARIA ELITA DO NASCIMENTO

Universidade Federal da Paraíba, João Pessoa, PB, Brasil

elitaairam@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2763-8106>

DOSSIER EDITORS

Gersem Luciano Baniwa (gmapolero@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5222-9339>)

Luiz Eloy Terena (adv.luizeloy@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9073-6086>)

Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima (acslima@mn.ufrj.br | <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5260-236X>)