

Potiguara Indigenous Narratives: Oral Literature, Enchanted Beings, History, and Tradition /

Narrativas indígenas Potiguara: literatura oral, seres encantados, história e tradição

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Received in: decembre 20th, 2024. **Aproved** in: decembre 22th, 2024.

How to mention this article:

BARBOSA, Milena Veríssimo. Potiguara Indigenous Narratives: Oral Literature, Enchanted Beings, History, and Tradition. *Revista Letras Raras*. Campina Grande, v. 13, n. 1, p. e6189, dez. 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14579713>.

ABSTRACT

The art of narrating, telling fabulous stories of great deeds, and describing supernatural beings and their actions are inherent tasks for individuals in various societies from ancient times to the present. Indigenous peoples, including the Potiguara, use storytelling through elders to communicate their culture, identity, and traditions. However, few published works gather the diversity of narratives shared through oral tradition. In this context, this work aims to analyze the narratives of the Mangrove Father and the Potiguara Witches, present in the collective imagination of the Potiguara people, located on the Northern Coast of Paraíba, to share narratives of the oral tradition that permeate the indigenous daily life of this region, in order to share narratives from the oral tradition that permeate the daily life of the indigenous people of this region, identifying common themes and structures, in comparison with other myths and stories inherited from other cultures. Authors such as Cascudo (2007), Munduruku (2009), Le Goff (1990), Cardoso and Guimarães (2012), Benjamin (1994), among others, theoretically founded this research. From a methodological point of view, a bibliographic research was conducted based on the book "É história viva, num é história morta: narrativas do Litoral Norte" by Barbosa et al (2020). The reports were analyzed from three perspectives: oral tradition, memory, and identity. This analysis identified the presence of structures

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and themes that circulate other myths and stories of the Portuguese oral tradition manifested in the narratives analyzed in the research.

KEYWORDS: Oral literature; Enchanted beings; Potiguara of Paraíba; Memory; Identity.

RESUMO

*A arte de narrar, contar histórias fabulosas e de grandes feitos, descrever entes sobrenaturais e suas ações, são tarefas inerentes aos sujeitos nas diversas sociedades, desde os tempos remotos até a atualidade (Benjamin, 1994). Os povos indígenas, assim também os Potiguara, por meio dos anciãos, utilizam a contação de histórias para comunicar sua cultura, sua identidade e suas tradições. Contudo, são poucos os trabalhos publicados reunindo a diversidade das narrativas compartilhadas através da oralidade. Nesse contexto, este trabalho busca analisar as narrativas do Pai do Manguê e das Bruxas Potiguara presentes no imaginário coletivo do povo Potiguara, localizado no Litoral Norte paraibano, a fim de compartilhar narrativas da tradição oral que permeiam o cotidiano indígena dessa região, a fim de compartilhar narrativas da tradição oral que permeiam o cotidiano indígena dessa região, identificando os temas e as estruturas em comum, na comparação com outros mitos e outras histórias herdadas de outras culturas. Autores como Cascudo (2007), Munduruku (2009), Le Goff (1990), Cardoso e Guimarães (2012), Benjamin (1994), entre outros, fundamentaram esta pesquisa. Sob o ponto de vista metodológico, realizou-se uma pesquisa bibliográfica, a partir do livro *É história viva, num é história morta: narrativas do Litoral Norte*, de Barbosa et al (2020)–sob três perspectivas: tradição oral, memória e identidade.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura indígena; Seres encantados; Potiguara da Paraíba; Memória; Identidade.

1 Introduction

The art of narrating or telling stories about something was born a long time ago and is fundamental in the history of humanity. According to Walter Benjamin (1994), it is impossible to date when and how this art emerged, because throughout the world, human beings narrated their stories of everyday life or great struggles, mainly through writing.

Storytelling has always been a tool for maintaining and perpetuating culture and is part of the makeup of indigenous peoples, especially through oral tradition. These indigenous peoples have only recently come into contact with writing and, until recently, their narratives were passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. This was also the case for the indigenous people of Potiguara for a long time.

With the colonization process and all the forms of oppression and destruction inherent to this moment of invasion of Brazilian territory, based on an integrationist vision of the native peoples into European culture, a series of interferences were triggered in the culture, memory and traditions of the indigenous peoples. The imposition of the Christian religion caused some transformations, among them those related to the belief in myths, legends and stories, which carry significant cultural aspects and

help communities to reaffirm and strengthen the memory and identity within the organization of each people.

Memory, which preserves teachings and traditions, has also been affected by contact with other cultures. From this perspective, the figure of the elders stands out as guardians of this ancient art of telling stories, endowed with supernatural plots and enchanted beings. From this context, we seek to analyze the reports published by Barbosa et al (2020), in the work entitled “It is living history, not dead history”: narratives from the North Coast of Paraíba, published by Editora UFPB.

This research is classified as qualitative, since this type of approach considers that “[...] there is a dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject, that is, an inseparable link between the objective world and the subjectivity of the subject that cannot be translated into numbers” (Kuart et al. 2010). Regarding the procedure, the research will be bibliographical, since an analysis of texts published in books will be carried out, opening space for the construction of a discussion of the narratives analyzed here. Analyzing the enchanted beings, the history and the facts of the northern coastal region of Paraíba also means offering space for the voices of these previously silenced subjects to be echoed.

In this sense, we will analyze supernatural narratives based on the relationship between oral tradition literature, memory and identity, as well as the literary manifestations present in the narratives told by the Potiguara elders. In this work we seek to make a theoretical overview that allowed the use of some of these authors (in a broad sense), such as the contributions of Cascudo (2007), Munduruku (2009), Le Goff (1990), Cardoso and Guimarães (2012), Benjamin (1994), among others.

2 Culture, resistance and identity

The Potiguara people are often labeled as a people whose symbol is resistance. This understanding does not occur by chance, since in the history of the arrival of the Portuguese crown in Brazil, the Potiguaras appear as a people who resisted, from the first years of colonization, the attacks of domination and, years later, the farmers and businessmen, the sugar mill owners and all the challenges that could have decimated this people or made them flee to another place. Even today, this people continues to fight for improvements in health, education and in many other areas. All of this is

strengthened by the knowledge of the “old trunks”, who fought so that their relatives could live and continue to fight on the land and for the land.

The stereotypes created by non-indigenous people about Brazilian natives are numerous and of various types. This was also based on the relationship between the people and the society that was developing in the light of European culture and with contact and mixing, in the terms discussed by Darcy Ribeiro (2015), which began to occur from the year 1501. According to the entire territorial and historical-cultural context of this people, we see that the narratives told throughout the entire territory of Rio Grande do Norte correspond to the construction of its territorial, cultural and sacred history up to the present day. Traditions, culture and identity were also and are constructed through these processes that Rio Grande do Norte society went through. The Rio Grande do Norte identity underwent changes in several aspects: such as religion, culture and traditions. In the religious sphere, it is formed through a syncretism of beliefs that involve Christian rituals and indigenous rituals, which demonstrates differentiated practices within the same territory and the same indigenous people. But to understand the issue of identity and indigenous identity in Brazil in a broader way, it will be necessary to discuss the main points made by some authors.

Identity is not something predestined; on the contrary, as Zigmunt Bauman believes, identity is constructed through the actions and decisions made by members of a community. For Bauman (2005), identity would only emerge from the understanding of difference, that is, through contact with a second community, and it is precisely through the presence of another community that the need to compare, make choices and deliberate on something arises, to later review the choices and make new decisions. Regarding the definition of identity, Bauman believes that:

The idea of “identity,” and particularly of “national identity,” was not naturally gestated and incubated in human experience, it did not emerge from that experience as a self-evident “fact of life.” It was forced into the Lebenswelt of modern men and women—and it arrived as a fiction. [...] The idea of identity was born of the crisis of belonging and the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between “ought” and “is” and to raise reality to the level of the standards set by the idea—to recreate reality in the likeness of the idea. (Bauman, 2005, p. 26).

In this regard, the people of Rio Grande do Norte cannot be directly correlated to the idea of national identity, as it requires an exclusivity that cannot be achieved not only in the context of the

Northeast or Paraíba, but also in the Brazilian context, which is deeply marked by racial mixing. For Antonio Cavalcanti Maia in *Diversidade cultural, identidade nacional brasileira e patriotismo constitucional* (2020), identity concerns the understanding of who we are, representing our essential characteristics as human beings. It corresponds to a discussion that works with an issue related to the self-perception of a group of people, the construction of their history, their destiny and their possibilities.

In the book *Hybrid Cultures*, García Canclini (1998) draws on studies on identity in Latin America and, according to him, identity has been historically marked by colonization processes practiced by Europeans. In this context, Latin American society was formed by the union, or hybridization, of several dichotomous social characteristics, such as: urban and rural, wealth and poverty, among others. This process generated the idea that the line is tenuous between each of these parts, since in some cases this distance is not so pronounced, causing the cultures to undergo symbiosis.

Canclini (1998) believes that identity is continually constructed and reconstructed, contrary to the idea that it has an absolute nature without any subsequent modifications. From this perspective, when we analyze the context of the formation of the Brazilian nation and, in particular, the historical constitution of the Potiguara people of Paraíba, the Brazilian nation began to be constructed based on an ethnic mix since the Portuguese arrived in Brazil, carrying out “a continuous and violent process of political unification, achieved through a deliberate effort to suppress all discrepant ethnic identity and repress and oppress every virtually separatist tendency” (Ribeiro, 2015, p. 19).

For Daniel Munduruku (2009), “culture is never static. It is in constant transformation. Even indigenous peoples had their culture altered by contact with other peoples with whom they traded, fought and intermarried” (Munduruku, 2009, p. 44). This perspective emphasizes the complexity and dialogue between cultures, showing that the cultural identity of indigenous peoples, as with any other group, is not something fixed, but a process of constant adaptation and reinterpretation in the face of new historical and social contexts. In this sense, identity “is an ongoing search, it is constantly under construction, it establishes relationships with the present and the past, it has a history and, for this very reason, it cannot be fixed, determined in one point forever, it implies movement” (Escosteguy, 2010, p. 148). In this context of interculturality, the culture and customs of their ancestors are still the reference for their identity for the people of Rio Grande do Norte. However, with the long history of contact and

conflicts with the white population, with blacks, and with other indigenous peoples, beliefs and customs have not remained intact over time. Therefore, indigenous identity cannot be observed in isolation, since it is formed by their beliefs, their actions, and their relationships within society. It is the consolidation of identity that keeps a people strong and that also makes them renew themselves at the end of cycles.

3 Indigenous Memory and Ancestry

Until recently, the history of Brazil was told through the eyes of those who came from far away, from Europeans and colonizers. However, in an attempt to demonstrate their cultural plurality, some indigenous people from various peoples scattered throughout Brazil are currently changing the scenario of “who told what”:

Previously, all indigenous cultural contributions were collected, selected, modified and recorded by white people; certainly, this intermediation caused much of the originality of the narratives to be lost. [...] What has happened in recent decades is that the indigenous people themselves have assumed the narrative voice, becoming subjects, authors/creators of their written cultural legacy which, in turn, is the expression of their mythical and magical legacy. (Guessé, 2011, p. 2).

This position regarding man, the subject who constructs his own history, moves towards an increasingly stronger affirmation of indigenous identity and autonomy, demonstrating their growing protagonism in society. Some of these authors who “tell their own story(ies)” are Daniel Munduruku, Ailton Krenak, Kaká Werá Jecupé, Iguarê Yamã, among others. In addition to being writers, they are also activists and their speeches have a strong impact on Brazilian indigenous policy. As writers, they mix the telling and (re)telling of myths, theories and fictional literary stories and represent a significant indigenous production with published books about their people, their stories and struggles. In this sense, Munduruku talks about the relevance of ancestry and memory for community life. According to him, indigenous people are

Holders of ancestral knowledge learned through the sounds of their grandparents' words, these people have always prioritized speech, words, and orality as an instrument for transmitting tradition, forcing new generations to exercise their memory, the guardian of the stories lived and created. Memory is, at the same time, past and present, which meet to update repertoires and enable new meanings,

perpetuated in new rituals, which, in turn, will house new elements in a circular movement repeated to exhaustion throughout history. (Munduruku, 2018, p. 81).

In this passage, we can highlight how necessary the “old trunks” are for indigenous communities. Although they do not have the technology of writing, this does not prevent them from teaching through speech, through oral words; they present the memories and traditions that are deeply rooted within the communities. For Ailton Krenak, in *Antes, o mundo não existe* [Before, the World Didn't Exist], the wise men of Western culture have different activities than the elders of traditional peoples. These Western wise men generally give lectures, conferences and classes in schools and universities. Meanwhile, indigenous intellectuals do not have as many institutionalized activities as Western intellectuals, but they have a permanent responsibility to be among their people, narrating their history, with their group, their families, their clans, the permanent meaning of this cultural heritage (Krenak, 1992, p. 201).

In this sense, we observe how much indigenous society needs to exercise memory and mechanisms for sharing its knowledge and skills, which are transmitted from generation to generation by elders through oral tradition and writing. In the essay *Indigenous Literature – the Voice of Ancestry*, the indigenous writer of the Sateré-Mawé people, Tiago Hakiy, states that:

The storyteller has always played a key role within the people. He was the center of attention, the bearer of knowledge, and it was his mission to transmit the cultural legacy of his ancestors to the new generations. This is how part of the knowledge of our ancestors reached us, showing us a unique kaleidoscope, strengthening in us the sense of being indigenous. In essence, the Brazilian indigenous people have always used orality to transmit their knowledge, and now they can use other technologies as transmission mechanisms. (Hakiy, 2018, p. 38).

The voice of the elder is fundamental in the process of identification and cultural affirmation in traditional communities, as he or she bears witness to the diverse stories that legitimize the territory, culture and history of the indigenous people. For him or her, the voice is an instrument of struggle, not just the sound of words uttered in the wind. It is therefore necessary that these voices be increasingly echoed through writing and other instruments capable of taking indigenous stories beyond the village; these voices must enter every corner: storybooks, squares, conversation circles and the media.

Based on Walter Benjamin's ideas about the role of the narrator, we can reflect on the importance of oral tradition among indigenous peoples and its fundamental role in building a relational place with the other, the past and ancestral memory. Benjamin argues that the narrator is not just a storyteller, but a mediator of experiences who establishes a deep connection between the individual and the collective, transmitting not only information, but also lived wisdom and shared values. Benjamin is emphatic when he says that "the narrator is among the masters and the wise. He knows how to give advice: not for some cases, like the proverb, but for many cases, like the wise man. For he can draw on the collection of a whole life" (Benjamin, 1994, p. 221).

Among indigenous peoples, narrative and narrator play a fundamental role, as they serve to preserve ancestral memory, consolidating collective identity and creating a space of belonging and continuity between different generations. The narrator, in this context, plays a crucial role, not only as a transmitter of stories, but as a weaver of relationships, keeping alive the connection between the people and their traditions, rituals and knowledge.

In order for new indigenous Brazilian literary productions to be retold in contemporary times, it is necessary for the most diverse narratives of indigenous communities to continue to be disseminated in as many spaces as possible, whether orally or in writing. Therefore, in the next chapter we will present some of the indigenous Potiguara narratives that have continued to be transmitted in the territory of the northern coast of Paraíba for several generations. They represent the care for the land, for the environment and for the syncretic religiosity that, over time, was constructed among the Potiguaras.

4 Supernatural Beings and Spaces: The Enchanted Potiguara

In the context of fictional literary narratives, Marisa Martins Gama-Khalil in *As teorias do fantasma e a sua relação com a construção do espaço ficcional* (The theories of the fantastic and its relationship with the construction of fictional space) (2012), spatiality is one of the fundamental components for the formation of meaning within the fantastic narrative, since fictional events can only be structured through a location that provides the necessary support and meaning.

In this context, if we consider these ideas pointed out by Gama-Khalil for the narratives told in the Potiguara indigenous territory, it is remarkable how much the territorial spaces of the forests, rivers and tides are capable of producing the climate conducive to the manifestation of the supernatural. In addition to the favorable space, the presence of abnormal beings in these places also stands out. These beings roam the forests, rivers and tides in the Potiguara territory and are entities that provoke fear and respect, as they are seen as protectors and organizers of the places where they usually appear.

The beings found in this region are defined in different ways by the indigenous people of this location. For some, they are invisible beings that manifest supernatural actions, for others they are understood as immortal beings with a human physical appearance. These supernatural figures are the “owners” of the environments, sometimes called father or mother, sometimes as the owner of the animals, or simply “enchanted ones”, and are seen as both dangerous and protective. The danger comes from the relative dangerousness and unpredictability of entering the environment “controlled” by the enchanted one, generating a certain “fear” regarding what is possible to happen, which is accentuated when the individual is aware that he has not fulfilled certain moral and ethical requirements before this entity. On the other hand, these beings are perceived by their actions as protectors or caretakers of the animals under their domain, with whom people can establish relationships of exchange and sympathy (Cardoso; Guimarães, 2012, p. 57).

The fantastic beings that are present in specific “places” in natural environments, according to the elders, in the research carried out by Glebson Vieira (2010, p. 170), are not “people like us”, but were once “people like us”. For Antonio Carlos Diegues, in *The Ethnoconservation of Nature*, in the Amazonian indigenous cosmologies, no ontological distinctions are made between humans, plants and animals. Therefore, there is a relationship between these species, interconnected to each other by what can be called a continuum, ordered by the principle of sociability, “in which the identity of humans, alive or dead, of plants, animals and spirits is completely relational and, therefore, subject to mutations” (Diegues, 2000, p. 30).

Based on these concepts, it is not possible to understand the interrelations of indigenous cosmology as conceived by Western science, since “nature” and other definitions such as “ecosystem” are not autonomous and independent fields; on the contrary, they are part of the same group. These

enchanted beings can also be considered a transfiguration. They can transfigure their appearances and behaviors and are responsible for regulating and affecting the body and individual and collective daily life. In this context, “some qualities of beings – animals, humans, objects, spirits and institutions – are understood as people with whom one can establish social relations, particularly “agreements” (Wawzyniak, 2011, p. 19).

Some people also believe that they are “beings” resulting from human transformations, usually unbaptized (pagan) children, after being captured by animals or by enchantments that occurred with relatives within one of the sacred spaces. They can protect humans they are fond of or endanger humans who displease them. They are recognized for their actions as protectors or caregivers of the animals under their control, with whom people can establish relationships of exchange and sympathy (Cardoso; Guimarães, 2012, p. 57). For Vieira,

Thus, a hunting ethic was established, based on the magical relationship that seeks profit and abundance, and a morality based on friendship, respect and the denial of any attitude that demonstrates ambition, greed and envy. In fact, these are inappropriate and forbidden attitudes in the forest, mangrove and seabed and river areas, and are punished by the owners of the kingdoms, since actions that demonstrate generosity and respect are expected above all. (Vieira, 2010, p. 272).

The enchanted beings are thus part of the social relations of reciprocity that permeate the economy of Rio Grande do Norte and are managers of “resources” in environments that are more “distant” from the domestic environment, represented by the house and its spaces. In Wawzyniak’s view (2011, p. 20), the “owners” of these places are spiritualized beings, seen as people, “moral entities”, with whom humans can establish social relationships. Among their main characteristics is that they define norms, based on their own regulations, in order to govern the conduct that is appropriate for the sociability of humans among themselves and of humans with these fantastic beings.

They are part of the culture of indigenous peoples and appear in legends and myths with the aim of explaining certain events and raising awareness among humans about the preservation of forests and rivers, and nature in general. Just like in Greek mythology, where nymphs were responsible for being present in nature, offering joy and symbolizing fertility, the enchanted beings, owners, or father and mother of indigenous cosmology, such as the Mother of Water, the Father of the Mangrove and many others, are beings that feed the imagination and keep oral tradition alive, in addition to

promoting the care and protection of that place. In myths, these “Supernatural Beings”, as Eliade calls them,

are known above all for what they did in the prestigious time of the “beginnings”. Myths therefore reveal their creative activity and unveil the sacredness (or simply the “supernaturalness”) of their works. In short, myths describe the diverse, and sometimes dramatic, irruptions of the sacred (or the “supernatural”) in the World. It is this irruption of the sacred that truly underpins the World and makes it what it is today. What’s more: it is because of the interventions of Supernatural Beings that man is what he is today, a mortal, sexual and cultural being. (Eliade, 1972, p. 09).

In the book by Barbosa et al (2020), the witnesses describe the appearances of these beings as visible and invisible beings. According to the elders, these beings do not appear randomly in any space; on the contrary, they only appear in specific situations, which causes the indigenous people to practice rituals when they need to go to these spaces. The Father of the Mangrove, as his name suggests, usually appears in the mangroves that run through the villages located in the cities of Rio Tinto and Marcação. This also usually occurs with the other beings: each has its own space of appearances and its “moments”, such as fishing time in the mangrove, hunting time, that is, according to predefined circumstances.

Based on the testimony of Orlando Soares, the Father of the Mangrove wears “a big red hat, the Father of the Mangrove, a big, black man, a BIG guy. That red animal, a red hat”. For Mr. Orlando, the Father of the Mangrove appears to be human, an idea that is confirmed by the expression “man” and then also specified by the color of his black skin. For Indigenous chief Cí, from the Três Rios village, the Father of the Mangrove has the power to appear or not as he wishes, and in addition, the person must meet certain requirements to be in that environment:

He doesn’t appear to everyone, but to those people who don’t believe, who think... That it’s just folklore, but he exists, and I tell you he exists because I’ve seen him, and it wasn’t even in the mangrove. I saw him right here, on the slope near the port. My father used to talk about it, my grandmother used to talk about it, saying there was a little torch, and this little torch would grow, it would grow bigger and bigger, and if you moved toward it, it would keep growing and shining brighter [...] (Barbosa et al., 2020, p. 61).

According to the memories evoked by Dona Zita, the Father of the Mangrove is a man and has a torch of fire in place of his head which, according to her account, can increase and decrease based on the distance at which this being was from the presence of the villagers:

He has a great blaze of fire on his head, you know? I've seen it myself, along with many other people, up there in Boa Vista. We spotted it at night; he was there. Then that blaze of fire started really small, and it rose up... When it came down, it was small, but when it rose up, it was huge. I, just a boy, would look at it and say: "Ave Maria, let's get out of here, it's the Father of the Mangrove!" (Barbosa et al., 2020, p. 68).

This same being with a fire on its head is described by other interviewees as Batatão, one of the supernatural beings that surrounds the region. According to Mr. Orlando:

Look, don't say no, don't say there's no Batatão, because THERE IS. When we least expected it, that torch of fire came down from up there, and then it got Antônio... Antônio went straight under the donkey... Then Father said: "See? Didn't I tell you Batatão was real? But don't call him Batatão, call him Aibino, Ai-bi-no." He said that if you call him Aibino and say, "Aibino, here comes the priest, he's going to baptize you," he'll disappear. But if you call him Batatão, watch out for the teeth he'll show, those big teeth to grab someone (Barbosa et al., 2020, p. 41).

Mrs. Matutina recounts, "They just said it was a ball of fire. Yes, a ball of fire. Woe to anyone who crossed its path." For Chief Cí, the Father of the Mangrove is the same supernatural figure as the Batatão. His account seems clear in this regard, as he describes the same characteristics reported by other witnesses. Mrs. Zita, from the Três Rios Village, also shares in her storytelling the descriptions presented by Mr. Orlando about the Batatão, making reference to the Father of the Mangrove:

And he has a great blaze of fire on his head, you know? I've seen it myself, along with many others, up there in Boa Vista. We spotted it at night; he was there. Then that blaze of fire started really small, and it rose up... When it came down, it was small, but when it rose up, it was huge. I, just a boy, would look at it and say: "Ave Maria, let's get out of here, it's the Father of the Mangrove!" When we realized it, the fire was closer to us, and we ran all the way to the cemetery. It was... There were so many people—it was him: the Father of the Mangrove. (Barbosa et al., 2020, p. 68).

As we can see, these beings are depicted in different ways. Some have a dual characterization: part human and part elements of nature (like fire); others are described as apparitions, "things," "objects," etc. These varying depictions of the beings likely reflect how they appear in their

environments. In this way, we observe that these differences in how the beings are described stem from the nature of oral transmission. The stories are told and retold, which often leads to a lack of precision in how they are conveyed.

The supernatural beings and spaces connect us not only to environments that embody the supernatural but also to entities that inspire and give rise to literary texts, as the supernatural is a frequently used element in fictional literature. According to França (2012, p. 02), in “the specific case of Brazil, legends, folklore, myths, and local customs have always provided material for literature based on supernatural elements.” Myths and legends are important genres within communities, as they help shape the ways of life of individuals within the community. According to Eliade:

The myth is an extremely complex cultural reality, which can be approached and interpreted through multiple and complementary perspectives. That is, myths can be seen in many ways: explaining origins, revealing and safeguarding secrets, addressing concerns, perpetuating traditions, cultures, and identities. (Eliade, 2000, p. 11).

Eliade's work focuses on the conception of myth, which, far from being a false story as it has been erroneously disseminated in society, is a cultural reality that gives meaning and helps in understanding a distant and unknown past or even something that might explain what is considered supernatural and abnormal. This type of narrative is deeply rooted in the culture of Brazilian Indigenous peoples and addresses their questions about their cultural, territorial, and identity formation. Through myths, these peoples seek explanations for phenomena that cannot be logically explained, thus bringing forth the supernatural.

Based on this conception, we observe that in primitive civilizations, myth fulfills an indispensable function: it expresses, glorifies, and codifies belief; safeguards and enforces moral principles; ensures the effectiveness of rituals; and provides practical rules for human guidance. Myth, therefore, is a vital ingredient of human civilization; far from being a mere fabrication, it is, on the contrary, a living reality, endlessly relied upon. It is not at all an abstract theory or artistic fantasy but rather a true codification of primitive religion and practical wisdom. These stories represent, for native peoples, the expression of a fundamental, greater, and more significant reality by which immediate life, activities, and the destinies of humanity are determined (Eliade, 1972, p. 19).

From the moral perspective of myth in Indigenous communities, authors Maria Inês de Almeida and Sônia Queiroz, in the book *Na captura da voz: as edições da literatura oral no Brasil* (Capturing the Voice: The Editions of Oral Literature in Brazil), state that:

The myth is not just an old story; it is also our daily life as portrayed by the media. For Indigenous peoples, myths permeate everyday life, not as an external and alienating creation, but as the foundation upon which wisdom is built, as if, since time immemorial, masterful voices—today called Tradition in Portuguese—teach or recount how things should be. Even with the understanding that everything transforms—and transformation is the central theme of myths—the village elders work with their memories so that new cultural elements that arise incorporate the teachings of the voices of their ancestors and spirits that predate humankind. (Almeida; Queiroz, 2004, p. 235).

Just as myths are part of the oral tradition of traditional peoples, legends are also deeply present in Indigenous narratives, reflecting the collective production of their society. They play an essential role in preserving Indigenous cultures as they refer to fictional stories and serve as a foundational element that determines local values. Even though legends are not considered historical documents that ensure their veracity, "the people resurrect the past, pointing out passages, showing, as indisputable references for rational verification, the places where the events occurred" (Cascudo, 2006, p. 56).

Stripped of ritualistic tradition, the legend can, in certain circumstances, serve, for example, to teach children to fear the unknown, such as a street or a man, revealing a danger from which they must protect themselves. Thus, we can distinguish between the "myth of constant action and the legend of remote, outdated, or potential action—a suspended action. The myth is characterized by its function. The legend explains any local origin and form" (Cascudo, 2006, p. 112), often creating a habit or superstition. Unlike the myth, the legend has a secular character, and its purpose is solely to convey a moral value and/or a lesson. In its composition, it also features supernatural beings, saints, and humans. Its local, circumstantial, and individual nature differs significantly from the myth, which is universal, timeless, and collective (Cascudo, 2006).

Although mysterious and frightening, supernatural beings are an integral part of everyday life for the Potiguara people. While for some societies, the supernatural can only be understood through dichotomous categories such as real and unreal, natural and supernatural, truthful and untruthful, in

Potiguara society, there is a predominant way of relating to supernatural beings, spaces, and actions that is acceptable to the Potiguara people. These are situations that are, in some way, expected within the Indigenous context, as they are part of the cultural reality of this region.

These accounts, gathered orally, are expressed through oral performance. The stories revealed in each recording are not merely readings (in a codified manner) or simple storytelling. They are gestures and expressions that are repeated and emphasized in the narratives of those who tell these stories. Indigenous society, as we have stated earlier, is rooted in oral tradition. Daniel Munduruku reinforces this by saying:

Orality is not just the words that come out of people's mouths. It is a choreography that makes the body dance. The body is the reverberation of the sound of words. Orality is the divinity that becomes flesh. The narrator is the master of the word. The word does not return without fulfilling its mission. (Munduruku, 2000, p. 72).

In this context, narratives do not end at the moment they are told; they last longer and resonate more deeply than the temporal frame of the narration itself. Le Goff states that in traditional societies without writing or with recent contact with it, there are memory specialists, “memory men,” who preserve important events of a given society within their memory. They are the guardians of a dual memory: “the memory of society,” serving simultaneously as the keepers of both “objective” history and “ideological” history (Le Goff, 1990, p. 429). Thus, these Potiguara “memory men” are indispensable for ensuring that the narratives of the encantados continue to echo and endure, even as time and generations pass.

4.1 The Father of the Mangrove

According to the reports from this research, the Father of the Mangrove is a supernatural being that inhabits the mangroves of the Potiguara territory. He is considered the owner of the mangrove space, and anyone seeking good relations in this place tries to follow the precepts established by this enigmatic Potiguara being. His appearance is described in distinct ways in the reports; in some cases, it is said that he is merely a “spirit,” or it is claimed that it is forbidden to see this being because of the possibility that he might punish those who do. Additionally, he is also described as a man who wears a large hat on his head:

(It was) a big red hat, the Father of the Mangrove, a big man, a big black man like that. That red guy, a red hat. But it's like this... The Father of the Mangrove is the most dangerous creature there is! If you go to the mangrove to fish and say... Mention his name, the Father of the Mangrove, you won't catch a (fish) (Orlando Soares) (Barbosa et al, 2020, p. 43).

He, they say he's the owner of the mangrove, right? This guy here, he's the owner of the mangrove, and when he wants a person to catch things, he doesn't bother them. And he has a big flame on his head, you know? I've seen it, me and several people up there at Boa Vista. We saw it at night, he was there. Then came that flame, it started really small and then it went up... When it went down, it was small, but when it went up, it was big. I, as a kid, looked at that thing and said: "Ave Maria, let's go, it's the Father of the Mangrove!" When we realized it, the fire was closer to us, and we ran all the way to the cemetery. It was... there were a lot of people, it was him: the Father of the Mangrove. (Dona Zita) (Barbosa et al, 2020, p. 68).

Then my mother started calling names, calling names. I said: "Look, mom, don't call names, because mom didn't like to call names." Mom said: "That troublemaker was around here driving our fish away." (They) would throw the net, but wouldn't catch anything. When we put the fish trap in, there'd be a lot of noise from the fish in the trap, but when we went to check, there was nothing. "Didn't I tell you not to call the name of the Father of the Mangrove?" And now we're not leaving here. We're staying until daybreak! And we stayed there until morning, because if we left, we'd get lost. Then, when we were leaving early in the morning, my mom looked and said: "Look where that son of mine is..." (Orlando Soares) (Barbosa et al, 2020, p. 42).

The story I know about the Father of the Mangrove is that he punishes people who don't respect or mistreat others, or those who do not follow certain rules. People who constantly call his name, sometimes he makes them "march." What do I mean by that? You go fishing, you're with a fishing partner, and your buddy says: "Man, you're not going today because of this and that... Oh, I don't care about that, I'm bigger than that." Then they go, and it ends up happening. [...] He doesn't appear to them directly, but he makes them turn back, and just like they came, they go back empty-handed, without any food for their children. Why? Because they didn't believe in what people say. So he exists [...] but he doesn't appear to everyone... (Cacique Ci) (Barbosa et al, 2020, p. 61).

As we can see in the reports, the reign of the Father of the Mangrove is highly feared by the Potiguara indigenous people. They consider him to be very powerful, as, according to the testimonies, this being can prevent fishermen from having a good catch, as well as stop them from leaving the mangrove's territorial space. The danger posed by the Father of the Mangrove and the constant fear of what he can do within the area he controls suggests the notion that the place belongs to him.

According to Diegues, many societies believe in the relationship between the natural world, the supernatural, and social organization, especially in indigenous societies, because for them, "there is no dualistic classification, no rigid dividing line between the 'natural' and the 'social,' but rather a continuum between the two" (Diegues, 2000, p. 30). This perception is quite evident among the indigenous relatives, as the reports show a certain "naturalness" in the way they point out the presence of this being among the indigenous people.

The mangroves of the Potiguara territory are places where a large part of the indigenous people living near these areas find sustenance, as well as those who travel from more distant villages for fishing activities, especially during the "crab runs" and shellfish harvesting periods. According to Silva, in *Sob o olhar do Pai do Mangue*, the mangrove, even though it is under tension, ideally belongs to all who live there, through the traditional right of ownership that traditional societies hold. It is a place of "common usufruct for all those who occupy it or extract from it their means of livelihood and/or commercialization" (Silva, 2011, p. 37).

The idea conveyed about the Father of the Mangrove as the owner of this space directly influences the balanced way of coexistence within this sacred space. For the Potiguara, even though the actions and appearances of this supernatural being bring fear and terror when perceived by the indigenous people, these apparitions are treated with "certain naturalness" due to the acceptance of the imposition of rules by the manager of this environment. In the *Dicionário de símbolos* by Chevalier, the symbolism of the word "father" denotes a sense of possession, with the father being one who dictates rules based on possession and control over something (Chevalier, 1986, p. 793).

Possession, deprivation, control, and authority are key words regarding the characteristics of the Father of the Mangrove. Considering these from a mythological perspective, these narratives may serve functions as defined by Campbell in *The Power of Myth*. One of these functions is sociological, where the myth acts as support and validation of a certain social order, governing ethical principles and the laws of life. According to Campbell, myths promote the perpetuation of cultural homogeneity for some time: "there are a number of unspoken, unwritten rules by which people guide themselves. There is an ethos there, a custom, an understanding according to which 'we don't do it this way'" (Campbell, 1990, p. 21).

In this context, when Mr. Orlando mentions that his mother pronounced swear words ("names") in the mangrove and was reprimanded afterward, the account emphasizes a relationship governed by moral and social laws for coexistence within the sacred space of the mangrove: "Then mom started calling names, calling names. I said: 'Look, mom, don't call names, because mom didn't like to call names'" (Barbosa et al., 2020, p. 42). These imposed rules are related to the idea of the territorial space as a sacred place, and the utterance of curse words and insults would be seen as an attack on the norms established for the coexistence and use of the mangrove space.

Therefore, in order to avoid certain punishments, it is necessary for the established norms to be followed by those who coexist with this supernatural being. The rituals performed with these supernatural entities, such as the Father of the Mangrove and Cumade Fulozinha, take into account moral attitudes, such as respecting the sacredness of the mangrove and forest, as well as their regulating agents. Offerings such as roll tobacco, cachaça, or aguardente (a type of strong alcohol) are some of the elements used in these rituals. Following these rules ensures that these beings "bless" those who seek food within the forest and the mangrove.

It becomes clear that it is as a result of the actions of the supernatural beings that the indigenous people are able to fish, hunt, and not get lost within the forest and the mangrove. Therefore, successful outcomes within these spaces do not occur solely due to the efforts expended on these tasks. In this way, the perpetuation of these narratives helps promote these behavioral patterns within the environment governed by each of these supernatural beings, guiding the "correct" ways of coexistence. Not pronouncing certain curse words, avoiding negative thoughts and bad energies, having "devotion," and offering goods to the beings are some of the mandatory characteristics of the Potiguara people.

4.2 The Potiguara Witches

Witches are beings that invade the collective imagination of many societies. According to Chevalier, the figure of the witch exists in the unconscious of humans and materializes as a resentful shadow that is greatly feared:

As a result of rejections, she embodies (the desires, fears, and other tendencies of our psyche that are incompatible with our self, either because they are too childish or for some other reason). [...] The witch is the antithesis of the idealized image of woman. In another sense, the witch was considered, due to the influence of Christian preaching, as a deliberate degradation of priestesses, sibyls, and druidic magicians. They were disguised in horrible and diabolical forms, in contrast to the initiates of antiquity, who connected the visible to the invisible, the human to the divine; but the unconscious awakened the fairy, of which the witch, a servant of the devil, no longer appeared except as a caricature. Witch, fairy, and magician, creatures of the unconscious, are daughters of a long history, engraved in the psyche, and of personal transfers from a slow evolution, whose legends made them real, clothed them, and animated them as hostile characters. (Chevalier, 1986, p. 200).

According to Chevalier, witches are considered diabolical, hostile, and horrific beings due to the ideas and influences spread by Christianity. In *Landscapes of Fear*, Yi-Fu Tuan discusses one of the fears caused by nature: the fear of witches. For Tuan (2005, p. 168), a “witch is a person who casts harm through the practice of exceptional powers. These powers can be considered supernatural because they operate in a way that cannot be detected; the cause is only recognizable once the damage becomes known” (Tuan, 2005, p. 168).

According to Tuan (2005), the belief in witches is universal, and the relationship with them can vary between cultures. In Potiguara culture, the meanings attributed to witches are understood in two ways: the first occurs when a person practices actions in “macumba” (a form of Afro-Brazilian religious practice) with the intent of favoring or harming a particular individual, and the person who performs this witchcraft is called a witch or wizard. The second mention of witches in Potiguara territory refers to beings that are the result of transformations, as reported in the narratives.

The stories gathered recount two narratives regarding the presence of witches in the region. The first was told by Mr. Orlando, who, when he lived in the São Miguel village (referred to as “Vila”), witnessed the appearance of a witch identified by actions performed by this being in the village. According to Mr. Orlando, this witch was actually the “cumadre” (godmother), who would transform into this being that frightened both the people and animals of the São Miguel village.

Look, we lived in the village, and my father... [...] My father raised some goats, and one night the goat gave birth to three kids. Then my mother said: “Antônio, be careful, the witch is going to take those kids.” Then, in the late afternoon, two unbaptized children—two boys—arrived to be buried. They had drowned in the river by the bridge, and they brought them to Saint Michael's Church to bury them the

next day, as was the custom. So, they came, right? In the early morning, look, their faces were bitten, and so were their thighs and arms. Then people started calling it the witch's doing. Time passed, and they buried the boys. Night fell, and the goat stayed with her kids. Then my father said: "Tonight, I'm going to load the shotgun and take a shot at that damn dog!" But it turned out it was his godmother. It was Baía's godmother who would transform. And then, at night, didn't she come?! She took the kids, screaming so loud it echoed. Then my father shot her with the shotgun. When the kid fell, it dropped at the man's feet: "thud!" Then my mother said: "Didn't I say she'd come at night, Antônio? They're all shameless!" (Orlando Soares) (Barbosa et al., 2020, p. 44).

In this excerpt, we observe two actions carried out by the witches. The first occurred against two boys who died as pagãos (unbaptized), and the second action was performed against animals (a goat and kids), which are very common in the region. If we analyze it from the perspective of religious influence, the witches' actions concerning the pagan boys are linked to the absence of baptism, leading to the belief that if a child is not baptized, they may be vulnerable to witchcraft. The night, the mutilation, proximity, and the seemingly ordinary behavior of people who transform into these supernatural beings are some of the elements that, according to Tuan, contribute to the manifestation of the mysterious actions of witchcraft:

People of ordinary appearance can, in secret and dark places, subvert the most deeply held beliefs of society. Worldwide, the antisocial traits of witches are very similar because, in all enduring communities, basic social values are almost the same. Among the most important are respect for life, property, and sexual conduct rules. Witches not only mutilate, kill, and destroy, but they also seem to choose their victims indiscriminately, who can be a stranger, a neighbor, or even a brother or sister. Witches are lustful and incestuous, have relations with corpses and demons, and have no control over their impulses. Witches are a force for total chaos, and are strongly associated with other forces or manifestations of chaos, such as dark nights, wild animals, untamed fields, mountains, and storms. Dark nights diminish human vision. People lose the ability to manipulate their environment and feel vulnerable. As daylight decreases, so does their world. Nefarious powers take control. Witches and ghosts hold a prominent place in Western traditions (Tuan, 2005, p. 170).

So, just like in the fictional works presented by Gama-Khalil, witches require a favorable environment that supports the actions carried out based on the narrative of these beings' practices in the Potiguara villages. As already mentioned: the night, paganism (from the Christian perspective), the

lack of protection for animals as a consequence of natural factors, such as the arrival of night, among others.

Another narrative that features witches as central characters are the *Bruxas de Coqueirinho* (Witches of Coqueirinho), as they are called. This story evokes affection within the indigenous territory and is greatly feared in the coastal region of the city of Marcação. According to the reports, these witches are known to play tricks on fishermen who arrive in the Coqueirinho village for fishing activities:

"So, the 'cumade' was the 'cumpade' of the guy... Then the guy said: – What's with the thing? My boat always wakes up every day full of flowers, and in Coqueirinho, there are flowers that no one has ever known, that are from the time of 'mãe Nenem' (old Nenem's time). So, off she goes... Then she said every night she would take the boat, three or four, and go to the city, to drink and have fun. Then he said: – What's with the thing? I wash the boat every day and I don't know what it is! Then one day, every fisherman has a big *samburá* (fishnet), that big *samburá* to put fish in. So, he went inside. They didn't kill him because she was his 'cumade' and the others too. When they got to the line of the sea, one of them said: – This smells like pig's blood. The 'cumade' said: – No, it doesn't smell like pig's blood. Then she started... One rowed to land and the other rowed to the sea. Each row took twenty-five leagues, and they kept going. Then she said: – Look, into the *samburá*. When they got to a city, they won the city, right? He went outside and stayed on the boat's deck, just watching. Then a guy arrived, it was midnight, right? And he said: – Where are you from? He said: – I'm from Paraíba, right? He said: – I know you're here, but... Don't leave here, because if you do, you'll get lost in the city. He left and came back. When he realized, they came back all DRUNK, with bunches of flowers, drinking only the best stuff. Then the other one just kept saying: – This smells like pig's blood! It was time to take the *samburá* and throw it into the sea. Then they came here, and when the day broke, they arrived before the rooster crowed. Before the rooster crowed, they had to arrive. Well, twenty-five leagues in one row goes a long way. When they arrived, he went out, and they all left. The next day, the 'cumade' went to his house, and she said: – Never do that again, if you do... they didn't end you because I was there. If not, you'd be dead, you know? And don't tell anyone I said this to you, don't say we exist, because if you do, we'll come back. Then he never went back inside there again. But the boat would wake up all dirty, all vomited, with the thing they drank. And they enter through the hole in a lock... They enter through the hole in the lock." (Orlando Soares) (Barbosa et al. 2020, p. 45).

In the narratives of the Witches of Coqueirinho, we observe elements found in the story of the witch that appeared in the São Miguel village, such as events occurring during the night, as well as the relationship of compadrio between the witches and the people they interact with. Given the intimate relationship that witches typically have with the people affected by their actions, in the Potiguara territory, they are commonly associated with the *comadres* (godmothers) of these affected individuals.

According to Cascudo (2005, p. 294), the term "comadre" indicates a close bond between people; for him, compadres and comadres share a kind of brotherhood, mutual aid, respectful intimacy, and an unbreakable spiritual connection. According to Tuan:

The witch is similar to an ordinary person. It could be my neighbor next door or even a close relative – rarely can one know. The person I see every day, who smiles so kindly, may, at night, be plotting spells that will cause me to break a leg or lose a child. Witches are unknown internal enemies: that's why they cause so much discomfort (Tuan, 2005, p. 169).

In the narratives presented, there is a closeness with those around the witches, as was reported in the story of the witches from the São Miguel village: "Then father said: – Today I'm going to carry the shotgun to shoot that damn dog! But it turns out she was his compadre. She was Baía's compadre who transformed." The relationship of compadrio also persists with the Witches of Coqueirinho, when the narrator begins telling the story by revealing this fact: "Then the comadre was the compadre of the guy... Then the man said: – What's with the damn thing, my boats wake up every day full of flowers, because in Coqueirinho there are flowers no one has ever seen, from the time of mother Nenem." And continues in other parts: "They didn't kill him because she was his comadre and the others. Then when it was time to go to the sea line, one of them said: – Here smells of royal blood."

In Barbosa et al. (2020), an observation was made about the expression "sangue riá" (royal blood) evoked when the story of the Witches of Coqueirinho was told. This expression had already appeared in the "First section: stories of European origin" in *Contos Tradicionais do Brasil* (1885), where Sílvio Romero recorded: "– Here I smell royal blood, here I smell royal blood!" in "O Bicho Manjaléo" and "O Papagaio do Limo Verde," stories originating from the state of Sergipe, where Luís da Câmara Cascudo (1984, p. 265) collected "Os Três Coroados" for *Literatura Oral no Brasil* (1952), with almost identical expression: "Fum... here I smell royal blood!... here I smell royal blood...". "Here I smell royal blood!" appears in one of the folk tales from Pernambuco, in Professor Roberto Benjamin's collection (1994, p. 156).

In this sense, such narratives associate the expression with the motive of a risky situation, where the hero hides from the antagonist with the complicity of another character, as happens in the story told by Orlando Soares. Note the same use and motif in the Amazonian tales recorded in the indigenous language Nheengatú, translated and commented by the ethnographer João Barbosa

Rodrigues (1890, p. 18, author's emphasis): "A proof of the Portuguese immigration tales in the Amazon region (...) that 'here I smell royal blood' is a Portuguese insertion made in the indigenous tale." These elements denote the existence of syncretism that occurred over time in indigenous culture, even though they preserved much of their traditions and culture after the European invasion.

Final Considerations

As analyzed, oral tradition narratives are one of the primary means of sharing ancestral knowledge within the Potiguara Indigenous territory. Beyond this, these narratives also incorporate elements observed in other cultures, with which the Indigenous culture interacted following the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500.

In this context, it is crucial to emphasize the important role of storytellers. Only through the transmission of these traditions, beliefs, and rituals to younger generations can the ancestral teachings of the elders enable the Potiguara culture to continue flourishing. Storytellers, often unconsciously, are directly responsible for ensuring that these traditions are remembered and kept alive within Potiguara society.

Moreover, oral storytelling becomes an act of resistance against cultural erasure and the homogenization imposed by colonization. Through narration, Indigenous peoples, such as the Potiguara, not only preserve their past but also reconstruct their present, affirming their place in the world and their responsibilities toward nature and other beings. Thus, the storyteller's importance in the culture of Indigenous peoples goes beyond the mere act of storytelling. They are agents of preservation, resistance, and cultural reconstruction, keeping ancestral memory alive and establishing a relational space of profound connection between the people, their ancestors, and their future.

Through the collective memory shared within the community, rooted in the cultural identity of the people, it is possible to build and strengthen the identity traits of those who belong to and are part of the Potiguara ethnicity. As previously discussed, identity encompasses a set of shared traits through which human communities recognize themselves, create habits, and define behaviors.

In this way, the stories told by the elders contribute significantly to the survival of Potiguara culture. As Escosteguy pointed out, identity can either be innate, predisposing individuals to act

according to what the group collectively believes, or it can be socially constructed through a process of identity formation.

The stories filled with supernatural elements and beings, such as the Father of the Mangrove, Cumade Fulorzinha, Batatão, Sopinha, and Cu de Fogo, as well as other autobiographical narratives documented in the research published by Barbosa et al. (2020), have been part of the oral tradition for an undetermined time. Their origins remain unknown, yet they continue to be shared to this day.

CRediT
Acknowledgement: Not applicable.
Financing: Not applicable.
Conflicts of interest: The authors certify that they have no commercial or associative interest that represents a conflict of interest in relation to the manuscript.
Ethical Approval: Not applicable.
Contributor Roles: BARBOSA, Milena Veríssimo. Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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