

## The authorship of indigenous communities: who is the author?

**Naira Christofolletti Silveira**

Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil  
[naira.silveira@unirio.br](mailto:naira.silveira@unirio.br)

**Aline da Silva Franca**

Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil  
[francaaline@yahoo.com.br](mailto:francaaline@yahoo.com.br)



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### Abstract:

*The starting point for this paper is the concept of authorship presented by Foucault and Barthes. For them, the author is a social construction. Therefore it is necessary to understand who the author of a work is to produce a real representation and to value cultural identities. The context of this paper is the IFLA Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge. It recommends - specifically in #2, #3 and #6 of its guidelines – to promote research and learning about indigenous peoples, to publicize the value of indigenous knowledge to both non-indigenous and indigenous peoples and to encourage the recognition of intellectual property of indigenous traditional knowledge and products derived from it. It is about an exploratory investigation, based on bibliographic, documental and comparative research whose object of study is the concept of indigenous authorship in bibliographic representation. As the author is represented in the bibliographic records according to guidelines established by cataloguing codes, reflections about authorship and its form of representation are instrumental for links to be created between bibliographic records, documents, users and memory preservation. In this perspective, learning about Brazilian indigenous peoples is the beginning of more complex studies to promote indigenous knowledge and to recognize their value for all societies, and eventually to construct a Brazilian identity.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous communities. Brazil. Authorship. Knowledge organization. Bibliographic representation.

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### Introduction

The starting point for this paper is the concept of authorship presented by Foucault and Barthes. For them, the author is a social construct. Therefore it is necessary to understand who the author of a work is to produce a real representation and to value cultural identities. The context of this paper is the IFLA Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (IFLA, 2014). It recommends - specifically in #2, #3 and #6 of its guidelines – promoting research

and learning about indigenous peoples, publicizing the value of indigenous knowledge to both non-indigenous and indigenous peoples and to encourage the recognition of intellectual property of indigenous traditional knowledge and products derived from it.

To believe that indigenous peoples belong to a homogeneous group is a prejudice, it is naive and incorrect. The last census published in 2010 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics found that Brazil has more than 896,000 indigenous people living inside and outside of indigenous lands, comprising 240 communities who speak about 180 different languages (IBGE, 2010). During the period that extended from the European colonization in Brazil until the first half of the twentieth century, indigenous groups were kept in a secondary condition in the Brazilian social dynamics. Only in 1988 did the Brazilian Constitution recognize formally the claims of indigenous peoples. It is observed, therefore, that the advancement of school practice in the villages, initialized in the late twentieth century, was the first step towards the emergence of indigenous authorship in bibliographic materials.

Following the increasing number of books and other materials produced by Brazilian indigenous peoples, the objective of this research is to discuss some questions about the authorship of indigenous knowledge.

We will study how indigenous works have been represented. It is about an exploratory investigation, based on bibliographic, documental and comparative research whose object of study is the concept of indigenous authorship in bibliographic representation. As the author is represented in the bibliographic records according to guidelines established by cataloguing codes, reflections about authorship and its form of representation are instrumental for links to be created between bibliographic records, documents, users and memory preservation.

The construction of indigenous knowledge has particularities. For example, in most of the cases, the origin of the tales lies within indigenous communities, but their expression in a book is the responsibility of one individual, or more. To clarify this point, this research interviewed some Brazilian indigenous authors to discover what they think about authorship and used the documental analysis of indigenous books to explain and exemplify some matters about indigenous works.

### **Matters about author and authorship**

Authorship is extremely related to the work, can be understood as a kind of relationship between the author and the work. When a work is created by more than one author, the subjects involved in this process are known as co-authors or collaborators and the authorship is called "shared authorship". Therefore, the authorship and the author may have different characteristics recognized by the constitution of a work. In addressing the theme "author", the initial references, following the recurrent discussion on the subject present in the literature, are Foucault (2006), Barthes (1988) and Chartier (1999, 2008).

In 1968, Barthes (1988) states that the writer is a social subject, historically constituted, who produces a text based on other texts. Although Barthes (1988) deletes the author's speech to the "reader's birth", Foucault (2006) points that the author remains. He recognizes four characteristics of an author's function, summarized below:

[...] The author's function is linked to the legal and institutional system that determines and articulates the universe of discourses; it does not perform every discourse

uniformly, in all times and in all forms of civilization; it is not defined by spontaneously assigning an address to the producer, but through a series of specific and complex operations; it does not simply refer to a real individual and may lead to various "selves" at the same time, several subject-positions that different classes of individuals can occupy (Foucault, 2006, pp. 56-57, *our translation*).

Probably, the absence or presence of the author does not relate only to issues of censorship in the Middle Ages (Chartier, 1999, 2008). The emergence of the author is also related to the need for recognition of an author by society and the emergence of cognitive capitalism that considers intellectual work as a result of the labor force and therefore deserves to be recognized and remunerated as such. Once the author has been recognized as responsible for his speech, it became a very important element in the descriptive representation of information.

Authorship has long been regarded as the primary identifying attribute of a work, at least in the Anglo-American tradition of cataloging. Authorship, thus, is a fundamental concept in cataloging theory and any consideration of the foundations of cataloging is obliged to address the problem of its definition (Svenonius, c1989, p. 17).

The emergence of "author" and the look of society on it changed the identification of authorship in a catalog. After the Middle Ages, the presence of authorship becomes increasingly evident in the bibliographic records and library catalogues. There are two reasons for the increase of the importance of authorship as access points in a catalog: a) to find a specific document when the author is known; and, b) to find out the documents by the author in the library (Needham, 1964). The following table presents the author settings in cataloging codes.

<b>Cataloging Code</b>	<b>An author is ...</b>
ALA/LA 1908	broader sense—maker of the book
Vatican 1948	one who has written a work; or has prepared a publication; or caused it to be prepared
ALA 1949	The person or body chiefly responsible for the intellectual content of the book; When divided ... collector or editor may be considered the author; When undeterminable ... substitute for an author's name (as a pseudonym); Governments, societies, institutions and other organizations are to be regarded as the authors
AACR 1967	The person or corporate body chiefly responsible for the creation of the intellectual or artistic content of a work
AACR 1978	The person chiefly responsible for the creation of the intellectual or artistic content of a work.; For example [writers ... performers] are authors

Table 1. Definitions of "author" (Smiraglia, Lee & Olson, 2011, p. 141)

In the *Resource Description and Access* (RDA), the new cataloguing code, after the AACR 1978 (the last line of table 1), uses the term “responsibility” instead of “author” or “authorship”.

**Statement of Responsibility.** A statement relating to the identification and/or function of any persons, families, or corporate bodies responsible for the creation of, or contributing to the realization of, the intellectual or artistic content of a resource (RDA Toolkit, c2010, online).

When we use the term “responsibility”, we extend the limits of understanding authorship. It now includes all those responsible and introduces the terminology of FRBR. The “responsible” could be a “person” (individual), “corporate body” (a group of individuals) or a “family” (such as a group with family relationship).

As shown in cataloging codes and reaffirmed by Cutter (1876) and Pettee (1985), for cataloging purposes, the role of author can be expanded beyond an individual, as a group, e.g. called as *corporate body* and is very important in the context of information representation. There are several reasons for the inclusion of authorship in catalogs, such as the identification and selection of similar documents with different authorship. With the documentary explosion it is increasingly necessary to list elements that can help one to organize, identify and select documents.

Author, in the narrower sense, is the person who writes a book; in a wider sense it may be applied to him who is the cause of the book's existence by putting together the writings of several authors (usually called the editor, more properly to be called the collector). Bodies of men (societies, cities, legislative bodies, countries) are to be considered the authors of their memoirs, transactions, journals, debates, reports, &c. (Cutter, 1876, p. 10).

What Jewett embodied in his Rule XXII, Cutter, in his first direction, restates in the form of a general law, specifically extending the authorship principle to corporate bodies [...]. Cutter goes farther. Authorship forms, personal, corporate, or conventional name as substitute for author, are fundamental to his author rules. These authorship forms assemble literary units. We find in Cutter, fixed for all time, I believe, the two fundamental principles of the modern author catalog: 1. The author catalog is more than a finding list of separate and particular books. It deals with literary units and its function is to assemble under a convenient heading all issues or forms of the same literary unit. 2. The most satisfactory method of doing this is through the attribution of authorship, using as heading the name of the person, or corporate body responsible for the work, or using as a substitute for author heading, a conventional name not derived from the title-page but from the literary source of the book or document (Pettee, 1985, p. 84).

Considering that the author’s function is directly related to the social, historical and economic development of society, this research interviewed some Brazilian indigenous authors to discover what they think about indigenous author and authorship.

Questions about	Consolidation of answers
Indigenous author	The indigenous authorship is closely embedded in the cultural context for each people. The narratives are full of cultural elements, beliefs and rites. The indigenous theme is not restricted to indigenous writers. However, these are recognized as authentic spokesmen of wisdom and ancestral knowledge of their people. In indigenous authorship, literary production is not for simple entertainment. It has, instead, the educational commitment to the transmission of culture and tradition to both their people and to civil society. They are story and history.
Adaptation of traditional story and history	Traditional stories and histories are respected in their essence. However, the literary opens possibilities for adjustments. In most cases, it seeks to maintain fidelity to the story that was heard, so that the knowledge to be transmitted is not lost, but the writers have creative freedom to recreate and enrich narrative contexts, respecting what is held to be true in the tradition. It is considered ethical and necessary to identify, where possible, the people to which the work relates and derivate.
Access point for indigenous communities in the catalog	Just as there are different worldviews among different indigenous peoples, the answer to this question was varied. Respondents were unanimous in the agreement that traditional knowledge should be recognized and that the people from which it originates (where possible) be identified. Thus, it confirms the need to establish an access point that allows both the identification and the recovery by the name of the people. Among the respondents, the proposed standard way to access points for indigenous collective authorship were "indigenous people [name]"; "People [name]"; "Indigenous Nation [name]." How "People [name]" was mentioned by two of the respondents.

Table 2. Consolidation of answers about author and authorship

It is possible to observe when the *work* come from knowledge of the indigenous community (*corporate body*) the community name should be considered as responsible for the *work* and the indigenous individual (*person*) as responsible for its *expression*. Thus, to represent a book reliably you must know the *work* and the *expression*. The indigenous documents should be very carefully analyzed and it is critical to identify who is the responsible for the *work* and who is responsible for *expression*. In bibliographic records one usually comes across the absence of responsibility to the indigenous community (*corporate body*), only the individual (*person*) being described. When this occurs the indigenous knowledge of the group is not being valued.

### The authorship of indigenous communities and bibliographic records

The figure 1 shows a bibliographic record to illustrate the discussion started in the topic above. It is possible to observe in this bibliographic record (Figure 1) that the indigenous community is neither represented as author or responsible for this work, such as access point (at circles 1 and 3) nor in the bibliographic description. The indigenous community appears only as “subjects” in this bibliographic record (at circle number 2 in the figure). The omission of the actually responsible community in this bibliographic record would be the beginning of the devaluation and non-recognition of the indigenous knowledge. In this case, the bibliographic record does not respect the IFLA Statement on Indigenous Traditional

Knowledge (IFLA, 2014), especially the recommendation #3: “Publicize the value, contribution, and importance of indigenous and local traditional knowledge to both non-indigenous and indigenous peoples”; and the recommendation #6: “Encourage the recognition of principles of intellectual property to ensure the proper protection and use of indigenous traditional knowledge and products derived from it.” (IFLA, 2014, p. 1).

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Figure 1. Bibliographic record (Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, 2014)

Looking at the figure 1 (at circle 1), responsibility is attributed only to the “person”, not the “community”. About the rules of bibliographic representation, the “community” can be considered a “corporate body” who represents the group or institution and similar situations. Sometimes, we felt that something was missing when using “corporate body”, for example, some communities do not have a formalized complex cultural structure. We understood that “corporate body” can be used by groups, but not by all autochthonous communities. More studies about communities (not only indigenous people) must be conducted in order to create a new concept that aggregates social, ethnical or special groups and communities, such as autochthonous people, Basques, and Kurds.

At this point, the concepts “person”, “corporate body” or “family”, as well as “work” and “expression” from FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Data) can be helpful, but we consider that these concepts are rather simple to be applied to complex autochthonous communities. It is necessary to understand who the responsible person for the “work” is and who has the responsibility for the “expression”. For the Brazilian indigenous knowledge, it is possible to observe that there are many “works” from the community or “corporate body” and these "works" have many “expressions” by “person”. These perspectives must be considered for a bibliographic representation.

The entities in the first group [...] represent the different aspects of user interests in the products of intellectual or artistic endeavour. The entities defined as *work* (a distinct intellectual or artistic creation) and *expression* (the intellectual or artistic realization of a work) reflect intellectual or artistic content. The entities defined as *manifestation* (the physical embodiment of an *expression* of a *work*) and *item* (a single exemplar of a manifestation), on the other hand, reflect physical form. [...] The entities in the second group [...] represent those responsible for the intellectual or artistic content, the physical production and dissemination, or the custodianship of the entities in the first group. The entities in the second group include *person* (an individual) and *corporate body* (an organization or group of individuals and/or organizations) (IFLA, 2009, pp. 13-14).

In this case, is essential to know who the responsible for the *work* is and who is responsible for the *expression*. The indigenous knowledge in a book could have as the responsible a *person* or *corporate body* (indigenous community). In this case, if the indigenous community is considerate responsible for the *work*, the name of indigenous community has to be present in the bibliographic records as responsibility, not only as the subject. Just for clarification, the term *corporate body* is used because it is more proximate to use, but, this term does not reflect the complexity of the concept of social indigenous community or rather, it is necessary to seek for news concepts.

### **Final considerations**

Works by indigenous communities (as abstract creations in the author's mind) are somehow considered collective authorship and the cataloguing librarian must comprehend the context of production of that authorship in order to attribute it to them. The one who writes the *work* is just responsible for the *expression*, making that abstract knowledge into something tangible, in this case, readable. The other responsibilities would be attributed to other people involved in the work production such as illustrators, translators, etc.

Studies involving ethnic aspects, specific social groups and different socio-cultural contexts have contributed significantly to the reflections about knowledge organization and information representation. The development of this research aims to endorse the discussions in the area seeking respect for social diversity. Brazilian cultural diversity can be considered one of this country's greatest national assets, as well as its main feature. Darcy Ribeiro (2008) indicates that the origin of the Brazilian people is their miscegenation, started between Portuguese and Indians and between Portuguese and Africans. Many indigenous peoples, in addition to the people of Tupi origin, played an important role in the formation of Brazil.

In this perspective and in the IFLA Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, learning about Brazilian indigenous peoples is the beginning of more complex studies to promote indigenous knowledge, to recognize their value for all societies, and eventually to construct a Brazilian identity. The important thing is that knowledge organization and bibliographic representation understand the context of origin of indigenous knowledge before establishing guidelines for bibliographic representation. Thus, it will be possible to recognize the cultural identity of indigenous communities for them and for other communities (indigenous or not), respecting the circle of knowledge from its construction to its use.

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