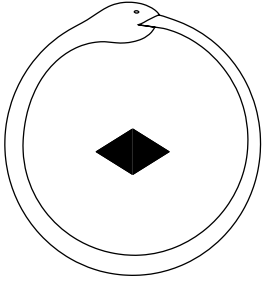


COLLECTIVE PRACTICES  
OF LIVING SCHOOLS  
Francy Baniwa and Cristine Takuá



notebooks  
SELVAGEM



## COLLECTIVE PRACTICES OF LIVING SCHOOLS

Francy Baniwa and Cristine Takuá

*This notebook was created from the conversation between Francy Baniwa and Cristine Takuá, recorded in May 2025, in the community of Assunção do Içana, in the Amazon, during the symbolic inauguration of **Baniwa Madzerokai Living School**.*

*The conversation became the Selvagem Message 5 and can be accessed [here](#).*

FRANCY BANIWA

**Baniwa** people are proud of being people of reference when it comes to swidden agriculture<sup>1</sup>, right? So I see how the knowledge on pepper, on diversity of manioc, cultivation, dominion of the territory of sacred places, has never been lost. What I believe has been somewhat lost is the practice of *Kalidzamai*<sup>2</sup>, which is the female and male rite of passage, and which requires *Kowai*<sup>3</sup> to be present. This is something that needs the presence of someone, because, in fact, it's not something to play around with. So the fear of our specialists was: 'Who knows it?' So they could pull us along and we could go together.

We cannot play around with living beings, because we will suffer the consequences. So, that was a big fear of initiating, performing the

---

1. Swidden, *roça* (PT), is also termed as shifting cultivation. An agricultural practice common to many Indigenous communities and widely developed in the Amazon. This practice involves the clearance of forested areas where food can be grown for a limited period of time allowing ecological succession to occur with the re-emergence of the forest. Swidden farming is a result of knowledge inherited from millennia of experimentation and constitutes the stewardship of land, biodiversity, community, culture and food sovereignty. The term swidden applies both to the agricultural practice as well as to the cultivated land itself. Source: SILVA, Luiz Felipe; ABREU, Fellipe. *Na Amazônia, práticas agrícolas indígenas interligam cosmologia e conservação. Terras Indígenas no Brasil. Instituto Socioambiental*. 19 Sept. 2022. Available at: <https://terrasindigenas.org.br/en/noticia/216981>. Accessed on: 26 Nov. 2025. (T.N.)

2. *Kalidzamai* (in *nheengatu*, *kariamã*) refers to important rites of passage, mainly those of male and female initiation.

3. *Koway* is a figure in **Baniwa** cosmology with various shapes and appearances, born with a body covered in hair and holes everywhere. He possesses the sounds of all kinds of animals, called today as groups of 'sacred animals'.

first ritual, right? So, I believe that the Saúva<sup>4</sup> is that place of reference, because it was born there, it was there that the first male rite of passage with the students took place, right? And the school here has always been a pioneer in something different. Research, even if education didn't allow us to research, they would do so, they would go with my father, they would interview all the specialists, seeking to understand the history of the community, who were the first inhabitants, the importance of the sacred place, the origin of *Baniwa* people... The students were the ones who did the research. So we have always been seen as a community who innovates things, who gets things done, who breaks through the bubbles to make new discoveries.

My uncle Antônio spoke of something very beautiful: of this transmission of knowledge, of having a father who says: 'My son, do this.' And without questioning you take your things and start doing it. I believe that is intergenerational transmission, because that happened with my father, now my father with his children, with his grandchildren, him with his children. So it's a knowledge that has always been present in this world of the Living School, which is different, it plays out in practice, in life experience. You understand the importance of things when you sweat while planting in the swidden, when you sweat to make flour, when you understand that taking care of the swidden is important to have that relationship of care. You are not going to cultivate a swidden – because it was so difficult – and not take care of it. So all of that advice. That's why I always say these narratives are alive and how these blessings are always present. *Napirikoli* is always present, *Amaro* is always present, *Kowai* is always present<sup>5</sup>. It seems that they are the ones who heal you, because the conversation always happens with them, right? *Ñapirikoli*, *Dzooli Ñapirikoli*... the jaguar is always there in the middle as well, *Dzaawi*<sup>6</sup> *Ñapirikoli*. So they are people who live in these other

---

4. Saúva is the name of the place where the new Training House is being built within the village. It is a very important place for the community's memory, because it was the site of the first malocas [communal houses], the first community school, and the first male initiation ritual with the sacred animals. (T.N.)

5. In *Baniwa* cosmogony, the myths of the beginning of the world are featured by *Hekopinai*, universe-people. *Ñapirikoli*, *Amaro*, *Kowai* and *Dzooli* are some of the *Hekopinai*, mentioned in many narratives.

6. *Dzaawi* means 'jaguar' in *Baniwa*. (T.N.)

worlds, but for you to heal and allow yourself to eat fish after your period of seclusion, the first initiation, they are the ones who allow you to do so, who authorise you to do so. It's a conversation you are having with these people who are present, who are here, who never died.

So I believe that, in this understanding, the book<sup>7</sup> is super important, because it's possible to read and interact with what these other worlds were. Today we only know of that experience. That's why sometimes I am proud of knowing all of those narratives, like my father does. My father knows all the narratives and so do I, but that was only possible because I wrote, read, reread, questioned, interpreted, translated, and it stayed, you know? It stayed in my head. So to be able to share *Umbigo do mundo* [World's navel] with my relatives and to be able to be that reference of that living memory once again, of what lived in our grandparents memory and was sleeping. Today they can read and say: 'That's right. That's exactly right'.

So I think the Living School came to strengthen us, you know? That affirmation of our knowledge: it is beautiful, it is important. My aunt Bibiana spoke: 'The period of seclusion is important, the rules are important, because if it wasn't for that, we'd all be disorganised. But what puts you in line are these pieces of advice, these rules, these consequences.' So being able to introduce you to this world, to Cris Takuá, who is a relative<sup>8</sup>, to Carlos Papá, who is a *Guarani* relative, to be able to show to three different peoples a little bit of the territory of Assunção, where this Living School is, which is something we already experience.

I think one thing we were in need of was a kick to show to the youth that they are pioneers. They are the protagonists. We need to be proud of all the knowledge our parents have today and say 'What's up, dad? Tell me more. What does this place mean? what does that mean?' To inquire our elders more. To listen more, to sit down and listen, to grab a seat and let yourself be taken away, you know? I think you don't have to set a time. 'I have an hour to listen to you.' No. It has to be an extended

---

7. Book *Umbigo do mundo* (Dantes, 2023), by Francy Baniwa and Francisco Fontes Baniwa, illustrated with 74 watercolour paintings by Frank Baniwa.

8. Members of different Indigenous Peoples have the practice of referring to each other as 'relatives', regardless of having direct blood relationship. It means they mutually recognise each other as Indigenous and share common interests. (T.N.)

time, like that. When it's finished he lets you go. So I believe that today we are having that opportunity to listen. They are saying: 'We are here. Now it's the time for you to ask.' So the opportunity to be able to listen to Cris, of that importance, that struggle for differentiated education, coordinating five different schools, of different territories, different challenges. That gives you a different capacity to say how diverse in fact the territories are. The issues of language, food, the challenges... Some are the same. But others are very different.

So all of us, the entire community is happy to be able to present a little bit of that life experience, of this community. Assunção was always this participative community who enjoys making *Dabucuri*<sup>9</sup>, who enjoys welcoming, who enjoys paying tribute, who enjoys saying goodbye with songs, with dance, saying 'come back soon'. I think that's a beautiful thing, no? A proper *Baniwa* way of organising, of sharing collectively, we are proud of it. 'Let's take that to the field, let's take you'... Like that, you know? To know, to tread, to feel. Because I believe that treading, that feeling, takes you a step further, saying: 'It's possible to do things. It's possible to dream, if in collectivity.' I think there is little space to be discouraged. Instead I think there are more dreams, hope to do something better, and not only Assunção, but the whole *Baniwa* territory.

We will be able to welcome our relatives here, we are going to be able to offer that training that does not exist elsewhere. So we truly become pioneers in this. And if this is possible, it is because we had this partnership, this alliance between relatives, where you can be mirrored and proud of other territories and to be able to speak of that territory from inside out, right? One that is the world from your own understanding, from your own experience, from your own eyes, whether you are young, women, adult, wise, elder. It is an extremely rich territory in memory, orality, ancestrality, living museum, living territory.

I always say we are only a molecule here, we think of ourselves as humans, rational human beings. But we are nothing without water, without this earth. Without the swidden, without *beiju*<sup>10</sup>, we won't

---

9. *Dabucuri* (in *Baniwa*, *poodali*) is a celebration of offering of fruits, fish, game meats, arts, common to the customs of several peoples across Rio Negro, in which several kinds of dance also occur, such as *maracá*, *embaúba*, *carriçú*, *japurutu*, *pithi* etc.

10. Traditional Indigenous food made from manioc. (T.N.)

survive. Without the air, without the Sun, without the rain. Without the birds, without the fish, we are nothing. We don't produce anything. Maybe we are in fact a cell that eats, that only knows how to eat and does nothing. I think humanity has that role of knowing how to devour things, because the territory doesn't need us, not to mention the forest. She has survived for years without human presence. So to be able to look at our territory and to have that awareness, that is something incredible, it's amazing.

CRISTINE TAKUÁ

To have come here has also had a very profound meaning for us. It got me reflecting on many things, and in that walk through the Living Schools, we were preparing ourselves to come here. We already felt and dreamed it would be something very profound which is why I made a point in bringing my children too, to feel, to experience, despite the distance and all. But everything we are living here, The words of each one... I am deeply moved really, to believe in that dream of the Living Schools and to see you making the bridge between the worlds. I see you, walking from one side to the other, but here, entirely here, despite being there. And it's beautiful, people who bridge worlds, but that have a very solid and structured foundation, with their father, their mother, their sisters, their family, with the community, right? And that's the most valuable thing in life, really. And we were able to see and feel that, right? Because one thing is for us to talk, because many people speak in lectures and all, but to live, to step your feet in the ground and to feel all of that, that's what's really true.

So, when I arrived here, I felt: It's all true, isn't it? The Living School is real, in the sense that many here have said, this is a Living School territory already. And I have been speaking of that in many places, that all Indigenous territory is a living school. It's just that many of us forget or stop practicing it. So within all of these challenges and of each one's historical process, sometimes it is difficult to achieve the strengthening you are able to have here. So that little kick – which I believe your father or

Miguel spoke of, I don't know – is, in reality, what we came to do in holding each other's hands to speak: 'No, let's row together, let's carry on together, because that's very powerful'. And to feel the children dancing and playing, and all of that energy I see in the circle moved me deeply. Even my youngest son said: 'Wow, how amazing!' Because everyone does things with love, with joy. Tiredness doesn't exist, it's not a play pretend, everything is true. And I am touched by that. Each time Kauê speaks like that, because he is very attentive to things, I am moved, because I feel Miguel's report, despite being younger than him, is a description of what I feel this dream is... But at the same time, I am saddened to feel how the schools and all of this schooling movement violently crosses our bodies, our memories, our territories and how they weaken these community relationships.

So when we come with the encouragement of the Living Schools, we realise it's possible, yes, and it's happening there in *Maxakali*, here, there in *Huni Kuĩ*, in *Guarani* territory. That is so beautiful because it's a process that we... It's like weaving, right? We are weaving the warp. When you stop to see, it's something very big already. And then, from that, you can create whatever you want. The artistry of the collective process, it's happening in the Living Schools. So for me it was very... It's been very profound to be here now. And being able to receive that energy from you, it's like an upraise. Like animating our soul so we can come back to our territory, facing our challenges with more lightness, with more courage.

And to realise that *Selvagem* is also a driving force. Is also a world bridge, because that dialogue between the sciences, many of which were left aside, when you bring the whole narrative of *Umbigo do mundo* and many other narratives that *Selvagem* is bringing, it's such a profound honouring that I am left questioning, till today, why no one has ever thought of doing this within academies and universities. And then, here comes this collective, which is so small. I see *Selvagem*, sometimes as something so tiny, but with such truthful depth, that it is touching people, poking this scowl square world into understanding that the big sciences of the forest, they resist. And their cradle, all of that care, is in that process of the Living Schools, which are the living territories, with the forests, with lore, with birth.

So to listen to the old ladies and those women so joyful, weaving and producing that art of such profound beauty that it's even difficult to speak of, that really touches me, because it's like seeing a dream I always had, you know? I arrived here, I saw a dream I have inside of me, which is, not to stop believing that the collective exists, you know? Not to stop believing that, regardless of all the differences that might exist, there are places that live in the potency of joy, of warmth, of harmony really. So for me, it's been a process of healing the habit of reflecting a lot on the challenges, but we have to focus on the dream and in doing now, in living now. And in that collective practice, we see that things are truly happening.

So I have a lot to thank you, for your strength, for your courage, because I know it's not easy to bridge worlds, but you are well protected, right? Your father prepared you for that. Your mother prepared you for that and all the spirits guide you on this journey. That's why you have so much strength, right? So I thank you, Anna, Digo, Kauê, Djeguaká, Papá, who took on this mission to get here, and for us all being together on this great adventure, which is, in reality, a profound learning experience, right? So I am truly grateful.

And so I wanted to ask you what is your big dream for this Living School, for this community. Because you were also present with the other coordinators. What is your dream in this project and in all of this relationship we are weaving together?

**FRANCY BANIWA**

I believe that dream is having a space. I believe that is already the beginning of that dream, being able to have little houses where each one can go and start weaving.

Of sourcing other alternatives, you know? To take the opportunity of such a big territory as this one to have a swidden field to cultivate, a collective swidden field to plant the diversity of cassava varieties, but also of fruits to provide for the Living School. That it can be organic – watermelon,

sweet potato, *cará*<sup>11</sup>, everything the soil allows us to have, right? That gifts us with that abundance. It's a dream to have two big swiddens, right? And to be able to beekeep so we can share with the children, but also to generate autonomy for the Living School, being able to create these other sustainable alternatives that the territory provides for us, right?

But I think that more than anything, would be to have this training centre to present our work, right? To make an exhibition for the community, but also an exhibition for the **Baniwa** territory, for them to be able to come here, to the Living School and see this work. May it inspire other communities to continue on the work. Being able to receive the students of other communities as well, arriving willingly – 'we want to learn' –, 'we have accomodation, you can come!' So, you know? Having a kitchen, being able to have a house, a space of the school, but of the community as well. I think that is our biggest dream, to have our own space and share the Living School, a space to receive researchers, to receive relatives, supporters, partners, and to show that extremely rich knowledge we hold.

I think that for a long time we did things for ourselves without the world knowing. But, at the same time, I find it incredible that all this knowledge has been there, we have always danced for ourselves, we have always made **Dabucuri** for ourselves. I think that being able to share a little bit now, with the world, about the existence of these songs, these chants, these arts, this knowledge about the territory, I think that encourages us to say to our relatives: 'Let's do it, let's write. If it's possible to do it, let's dream about it.' I believe that's what most motivates me, you know? To inspire other relatives too, of other territories, to dream about it. I think that's the biggest dream. To see these elders being valued. That's another dream, of being able to... You know? Being in their place as doctors, masters, **madzero**<sup>12</sup>. To see these women being thanked for sharing. I think this is something that is already beginning to happen. To say: 'Where are those who hold knowledge in the community, in the Living School?' They stand up. Proud of the recognition we have for these masters of lore.

---

11. Common name for several herbaceous climbing plants of the genus *Dioscorea*, of the *Dioscoreaceae* family, many of them native to Brazil and known as yams. (T.N.)

12. **Madzero** means 'wise' in **Baniwa**. (T.N.)

I think that... And being able to grow, grow and... being able to have that welcoming arm for other relatives too, because I believe that we have that willingness to say: 'Do you want to learn how to make *Aturá*<sup>13</sup>? Then come, this space is for us to learn in this trade, this exchange.' I think that's it, from all of these different dreams, right?

---

13. *Aturá* is a big basket used to carry cassava.

Indigenous women, anthropologist, photographer, writer, swidden owner\* and researcher of Baniwa people, Waliperedakeenai clan, born in Assunção community, in Lower Içana River, in Indigenous Land Upper Rio Negro, São Gabriel da Cachoeira/AM municipality. Engaged in Indigenous organisations and movements in Rio Negro for over a decade, she works and conducts research in the areas of Indigenous ethnology, gender, women's lore, objects and collections, traditional knowledge, memory, narrative, photography and audiovisual media. Author of *Umbigo do mundo: mitologia, ritual e memória Baniwa Waliperedakeenai* [World's navel: mitology, ritual and memory Baniwa Waliperedakeenai] (Dantes Editora, 2023), she is the first Indigenous Brazilian women to publish a book in the area of anthropology. Since 2024, coordinates *Madzerokai, Casa dos Conhecimentos Ancestrais* [Madzerokai, House of Ancestral Knowledge], the Baniwa Living School, in the community of Assunção do Içana.

\* Swidden farming is largely marked by gender division of labour, even though men select the land that will be cleared and burned, women are the ones who cultivate the land, who establish and care for the abundance swidden farming can bring. In that sense women are the 'swidden owners' as the farming lore is held by them and passed on to the following generations, ensuring the community's food sovereignty and the preservation of the Indigenous varieties of seeds and plants. Source: NERI, Ilma Fernandes. The Traditional Agricultural System of the Upper Negro River Region. *20th anniversary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: strategies and experiences from Latin America and the Caribbean*. Editors: Luciana Gonçalves de Carvalho, Yoselin Rodríguez. Belém: NUMA/UFPA ; Brasília: ABA Publications, 2023. pp. 153-157. Available at: [https://www.abant.org.br/files/308876\\_00180863.pdf](https://www.abant.org.br/files/308876_00180863.pdf). Accessed on: 25 Nov. 2025. (T.N.)

From the *Maxakali* people she is a thinker, midwife apprentice and educator. She holds a degree in Philosophy from São Paulo State University (Unesp) and taught for 12 years at the *Txeru Ba'e Kuai'* Indigenous State School. Currently she is the coordinator of the Living Schools movement and a member of the council of the Selvagem Association. She lives in the Ribeirão Silveira Indigenous Land, located on the border between the municipalities of Bertiooga and São Sebastião, in the state of São Paulo, with her partner, Carlos Papá, and their children Djeguaká and Kauê.

**TRANSLATION**  
**CLARA SANTIAGO**

Cultivating a presence of eternal curiosity and awe with life, Clara seeks a wide variety of interests and is now dedicated to the mothering of the project CECAI, *Centro de Convergências*, seeking to weave art, traditional ecological knowledge, education and community engagement.

**REVISION**  
**MARY HATAKEYAMA**

Mother, gardener, teacher, translator. Graduated in languages and pedagogy. Born in São Paulo, Brazil. Since 2022 participates in the Selvagem Community, collaborating in the Spanish and English text translation groups, reading, translating, and revising texts collectively and artisanally.

The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem Translation Group. The editorial direction is by Anna Dantes, and the coordination by Alice Faria. Layout by Tania Grillo and Érico Peretta. Coordination of English translations by Marina Matheus.

More information at [selvagemciclo.org.br/en/](https://selvagemciclo.org.br/en/)

All Selvagem activities and materials are shared free of charge. For those who wish to give something back, we invite you to financially support the Living Schools, a movement of support to five Indigenous projects of strengthening and transmission of their knowledge.

Find out more at [selvagemciclo.org.br/en/apoie/](https://selvagemciclo.org.br/en/apoie/)

SELVAGEM Notebooks  
digital publication by  
Dantes Editora  
Biosphere, 2025  
English translation, 2026

