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From Disappearance to Hope: The Construction of the Brazilian Indigenous Movement's Imaginary (1974-1977)

by

Carlos Benitez Trinidad and Poliene Soares dos Santos Bicalho

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This article analyzes the construction of the imaginary created by the Brazilian Indigenous Movement against the historical representations imposed by the non-indigenous, of disappearance, and backwardness. It is based on the study of the speeches of the assemblies of Indigenous chiefs between 1974 and 1977. The crisis of institutional Indigenism, military authoritarianism, and developmentalism announced the extinction of Indigenous peoples. Faced with ethnocidal integrationism, the Indigenous chiefs had to deal with the challenge of ethnic differences, external influence, and dehumanizing stereotypes to build a new ideological framework. This research focuses on the mechanisms that led from an imaginary of disappearance to one of hope in a context of aggressive growth of neoliberal threats against Indigenous lands.

Keywords: *Brazilian Indigenous movement, Imaginary, Military dictatorship, Indigenous issues*

> "We live under the sign of the death-resurrection of the Lord. Our Indigenous peoples over time have already paid their painful price of death. The moment has come to announce, in hope, that the one who should die is the one who should live."
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> *Y-Juca-Pirama. O índio: aquele que deve morrer, Documento de Urgência de Bispos e Missionários, 1973: 25*[1]

When the Catholic bishops and missionaries of North and West-central Brazil published the document quoted above in 1973, the country seemed to wake from a dream. In the early 1970s, Brazil was subject to the apparent triumph of the military-authoritarian project presided by Emilio Garrastazu Medici (1969-1974). Intense propaganda, repression, and censure projected a country blessed by an economic miracle, allegedly free from corruption and communism (Fico, 1997).

Carlos Benítez Trinidad is a Professor of Latin American History at the University of Salamanca (USAL). Poliene Soares dos Santos Bicalho is a Professor of History at the Universidade Estadual de Goiás (UEG) and the postgraduate program in *Territórios e Expressões Culturais do Cerrado* (Territories and Cultural Expressions of the Cerrado, PPGTECCER/UEG).

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The simple mention of *Y-Juca-Pirama. O índio: aquele que deve morrer*, enables direct and indirect approximations between Indigenous peoples, necropolitics, and neoliberalism. The latter emerged in Latin America, in countries such as Brazil and Mexico, precisely from 1975 onwards (Ibarra, 2011), with promises that the free market would lead to economic development, which, consequently, would lead to overcoming the backwardness of countries that made up the so-called Third World. In Brazil, neoliberal policies led the authoritarian state to stimulate the entry of private foreign capital through various facilitators, such as exemption from and relaxation of legislation, including those that regulated the exploitation of minerals in Indigenous territories. This led to their subsequent invasion by agribusiness, extensive livestock, the opening of roads, and hydroelectric plants.

If the Indian was/is the one who must die, as the document listed in the homonymous text explained, it is no exaggeration to say that the Indigenism policy of the period of the military dictatorship, committed to the pubescent Third World neoliberalism, was unquestionably, violent and genocidal. This policy combined the sovereignty of an authoritarian state with military discipline, in other words, "biopolitics and necropolitics" (Mbembe and Meintjes, 2003: 31). In this way, the idea of necropolitics emerges as a theoretical discussion that permeates the notions of biopower, sovereignty, and the state of exception, which fits well to better understand the relationship of the Brazilian state with racialized populations, and reaches the conclusion that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe and Meintjes, 2003: 11).

Advances on Indigenous territories subjected their inhabitants to the interests of private capital, causing conflicts, violence, sociocultural imbalances, and deaths. The state definitely selected who should live and who should die. In this sense, says Eduardo Mei in an interview with João Vitor dos Santos (2020):

> Brazil is the daily product of a war of conquest, where victims are the poor, the Indigenous, the Blacks, the favelados, the landless, the homeless. . . Necropolitics is the very negation of humanity. . . it is a living vestige of colonial conquest and slavery, as a constitutive corpse of our everyday life. The origin of this is found in the past, when the Blacks, after being decimated in slavery, were freed and left to their own devices, and the Indians were exterminated or confined to reservations. . . Capital accumulation and neoliberalism favour the necropolitical character of a country formed under the impact of colonial conquest and slavery.

Thus, hidden in these years of 'lead' and 'miracles,'[2] Indigenous peoples were besieged by the relentless advance of government-sponsored infrastructure and development projects. With the dismantling of the *Servicio de Proteção aos Índios* (Indian Protection Service, SPI) and subsequent creation of the *Fundação Nacional do Índio* (National Indian Foundation, FUNAI) in 1967, the Indigenism dream of positivist and integrationist protection was extinguished in favor of authoritarian developmentalist policies.[3] The new military command leveraged the widely accepted historical thesis that predicted the extinction of the Indigenous peoples of South America due to their inherent incapacity to adapt to modernity and 'civilized' life. Through action or inaction, this was used to empower genocidal practices and policies (Ramos, 1988; Fabvre, 1996). This interpretation provided the growth medium for cultivating the aforementioned necropolicies (Mbembe and Meintjes, 2003) that suppressed human rights to foster the deliberate extermination of Indigenous populations on land intended for development (Alvarenga and Americo Junio, 2019).

At a time when Brazilian society was being subjected to intense state violence, institutional Indigenism was also at the mercy of the geopolitical and ideological interests of the authoritarian state (Evangelista, 2021; Trinidad, 2016). The SPI structure was transplanted to the new FUNAI without questioning any of its outdated, inoperative, paternalistic, and tutelary paradigms (Oliveira, 1988; Garfield, 2001), or attending to international developments concerning the participation and recognition of ethnic minorities (Bicalho, 2020).

A group of Catholic missionaries who embraced the then new liberation theology organized a gathering of Indigenous chiefs in May 1974 (Bicalho, 2020; 2010a; 2010b). There, Indigenous chiefs had the opportunity to share their common suffering and express how they had been subjected to an imposed imaginary of historical failure.

From 1971 to 1973, Indigenous issues were not attracting attention in the authoritarian regime (Fico, 2001: 169).[4] This vacuum favored the organization and assembling of Indigenous chiefs, and planted the seeds of the *Movimento Indígena Brasileiro* (Brazilian Indigenous Movement, MIB).[5] In 1974, however, the regime's apparent lack of concern began to change with the spontaneous and widespread proliferation of Indigenous Assemblies throughout the national territory (Heck, 2021).

The contemporary MIB began to organize itself systematically in the early 1970s with significant action by Indigenous leaders and various pro-Indigenous organizations and institutions. Researchers interested in the MIB, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, converged on the notion that there is no movement, in the singular, but movements, in the plural, acting for all the country at all times though with different dynamics, objectives, and strategies.[6] In the words of Ailton Krenak and Sergio Cohn (2015: 242): "The MIB is, therefore, the result of the strangulation of relations between the authoritarian policies of the dictatorial period and the deliberate advance on Indigenous lands." Not restricted to its literal meaning, the MIB gained conceptual strength by relating to the awakening of a collective ethnic consciousness of different Indigenous peoples affected by these same policies for centuries.

The objective of this article is to reveal problematic, unpublished aspects associated with the formation of the MIB imaginary. It mainly addresses the horizon of Indigenous self-knowledge and epistemology in relation to the catalogue of socio-cultural representations that had historically been constructed about them by non-Indigenous society, and how a new frame of common self-representation was built through the exchange of subjectivities. The central hypothesis of this article argues that Indigenous agency first emerged when Indigenous chiefs saw themselves in a shared imaginary of dehumanization and disappearance. Corroboration of shared suffering was the trigger for developing an imaginary of struggle, self-recognition, and hope.

This study maps out the *Asambleas de Jefes Indígenas* (Assemblies of Indigenous Chiefs) from 1974 to 1977 that are accessible today, as numbered by the *Conselho Indigenista Missionário* (Indigenist Missionary Council, CIMI):

- 1st Assembly in Diamantino (MT), April 17-19, 1974.
- 2nd Assembly at the Cururu Mission (PA), May 8-14, 1975.
- 3rd Assembly in Merure (MT), September 2-4, 1975.
- 6th Assembly in the Village of the Nanbikwára - Córrego Tira-Catinga, Diamantino (MT), December 29-31, 1976.
- 8th Assembly at the Jesuit ruins of São Miguel (RS), April 16-18, 1977.
- 10th Assembly in the Village of the Tapirapé (MT), August 7-8, 1977.

This selection of documents corresponds to a controversial numeration of the assemblies during the formation of the MIB and the difficulty in accessing the records of the 4th, 5th, 7th, and 9th Assemblies, for which we have only found indirect references. This is closely linked to the initiatives of the CIMI missionaries and their interest in being the 'preferred' partner of the MIB.

Given the contours of the sources available, we attempted to center our study on the proceedings of the early assemblies, from the first one in 1974 through the tenth in 1977. In 1978, Indigenous questions came to a turning point as the *Projeto de Emancipação* (Emancipation Project)[7] began to consolidate the importance and scope of the MIB.

Archive and journal research complemented the reading of the assembly records, allowing us to individualize, contextualize, and recognize elements of the speeches of the Indigenous chiefs. This was possible thanks to the vast amount of digitalized documentation contained in the Armazém Memória[8] project and the *Instituto Socioambiental* (Socio-environmental Institute, ISA).[9] Not all of it can be covered within the limitations of this paper.

Through analysis, we divided the assembly proceedings into three main parts. In the first, we discuss the documents themselves and the discourses, representations and narratives of the missionaries who compiled them.

In the second part, we analyze the conversations of the Indigenous chiefs as they described community life in an unfavorable historical situation. We discovered how they assimilated and then reworked a corpus of representations associated with disappearance and savagery, explained from within their own cognitive horizon and frame of reference.

Finally, the third section describes how, from their awareness of dehumanized alterity, the Indigenous people established the bases of their own system of representations. This generated the ideological imaginary of struggle and resistance that gave life to the MIB. The reduced analytical scale of the study facilitates deeper insight into how these early assemblies of Indigenous chiefs defined the subjectivities that were subsequently distilled into the imaginary of Indigenous struggle that would inspire generations.

We believe that this study will enrich the research on Indigenous history and Indigenism during the second half of the twentieth century as well as our understanding of how it is woven into the political, social, and cultural history of contemporary Brazil. Mainly because it shows that the ideological bases that would give life to the MIB, and its struggle as a social movement, were a conjunction of understanding their specific ethnic realities within a common framework of marginalization and historical genocide, as well as understanding the interventionism of the missionaries and its reworking according to the MIB's strategic interests.

THE INDIGENIST MISSIONARY COUNCIL AND THE ASSEMBLIES

Surprisingly, the Assemblies of Indigenous Chiefs, which have been taking place since 1974, only recently received attention as a source for studying Indigenous history. Previously, the assemblies had not been used for the historical analysis of the discourse of Indigenous chiefs.

The assembly proceedings published by the CIMI became part of an ideological corpus that favored the Indigenous peoples and resisted critical analysis. Here, the reading of the Belgian cleric Eduardo Hoornaert prevailed. In 1978, he published the article "A Importância das Assembléias Indígenas para os Estudos Brasileiros" ("The Importance of the Indigenous Assemblies in Brazilian Studies"). It defended the work of the CIMI and its concern to "give" voice to Indigenous peoples, something that nobody had until then done. Hoornaert envisioned this as a way of bypassing the figure of the "explainer of Brazil" and its inevitable colonialist paradigm in order to "explain Brazil" directly from the Indigenous perspective (Hoornaert, 1978: 177).

Both Hoornaert and the CIMI received strong criticism. That same year and in the same journal, Viveiros de Castro (1978: 193) berated the teleological vision of history they sought to construct, in particularly the idea that the assemblies were the Indigenous voice via the CIMI bulletin. "Or is it really the voice of the CIMI via the Indians?". Later, Frans Moonen (1985) questioned the missionary technique of leaving the Indigenous peoples alone and "without guidance."

Despite this, Hoornaert's thesis took hold thanks to the charismatic omnipresence of the missionaries in the media. The anthropologists and historians who have since worked to reconstruct those moments have found it difficult to get past this filter when analyzing the CIMI documents. Historically, and apart from the evangelizing and political interests of the Catholic Church, the missionaries clearly sought to create a narrative that cast them as the preferred partner of the Indigenous population in its "ethnic awakening" (Trinidad, 2019).

In 1975, after seeing the success of their first assemblies, the Indigenous peoples began to meet spontaneously at local and regional levels (Moura, 2021). While the missionaries did not condemn this, they sought to mitigate the impact, first by pointing to and numbering the assemblies that they considered 'the main ones' and then by compiling and distributing the proceedings of the assemblies as they saw fit.

The CIMI strategy was analyzed by Jean-Philippe Belleau (2014), who underscored the nature of the assemblies as a strictly missionary initiative by those who would eventually produce the history about them (Belleau, 2014: 707–708).

The author considered that the discrepancies regarding the number of assemblies actually held were full of subjectivities, revealing a possible manipulation of the sources, with the intent of controlling how the functional narrative of the MIB was constructed.

The proceedings from the 1st Assembly created a precedent upon which the narrative was constructed. In them, the CIMI clarified that the encounter was intended to give the Indigenous chiefs an opportunity to meet, get acquainted, and speak with "complete liberty, without pressure or outside guidance, about their own problems, discovering for themselves the solutions, overcoming the paternalism of the FUNAI and the missions themselves" (CIMI, 1974: 1).[10]

In the speeches that were recorded, official Indigenism was generally cast as the enemy and the missionaries as the fundamental allies.[11] A few examples will suffice. Eugênio Aidji of the Bororo people stated during the 1st Assembly that: "They [the Bororo] prefer the *padres* [missionaries] to the FUNAI . . . We are hurting, we are treated like *bichos* [animals or insects in Portuguese], like dogs. We are hurting." (CIMI, 1974: 3-4). The Tiriyó had a similar narrative during the 2nd Assembly. They claimed to live happily, go to Mass on Sundays, and play games and drink at night. There was no FUNAI presence in their lands, only the missionaries and some support from the Armed Forces (CIMI, 1975: 23). The records build on the idea that the clerics should be defended, as indicated by the Xavante chief Apoena: "The chiefs should keep their eyes open and not sleep. [They must] defend the missionaries from the accusations of the farmers and the FUNAI" (CIMI, 1975: 27). Xavante chief Nicolau Tsererowe echoed the sentiment regarding government prohibitions (CIMI, 1975: 38).

The sequence of events presented by the missionaries awakens an intuition about the representative elements of CIMI work among the Indigenous peoples. It seems the missionaries were the only ones to give effective help for political organization. Sampre of the Xerente people expressed this when he received support to go to Brasilia to fight the FUNAI "rogues" who were blocking missionary access to the villages (CIMI, 1975: 18). Eugênio Rondon of the Bororo people pointed out how through the help of the missionaries, they knew that there were many white people who supported them (CIMI, 1975: 34).

That the missionaries inspired them to respect their culture by "preserving their ancient festivals, headgear, forms of dress, and arrows" was a strong point of liberation theology (CIMI, 1975: 23). It also reinforced the narrative of the sacrificing missionary faced with an alterity that had to be "seduced." Mario Nasau of the Tiriyó people recounted how the missionary of his village was mistreated at first but ended up becoming a brother in the struggle (CIMI, 1975: 13).

The assembly documents describe the process of becoming brothers as progressive and essential. Proceedings of the 2nd Assembly emphasize the festivities, acceptance, and shared meals, all directed by the Munduruku people. Proceedings from the 3rd Assembly underscored the Bororo's "spontaneous" initiative to "ask" the missionaries to help them make it happen. The endeavor was so successful, Lourenzo Chibaewororo of the Bororo people highlighted, that the assemblies were created considerable interest among the Indigenous peoples and even the FUNAI: "Here we are all brothers, no one is going to care if you speak better or worse, only that you speak freely" (CIMI, 1975: 6).

Similarly, the introduction to the 8th Assembly proceedings reveals the concern of the compiler of the 1977 CIMI bulletin (1977a: 1) to emphasize that all the sessions took place "without the intervention of any white person. The Indians had complete freedom of expression and thought throughout the entire gathering." Such clarifications also appeared in the published proceedings from the 6th and 10th Assemblies, revealing how the CIMI needed to emphatically reaffirm its non-intervention.

The strategy of numbering the assemblies gave a sense of progression that was widely accepted by activists, journalists, and experts. The main questions addressed in the present work concern the structural inconsistency of the assemblies and discrepancies between those numbered and those actually held. These questions were inspired by Belleau's work (2014) concerning legitimacy in the context of political representation, something which endows this documentation with a complexity that belies its apparent simplicity. Nonetheless, the political ideology and common imaginary that the Indigenous peoples constructed during these assemblies effectively informed the main lines that the MIB subsequently developed.

Though this analysis primarily addresses the transition from an inherited imaginary of disappearance to one of "hope" constructed by Indigenous peoples, missionary presence was a constant feature that must be taken into account, since they initially provided a large degree of the economic means, infrastructure, strategic advice, and mediatic dimension.

DISCUSSING THE DISAPPEARANCE

Our analytical enquiry starts by asking how the Indigenous chiefs who met in 1970's perceived the discourse and historical representation of dehumanization and disappearance that was imposed on them.

Critical reading of colonial relations and logics had already identified their dehumanization for a long time. Franz Fanon (2009) graphically exposed a hierarchical division of the world into human and non-human beings, in which the subalternized latter group could only expect violent interaction with the system. In Brazil, the sociologist José de Souza Martins spent long periods in the "frontier" territories during the 1970s, documenting countless cases and examples of dehumanization among alterities. For Martins, this line between the human and the not human, applied in this case to Indigenous peoples, was a clear transversal axis across time from the first moments of colonial Brazil: "These categories marked with mortal severity, as they still do today in a way, the ethnic limits of those who belonged and did not belong to the human species" (Martins, 1997: 28).

From the 1st Assembly, the Indigenous people were clearly aware of this dehumanization. They not only were spoken of as rustic or backwards, but even bestialized, referred to as *bicho* or savages. Axikaruçauá of the Namkibkwara people understood this line between human (white or civilized) and non-human (the Indigenous person as beast): "We are not *bichos*, now in the land of my father they speak the language of the *fazendeiros* [farmer-ranchers, landowners]. They thought we were *bichos*, but we are people like the whites" (CIMI 1975: 32).

Apart from this apparently simple dichotomy, the Indigenous peoples also perceived the subtleties of these complex representative structures. Xavante chief João Borominari stated during the 1st Assembly: "I have already heard it: Indians are not people, the Indian is a *bicho*. We are not *bichos*, because we have souls, we are intelligent. . ." (CIMI, 1974: 5). Anansu-Nambikwara Marakanã said: "If someone kills our people, we will not run away, we are not *bichos.* We are going to help" (CIMI, 1976: 6). In the same Assembly (CIMI, 1976: 9), Ahezomaré of the Paresí people reinforced this perception: "some people think the Indian is a *bicho*." They understood that this was not a simple separation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous but a category that expelled them from common humanity.

Indigenist positivism can be perceived in the words of Lauro Yotobimainbe of the Munduruku people: "We are not wild, we are almost civilized" (CIMI, 1975: 16). Infantilization resulting from racial supremacy was expressed by the Tapirapé chief Chico Kãorewjngi: "The *fazendeiros* say we are like children, we Tapirapé are not children. Children know nothing. They [the *fazendeiros*] steal the things of those who know nothing and keep them" (CIMI, 1975: 19).

Xangrê, chief of the Kaingang people, took the question further in the 8th Assembly: "The Indians are capable of solving problems in their own lands. . . The time has passed for saying that Indians don't know how to express themselves, that we are small children. We are in our home, and people from outside come to tell us what to do. . ." (CIMI, 1977a: 13).

These representations portray a scenario in which Indigenous people encountered an essential, fierce, and evil enemy. Inâcio Kaiol'i of the Irantxe people pointed out that "we never say anything bad to the whites, but the whites always find something to make trouble about" (CIMI, 1975: 30). José Miguel Awatekato'i of the Tapirapé people added: "Why do the whites want to tame us? [If not only to see us]. . . among the whites, working for the whites who only want our land, so the Indian ends up with nothing, to do away with the Indians" (CIMI, 1975: 19).

The denial of their human condition included their expulsion from the Brazilian *communitas*. Abandonment was a frequent theme in the testimonies of the Indigenous chiefs, and it was felt directly in two ways: as lack of support and as inaction in the face of violence. They were mainly referring to the FUNAI, which oscillated between being an instrument of repression in white hands and a deaf, inoperative interlocutor.

To illustrate lack of support, we refer to the testimony of Txuaeri Tapirapé, who said that in his land "there are no *padres* there, only the FUNAI", and consequently his people were continuously harassed by the *fazendeiros* and land workers, in collusion with the authorities. "We were many, but we are coming to an end," he declared (CIMI, 1974: 19). Similarly, an example of inaction can be found in the words of the Xerente people, who sought cooperation with the other chiefs by alleging that they were all suffering "the same massacre," since the civilized people were "killing our children" and "throwing cattle on them" with no help from the FUNAI. "The oldest healers are almost gone, and their knowledge with them, the mounted police attack the Indians. We have no assistance from the FUNAI or the government," they said (CIMI, 1975: 20).

However, broadly speaking, society itself was included in this troubled *communitas*. Bororo Captain Eugenio Aidji blamed their disappearance and decadence on this abandonment: "Society does not help, we have been here 70 years, our grandparents left, their children stayed. Alcohol is the main evil of San Lorenzo" (CIMI, 1974: 3-4). Bororo Txibaibou tells a similar story of complete abandonment by the authorities and society in all situations. The police would arrive with "trucks and planes to protect the white people" who "mistreat the Indian." When the Indians asked for help, "the police do not come, nor does the FUNAI." He lamented that they should all be equally "protected," not just the "more advanced" group. Vaqueano of the Parესí people spoke of this in the 10th Assembly:

> We never went to the FUNAI or the Mission, if we go to the FUNAI, they say. . . 'wait a bit and we will send a civil servant out to open a road.' Then we wait and they never appear. Only the Indians are really suffering because of the *fazendeiros*, messing with the *fazendeiros*, fighting the *fazendeiros*; the *fazendeiros* also promise to kill the Indians, but the Indians also kill, right? (CIMI, 1977b: 7-8).

Existential abandonment was also perceptible. Txibaibou spoke of how they lived in fear that through contact with white people "they might little by little stop being Indians," or that by being treated like *bichos* or cattle ("like the [dark-skinned] *pretos* treat their cattle"), they might end up in the worst-case scenario: disappeared, moved, or expelled from their lands (CIMI, 1975: 41).

Feeling abandoned and not even considered by society was the most sorrowful feature of the Indigenous discourse, but this turned into indignation and rage when they spoke about abuse. Bororo chief Eugenio Rondon, called Auge Kuguri in their language, lamented how the Bororo were diminishing because of the pressure on their people. The white people wanted to "take everything the Indians have left." The government "is only interested in business and industry," it "doesn't care about the Indians." No one spoke of them, not "even on the radio;" it was as if "the Indians did not exist in Brazil." He affirmed that they had never been visited by indigenist advocates, not even during the SPI era. Several times they went to Brasilia to petition a hearing, to wait for a "report" or a "solution" that never came. The Indigenous people were alone and got no help from the "nation." "We will always fight, no matter the cost. . . we have to die for what is ours" (CIMI, 1975: 7).

The dehumanization and abandonment perceived by the Indigenous chiefs focused on the main vectors of their perception of the white imaginary of disappearance. The idea that the Indigenous peoples were an extinct "race" associated with a lost, bucolic time had been a trigger in the Brazilian national narrative for designing a "new" society. It should be genuine, thanks to the Indigenous legacy, but essentially Europeanized and white. This representation of Indigenous peoples in danger of extinction due to their incapacity to adapt to modernity was key to the configuration of Brazilian culture and territorial expansion. It had been consolidated by the great intellectuals of the nineteenth century (Henrique, 2018) and was operative in anthropology, Indigenism, and Brazilian politics under the dictatorship (Trinidad, 2021). Governor Luís Paes Leme de Sá of Rondonia even declared in an interview for *O Globo* (July 1, 1973): “Rondonia is struggling to grow and cannot stop just to protect a race that is already extinct.”

Of course, the Indigenous chiefs perceived this imposed logic of disappearance. The sad ending was present and at times accepted in the narrative of the Kaiai chief Francisco Iaopareipo, who spoke of “how they let our people go” in reference to the forced relocation of part of their village by the Vilas Boas brothers in Operation Maiabi (1964), which divided families. “I long for my dispersed people’ (CIMI, 1974: 6). Antonio Axikaruçaua of the Nambikuara people also described how ‘the white people want to kill the Indians, they have much, we are coming to an end,” he said. (CIMI, 1974: 8).

Desolation played a key role in each ethnic group as they related their situations. They found themselves on common ground in the pain associated with disappearance and abandonment. In the 2nd Assembly, an unidentified Munduruku person indicated that in their village there were no more initiation, marriage, or funeral celebrations: “We only cry.” (CIMI, 1975: 26). Araikiná Nambikuára expressed similar malaise about the evangelizing action of the missionaries and their disastrous effects on the culture: “No one is allowed to smoke, sing, dance, play the flute, wear a necklace, it is sin” (CIMI, 1976: 17). There were also threats and territorial losses; in the words of Meiê Kaingang, who was concerned about intrusion into their areas: “The Indian is more and more besieged” (CIMI, 1977a: 5).

The testimony of Claudio Nenito of the Guaraní people during the 3rd Assembly illustrates this best. Claudio recalled what had happened to the Indigenous Kaiowá, who were repeatedly moved from their territory, making it “impossible to possess anything.” The white people “are finishing off the wood on Indigenous lands” and “tearing down the forest.” If the Indians protested, they were evicted by the local authorities. He announced pessimistically: “For my part, I believe that one day the Indians will disappear because there are already so few” (CIMI, 1975: 6).

STRUGGLING FOR HOPE

Ethnic self-recognition is a key narrative in the proceedings. After expressing the pain analyzed in the prior section, the Indigenous peoples identified themselves as Indigenous: part of a persecuted, marginalized collective under ongoing and violent siege. This pivotal moment, consecrated by the narrative constructed in the assembly proceedings, became the foundation of the entire MIB narrative and public opinion in favor of the Indigenous cause.

The self-recognition became especially powerful after the 2nd Assembly, and Yananxi of the Irantxe people manifested it in their telling of how they came to awareness by seeing that they all had the same land issues because of white people (CIMI, 1975: 32). The imaginary, associated with centuries of persecution made colonialism the transmission line that perpetuated this suffering, as Sampré of the Xerente people described:

> My brothers, I call you brothers because I am Indian, of the same color and the same massacre. We have the same blood, I had to contain myself, I was so touched by the reception. Seeing children running happily. I have seen many villages in great poverty, I only knew the *padres* [missionaries] that gave long sermons, not the ones who defended the Indian. We are only strong if we all shout together (CIMI, 1975: 12).

He later confirmed that "what we need is united strength to resolve our problems, we must not waver and [must] be united in our suffering. The suffering began with the first ship that arrived in Brazil" (CIMI, 1975: 28).

The time dimension created surprise at being able to corroborate that there were others like themselves who shared a common fate, as Galibi Geraldo indicates:

> Our grandparents told us that there were many people like ourselves, many Indians, but I never thought I would meet them. We are the lords of the land, not the men who come from far away on the other side of the ocean, making slaves of black people in Africa, they are rich from our riches (CIMI, 1975: 40).

Angélica Kamuntsi of the Irantxé people said: "I never met other Indians, other people, and I am realizing that we are going through the same things as other Indians" (CIMI, 1975: 23).

Some long-suffering Xavantes observed how contempt engendered dignity among the marginalized. "[We are] all brothers, of the same blood. White people believe only they are intelligent, we are also intelligent" said Manoel Noziú. while Apoena noted "the Indian needs to keep being Indian, to keep their hair [as it is], we should not imitate the civilized people. . . we should live this way until we die" (CIMI, 1975: 22-23). Ahezomaré Paresí added: "Why play the white person's game? Ours is much nicer than the civilized one" (CIMI, 1976: 10).

In this narrative process, we can perceive the shift in ethnic self-awareness from being "brothers of the same massacre" to voicing a proud and belligerent response. At this point, Indigenous agency was generated in the fight against an imposed fate. Now they were fighting together against the whites, identifying the FUNAI, the *fazendeiros*, and the politicians as common enemies.

As the Indigenous chiefs began to construct this imaginary, recovery and exchange of memory became especially relevant. The elders of the communities spoke nostalgically of past resistances, especially Munduruku people such as Marú:

> Our grandfathers were warriors, they took these lands with many pains . . . we are the descendants of the warriors who surrounded the ships from the hills of Santarém, thousands of them shooting arrows and making them retreat. Munduruku warriors were everywhere, today we are scattered (CIMI, 1975a: 28).

Datié added: "We will mark out and defend our land, the old ones were strong and did not let the white people enter. The grandfathers told how the old ones were warriors" (CIMI, 1975a: 37).

At times, the heated speeches called for violence. Inâcio Kaioli of the warring Iranxé people denounced how "the whites are criminal. . . they come civilized with machete and dagger. . . we must do as the ancients did, kill and throw in the river. Not even burying, letting the vultures eat them" (CIMI, 1975b: 18). This was echoed by his companions, Maurucio Tupxi: "The Indians are also strong, if the Indian dies, the white people also die" (CIMI, 1975b: 13); and Meiê Kaingang: "When the Indian strikes or kills, they think the Indian is evil, when they are the evil ones" (CIMI, 1977a: 5).

A Marakanã chief described how they saw the world: "You [civilized ones] do not think like us. We know what we know. We have other kinds of ideas. We must be strong. It is time to defend ourselves" (CIMI, 1976: 6). In other words, "we think differently" and "we should resist you. . . civilized people!" A clear difference existed between the image that non-Indigenous people had of them and the image they had of non-Indigenous people.

The discourse of the Marakanã chief also conveyed the perception Indigenous people had of their centrality in the need to fight for the land. There was an inherent awareness of the experience of these peoples, the result of experiences marked by territorial violations and appropriations. This historic process shaped their understanding of reality in the face of imminent new attacks, usurpations, and invasions that accompanied militant development projects. "We have the right to live with our land here. We have rights, we are the first Brazilians, the Indians, and not the white people" (Tsererob'O, Xavante from Sangradouro, CIMI, 1977b: 14). In the words of Tupâ-y Guarany: "We cannot be afraid. Because we are in our homeland, in our land" (CIMI, 1977a: 24).

Mario Juruna of the Xavante people first appeared in the 3rd Assembly, where he revealed his rhetorical gifts and capacity for political engagement. His speeches were always radical, encouraging a fight to "squeeze" the government and the FUNAI until Indigenous claims "ripen in their heads." Juruna distilled the entire transition from pain to awareness into belligerent pride:

> We have to shout in the face of the government. . . [unafraid, fed up with false promises]. They can take the reservations from you and scatter you. . . [but] they haven't the courage to kill you.. . . The President is nothing to me, he never thinks about Indian problems, he only thinks about white wealth. . . He picks us up and tosses us in the rubbish heap, where the land isn't worth anything. (CIMI, 1975b: 12)

Juruna was the first chief to warn against corruption and propose strategic action lines, alleging that the government bought everything, "even the chief of the Xavantes." He stressed that Indigenous people had to watch their chiefs after they talked to the FUNAI. "We are going to discuss it face to face, then if they want to kill the Indians, they can kill, and there will be war, there already is war," he emphasized. Juruna railed against the "dirty" life of white people and extolled the simple life of the Indians. He also described how to fight: "We must denounce them. . . when we speak the truth it hurts them" (CIMI, 1975b: 12).

In his second speech, Mario Juruna appealed to the CIMI to help them pressure the FUNAI. Following his strategic lines, Juruna called on people to study and understand the complicated and boring but above all "dirty" life of white people. The *fazendeiro* buys the judge, the police, and the government, which has no interest in the Indians because they neither vote nor pay taxes. The entire process up to this point could be synthesized in the phrase: "If someone kills an Indian, we kill them instantly. . . because poor people go to prison, we are not *bichos*, we are people and we are more civilized than white people" (CIMI, 1975b: 23).

So far, we have been able to observe how the Indigenous people built an imaginary of counterpower that set the foundations of the ideology of Brazilian ethnic awakening. Through discussion and analysis, the Indigenous chiefs concluded that it was a matter of life or death. They would stay alive by assigning value to their traditions, territories, festivities, and artistic and cultural expressions.

All those encounters culminated in a strong bid for hope, a future united against tyranny and injustice. Joaquin Zalenzoe of the Paresi people made it clear that the Indians are not "civilized;" they shared the same blood and were united, no longer enemies among themselves. They would surely make themselves heard if they stayed together (CIMI, 1975b: 31).

This work is not an attempt to describe a happy ending but a raw beginning. These encounters set the MIB in motion and facilitated the resistanace of Indigenous peoples resist despite the *continuum* of genocidal war they face. Theirs is the united strength of ethnic awakening in the face of historical cover up:

> The FUNAI, when we are united, will listen to us with greater respect because of our strength. Disagreements between communities make us weak. . . because freedom for the Indian will come when the Indians decide to unite and seek to solve their problems together (Omizokay of the Paresi people, CIMI, 1977a: 15-16).

They would help each other and not leave anyone behind, as José Carlos Kuiar of the Bororo people expressed: "The more aware tribes should help the needier ones" (CIMI, 1975b: 46).

Those who knew themselves to be marginalized remained convinced that they would endure through their own agency. It is the key to understanding how Indigenous peoples went from being "disappeared" to becoming the referent for a "hopeful" future:

> The time has come when we can do nothing in isolation. We must unite arm in arm and let the voice of our ancestors who were massacred ring out. We have come to a point at which the Indians must take the reins of Indigenous government, and this is the correct path: assembly, meeting together, listening to everyone (Tapã-y-Guarany) (CIMI, 1977a: 23).

DISCUSSION: NEW IDEOLOGICAL AND ETHNIC FRAME

Despite being historically relegated to the role of passive, incapacitated victims, we have seen how Indigenous peoples were clearly aware of the multifaceted and ambivalent corpus of representations they embodied in the eyes of non-Indigenous people. From this awareness stemmed suffering, hardship, and misery, sometimes translated into desperation. However, they responded not with passive resignation but with reactive indignation. They refused to be bestialized and considered non-humans. In an exercise of shared recognition, they discovered their common condition and identity as Indians. This great discovery can be observed in their discourse, as they realized that they were not alone but part of a collective subjected to the same circumstances. At that moment, "Indian" stopped being an inherently negative category; it was re-signified and dignified with belonging, a siblinghood united by the "same massacre." They had the obligation to unite, defend themselves and fight.

> We are all Brazilians, more Brazilian than the civilized people. We are the legitimate children of this land, we have every right to a piece of land. . . We should study how to defend ourselves from the white people; we hope to win against the *fazendeiros.* White people consider the Indians as *bichos*, but we are people like they are, we have bodies, souls, we know how to think. We should trust that the *padres* will defend us with their lives. Another problem is we cannot trust the FUNAI about the land, because it helps the *fazendeiros.* We are here to understand how to defend our reservation, some of us will help the others to know how to defend themselves (Bororo chief Lourenço-Txibaibou, CIMI, 1975b: 11).

We have also shown that the assembly proceedings were a missionary production; they were ordered and presented to complement an orchestrated scenario. The FUNAI was the antagonist that united the factions that divided Indigenous peoples, sometimes as an instrument of repression, but most often as an institution "by and for the Indians" that was disloyal and inoperative. The missionaries occupied this space, sponsoring the gathering of Indigenous peoples, and imposing itself as the preferred partner in the fight. The ideological corpus of the CIMI was present: the "freedom" of the Indigenous people to meet and talk; the alignment of their political and ideological position with liberation theology; their respect for Indigenous culture; and the sacrifice and generosity typical of the kind of Christianity these missionaries professed. The most evident attempt to appropriate the phenomenon is seen in the organization and recording of the assemblies that they considered "official" and the symbolically charged staging of the assemblies, especially the 8th Assembly in the Jesuit ruins of São Miguel.

This does not diminish the importance of the documents which, as with any historical source, should be critically assessed. An attentive reading of the proceedings has shown us how Indigenous chiefs appropriated the discourses, concepts, and ideas that the missionaries were trying to consolidate and reworked them to forge a new ideological frame in which a new Indigenous imaginary could prosper. It was linked to human rights, the land, environmentalism, and a counter-hegemony that exposed the worst evils of capitalism. These successful components were avidly consumed by national and international public opinion, consolidating powerful alliances with the MIB.

The CIMI may have managed to construct the foundational narrative of the MIB according to its own interests, but Indigenous agency generated a power of its own that escaped the control of the missionaries and claimed centrality in an emancipatory process, against all odds. The CIMI lost its hegemony in the 1980s but continues to be an important actor in the Indigenous struggle.

This analysis does not intend to give dignity to Indigenous protagonism by diminishing that of the missionaries or promoting a negative image of them. We must always keep in mind, when we talk about the MIB, that it is not made up exclusively of Indigenous men and women, but also by all those non-Indigenous people who supported and fought alongside Indigenous peoples. Every one of them contributed necessary elements for the MIB to consolidate itself as a more or less relevant political actor, conquering an important symbolic space in the current imaginary of Brazilian society.

Of all of them, the missionaries of liberation theology were probably the most influential and necessary in the formative phases of the MIB. Their generosity and enthusiasm helped launch this activism. For this reason, the socio-political strategies and the ideological corpus of the MIB have an integral component that comes from the missionaries, as well as from other movements such as environmentalism or from the academic intellectuals, including anthropologists. Downplaying any of them is detrimental to understanding in all its complexity the importance that the MIB has had for Brazil at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

The reading and analysis of those discourses has revealed the pulse of ethnic awareness, reflected in Indigenous activism that defied the vision of the failed, subjugated, completely apathetic Indian trapped in a historical process of domination. These declarations hold great value, even if recorded in questionable circumstances. Despite the interest of the CIMI in presenting their version of the achievements, the attempts of military governments to prohibit the 8th Assembly and intimidate the chiefs during the 10th Assembly – with the uncomfortable presence of three FUNAI workers – these declarations uncovered facts, stories, and attitudes of Indigenism very different to those found in the widespread historiography of the time.

> Do you know what discouragement is? No, do not fear those who are invading the reservation, invading the land. You cannot, you cannot be afraid, because we have a right to life on this land, because Brazil is our land; it does not belong to the white people, to the foreigners, it is not theirs, it is not theirs! Our land is Indian land, it belongs to the Bororo, the Xavante, the Tapirapé, the Karajá. We can do what we want. As we want (Babatti-Xavante) (CIMI, 1977b: 25)

We do not find the failed Indian in the Assembly discourses, but Indians actively participating in the process, aware of their role in the fight for their territory. To a degree, Hooanert (1978) was correct when he said that the assemblies were important for re-explaining Brazil. It was these Indigenous peoples gathered in the assemblies who announced – with words aimed at past and present interlocutors well-known to history – the rise of historical actors with relative awareness of what they wanted and what they needed to do to achieve their objectives: fight, resist, organize collectively, and become acquainted with the needs and sorrows of other communities; and to strengthen themselves to confront and fight the great common enemy of those years, namely the authoritarian state and the predatory elites who sustained it.

The Brazilian military dictatorship was a particularly fertile period for the generation of sensibilities, which finds an important outlet in the Indigenous issue. That "powerful ideological building," which was Indigenism (Ramos, 1998), was shaken by the entry into the field of notions associated with a changing world, such as the ecological perspective or decolonization and, therefore, a whole series of critical perspectives with the system of principles and values associated with traditional liberal democracies, such as the right to difference. Currents that emerged simultaneously, such as liberation theology, critical anthropology, and interest in the consequences of capitalism in the so-called "Third World," converged to advance in Brazil, which was a country in need of changes and responses. Thus, not only was a certain "pro-Indigenous" euphoria built in the country, which made it possible to question the military regime and everything it represented in terms of developmentalism and authoritarianism. This space was used by Indigenous peoples to organize and fight increasingly more effectively for their rights before an audience that transcended the borders of the country and, therefore, the control of the military authorities.

We have sought to identify the elements of this transition and understand how Indigenous people went from being considered as disperse, persecuted, besieged tribes in danger of extinction to being one of the most vigorous social movements of Brazil during the second half of the dictatorship. They managed to reverse the desperate situation of the late 1960s and early 1970s entirely, then gather and channel the effervescent transnational forces, opinions, and ideas of the day towards their political and social interests. They overturned an imposed historical failure in the face of modernity, transforming it into unyielding resistance fed by hope.

Indigenous self-representation undertakings initiated in the 1970s revealed numerous organizational initiatives and fundamental actions for strengthening the struggle and systematization of the MIB. This includes the wide mobilization of different ethnic groups in the country that acted directly in the National Constituent Assembly of 1987, pressing the rapporteurs to discuss and approve the text on the Indigenous chapter of what would become the 1988 Constitution. It also includes the expressive Indigenous participation in the front of resistance to the commemorations of the 500 years of Brazil in Porto Seguro, Bahia, in 2000, as well as the Indigenous role in organizing the annual meetings of the *Terra Livre* or *Abril Indígena* Camp, which marks the beginning of the *Articulação dos Povos Indígenas no Brasil* (APIB), a national indigenous association has been acting strongly against the excesses of the State.

Beyond the ups and downs of the MIB since its inception, today its maturity has been demonstrated through its self-reconfiguration as a movement due to its experiences under the Bolsonaro administration. The extreme right-wing government used the 1964 dictatorship as a frame of reference and employed mechanisms of the most aggressive necropolitics and savage capitalism. The social support gained by the intensive use of digital tools, a mobilization backed by conscientious sectors of Brazilian society, as well as political alliances, enabled Indigenous peoples to confront the dramatic situation that Bolsonarism imposed on them. This featured the exponential increase of: 1) land invasions; 2) political and interethnic violence; 3) abandonment and dismantling of administration and public services; 4) deforestation and pollution of nature; and 5) hate and dehumanizing speech.

The expressiveness of this organization has become more evident during the Bolsonaro administration, not just in firmly resisting Bolsonarism's attacks against Indigenous peoples, but also in leading the democratic recovery with its main leader, Sônia Guajajara, assuming in 2023 the Ministry of Indigenous People, a first in Brazilian history.

NOTES

1. Acervo Instituto Socioambiental, available at: https://acervo.socioambiental.org/acervo/documentos/y-juca-pirama-o-indio-aquele-que-deve-morrer.

2. Referring to the macroeconomic bonanza known as the Brazilian Miracle (1969-1973) and the repression of the Years of Lead (1968-1974).

3. Indigenism is a complex concept that, depending on the historical moment or country it is applied to, may contain substantial variations. In this paper we refer to Indigenism as the institutional and bureaucratic mechanisms organized by the Brazilian state throughout the 20th century to manage the policies of contact and integration with Indigenous populations. We refer to positivist Indigenism as the ideological and methodological basis that inspires the creation of this institutional initiative, led by Mariano Cándido da Silva Rondon (Oliveira, 1988).

4. To be fair, there was some concern on the part of the authoritarian state on Indigenous questions, but it was focused on the image that Brazil presented to international public opinion (Gomes and Benítez Trinidad, 2022).

5. The concept of MIB is more of an academic construction, to facilitate the understanding of the whole process of systematization of the Indigenous struggle, than properly a representative expression in its essence of this same struggle. Furthermore, the acronym MIB was initially adopted by researcher Poliene Bicalho, during the preparation of her doctoral thesis, with the aim of facilitating the narrative, making it more attractive. However, Bicalho does not disregard the diversity inherent to this same Movement, both in relation to the peoples that compose it and to the demands, banners, divergences of opinions, and organization, etc. In this same perspective, Daniel Munduruku (2012) points out that there is not one movement, but several Indigenous movements, therefore, it would be more prudent to speak of Indigenous people in movement.

6. The most innovative study on the MIB is the PhD thesis by João Gabriel Ascenso, defended in 2021 and referenced at the end.

7. In 1978, reflection on the place of Indigenous peoples in Brazilian society came to the forefront in national media with a draft law proposed by Minister of the Interior Maurício Rangel Reis, which sought to end state tutelage of Indigenous peoples (Bicalho, 2019).

8. Armazém Memória digital archive, available at: http://armazemmemoria.com.br/centros-indigena/.

9. ISA digital archive, available at: https://acervo.socioambiental.org/.

10. The assemblies will be referenced in this way to simplify the text. A complete list of references, including the assemblies can be found at the end.

11. It is interesting how Indigenous peoples differentiated between Indian and white/civilized (complementary categories). Missionaries were not generally put in the primarily antagonistic 'white' category. The more complex 'white' category includes subgroups such as the FUNAI (an instrument of white people), the *fazendeiros*, the police, the 'government,' and other actors on the frontier.

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