

**INDIGENOUS GENOCIDE TODAY:
KAIOWCIDE AND THE GUARANI-KAIOWA
ETHNOPOLITICAL TRAGEDY****GENOCÍDIO INDÍGENA HOJE: O KAIOWCÍDIO E A TRAGÉDIA ETNOLÓGICA
GUARANI-KAIOWA**

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ABSTRACT

The indigenous genocide unfolding in the Brazilian State of Mato Grosso do Sul – described here as Kaiowcide – is not just a case of hyperbolic violence, but it is something qualitatively different from other serious crimes committed against marginalised, subaltern communities in the rest of the country. Kaiowcide is the reincarnation of old genocidal practices of agrarian capitalism that once again target the Guarani-Kaiowa indigenous people because of their land-based ethnopositional demands. The present analysis is based on a novel interpretation of indigenous genocides through the nexus between genocide-geocide-massacre. Considering that politico-spatial nexus, Kaiowcide combines strategies and procedures based on the competition and opposition between groups of people who dispute the relatively scarce social opportunities of an agribusiness-based economy that characterises the region.

Keywords: land struggle; violence; ethnic discrimination; indigenous genocide; settler capitalism; agribusiness; Mato Grosso do Sul; Brazil

RESUMO

O genocídio indígena que se desenrola no estado brasileiro de Mato Grosso do Sul – descrito aqui como Kaiowcídio – não é apenas um caso de violência hiperbólica, mas é algo qualitativamente diferente de outros crimes graves cometidos contra comunidades marginalizadas e subalternas no resto do país. Kaiowcídio é a reencarnação de velhas práticas genocidas do capitalismo agrário que mais uma

vez atingem os indígenas Guarani-Kaiowá por causa de suas demandas etnopolíticas baseadas na terra. A presente análise baseia-se em uma nova interpretação dos genocídios indígenas através do nexo entre genocídio-geocídio-massacre. Considerando esse nexo político-espacial, o processo de Kaiowcídio combina estratégias e procedimentos baseados na competição e oposição entre grupos de pessoas que disputam as oportunidades sociais relativamente escassas de uma economia baseada no agronegócio que caracteriza a região.

Palavras-chave: luta pela terra; violência; discriminação étnica; genocídio indígena; colonização; agronegócio; Mato Grosso do Sul; Brasil

I. THE GUARANI-KAIOWA GENOCIDAL GEOGRAPHY

Displacement, destruction and murder of indigenous nations were the first operations that helped to consolidate Brazil as a colony and as a country, and all have continued ever since. In that long-term process of colonisation and national building, one of the peoples particularly affected by enslavement, exploitation and displacement were the Guarani, who used to occupy large parts of the Plata basin and were accordingly assaulted and enslaved from the early decades of Portuguese and Spanish conquest. Among the sub-groups of the large Guarani population subjected to this invasion, there is the Guarani-Kaiowa, who since the beginning of the last century have been severely impacted by the invasion of their land and their confinement in small, utterly inadequate reservations (IORIS, 2020). Because of the prime agricultural value of their ancestral land, the strategic importance of the region for national development and the hostile attitudes of farmers, violence was the main point of contact between the indigenous population and an increasing number of settlers. In addition to more regular aggressions in the form of massacres, cases of genocide typically erupted when the Guarani-Kaiowa demonstrated their opposition to conquest and attempted to survive as a cohesive ethnic population. If brutal pressures were not sufficient to reduce their determination to recover the lost areas and restore key elements of traditional community life, genocide was the answer.

With around 55,000 individuals, the Guarani-Kaiowa are the second largest indigenous people in Brazil today (the biggest outside the Amazon), and maintain close connections with a population of the same ethnic group on the other side of the Paraguayan border (who self-denominate themselves Paĩ-Tavyterã in Paraguay), as well as with other indigenous peoples in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, particularly the Guarani-Ñandeva, who also belong to the Guarani nation and speak almost the same dialect (PEREIRA, 2016). The Guarani-Kaiowa certainly share the accumulated impacts of violence and marginalisation with all other indigenous peoples in the continent. However, their experience also has some

important specificities. They live in a region where export-oriented agribusiness has expanded exponentially in recent decades, which aggravated land conflicts, made more difficult the devolution of properties (illegally or semi-legally) grabbed and intensified indigenous labour exploitation. The Guarani-Kaiowa have been the victims of half off all assassinations of indigenous individuals and greatly affected by widespread youth and teenager suicides. Their grassroots mobilisation since the 1970s and the organisation of regular community assemblies [Aty Guasu] have been criminalised and repressed on grounds of political and religious beliefs, as well as ethnic origins. Because of the proliferation of private farms and aggressive regional development policies since the middle of the last century, the Guarani-Kaiowa have lost around 98% of their ancestral land and been confined to the fringes of the hegemonic agribusiness-centred economy (living in reservations and encampments).

The Guarani-Kaiowa have paid a heavy price for who they are and where they live, amounting to a challenging geography that is complicated by the fact that their existence and intense socio-spatial interactions are deeply interconnected with the economic transformation of the region and the expansion of agribusiness production units (IORIS et al., 2019). Most observers believe that the situation is nothing other than genocide, and that those responsible for the genocidal fate of the Guarani-Kaiowa, including farmers, political leaders and members of agribusiness support organisations, bear criminal responsibility. In the words of professor João Pacheco de Oliveira, leading anthropologist at the National Museum (UFRJ), “these are the clearest circumstances in the country where the failure of the public authorities to comply with the law, and their collusion with the powerful, engenders absolute impunity, placing the Kaiowa as victims of a process of true genocide” (preface of MURA, 2019, p.20). As in the case of North America, Guarani-Kaiowa leaders understood and denounced the fact that nation-building and frontier-making involved not only land grabbing but also the intention to totally annihilate their communities, people and nation; in other words, that the hostile intent behind development was serious and tangible (Morais, 2017). Between 2000 and 2019, the Guarani-Kaiowa was the indigenous group most severely assaulted in the country, with an annual average of 45 new cases and the assassination of 14 political leaders (CIMI, 2020). Moreover, the ongoing genocide in Mato Grosso do Sul has meant much more than just the loss of land and assassination of community members, but is rather a brutal mechanism of spiritual, social, economic and environmental destruction.

There is no need here to produce new definitions – the typological debate has been vast, normally contrasting the Jewish Holocaust with other systematic and large-scale social annihilations – but it will be argued that a genocide is essentially predicated upon, and starts with, the subtraction of key socio-spatial relationships that define particular ethnic groups (called geocide). Indigenous genocides deserve

particular attention, because as destructive as the grabbing of land, the killing of leaders and immiseration communities is the denial of their humanity and the imposition of institutional rules centred on the market value of land and resources. It is not difficult to verify that indigenous genocides are often mentioned but usually occupy only the periphery of academic and non-academic debates. For instance, although the indigenous genocide in the Americas is widely acknowledged, the diversity of its experiences and situations is still not properly understood (BISCHOPING and FINGERHUT, 1996). The various attempts to systematise this debate suggest that genocidal strategies differ according to the key social entitlements the process attempts to erase, which could be the membership of a political movement (politicide), destruction of ecosystems to an extent that significantly undermines the livelihoods and socio-spatial conditions of the inhabitants of a particular territory (ecocide), annihilation of a people's way of life (ethnocide), elimination of a group whose members belong to a political movement (politicide), systematic assassination of members of a specific gender (gendercide) and deliberate destruction of a culture without necessarily encompassing the physical destruction of its bearers (culturicide).

In addition, the ecocide-genocide nexus, what represents an 'ecological turn' in genocidal studies, has drawn attention to the biological integrity of social groups, such as indigenous peoples and territorially dependent placed-based groups that victims of ecological and culturally genocidal coercive practices (CROOK and SHORT, 2021). Discussing the mass murder of native American populations, Anderson (2014) argues that this was qualitatively different to twentieth century genocides and proposes the expression 'ethnic cleansing' (although MADLEY (2016) insists that what happened in California at least constituted a clear case of indigenous genocide). To compensate for the original gap in conceptualisation and the associated legislation, the literature has been expanding to put forward analytical tools more appropriate for dealing with indigenous genocides. First there is the question of victims and perpetrators, which is not as simple as it seems. Genocidal agents are not innately born with destructive intents, but shaped throughout concrete political, ideological and economic trajectories. Likewise, victims became targets and found themselves in vulnerable positions because of exacerbated social and ethnic differences. It is remarkable that, despite strong globalised connections, ethnicity remains a defining feature of social identity and personal attitudes (the 'fear of ethnicity throughout the world', indicated by MAYBURY-LEWIS, 1997). Yet, victims of genocide are often treated as largely passive masses, so close to destruction that they are almost powerless to react, ignoring the also important escape and reaction mechanisms used by elements of the targeted group, which correspond to some degree of mitigation or delay of even worse genocidal practices.

Our study introduces a new term – Kaiowcide – which is the unique, but also shared process of indigenous genocide that continues to affect the Guarani-Kaiowa

today. The expression Kaiowcide is intended to highlight the particular levels of violence and the sustained aggression suffered by the Guarani-Kaiowa in recent years, their peculiar condition of expatriates in their own territory and the concerted reaction of private and public agents against the politico-spatial mobilisation of the indigenous communities. The term also has direct political consequences, insofar as it intended to draw national and international attention to the persistence of genocide and the abject failures of the state apparatus (including indigenist agencies, the judiciary, the police and the parliament). Making use of empirical results obtained during research among and with the Guarani-Kaiowa, one of the main contributions of this paper is to question conventional descriptions of genocidal realities which are reducible neither to schematic, fragmented socio-cultural conceptions nor to abstract, structuralist explanations, and to discuss how their ontological condition influences, and is influenced by, the socio-spatial agency of indigenous groups. It will offer a novel interpretation of indigenous genocides through a theorisation of the nexus between genocide-geocide-massacre, as presented in the next section. A genocide is essentially predicated upon, and starts with, the subtraction of key socio-spatial relationships that define particular ethnic groups, what is described here as geocide (in a sense slightly different than previously used by BERAT, 1993). As destructive as the grabbing of land, the killing of leaders and immiseration of Guarani-Kaiowa families is the denial of their humanity and the imposition of institutional rules centred on the market value of land and the short-term profitability of agribusiness commodities. A declaration issued at the end of the 2018 Kuñangue Aty Guasu (the Great Assembly of Guarani-Ñandeva and Guarani-Kaiowa Women) clearly indicates awareness of the genocidal challenges before them:

There have been many violent deaths of women in our villages, which are confined between cities and towns reservations, leaving us nowhere to turn. We live in public insecurity in our daily lives, having to deal with racism, prejudice, the violation of our bodies and our culture, and the violence of non-indigenous people when we try to use state services that should officially protect us as women. We are Guarani and Kaiowa women and our rights must be guaranteed, taking into account our cultural specificities, so that we are not left as victims of state violence and Brazilian society. Without the demarcation of our lands, we Guarani and Kaiowa women cannot live a life free from violence. And we will resist so that we can have a life with freedom together with our children, our people, in our land.

Although genocide is a word commonly used by academics, journalists and activists in relation to the dramatic challenges faces by indigenous peoples in Brazil, the significance of the Guarani-Kaiowa genocidal experience (Kaiowcide) is not

casual or merely sloganized. The indigenous genocide unfolding in Mato Grosso do Sul is not just a case of hyperbolic violence or widespread murder, but something qualitatively different from other serious ethnic-related crimes. The lived, often tragic, trajectory of the Guarani-Kaiowa was central for the sustenance of the exploitative, rentist and wasteful agrarian capitalism. Whereas the subjugation of the Guarani-Kaiowa represented an important chapter of the settler colonisation of South American countries, the present-day genocide continues to be crucial for the maintenance of the regional economy and for the consolidation of export-oriented agribusiness in Mato Grosso do Sul. As observed by Wolfe (2008, p. 102), settler colonisation identifies a 'logic of elimination' underpinning the bio-cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples with "the Scylla of reified social systems and the Charybdis of spontaneous individual voluntarism." While abundance was promised by the national Brazilian government since the middle of the last century at newly created agricultural frontiers, new rounds of scarcity emerged in both consolidated and recently incorporated areas due to the expansionist and exclusionary dynamics of capitalism (Ioris, 2018). The process of land grabbing and labour commodification, which began after the end of the Paraguayan War (1864-1870), was augmented from the 1960s onwards with the expansion of export-based agribusiness, and led to the removal of most remaining vegetation, the aggravation of land disputes and, eventually, Kaiowicide.

Before we progress further, it is necessary to explain that the methodological approach employed in this article can be defined as a contingent and combined ethnography, taking all methodological opportunities to accumulate information, learn together and make sense of deeply politicised processes that produce lived, contested spaces. Text is basically a reflection on indigenous genocide as a form of acute ethnopolitics, which is based years of engagement with Guarani-Kaiowa communities and tries to interpret their socio-spatial condition from the perspective of Kaiowicide (see more in IORIS, 2021). The analysis relies on 48 interviews (most done in the Guarani language, with the help of a research assistant, and then translated to Portuguese and English), systematic meetings with individuals, groups and communities, observation of rituals and practices), examination of documents and attendance of religious ceremonies and public events during fieldtrips between 2017 and 2020. It first entailed the construction of an equitable and productive dialogue with indigenous communities that required, first of all, an ethical and political commitment to avoid patronising stereotypes and utilitarian oversimplifications. Rather than a naïve attempt to 'give voice to indigenous people' which normally produces a simulacrum of their opinions and perspectives, the intention was to engage with real individuals and try to capture some of the complexity of their lived space. The research project required an open dialogue with the Guarani-Kaiowa communities based on an ethical and methodological commitment of the researcher away from stereotypes and oversimplifications. Initial contacts took in average

a few days, but were followed by additional visits, meetings and targeted interviews. Early discussions took place with community leaders, helped by local university academics, and then involved other community members, who all agreed to take part and supported the participatory and critical nature of the investigation.

2 THE GEOCIDE-GENOCIDE-MASSACRE NEXUS

As affirmed by Maybury-Lewis (1997, p.7), the “Americas furnish the oldest and most dramatic example of the treatment of indigenous peoples. It was the invasion of the Americas that marked the beginning of European expansion, and it was the Indians of the Americas who have borne the brunt of their indigenous status for the longest time.” The American landscapes, which had been transformed over millennia by socio-ecological interaction between human and more-than-human agents, were simply considered *terra nullius* by the European invaders, that is, it was nobody’s property, free to be grabbed by those moving from the East hungry for profit. In effect, the aggressors themselves nullified and ruined everything blocking their way to personal enrichment, equipped with firearms and royal and papal decrees guaranteeing them access to the world of peoples never heard of before. Social destruction clearly happened not only through the direct assassination of individuals and groups, but also through the spread of diseases and the imposition of the European religion. The primary motive for the elimination of the autochthone nations has been territorial conquest, but not always, as in the case of the fur trade in Canada or the exploitation of labour in the Peruvian mines. In the end, the indigenous peoples had only a handful of choices: integrate into to ethnocidal policies and Christian theology, resist (and be eliminated), or migrate to new areas where they had to cope with unfamiliar, inhospitable environments and often enemy nations. Evans and Thorpe (2001) aptly propose the concept of ‘indigenocide’ to describe the theoretical and practical procedures that made indigenous peoples less valued than the land they inhabited and which was wanted by the invaders.

‘Indigenocide’ contrasts with state-driven, industrial and bureaucratic genocides, such as the Jewish Holocaust, and happens when land is intentionally invaded, for as long as it is necessary or possible, leading to the killing of the original inhabitants, classified as the lowest form of humanity and deserving of extermination. The idea of ‘indigenocide’ is certainly helpful in terms of understanding the specificities of indigenous genocides, but it is necessary to address several crucial questions, especially because present day phenomena are more subtle and harder to identify, although not less violent, than during the colonial period. First, the question of intentionality, which in the definition of ‘indigenocide’ seems to echo the provisions of the Genocide Convention, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, which determines that indirect acts of violence and incidental measures,

such as the spread of contagious diseases, can also amount to genocide. Second, the attack on the indigenous population appears restricted to the classical model of land invasion followed by social and religious abuses and concentrated mass assassination, which are certainly relevant for the characterisation of the crime, but fall short of exhausting other possible genocidal strategies. "A discussion of genocide as practiced against indigenous peoples should not (...) focus solely or even principally on deliberate attempts to massacre entire societies. Often the widespread dying resulted not so much from deliberate killing but from the fatal circumstances imposed by the imperialists on the conquest" (MAYBURY-LEWIS, 2002, p.82). Many accounts of indigenous assimilation and killing, including Lemkin's own position (known for coining genocide and initiating the Genocide Convention), describe indigenous groups as lacking agency, ignoring their reactions, and adaptability and, particularly in the early stages of colonisation, the tenuous European grip on power.

Third, it is not the scale or rate of killing that determines whether an indigenous genocide is taking place but the systematic and brutal imposition of oppressive actions and norms that make it extremely difficult for indigenous people to survive and reproduce. An indigenous genocide, as a period of intense social destruction and the loss of a significant proportion of the population, is not an isolated phenomenon, but is preceded and supervened by a broader process of world grabbing, that is, the subtraction and invalidation of the indigenous world. This longer and deeper process can be described as *geocide*, which is not merely the recognition of a major antagonism between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, but encapsulates the intolerance and destructive impetus of more powerful invaders. Genocide is dialectically connected with, and predicated upon, the subtraction of indigenous worlds that is *geocide*. *Geocide* is the language and technology of colonisation, which gradually eliminates any remaining opportunities for indigenous people to maintain their collective and individual lives. It entails micro- and macro-dynamics of violence that consolidate prejudices, difference and rivalries and, depending on the nature of the disputes and the balance of power, can spark a genocide. There are also isolated or more circumscribed cases of lethal violence in the form of massacres, which also have *geocide* as their deep-rooted motivation. In other words, genocide and massacres are the visible face of the subterranean phenomenon of *geocide*, and these relatively shorter processes typically erupt when indigenous groups resist and attempt to react against *geocide*. The *geocide*-genocide nexus is a dialectical synthesis of the lived spatial experience of indigenous peoples amid capitalist relations of production and reproduction. A genocide ultimately happens when the perverse *geocidal* order derails, not because the system collapsed, but because it needs these moments of intense destruction to maintain the perverse, highly asymmetric balance of power.

Geocide is an expression of what the indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2004, p.90) describes as situations in which native peoples have inherited “relationships founded on hatred and violence and a culture founded on lies to assuage the guilt or shame of it all,” and where victims and perpetrators alike continue to deny their shared past and the corresponding moral implications. Before an actual genocidal experience, a series of ‘preconditions’ must be fulfilled, first of all the reduction of the victims to something less than human, worthless and “outside a web of mutual obligations”, as well as the degradation of the perpetrators to criminals or pathological individuals (CHALK and JONASSOHN 1990, p.28). It is perhaps ironic that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples itself incorporated a sense of geocide in its definition of such social groups. The text of this declaration states that indigenous peoples are those with a historical and geographical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies, and that still consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in their territories. They form minority, non-dominant sectors of national societies and struggle to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral lands and ethnic identity which are the basis of their continued existence according to their own social institutions and traditional practices. The Declaration suggests that for a group to become indigenous (in general rather than in terms of any particular ethnic denomination) their land must have been invaded and there must be some geocidal antagonism from other social groups. As such, the definition has an inadvertent backward-looking connotation that perpetuates the idea that geocide is essential for a group to be considered indigenous, which is certainly important as a political gesture but is also ontological restrictive.

Fourth, and even more important, significant controversy has arisen over whether the definition of genocide should be limited to the elimination of a *genos*, an ethnicity or nationality, evidently following the perpetrators’ definition of an ethnic minority (BAUER, 1999), or whether its scope should be broadened to include atrocities based on class identity and politico-economic disputes (Mann, 2005) amplified by references to ethnicity and belonging. Nonetheless, this is a false dichotomy and questions related to ethnicity of indigenous people, as demonstrated by the incidence of racism, discrimination and segregation, cannot be separated from the exploitation of the indigenous labour force by the owners of the means of production. This apparent separation between ethnic or class-based oppression, which could independently lead to genocides, is reconciled through the control of state action. There exists a politico-economy of genocide that is not restricted to past events and continues to shape political interventions in favour of or against new genocides. As observed by Bauman (2000), genocide is a rare event but not without major socio-political repercussions, and it reveals a great deal about the shortcomings of Modernity (particularly in the twentieth century) and helps us to interrogate the present condition of the world. The same global society that made

the Holocaust possible still exists, and there was nothing in that society that could stop it from happening during the war or that could stop it from happening again today. Some take genocide to be an aberrant act, but its roots are really in the “process of historical development out of which our entire, global, political-economic system has emerged” (LEVENE, 2005, p.9).

Based on the above, it can be inferred that a genocide is the contingent and concentrated manifestation of more perennial and dispersed forms of socio-spatial violence involved in the subtraction of the indigenous world (geocide). The long and gradual unfolding of geocide – according to a politico-economic and ideological regime that connects local circumstances with national trends – guarantees the necessary conditions for the occurrence of regular genocidal episodes during conquest and colonisation. In schematic terms, geocide is the world subtraction caused by the arrival of new groups and the imposition of new socio-economic relations, while genocide is a moment of concentrated social destruction, group displacement, violent attacks or severe negligence. The notion of geocide refers to a long-term process of brutal disqualification, exploitation and appropriation of land from the ancestral inhabitants of a territory who find themselves in the way of the economic, spatial or political gains expected by invaders and colonisers. Genocide, in turn, is the more intense destruction of social groups, carried out over a relatively shorter time, through direct or indirect measures (direct measures could include the use of firearms and the capture and execution of target populations, while indirect measures could include spreading disease or provoking regular road accidents). Genocide is nonetheless predicated upon the progress of geocide, and therefore the connection between geocide and genocide is not just temporal, but deeply dialectical and associated with acute politico-economic disputes. Geocide is the destruction and theft of somebody else's world and during the long-lasting geocidal process there will be stages when the oppressed themselves become vulnerable to elimination: these are the moments when genocides take place.

As emphasised before, genocides occur independently of direct intention and through actions that may be to a greater or lesser degree deliberate, but which result in the partial or total annihilation of groups or societies. Therefore, genocides do not happen by chance or in socio-spatial vacuums; rather, people are attacked or contaminated by new pathogens because of who they are and where they live. Victims of genocide may also include those who have tried to oppose geocidal violence, as in some circumstances the repressive reactions of those in charge of geocide can pave the way to genocide. Finally, to complete the picture, not all instances of aggression and murder clearly amount to genocide, but there are also cases of sporadic and opportunistic violence committed because of the persistence of geocide. These include massacres of various numbers of individuals, who may, for example, be attacked during protests or during the reoccupation of indigenous lands. Massacres and genocides are the most striking and graphic manifestations

of the ongoing processes of lower-level violence, and occasional killing, that characterise geocide. Indigenous massacres may happen as part of wider processes of genocide, or take place in circumstances that appear to be isolated but are in fact associated with geocide. Figure 1 summarises the geocide-genocides-massacre nexus and shows how these processes may evolve over time. In the case of the Guarani-Kaiowa, repeated genocides happened during the colonial and early national development periods, with numerous cases of massacres promoted by explorers and farmers, which culminated in the most recent genocidal process (Kaiowcide). Underpinning those moments of acute ethnic-relate violence, it was possible to perceive the unfolding of geocide, demonstrated by the attempt to remove the native population and impose a new spatial and politico-economic order.

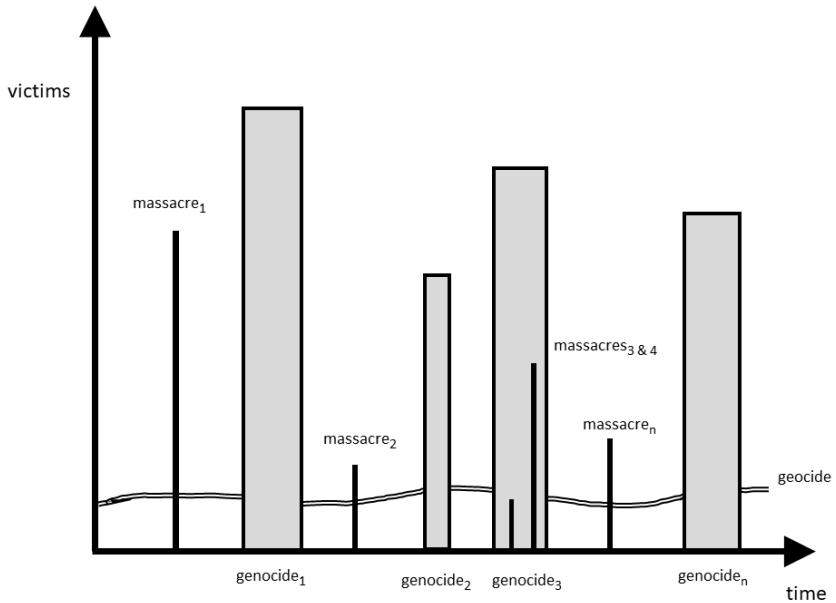


Figure 1 – Illustration of the Geocide-Genocide-Massacre Nexus

This conceptualisation of the socio-spatial association between geocide, massacres and genocide will facilitate the comprehension of indigenous genocides as quantitatively and qualitatively different from comparable non-indigenous phenomena. Indigenous genocides, typically associated with settler colonisation, resource exploitation and the formation of economic frontiers by attracting national and international migrants, contrast with the other forms of genocide which are more commonly caused by religious, political and ethnic rivalries between social groups

with previous connections. In general terms, although these other genocides also have long-term socio-economic motivations and are the consequences of multiple tensions accumulated over time, these are primarily related to specific non-economic disputes. Indigenous genocides are instrumental in eradicating obstacles to state power, personal gain and regional economic growth, which are all goals that require the more prolonged destruction and radical transformation of socio-spatial settings via geocide. Indigenous genocides are, therefore, predicated upon geocide as part of the formation of different social, economic and socio-ecological patterns. In other words, the recourse to genocide is perfectly justified, according to the agenda of colonisation and domination, to complement the more extensive geocidal violence employed to pave the way for appropriation of the assets and riches of indigenous inhabitants in coveted areas.

3 KAIOWCIDE: CONSOLIDATING LAND GRABBING TENDENCIES

Informed by the geocide-genocide-massacre nexus discussed above, it can be seen that the socio-spatial trajectory of the Guarani-Kaiowa in Mato Grosso do Sul has involved aggressive appropriation of their world (geocide), repeated efforts to directly or indirectly destroy their communities and destabilise their social organisation and socio-spatial relations (genocide), and numerous isolated assassinations of leaders, community members and even children (massacres). Although their original territories were incredibly vast, spreading over several million hectares, most of the currently existing Guarani-Kaiowa population is confined to little more than 70,000 hectares in an archipelago of 31 sites throughout the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, which have different levels of official recognition and contestation. In the last three decades, due to indigenous protests and international pressure, the Brazilian state formally recognised Guarani and Kaiowa legitimacy over 242,370 hectares, but only 29.03% of that total is currently used by the indigenous families (CIMI, 2020). At the same time, the struggle of the Guarani-Kaiowa for the recognition of their most basic rights has important parallels with the class-based struggle of landless peasants and marginalised urban groups in Brazil. The defining features of the Guarani-Kaiowa include precisely the ability to preserve their language (a semi-dialect of Guarani) and maintain a relatively large and unified social identity amidst a series of interrelated genocides. It has been reported in several documentaries, movies and UN reports, and the images of protest, police repression, dead bodies, miserable living conditions and dirty children have circulated around the world. Still, the Guarani-Kaiowa remain the most threatened indigenous population in Brazil, denied recognition of their original lands and subject to systematic abuses and exploitation (UN, 2016). The indigenous groups and extended families

that are now described as Guarani-Kaiowa have been living through a series of genocides for more than four hundred years.

Since the seventeenth century, after the arrival of the first Spanish and Portuguese explorers and the formation of the Jesuit reductions, repeated genocides have been perpetrated against the Guarani-Kaiowa as part of the much wider geocide carried out against Tupi-Guarani nations in the Plata river basin and along the Brazilian coast. Genocides during this period were poorly recorded but basically involved attracting indigenous people to the Jesuit missions or capturing and enslaving them. Subsequent genocides happened for various reasons. Initially, these included the expansion of landed property and the extraction of *erva-mate* in indigenous lands in the context of nation building. Later, genocides resulted from the expansion of a highly peripheral form of agrarian capitalism, which culminated in the promotion of a state-led National Agricultural Colony of Dourados (CAND), through Decree 5,941/1943, and, after its failure in the 1950s, the consolidation of an economic model based on export-oriented agribusiness production and large private properties. If during the colonial period indigenous genocides happened through the enslavement and forced Christianisation of the native people, during the advance of agrarian capitalism the equivalent process of genocide was enacted through displacement, confinement, assimilation and tutelage.

The most recent and ongoing process of genocide since the 1970s – described here as Kaiowcide – corresponds to the consolidation of the agribusiness-based economy, the growing neoliberalisation of production, rapid urbanisation, the serious deterioration of living conditions inside and outside the reservations, and the introduction of formal democratic legislation. The national state was the main promoter of socio-spatial change and for the opening of new agricultural frontiers, as in the case of the experience in Mato Grosso do Sul. The state apparatus is evidently complex and fraught with internal disputes and contradictions, but the hegemonic direction of state interventions was in favour of the privatisation of common land and the intensification of commodity production. All that paved the way for the legitimisation and strengthening of agribusiness-oriented rural development and the dominance of large private estates against environmental concerns and the rights of the ancestral inhabitants. From the perspective of the agribusiness sector, the presence of a contemporary indigenous population is no more than a leftover from violent skirmishes that happened decades ago during the conquest of the territory, and indigenous people constitute a horde of desolate, strange people who ‘only have themselves to blame’ for their fate. According to this argument, indigenous groups wish to return to the pre-colonial past, while the future ‘clearly’ belongs to the expansion of agribusiness exports. The decisive cause of Kaiowcide is not simply the cumulative result of those ongoing changes, but precisely a coordinated attempt to contain the bottom-up reactions of the Guarani-Kaiowa to

economic and socio-spatial forms of exploitation. Figure 2 schematically shows the three main phases of the genocidal experience.

Schematic Moments of the Guarani-Kaiowa Genocide

17 th -19 th Century Conquest and Enslavement	most 20 th Century Agrarian and Agribusiness frontier	late 20 th Century Kaiowcide
Catholic Missions Encomiendas Bandeirantes Colonial and national frontiers	Territorial grabbing Land market Over-exploitation of labour (semi-enslavement)	1970s – early 1990s mid-1990s – 2007 since 2007
Forced labour and population control	Assimilation, exploitation and tutelage	Extermination, financialisation and juridical asphyxia

Figure 2 – Key Moments of the Guarani-Kaiowa Genocidal Experience

The expression ‘Kaiowcide’ has both descriptive and normative meanings, as it explains the distinctive genocidal practices adopted during a moment of formal democratic liberties but economic and judicial authoritarianism since the 1980s, as well as recognising the astute political agency of indigenous groups living through a present-day genocide. While new legislation recognised the rights of ancestral peoples to maintain their indigenous identities indefinitely (rejecting assimilation and tutelage), geocide continues through neoliberal economic and ideological constructs that guarantee high levels of alienation and homogenisation through market consumerism, evangelical protestantism and the financialisation of all aspects of life. Despite legal and constitutional improvements, most public authorities prefer to look the other way and hope that the indigenous population will renounce their ethnic claims and become indistinguishable from other poor Brazilians. Consequently, Kaiowcide has entailed killing both through the imposition of market-based interpersonal relations (e.g. hyper-exploitation of indigenous workers and the renting out of indigenous land to agribusiness) and, as in the past, ‘conventional’ murder by state police or paramilitary militias (and increasingly by drug dealers too). The main claim here is that Kaiowcide has dramatically impacted the Guarani-Kaiowa in recent decades – which remains clearly connected to geocide and is the continuation of previous genocidal phases – because it is a counterreaction of land grabbers, reactionary judges and politicians and the repressive agencies of the state apparatus against a legitimate and determined indigenous mobilisation for the restoration of

land-based relationships and for better social, political and economic opportunities. Kaiowcide is a renewed, bespoke and ongoing phenomenon of brutal socio-spatial elimination taking place in a context dominated by agribusiness farmers and the prevalence of globalised, urban values. Our ethnographic work has revealed the intense, genocidal interaction between indigenous communities, farmers and law enforcement agents, as can be seen below in two interviews with a woman and man from the indigenous community Pyelito Kue, one of the most fiercely disputed between agribusiness farmers and indigenous families:

My Indigenous name is Kuña Rendy. When my daughter was very small, the 'whites' displaced us from our original area, we had to leave. (...) We suffered a lot, we had to endure so many bad things. The farmers used to come and fire on us with their guns. We recuperated this area in 2009, I took part with my relatives. I have been in the struggle ever since. We entered here, stayed eight days in this place and then the farmers [who had occupied the Indigenous land] started to arrive, on the 8th of December to be exact. The next day, early in the morning, around 5:00 o'clock, they attacked us, everyone was trying to find shelter, they hurt us, many were seriously injured. Maria [all real names have been changed] was badly hurt, she was shot several times in the legs, everything was broken, and she got a rubber bullet stuck in her arm. My cousin José, he was shot in the stomach with rubber bullet ammunition that burst his belly, he endured the pain for two years, then he died.

It is precisely because the Guarani-Kaiowa decided to react to the geocidal violence associated with agribusiness production, making good use of novel politico-institutional spaces, that they have been targeted for further rounds of genocide, now in the form of Kaiowcide. In other words, Kaiowcide is not happening because of a lack of political resistance, but precisely as a result of the ability and determination of the Guarani-Kaiowa to fight for what they consider legitimate. The fundamental demand is, obviously, the return to their ancestral areas grabbed by farmers in the course of agrarian development, what happens in the form of reoccupation and retaking of land (called **retomada**, or retaking). A main claim here is that Kaiowcide is a form of genocide that has occurred because of the political reaction of the Guarani-Kaiowa, since the late 1970s, against a long genocidal process that escalated with the advance of an agribusiness-based economy. The key analytical challenge involved in making sense of Kaiowcide is to connect the widespread hardships faced by the communities with the collective mobilisation of groups dispersed in the territory and capable of coordinating effective political initiatives (such as the **retomadas**). It is necessary to comprehend that, because of the persistence of a genocidal milieu in the region, mobilisation to oppose it has triggered a new and more sophisticated type of genocide – that is, Kaiowcide – that

combines, among other strategies, the manipulation of the rule of law and court decisions with the operation of paramilitary forces and enhanced state repression. The ambiguity of Kaiowcide, combining both innovative and apparently archaic forms of cruelty, is also an emblematic hallmark of neoliberalised agribusiness, which seems to offer a solution to food insecurity but in effect maintains and aggravates malnutrition, risks and socio-ecological degradation.

Kaiowcide has certainly incorporated additional unique features, such as the need to respond to international public opinion and give the impression that the actions of agribusiness organisations are legal and legitimate, but it also dialectically preserves elements of the most primitive brutality employed by the Jesuits, kings and *conquistadores* in the past. Even so, there is a subtle but important difference between previous genocides associated with space invasion and ethnic cleansing and the systematic attempts to contain and undermine the Guarani-Kaiowa socio-political revival since the 1970s through Kaiowcide. In the previous phases, the Guarani-Kaiowa were subjugated by Catholic missionaries and attacked by (*Portuguese*) *bandeirantes* and (*Spanish*) *encomienderos*, were converted into semi-enslaved labourers working in the production of *erva-mate* and occasional farm labourers [*changueiros*] recruited (ironically) for the removal of the original vegetation, while also being expected to remain in small, inappropriate reservations and having their identity rapidly diluted as a consequence of individualising policies (as in the case of the division of the reservations into family plots of land instead of collective areas). These past experiences form the basic etiology of Kaiowcide, considering that the long process of colonisation, territorial conquest and settler migration paved the way for the subordinate insertion of Brazil into globalised agribusiness markets and the consolidation of agrarian capitalism in Mato Grosso do Sul.

The more diffuse and less evident basis of indigenous genocides, which the literature often treats as politicide, gendercide and culturicide, was certainly present in the previous two phases of the long Guarani-Kaiowa genocidal experience (Figure 2), but the important difference is that in the past the aim was to assimilate and proletarianise the indigenous population, while under Kaiowcide the goal is to contain the possibility of political revolt through mitigatory measures, alienating religiosity and encouraging consumerist behaviours, as well as intimidation and the suppression of legitimate land claims through lengthy court disputes complemented by the operation of paramilitaries and private farm militias. Note that the deadly features of Kaiowcide go beyond the boundaries of politicide, as the victims have been targeted because of the perpetrators' prejudices against Guarani heritage and ethnicity. The genocidal practices associated with Kaiowcide have been greatly facilitated by the fabricated invisibility and neglect of indigenous communities by the vast majority of the regional population, who prefer to remain ignorant of the crude realities of life for the Guarani-Kaiowa. Ethnic differences are constantly reinforced by the exploitative jobs prevalent in the labour market and

the elitist methods of the state apparatus, which segregate poor communities in degraded spaces, maintain inequitable opportunities to reach the best universities and in the top positions of the civil service, and almost only incarcerate non-white, poor citizens in the horrendous Brazilian prisons (given that the judges impose an extremely severe, often illegal, punishment on non-whites and dedicate exceptionally friendly and diligent attention to wealthy, white defendants). Those perverse tendencies are often disguised by the empty, neoliberalised defence of multiculturalism in Brazil (TURNER, 1995), nonetheless, as demonstrated by Sullivan (2017; 2021), beneath the dominant ideology of agribusiness success and the powerful ethno-racial order of the exploitation of subaltern social groups, indigenous and non-indigenous activists have tried to organise their reaction – called ‘coming out moments’ – and undermine the fantasy of racial harmony.

As a result, Kaiowcide has not only lasted for several years now, but has created a self-reinforcing mechanism in the stimulation of novel forms of reaction and counteraction. There is a vicious circle that constantly reinvigorates Kaiowcide: the Guarani-Kaiowa react to previous genocides and then have to be crushed through new cycles of genocide, which inevitably, because of their active political agency, spark fresh reactions and enflame additional genocidal measures. The agribusiness community and state armed forces have the necessary resources to buy equipment, guns and bullets, recruit mercenaries, lawyers and judges, and sustain an aggressive media campaign in defence of the highly perverse status quo. Their strength is entirely dependent on the brutality of the state apparatus, the inscrutability of the legal system and the profitability of export-oriented agriculture production. The Guarani-Kaiowa, by contrast, forge ahead through a horizontal power network based on a family support system, reliant on the wisdom and prestige of respected community elders and religious notables (often the same individuals). The brutal elimination of any one person is bitterly felt and will be always remembered by the communities, but the non-Western mentality of indigenous peoples is much less individualistic, and they are therefore able to more effectively respond to the losses of chiefs, elders, shamans and community members. Cross-community political alliances and mutual support are centred around personal reputation, family bonds and interactions with the common ancestral land rather than money, material resources and external lobbying influence.

Kaiowcide is, therefore, the coordinated attempt to annihilate, repress and contain the Guarani-Kaiowa precisely when they have been able to challenge the accumulated consequences of agrarian capitalism and frontier-making in the service of conservative national development. Distinct from the graphic narratives of other contemporary genocidal processes, the victims of Kaiowcide are not calculated in thousands of deaths. If violent murders of indigenous persons are recurrent news in Mato Grosso do Sul, a much larger number of deaths have been caused by a lack of proper housing, malnutrition, contaminated water, mental illness and ina-

dequate medical assistance (often related to the lack of transport connections and infrastructure needed to transport patients to distant hospitals). As Levene (2005) theorises, genocides presume a reified treatment of the victims, who are considered generic strawmen and no longer seen as real people. Indigenous identities and social organisation have been devalued, and aspects of the Guarani-Kaiowa way of life are persistently scorned and even criminalised (as in the case of collecting medicinal plants on private farms). A new social reality was imposed by the perpetrators of genocide and reinforced by constantly renewed feelings of hatred towards indigenous people. Furthermore, the reductionist *modus operandi* of agribusiness, which reduces ecosystems to farmland and biodiversity to a few varieties of a single crop (typically soybean or sugarcane), echoes the pressures of Kaiowcide, which contrast directly with the Guarani-Kaiowa practices that puts strong emphasis on the uniqueness of locations, families and their own religious leaders. The collective political action of the Guarani-Kaiowa demonstrates full awareness that insisting on difference on their own terms is simultaneously as reactive, responsive and propositive action. “Indigeneity thus becomes a collaborative work-in-progress – a discourse of empowerment and optimism rather than one of persecution or amnesic glorification” (GUZMÁN, 2013, p.25). In the final section it will be discussed how the sense of indigeneity and the adoption of several strategies have helped the Guarani-Kaiowa to live through an ongoing, contemporary genocide.

4 LIVING THROUGH AND TRYING TO OVERCOME KAIOWCIDE

In the previous pages it was argued that Kaiowcide is, effectively, the most recent phase of a long genocidal process that has, since the seventeenth century, attempted to destroy the Guarani-Kaiowa people and significantly destabilised their socio-spatiality through invasions, enslavement and persecution. Kaiowcide is the reincarnation and revival of an old genocidal practice. While the focus in recent years may have shifted from assimilation and confinement to abandonment and confrontation, there remains the same intention to destabilise and eliminate the original inhabitants of the land through the asphyxiation of their religion, identity and, ultimately, geography. Like the motto ‘kill the Indian, save the man’, used to try to complete the unfinished eradication of indigenous tribes in North America, in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul the rationale of Kaiowcide is ‘undermine, reject and, if necessary, kill or imprison the troublemakers.’ Because of the multiple difficulties within communities and beyond the small spaces where they live, where their ethnicity is at least respected and cherished, the Guarani-Kaiowa are relentlessly propelled into a daily anti-genocidal struggle for social and physical survival. In the words of Quijano (2000, p.226), they constantly have to be “what they are not”, that is, there are major barriers to acceptance for their ethnic specificities and their most fundamental needs as a distinctive social group. Regular

murders of Guarani-Kaiowa, both during the *retomadas* and in isolated hostilities, have become so common that many incidents now do not even make the headlines. Between 2003 and 2017, around 45% of the homicides involving indigenous victims in Brazil were committed in Mato Grosso do Sul (461 in total), and 95% of these were Guarani people (CIMI, 2018). In the same period, 813 indigenous suicides were registered in the State. This means that through suicides and murders alone, around 3% of the Guarani-Kaiowa population was eliminated in less than 15 years. When other causes of death are factored in, such as loss of life due to hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity, poor sanitation, lack of safe water, drug use and acute mental health problems, among others, it is not difficult to perceive the widespread impact of genocide in Guarani communities and settlements.

This situation of forced invisibility and immanent protagonism has ethnicity as a central, but highly contested, category. Rather than separating indigenous people into an entirely distinct politico-economic condition, ethnicity influences land and labour relations (i.e. facilitating land grabbing and the over-exploitation of labour-power) and also the mechanism of adaptation and political reaction. Thus, there exists a crucial tension between an identity that is tolerated by the stronger groups only inasmuch as it increases economic gains, and a disruptive alterity that rejects exploitation and is constantly revitalised by the ethnospatial practices of the Guarani-Kaiowa. This lived reality defies any simplistic politico-economic categorisation. The prejudices of the non-indigenous sectors give rise to concrete forms of exploitation and, not infrequently, hyper-exploitation in the form of modern slavery. Criminal cases involving modern slavery have been common since the 1990s, when enslaved people were frequently rescued from sugar cane plants; on one occasion, around 900 people were liberated in a single day. In a context of sustained transgressions committed by public authorities and businesses, Kaiowcide continues to unfold through an accumulation of anti-indigenous pressures that go beyond land-related controversies to include a whole range of ethnic-related aggressions. The most relevant form of resistance and reaction to such a genocidal state of affairs is, clearly, the mobilisation for the retaking of indigenous areas – *retomadas* – which involves not only the material dimension of land but is also a source of collective hope and reinforces a sense of joint political purpose. The long and difficult journey of indigenous communities to recover lands lost to development through the *retomadas* is evident in the following interview extract:

I am a Guarani man, born in 1959, and I have lived here in the tekoha Jarará for almost 23 years. The recovery of this area required several *retomadas*, the first in 1980, the second in 1984. In 1990 the whole area [of the farm] was burned, pastures, crops, and then we came back in 1996, determined to resist and stay, we entered the area on 23 March, and I have been here since that day, for 23 years, fighting the police, state and municipal au-

thorities, it was a long road to take over our land. Thanks to God, we won and now we have all the documents. We always work hard and whenever my relatives need it I am ready to help them [in other areas] to regularise their land. (...) We have secured so far only 471 hectares and there is much more, 7,800 hectares that we are still fighting for. We are gauging the right moment to take the farmer to court, counting on the help of the anthropologists, waiting to see if the situation can be sorted out by the government [administratively]. That is it, we are always waiting.

If the reoccupation of farmland became even more dangerous after the election of the openly fascist and 'pro-indigenous genocide' government in 2018, this has not curbed the determination to demand that the state resolve the dispute and allow the indigenous families to return to the land of their ancestors. The main pillar of the land recovery action by the Guarani-Kaiowa is their awareness that politics must be a shared endeavour that presupposes interpersonal reciprocity. This turns individual land recovery actions into a collective territorial strategy because of the common will to be recognised as a distinctive and valued social group. In that regard, the Guarani-Kaiowa are in a position of strength, because their life is intensely based on social interaction, particularly among members of the same extended family. The long road back to their ancestral areas typically ends with an intense and mixed feeling of achievement, loss and realisation of what comes next. In a letter issued in January 2018 from communities in the Tey Kuê reservation (or Te'yíkue, which in Guarani means 'old residential place'), also known as the Caarapó reservation, their defiant voice was clearly heard:

For our children, we promise not to retreat. Confident, fearless and humble, we are prepared. We will always resist! We Guarani and Kaiowa people are no landowners, on the contrary, we belong to the land, we are its children, its fruits, so we fight for our mother! All those who fight in defence of life, will accept no more injustices, will accept no more genocide against our Guarani-Kaiowa people, will accept no more evictions. Every time an Indian dies, a part of our history dies too – join us.

The above discussion has presented the genocidal tragedy but also the defiant political struggle of the Guarani-Kaiowa, a group that is desperately trying to resist and overcome genocide associated with agribusiness-based development, using this experience to provide a heuristic account of the importance of political ontology as a tool for interrogating the impacts of Western modernity and its socio-spatial legacy (IORIS, 2022). The Guarani-Kaiowa had to be partially assimilated and their social institutions severely undermined so that they could be exploited through undifferentiated market-based relations. Socio-spatial differences were manipulated to render them invisible from a development perspective and

to justify the appropriation of indigenous land and other illegal and racist practices by the state and business sector. At the same time, the Guarani-Kaiowa's own singularisation is their best hope of resistance and the main force that allows them to continue hoping for a better life under a different world order. The refutation of the reductionism of a single, given reality of the world represents an ontological political practice based on the political dimension of ontology and on the ontological dimension of politics (ESCOBAR, 2015). The reconstruction of their socio-spatial settings is also a form of resistance against labour exploitation, the alienating influence of evangelical churches and the homogenising pressures of urban pop culture.

An indigenous genocide such as Kaiowcide cannot be judged in terms of the number of people, the extension of reservations, seats in the parliament or media coverage, but must first and foremost be judged by the monstrousness of past and present relations between 'Indians and non-Indians', which continue to be based on violence, neglect and racism. If the indigenous problematic is important and disturbing, more important still is the prospect of the 'Indian-political' widening their role in local and national politics. This threat or hope, depending on how one perceives it, is like a shadow hanging over the Brazilian national government and sectors of civil society, because the indigenous list of demands and their higher moral ground is clear, as much as their ability to forge alliances and subvert the orderly flow of public affairs. There is a profound politics of identity based on the understanding that ethnic and cultural identification is neither immutable nor essentialist, but subject to various influences and fraught with internal tensions. The 'Indian-political' is not necessarily coherent and does not have a fixed, unchangeable goal, but is able to creatively learn from acts of mobilisation, confrontation and negotiation. The Guarani-Kaiowa are already doing this very well, even at the cost of devastating sacrifices made by many for a few, but tangible, accomplishments. The land struggle has caused considerable distress and internal tensions, but it has also strengthened the internal ability of the Guarani-Kaiowa to negotiate, take action and live through, aiming to end, Kaiowcide.

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