

Genocide Today

The Guarani-Kaiowa Struggle for Land and Life

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ABSTRACT

Although genocide is commonly used today to describe the dramatic challenges indigenous peoples face worldwide, the significance of the Guarani-Kaiowa genocidal experience is not casual and cannot be merely sloganized. The indigenous genocide unfolding in the Brazilian State of Mato Grosso do Sul –“Kaiowcide”– is not just a case of hyperbolic violence or widespread murdering, but it is something qualitatively different from other serious crimes committed against marginalised communities. Kaiowcide is the reincarnation of old genocidal practices of agrarian capitalism employed to extend and unify the national territory. In other words, Kaiowcide has become a necessity of mainstream development, whilst the sanctity of regional economic growth and private rural property are excuses invoked to justify the genocidal trail. The phenomenon combines strategies and procedures based on the competition and opposition between groups of people who dispute the same land and the relatively scarce social opportunities of an agribusiness-based economy. Only the focus in recent years may have shifted from assimilation and confinement to abandonment and confrontation, yet the intent to destabilize and eliminate the original inhabitants of the land through the asphyxiation of their religion, identity, and, ultimately, geography seems to rage unabated. In that challenging context, creative adaptation and collective resistance have been the most crucial requisites for the Guarani-Kaiowa to survive through recurrent genocides, particularly Kaiowcide.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, land grabbing, agribusiness, frontier development, Brazil

“Another victim in the Guarani-Kaiowá’s struggle for land Kuretê Lopes, a 69-year-old Guarani-Kaiowá indigenous woman, has become the latest victim of land-related violence which blights the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul. Kuretê Lopes died when she was shot in the chest by a private security guard during an eviction from farmlands that the Guarani-Kaiowá claim as ancestral. The death of Kuretê Lopes fits into a pattern of violence and intimidation against indigenous peoples fighting for the constitutional right to their ancestral lands in Mato Grosso do Sul, a state which has become an epicentre of human rights abuses against indigenous peoples.”

- *Amnesty International*, 12 Jan 2007

Guarani-Kaiowa's Everyday Genocide

The Guarani were among the main indigenous groups affected by enslavement, exploitation, and displacement during the long history of colonization and nation-building in South America. They occupied large parts of the Plata basin and were assaulted and enslaved from the early decades of Portuguese and Spanish colonial conquest. One of the sub-groups of the large Guarani population subjected to this invasion were the ancestors of the Guarani-Kaiowa, who especially in the last century were severely impacted by the invasion of their land and their confinement in small, utterly inadequate reservations.¹ 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, the practice of violence was the main channel of communication between the increasing number of settlers and the indigenous population.² In addition to more regular aggressions in the form of assassinations and massacres, a new genocidal order has taken root since the 1980s – described here as *Kaiowcide* – when the Guarani-Kaiowa demonstrated their opposition to land grabbing, large-scale agribusiness and attempted to survive as a cohesive ethnic group.³ 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 ‘proper’ answer.

The Guarani-Kaiowa are the second largest indigenous groups in Brazil today (with around 55,000 individuals, the largest outside the Amazon) and maintain close connections with

a population of the same ethnic group on the other side of the Paraguayan border, as well as with other indigenous peoples in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul (located on the border with Paraguay and Bolivia), particularly the Guarani-Ñandeva, who also belong to the Guarani nation and speak almost the same dialect.⁴ Numerous other confrontations have taken place in the region and all over the region, attracting negative media attention and bad publicity for the farmers. However, this does not seem to concern them particularly. The situation became easier to manage with the election of a neo-fascist president in 2018, who intensified the anti-indigenous and anti-life tendencies in national and local politics. The authors of violent, criminal attacks are typically abusive landowners who share discriminatory attitudes against ‘the sub-human Indians’ and operate in alliance with politicians (most of whom are landowners themselves) and through their private militias, known as *pistoleiros*. Because of the proliferation of farms and aggressive regional development policies, the Guarani-Kaiowa have lost around 99% of their ancestral land and been confined to the fringes of the hegemonic agribusiness-centred economy. The struggle for land has significantly redefined their existence, and their world has been dramatically undermined and compressed.

The monumental struggle to mobilize the communities and to survive genocide and colonialism is vividly described in the

¹ Ioris, 2020.

² Ioris et al., 2022.

³ Ioris, 2021.

⁴ Pereira, 2016.

documentary “*Guavira Season*” (2021), which is the result of a partnership between the Guarani-Kaiowa representative organization (*Aty Guassu*), the NGO RAIS, the Missionary Council for Indigenous Peoples (CIMI), Cardiff University and other international organizations. It is based on lengthy interviews with indigenous leaders and visits to numerous communities. The documentary *Guavira Season*, can be watched (with subtitles in English) at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkBH6XHjHZU

The Guarani-Kaiowa have undoubtedly paid a heavy price for who they are and where they deserve to 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.⁵ 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 organizations, bear criminal responsibility.⁶ 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.⁷ In the years 2015 and 2016 alone, 33 attacks were perpetrated by paramilitary groups against Guarani-Kaiowa communities. Moreover, the ongoing genocide in Mato Grosso do Sul, particularly during the extreme right-wing government of Bolsonaro (between 2019 and 2022, which promoted a series of anti-indigenous people’s policies and considered it a top political and symbolic

priority), 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.

A genocide is essentially predicated upon, and starts with, the subtraction of key socio-spatial relationships that define ethnic groups, as has happened in processes of intense spatial and social unravelling in the Gaza Strip, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Somalia. As destructive as the grabbing of land, the killing of leaders, and the immiseration of Guarani-Kaiowa families is the denial of their humanity, and the imposition of institutional rules centered on the market value of land and the short-term profitability of agribusiness commodities. Although journalists and activists commonly use genocide in relation to the dramatic challenges faced by indigenous peoples in Brazil, the significance of the Guarani-Kaiowa genocidal experience 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 crimes. The phenomenon combines strategies and procedures based on direct opposition between groups of people who have been turned into irreconcilable enemies by the pattern of regional development and the balance of political power. The situation in Mato Grosso do Sul is even more painful because the Guarani-Kaiowa are fully aware of being at the center of an unstoppable genocide that is only the

⁵ Ioris et al., 2019.

⁶ Mura, 2019.

⁷ CIMI, 2020.

most recent stage in a long genocidal cycle. In this brutal context, resistance has been crucial for the Guarani-Kaiowa to have any chance of surviving, and resist they do.

Several authors working in this field have demonstrated the continuity between colonial and contemporary processes of genocide. The lived, often tragic, trajectory of the Guarani-Kaiowa was central for the sustenance of the exploitative, property rentals, and wasteful politico-economy of Brazilian resource extraction and agrarian capitalism.⁸ Yet, it is still to be demonstrated that, whereas the subjugation of the Guarani-Kaiowa represented an important chapter of the colonization 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. The Guarani-Kaiowa are both survivors and victims of a genocidal cycle that continues because very little has changed in economic or moral terms over the centuries. The Guarani-Kaiowa have endured various genocides over several generations, and their current existence remains a perennial struggle to contain and reverse these processes. These actions call for more careful consideration of the causes and ramifications of a genocidal tragedy that is constantly being denounced by the victims and their closest allies (to no avail).

There was a real chance of compromise in 2007 when the federal government signed an agreement ordering the return of a minimal amount of land to the Guarani-Kaiowa. However, the land was evidently never returned. In 1988 a similar solution had been agreed, and ignored.

No laws or agreements aiming to redress even a small part of the damage caused by land grabbing have been acceptable to those ‘masters of the universe’ in charge of (indigenous) life and death. Once again, national politics forced marginalized groups living below the threshold of whiteness, status, and property into a socio-spatial position outside the hegemonic economy, politics, and the oppressive rule of law. Just as Germany today is less than what it could have become if not for Nazism, and the United States is dwarfed by its own indigenous Holocaust, Brazil is haunted by the failure to rectify, at least partially, this significant socio-spatial liability. Life through genocide is the perpetuation of centuries of socio-ecological devastation and Western intellectual, economic, and religious arrogance. Genocidal crimes were not only committed against the Guarani-Kaiowa during colonization; these happened yesterday, are being committed today, and most likely will happen again tomorrow and next year. This large-scale waste of human lives seems unstoppable and is even accelerating. The long genocidal trends became even more evident during the anti-life management of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 by the genocidal government of Jair Bolsonaro. With the election of President Lula in 2022 and the creation of the Ministry of the Indigenous Peoples in January 2023, there is some renewed hope that some indigenous land may be now demarcated; however, the reaction of landowners and agribusiness farmers intensified, with the recurrent and illegal arrest of Guarani-Kaiowa people in the first half of 2023. The

⁸ Ioris, 2023.

main bottleneck is, as always, the moroseness and the class commitment of judges and most public authorities (typically in favor of the landowners, regardless of the most basic legal and constitutional rights of indigenous peoples).

It is perhaps odd to interrogate the extent of today's genocide, considering that for the indigenous peoples in the Americas – also described as native, ancestral, or Fourth World – the world, by and large, ended after the arrival of the European invaders several centuries ago. They know, better than anyone else, the meaning and the consequences of genocide. The indigenous genocide was just part of the massive effort to deal with mounting scarcities in Europe. While abundance was promised at the new frontiers, new rounds of scarcity emerged in both areas due to the internal dynamics of capitalism, notably the exploitation of society and the rest of nature.⁹ As a crucial chapter of that long geography of conquest and annihilation, the genocidal pressure on the Guarani-Kaiowa reproduces, and 'modernises' forms of prejudice and oppression employed during colonization and the early history of Brazil, when indigenous peoples were treated as exotic relics of an ignoble past that had to be overcome. The process of land grabbing and commodification, which began in the early years of the last century and 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.

The relationship of the Guarani-Kaiowa with genocide is more complex than the passive victimization of human rights discourses. A key message from Guarani-Kaiowa theology is that

genocide is not unprecedented. However, that does not make it any less awful and despicable. The eschatological perspective of the Guarani-Kaiowa adds some very special features to their life through genocide since colonization. For instance, Guarani people have a particularly troubled relationship with death and are always intensely concerned about losing relatives and the possibility of dying alone. It is unacceptable for them to show pictures of dead bodies, and they carefully avoid images of deceased people because these may attract bad spirits, which will try to take them to the next world. According to Guarani religious beliefs, death is not the end of the story but brings additional troubles to all involved. The Kaiowa feel particularly demoralized when, as happens quite often in attacks organized by hostile farmers, a relative is murdered. The body simply disappears.¹⁰ Another lesson from their tragic experience is that those at risk of suffering total destruction should mobilize the accumulated knowledge of the world, combined with past memories and spiritual support, and persevere in the pursuit of justice and shared goals. The Guarani-Kaiowa seem to have been doing all that for many years. They rapidly understood the methods and direction of colonization and land grabbing and the values and attitudes of those coming to their territory in ever greater numbers. They had to develop adaptive responses to somehow mitigate the losses and coexist with these aggressive enemies. Guarani-Kaiowa spatial controversies demonstrate that very few groups, if any, are more attuned to contemporary trends or have a more active socio-spatial protagonism.

⁹ Ioris, 2018.

¹⁰ Morais, 2017.

This text – informed by years of engaged geographical research on and with the Guarani-Kaiowa and in favor of their tragic struggle for land and survival – briefly reflects on one of the most emblematic indigenous genocides in the contemporary world. It is based on more than seven years of engagement with Guarani-Kaiowa communities and tries to reinterpret their socio-spatial condition from the perspective of Kaiowcide. Rather than a naïve attempt to ‘give voice to indigenous people’, which usually produces a simulacrum of their opinions and perspectives, the intention was to work with real individuals and try to capture some of the complexity of their lived space.

Kaiowcide: Consolidating the Power of Agribusiness

The long 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 marginalized urban groups in Brazil. Each indigenous group is unique and defining features of the Guarani-Kaiowa include their 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 images of protest, police repression, dead bodies, miserable living conditions, and dirty children have circulated the world. Still, the Guarani-Kaiowa remain Brazil’s the most threatened indigenous population, denied recognition of their original lands and subjected to systematic abuses and exploitation. The indigenous groups and extended families that are now described as Guarani-Kaiowa

(and Paĩ-Taviterã in Paraguay) have been living through a series of genocides for more than four centuries.¹¹ The most recent and ongoing process of genocide since the 1970s – Kaiowcide – directly corresponds to the consolidation of the agribusiness-based economy, the growing neoliberalization of production, rapid urbanization, the severe deterioration of living conditions inside and outside the reservations, and the introduction of formal democratic legislation. From the perspective of the agribusiness sector, the presence of an 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.

While new Brazilian legislation has recognized the rights of ancestral peoples to maintain their indigenous identities indefinitely (rejecting assimilation and tutelage), the genocide has continued through neoliberal economic and ideological constructs that guarantee high levels of alienation and homogenization through market consumerism, Pentecostalism (evangelical fundamentalism) and the financialization 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

¹¹ In January 2023, we organized the Guarani-Kaiowa Week at the Federal University of the Great Dourados; several communities and families were visited by a group of academics, students, and activists, including Guarani visitors from Bolivia and Paraguay. More information can be found in the NACLA report: Costa, W. *Transnational Guarani Land Defense and Solidarity*, <https://nacla.org/transnational-guarani-land-defense-and-solidarity>, published on 8 March 2023.

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 because it is fundamentally a counterreaction of land grabbers, reactionary judges and politicians, and the repressive agencies of the state apparatus against a legitimate and determined indigenous mobilization for the restoration of land-based relationships and better social, political and economic opportunities. Kaiowcide is a renewed, bespoke, and ongoing phenomenon of brutal socio-spatial elimination in a context dominated by agribusiness farmers and the prevalence of globalized, urban values.

It is precisely because the Guarani-Kaiowa decided to react to the genocidal 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, which happens in the form of reoccupation and retaking of land (called *retomada*). The main argument 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 critical analytical challenge involved in making sense of Kaiowcide is to connect the widespread hardships faced by the communities with the collective mobilization of groups dispersed in the territory and capable of coordinating effective political initiatives (such as the *retomadas*). In historical terms, Kaiowcide corresponds to the violence and deception of neo liberalised agribusiness, which is both explicit and embedded in aggressive mechanisms of mass production and elitist property rights. The ambiguity of Kaiowcide, combining both innovative and archaic forms of cruelty is also an emblematic hallmark of neo liberalised agribusiness, which seems to offer a solution to food insecurity but, maintains and aggravates malnutrition, risks, and socio-ecological degradation.

The more recent genocidal phase merges elements of state abandonment and political persecution with a range of violent measures stimulated and facilitated by the exploitative pattern of regional development. 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 organizations are legal and legitimate. However, 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 fundamental 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 Kaiowicide. In the previous phases, the Guarani-Kaiowa were subjugated by Catholic missionaries and attacked by *Bandeirantes* and *encomienderos*, were converted into semi-enslaved laborers working in the production of *erva-mate* and occasional farm laborers [*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 individualizing policies (as in the case of the division of the reservations into family plots of land instead of communal areas). These past experiences form the basic analysis of Kaiowicide, considering that the long process of colonization, territorial conquest, and settler migration paved the way for the subordinate insertion of Brazil into globalized agribusiness markets and the consolidation of agrarian capitalism.

The more diffuse and less evident basis of indigenous genocides, which the literature often treats as politicide, gendercide, and culturicide, was undoubtedly present in the previous two phases of the long Guarani-Kaiowa genocidal experience. Still, the vital difference is that in the past, the aim was to assimilate and proletarianize the indigenous population, while under Kaiowicide, 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 farmers' private militias. Note that the deadly features of Kaiowicide go beyond the boundaries of politicide,

as the victims have been targeted because of the perpetrators' prejudices against Guarani heritage and ethnicity. Moreover, it is more than ethnocide because there has been a clear intention to kill the leaders of the indigenous mobilization. It also has elements of culturicide but goes beyond that because Kaiowicide entails forced movement and murder. In practice, all these processes converge and reinforce each other. The genocidal practices of Kaiowicide 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. As a result, Kaiowicide has not only lasted for several years now but has dialectically created a self-reinforcing mechanism in the stimulation of novel forms of reaction and counteraction.

Living to Overcome Kaiowicide

As mentioned above, Kaiowicide constitutes the most recent phase of a long genocidal process that has, since the seventeenth century, attempted to destroy the Guarani-Kaiowa people and significantly destabilized their socio-spatiality through invasions, enslavement, and persecution. Kaiowicide 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, the intention remains the same to destabilize and eliminate the land's original inhabitants through the asphyxiation of their religion, identity, and, ultimately, geography. As a background to the genocide, the aggression and world robbery trend intensified in the second half of the last century. It produced multiple consequences at individual and community levels, including severe mental

health issues, alcoholism, domestic violence, and high levels of suicide. When it became evident that the government would continue to prevaricate, the collective decision was made to start a coordinated reoccupation of ancestral areas lost to development (the *retomadas*), which triggered a corresponding reaction from farmers and the authorities in the format and language of Kaiowide. In practice, this means that in addition to the obstacles faced by any subaltern class or social group in the highly unequal, racist, and conservative society of Brazil, the Guarani-Kaiowa also face the monumental challenge of continuing the fight to recover their land in order to rebuild basic socio-spatial relationships amid a genocide.

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 Quijano¹², they constantly must 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, 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.¹³ In the same period, 813 indigenous suicides were registered in the State. These deaths mean 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, 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.

Although from the perspective of Guarani-Kaiowa geography itself, the boundaries of their land are not absolute but associated with the long and dynamic presence of extended families in the terrain, non-indigenous institutions have imposed borders and fences in the name of national sovereignty and the sanctity of private rural properties. Because they needed to present their claims before the apparatus of an antagonistic state, their idiosyncratic understanding of space had to be translated into objectivity-seeking maps, anthropological surveys, and legally valid proof of socio-spatial connections. All these legal and bureaucratic requisites mean that only the areas with the most compelling evidence of recent indigenous presence have a minimal chance of being returned to the indigenous claimants. These are the most significant areas under dispute or already have some level of regularisation. Note that, despite the violence and the genocide, the indigenous demands are relatively small in relation to the total size of the region. Note also that, even if all those areas are one day restored to the original inhabitants (as stipulated in the legislation), it will remain an actual archipelago of isolated indigenous ‘islands’ in a sea of hostile agribusiness activity. In any case, most areas in this image, especially the largest ones, are merely

¹² Quijano, 2000, p. 226.

¹³ CIMI, 2018.

aspirational, as they are still controlled by the farmers and their return blocked by the courts.

Such a dialectic of forced invisibility and immanent protagonism has ethnicity as a major but highly contested category. Rather than separating indigenous people into an entirely distinct politico-economic condition, ethnicity influences land and labor relations (i.e., facilitating land grabbing and the over-exploitation of labour-power) and also the mechanism of adaptation and political reaction. Thus, crucial tensions exist between an identity tolerated by the stronger groups only since it increases economic gains and a disruptive alterity that rejects exploitation and is constantly revitalized by the ethnospatial practices of the Guarani-Kaiowa. This lived reality defies any simplistic politico-economic categorization. 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. In July 2020, right in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, the authorities freed a group of 24 Guarani laborers, four of whom were aged only 15, and their families, including six young children, after secretly contacting an indigenous community leader. The group had been forced to stay on the farm because of unpaid debts and lived in miserable conditions, sleeping on thin and dirty mattresses in minuscule, cold rooms with appalling kitchen and toilet facilities. 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, Kaiowide 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 mobilization for the retaking of indigenous areas – *retomadas* – which involves not only the material dimension of the land but is also a source of collective hope and reinforces a sense of common political purpose. 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 endeavor that presupposes interpersonal reciprocity. Such a shared endeavor turns individual land recovery actions into a collective territorial strategy because of the common will to be recognized 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 realization of what the future has in store for them.

Conclusion

Indigenous genocide is the forename, surname, and address of agrarian capitalism and rural development in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul and throughout the country. The last round of genocidal action came in the form of Kaiowicide, a coordinated, cross-scale reaction against the well-organized mobilization for land rights and material compensation for past aggression. Previous phases of genocide resulted in the tragic disintegration of lived, ethnic-referenced spaces [tekoha] and the confinement of the Guarani-Kaiowa in overcrowded sites with the worst social indicators in Brazil and unimaginable levels of human misery. When the Guarani-Kaiowa sensed that their total annihilation was the shared plan of farmers, businesspeople, and the government, they started to organize large and regular assemblies to better connect with other indigenous peoples, campaign for political recognition, send their children and young people to school and university, and take back areas from where the elders and deceased ancestors had been expelled. Because the powerful sectors in Brazilian society only use genocidal language to communicate with indigenous peoples, once the Guarani-Kaiowa began confronting and denouncing the illegitimate order, the authorities put into practice what they were already experts at—a new genocide in the form of Kaiowicide. If the Guarani-Kaiowa believed from the 1970s

that they could recover from the tragic legacy of previous genocides, they only received what the powerful decided was right for agribusiness-based development: more destruction, persecution, and death.

At the same time, the Guarani-Kaiowa have desperately tried to resist and overcome genocidal pressures 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.¹⁴ They had to be partially assimilated. Their social institutions were severely undermined so that they could be exploited through depersonalized 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 singularization 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 that meaningfully compensates the terrible crimes suffered over the years and gives precedence to the rights, the knowledge and the socio-spatial and political agency of indigenous peoples.

¹⁴ Ioris, 2020b.

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