

The Genocidal Trail of Agrarian Capitalism: Guarani–Kaiowa’s Struggle for Survival

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journals.sagepub.com/home/rbp**Antonio A. R. Ioris¹** 

Abstract

Although genocide is an expression commonly used today in relation to the dramatic challenges faces by indigenous peoples around the world, the significance of the Guarani–Kaiowa genocidal experience is not casual and cannot be merely sloganised. 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, subaltern communities. Kaiowcide is actually 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. Many lessons must be learned and could directly contribute to improve democracy, justice and the rule of law in the country.

Keywords

indigenous peoples, land grabbing, agribusiness, frontier development, Brazil

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The Guarani–Kaiowa Genocidal Geography

Dispossession of indigenous land and displacement of indigenous communities were among the first operations that helped to consolidate Brazil as a colony and later as a country. From the Atlantic coast to the Western, Southern and Amazonian regions, indigenous peoples and their lived territories were the obvious targets of colonisation and nation building. One of the main groups 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 Iberian conquest. Among the sub-groups of the large Guarani population subjected to the invasion and still present in dozens of communities in the centre of South America (not only in Brazil, but also in Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina), there are 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 (Ioris, 2019, 2020a, 2022; Ioris et al., 2019). Because of the prime agricultural value of their ancestral land and resources, the strategic importance of the region for national development and the hostile attitudes of farmers and smugglers, the practice of violence has been the main channel of communication between the increasing number of settlers and the indigenous population. In addition to more regular aggressions in the form of massacres, cases of genocide typically happened when the Guarani–Kaiowa demonstrated their opposition to land grabbing and the attempt to survive as a cohesive ethnic group in their original territory. 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 more than 55,000 individuals, the Guarani–Kaiowa are the second largest indigenous nation in Brazil today (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 (the Paĩ-Tavyterã), as well as with other indigenous peoples in the same 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, speak almost the same version of Guarani and live in the same or in surrounding areas. Numerous confrontations have taken place in all over the region in recent years, attracting negative media attention and bad publicity for the farmers, although this does not seem to concern them particularly. The situation certainly became easier for the landowners to manage with the election of a proto-fascist president in 2018, Jair Bolsonaro, who intensified the anti-indigenous and anti-life tendencies in national and local politics. Just like in Germany and Italy a century before, extreme right-wing politicians manipulated public opinion to win votes and advance a liberal, ultra-conservative agenda of reforms. The Federal Prosecution Service (MPF) event commissioned a Brazilian and a North American university (UNISINOS and Cardozo Law School, Yeshiva University) to review the information available on 24 recent armed attacks on indigenous communities committed in the course of land disputes in Mato Grosso do Sul.¹ In the report, published in 2019, experts concluded that the criminal incidents were not isolated but clearly

interconnected with other forms of violence and could unequivocally be classified as crimes against humanity, considering that the aim of the farmers is always to expel people from private properties established in areas legitimately and legally recognised as indigenous lands.

The perpetrators of such criminal attacks are typically carried out by abusive landowners who share discriminatory attitudes against 'the sub-human Indians' and operate in alliance with conservative politicians (most of whom are landowners themselves). Anti-indigenous acts are normally perpetrated by the police force and the farmers' private militias, known as *pistoleiros*. Because of the proliferation of private farms, the Guarani-Kaiowa have lost around 99% of their ancestral land (Temporary Senate Commission, 2004) and have been confined to the fringes of the agribusiness-centred economy (according to CIMI (2020), the Guarani-Kaiowa, in many cases together with Guarani-Ñandeva families, currently occupy only 70,000 hectares, what is less than 1% of their ancestral territory with more than eight million hectares). Like most other indigenous peoples in the South American continent, despite their rich knowledge and complex practices, the Guarani-Kaiowa were left in a difficult social and economic situation marked by widespread poverty and clear disadvantage compared to most other non-indigenous groups in the region (Eversole et al., 2005). Their existence has been significantly redefined by the endless struggle for land, and their world has been dramatically undermined and compressed. 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.

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. For instance, in the words of João Pacheco de Oliveira, 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' (in Mura, 2019, p. 20). As in the case of North America, examined by Ostler (2019), Guarani-Kaiowa leaders have denounced that nation-building and frontier-making involved not only land grabbing but also the intention to totally annihilate their families and communities. Between 2000 and 2019, the Guarani-Kaiowa was the indigenous people most severely assaulted in the country, with an annual average of 45 new cases and the assassination of 14 political leaders (CIMI, 2020, p. 45). In the years 2015 and 2016 alone, 33 attacks were perpetrated by paramilitary groups [*pistoleiros*] against Guarani-Kaiowa communities. The ongoing genocide in the State of 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.

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. The indigenous genocide unfolding in Mato Grosso do Sul is not just a case of hyperbolic violence or widespread murder, but it is certainly something qualitatively different from other serious crimes. The phenomenon combines strategies and procedures based on direct opposition between groups of people who dispute the same land and the relatively scarce social opportunities of an agribusiness-based economy. The situation is even more painful because the Guarani–Kaiowa are fully aware of being at the centre of an unstoppable genocide that is only the most recent stage in a long genocidal cycle. In this brutal context, resistance has been crucial to give them any chance of surviving, and resist they do. The lived, often tragic, trajectory of the Guarani–Kaiowa was central for the sustenance of the exploitative, rentist and wasteful political economy of Brazilian extractivist and agrarian capitalism. Yet it is still to be demonstrated that, whereas the subjugation of the Guarani–Kaiowa represented an important chapter of the 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. The Guarani–Kaiowa have endured various genocides over several generations, and their current existence remains a perennial struggle to contain and reverse these processes. This calls for a more careful consideration of the causes and ramifications of a genocidal tragedy that is constantly made public by the victims and their closest allies (to no avail).

It may be odd to interrogate the extent of today's indigenous genocides, taking into account that for the indigenous peoples in the Americas the world, by and large, ended after the arrival of the European invaders several centuries ago. As observed by Viveiros de Castro and Danowski (2018), the exploration initiated by Columbus was the 'end of the world' for most original inhabitants, and the small number who survived did so because of their usefulness as slaves or due to refuge in remote locations. They know, better than anyone else, the meaning and the consequences of genocide. The indigenous genocides that transformed the American landscapes were just part of the massive effort to deal with mounting scarcities and other political-economic questions in Europe. Nonetheless, whilst abundance was promised and temporarily realised, new rounds of scarcity emerged due to the internal dynamics of capitalism, notably the exploitation of society and of the rest of nature (Ioris, 2018). As an important chapter of the long process of conquest and annihilation, the contemporary genocidal pressure on the Guarani–Kaiowa is certainly unique but at the same time related to forms of prejudice and oppression employed during colonisation and the early history of Brazil, when indigenous peoples were basically treated as exotic relics of an ignoble past that had to be overcome. More than two centuries after the initial clashes with the colonial enterprise in the 17th century, the commercial demands associated with the Second Industrial Revolution and the geopolitical stability that followed the end of the Paraguayan War (1864–1870) triggered an increasing exploitation of indigenous land and labour. From the last two decades of the 19th century, large-scale harvesting of *erva-mate* leaves was carried out by Brazilian and Paraguayan corporations, making use of a semi-enslaved indigenous labour force. Finally, 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, *Kaiowcide* (the ongoing genocide of the Guarani–Kaiowa discussed below).

A basic message from the Guarani–Kaiowa experience is that their genocide is not unprecedented, but 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 colonisation. It is painful and 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 it can bring additional troubles to all involved. The Guarani–Kaiowa feel particularly demoralised when, as happens quite often in attacks organised by hostile farmers, a relative is murdered and the body simply disappears (Moraes, 2017). On the other hand, their tragic experience has demonstrated the importance of mobilising their accumulated knowledge of the world, combined with past memories and spiritual support to persevere in the pursuit of justice and compensation. The Guarani–Kaiowa seem to have been doing all that for many years. They rapidly understood the methods and direction of colonisation and land grabbing since the end of the 19th century, and the values and attitudes of those coming to their territory in ever greater numbers, and had to develop adaptive responses to somehow mitigate the losses and coexist with aggressive competitors. 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. Since the 1970s, the Guarani–Kaiowa, together with their brothers the Guarani–Ñandeva, have managed to reverse population decline, organised regular grassroots and inter-community assemblies [*Aty Guasu*], secured guaranteed spaces in public universities and forged important alliances with international organisations. Before we progress further, it is necessary to explain that the methodological approach employed in this research on the political economy of indigenous genocide.

Methodological, Political and Ethical Commitments

The main strategy used to investigate the contemporary genocide of the Guarani–Kaiowa 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. The investigation followed a strict ethical standard for research involving indigenous partners, as recommended by Ball and Janyst (2008), which entailed an active and autonomous involvement of the indigenous communities, not as object of study but as true co-investigators. Before any step was taken, preliminary visits were carried out to present the planned research and take onboard local demands and specific interests, which constituted a previous memorandum of understanding with each community that also informed the sequence of activities. The work included research-assistants

and facilitators from the groups involved in the process of reflection and understanding. The project, therefore, went beyond conventional, bureaucratic considerations of research ethics (for example, the naïve goal to ‘give voice to subaltern groups’) and situated the work in the broader social agenda of restorative justice, socio-spatial inclusion and self-determination of indigenous peoples. Instead of the simple role of informants, the members and leaders of the Guarani–Kaiowa communities helped to manage the sequence of activities and the timetable of the assessment of contemporary genocide. Likewise, the interpretation of results (to some extent conducted in the Guarani language) was jointly carried out by the indigenous and non-indigenous participants who worked together. Once those ethical requirements were fulfilled, the research comprised community visits, meetings, information conversations, on-site observations, interviews and attendance at religious ceremonies and public events, during fieldtrips between 2017 and 2023. Due to the impossibility to travel to Brazil in 2020–2021 (because of the COVID-19 pandemic), interaction was conducted remotely in the middle part of the research project, with the active involvement of indigenous research partners, complemented with the use of secondary data.

It is important to explain that the richness of the contribution from indigenous and non-indigenous co-researchers was published in a series of four books edited by the author of this article and other colleagues. Those books, in Portuguese and Guarani, contain long interviews, position papers, artistic expressions and photographs. The purpose of this current text, however, is to present the author’s personal perspective on the ongoing genocidal violence and connect the Guarani–Kaiowa trajectory with the international experience. This article, therefore, is informed by a rich ethnography and extensive engagement with indigenous communities, but it is an authorial statement. During the 4 years of research, fieldtrips were organised every 6 months, during which the author was based in the city of Dourados, the regional hub, working with colleagues of the Federal University of Great Dourados (UFGD), particularly in the Department of Geography and in the indigenous college (FAIND). The main study areas, which were visited several times, were the reservations of Dourados, Caarapó, Amambai, Pirajuí and Laranjeira Ñanderu. In total, 55 semi-structured interviews (mostly in Guarani, then translated into Portuguese) were conducted with members of the partnered indigenous communities. In addition, there were 12 interviews with local authorities and social movement activists. Most interviews were individual, but on some occasions small groups of people were interviewed. Key players were interviewed several times. In addition, the opportunity to entail informal conversations with multiple indigenous and non-indigenous individuals, as suggested by Mignolo (2012), complemented formal contacts and interviews. The project 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. It constituted a novel and ambitious framework of ethical conduct secured with sincere respect and mutual support from indigenous and non-indigenous participants. This created an opportunity to bring together the emotional insights of personal narratives and instances of the cruel geography of exclusion and deprivation that underpins Kaiowicide. The (non-

indigenous) researcher and author of this text tried to establish trusted connections with various communities and helped with the organisation of meetings and assemblies, as the *Aty Guasu* and *Kuñangue Aty Guasu* (of indigenous women) and the Guarani–Kaiowa Week, as well as protests against the new federal administration, meetings with regional authorities and visits of indigenous leaders to Europe. Those activities were carried out without romanticising events or political leaders, that is, avoid dealing with the ‘hyperreal Indian’ of many NGOs, a fantasy that reinforces the simulacrum image of indigenous people, supposedly pure, ecological, stoic, unadulterated (Ramos, 1994).

The investigation considered that the Guarani–Kaiowa ‘subject’ emerges from relations across wider categories of their society, it is an intense dialectic between the self and their collective condition (hence their discrimination against single adult males). Indigenous identities are fluid and contingent, their narratives and engagement with place and space are mutable, not linear; all that invite and prompt experimentation, innovation, affection and partnerships. One important mediator between the researcher, non-indigenous research partners and indigenous communities were the growing number of Guarani–Kaiowa academics in local and national universities. The contribution of indigenous intellectuals (both with and without university degrees) has triggered the reconsideration of century-old research practices and their present-day condition, which raised further questions and provoked meaningful exchanges between the indigenous and non-indigenous participants in the research. Due of long-lasting conflicts and repeated cases of extreme violence practiced by farmers and the police, the situation of the Guarani–Kaiowa has attracted growing attention by graduate students and researchers. On the other hand, because of numerous graduate students dedicated to the Guarani–Kaiowa experience, research fatigue was a real problem affecting the relation between academics and members of indigenous communities, something that was denounced several times in our interviews and meetings. Although the indigenous families naturally welcome scholars interested in their culture and difficult socio-political condition, at the same time they complain about the lack of communication after the research is concluded. Many individuals during our research expressed a deep frustration with the arrival of new investigators trying to gain their trust and inquiring about details of their family life, memories, knowledge and personal relationships, but that in the end take a lot of their time for no direct or indirect reward. It was therefore unacceptable for the Guarani–Kaiowa that researchers would not give clear feedback and yield some concrete benefit back to them in relation to their struggle for recognition, rights and land. As a response, the research effort needed to recognise that their political demands are complex, multiple and constantly changing because of lasting and rising problems.

The study also mobilised other empirical evidence, newspaper articles, government and NGO reports, statistics, historical data and multiple theoretical points to build an argument on the community-based political economy of reciprocity realised by the Guarani–Kaiowa – which has been under attack from wider socio-economic forces and also subject to internal community tensions – without going down the route of neopopulism or schematic localisms. 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. Our intention was to jointly reflect on a transformative indigenous geography that combines the commitment implicit in participatory action research and, in addition, the need to make sense of difficult situations fraught with injustices and ongoing territorial disputes. It was a challenging but rewarding attempt to remove prejudices and learn together. Indigenous co-researchers and informants were able to have control over collecting information about themselves, access and analyse information according to their own needs and goals, determining what and how it should be communicated. The research basically created a space to interrogate and theorise the world from the perspective of the indigenous groups, rethinking universal concepts and search for alternative socio-economic and political paths, particularly in relation to the ongoing and widespread violence. The next section will relate long genocidal trends with the anti-life management of the COVID-19 pandemic that was very emblematic of long-lasting genocidal trends.

Brazilian Genocidal Context: Before and Because of COVID-19

Supernatural threats and sensitivities in relation to the afterlife have become an extra burden for the Guarani–Kaiowa because of regular massacres and persistent violence, but the dangers reached a new peak in 2020 with the COVID-19 outbreak. Like other indigenous peoples in Brazil, the Guarani–Kaiowa were severely impacted by the disease and suffered great disruption to their already difficult lives. The pandemic further exposed the commodification of conventional medicine, the acute failure of risk management approaches and, in particular, the ineptitude of the Brazilian government, which tried to deny and detach itself from the crisis, and often aggravated the transmission of the disease, undermined medical services and prevented the coordinated of action between states and municipalities. In this tragic context, the handling of public health by the proto-fascist administration (2019–2022) brought a new order of magnitude in terms of threats and misinformation. The Guarani–Kaiowa have traditionally feared mystical beings, such as a well-known snake spirit, a type of boa constrictor, whose manifestation is considered a serious indication that relatives will die in unexplained circumstances, one after another (Pereira, 2016). However, it is possible to infer, based on the indigenous traditions, that the mythological boa constrictor has become very real and disturbingly present in the person of President Jair Bolsonaro, a recognised offender with an inflammatory rhetorical style and zero administrative experience, just like his German predecessor Adolf Hitler in 1933. During the electoral campaign of 2018, won in dubious political circumstances, Bolsonaro's image was shaped by systematic media and Internet manipulation.

The COVID-19 virus arrived in Brazil in 2020, brought by travellers arriving from rich countries where the outbreak was already rampant. Not much was expected from a government with a fascist-neoliberal agenda that was doing everything possible to

maximise alienation, labour exploitation and environmental destruction. The attitudes of the Bolsonaro administration were not new, but displayed similarly arrogant and reckless attitudes to those assumed during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918, when public authorities and medical officers refused to take effective measures, leading to more than 35 thousand deaths, including the Brazilian president at the time, Rodrigues Alves. Authoritarianism, vulgarity and obscurity were not enough: the president adopted a distinctive anti-people, anti-life and pro-Coronavirus rhetoric. First, Bolsonaro ignored the risks, mocked the disease and called it a 'minor flu' [*gripezinha*]. Then he claimed to be immune and to have superpowers, although almost 30 people on the presidential airplane were infected with COVID-19 after a trip to Florida in March when Bolsonaro met his controversial idol, Donald Trump. Even before the election, the president and his team made regular use of Nazi symbols. This continued after the inauguration with, for instance, the public use of the Auschwitz motto 'work sets you free' [*Arbeit macht frei*] by the Secretariat of Communication and a proto-Nazi video made by the Secretary of Culture that reproduced imagery from a famous advertisement made by Joseph Goebbels. One of the most emblematic episodes happened on 28 April 2020: when asked by journalists to respond to the fact that thousands of Brazilians were sick and dying, Bolsonaro replied: 'So what? What do you want me to do?' [*E daí? Quer que eu faça o quê?*]. Previously he had declared that he was not a gravedigger [*Eu não sou covoeiro, tá?*] and, for that reason, could do nothing in response to the deaths. The president's 'so what?' [*E daí?*] spoke volumes about the past and present of national politics, and the sad reality that the great majority of the population is regarded not only as second class, but that their lives are disposable and worthless to those in positions of power. The country was built on the same 'so what?' every time the fate of slaves and deprived groups was exposed.

The terrible events associated with COVID-19 revealed a great deal again about the mindset and the political means of Brazilian conservative groups, whenever formal democracy and the rule of law become too high a price to pay. Already in August 2019, the president stimulated farmers to in the Amazon region to promote 'day of fire' along the BR-163 motorway, in southwest of the State of Pará. The consequence was that several cities were covered by dense clouds of smoke.² Bolsonaro, as the palpable manifestation of the mythical boa constrictor, did everything in his power to favour the virus and dismiss the suffering of millions of families. In the middle of June 2020, when the country was approaching 900,000 official cases and more than 44,000 official deaths (the total number, in March 2023, was more than 37 million cases and 700,000 deaths), the president continued to express disregard for the loss of human lives, and the country still had no health minister (as mentioned, the ministry had been occupied by a group of army generals and colonels with no health training, but who had doubled their salaries to around US\$ 200,000). In his daily public meetings with supporters at the entrance to the presidential residence (encounters which grew so tense that the main TV channels and newspapers removed their journalists due to the risk of assault by fanatical supporters and vicious abuse from the president himself, which had repeatedly occurred), Bolsonaro concentrated on virulent attacks

against any opposition movements and on trying to protect his clan from mounting accusations of corruption and mismanagement, including allegations made directly to Supreme Court judges. His only comments on the COVID-19 crisis were to defend useless drugs such as Chloroquine and Proxalutamide, incite his followers to invade hospitals to check whether there was any spare capacity (which would supposedly indicate that the situation was not too bad, ignoring measures taken by hospitals and state governors to increase hospital capacity) and, implicitly, insult medical professionals.

The above is just a brief account of a much more complex and extremely upsetting public health catastrophe (the rate of daily deaths was the highest in the planet, with the collapse of the health system in parts of the country and serious evidence of mismanagement and corruption investigated by a special commission of the Senate), but it illustrates how the legacy of the colonial past has never really disappeared or healed. The Coronavirus pandemic was just one of many such moments when the reality of the situation faced by the most vulnerable and exposed social groups has been highlighted, justifying the unapologetic use of the word genocide. Not unexpectedly, the social group with the highest vulnerability and largest number of victims and deaths, proportionately, was the indigenous population. The genocidal attack was already being promoted by the Bolsonaro government before the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite being told by the Supreme Court, the government did not adopt any of the measures imposed by the judiciary and continued to downplay the significance of the pandemic and challenge the number of victims. The president just shrugged his shoulders and repeatedly said that it was business as usual, given that ‘everybody dies one day’. As a result, the main thing the indigenous population could do was to take action independently of the health authorities and erect barriers to isolate their communities from outside contact. That is exactly what the Guarani–Kaiowa tried to do, making use of the efficient coordination between external representatives and local leaders. Nonetheless, it was difficult to secure complete social segregation considering the need to go to regional towns to collect the meagre support offered by the government. In the next section, it will be presented the conceptual framework – the geocide–genocide–massacre nexus – that will inform the analysis of Kaiowicide.

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 invaders, that is, it was nobody’s property, free to be grabbed by those moving from the East hungry for profit. Ultimately, the main tool used by the Europeans to create the modern world was outright genocide, which paved the way for their territorial and extractive plans and for the consolidation of a

mercantilist economy based on slavery and racially driven killing. This 'expansion of the frontier, and the suppression of Indian rebellions, provided a continuing pretext for both genocidal massacres and enslavement' (Robins, 2010, p. 311). 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 destabilisation and destruction 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. 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.

The primary motive for the elimination of the autochthone nations has been land grabbing and settler colonisation (but not always, as in the case of the fur trade in Canada or the exploitation of labour in the Peruvian mines). This rationale of displacement and conquest continued to underpin national development and state building when the management of the former colonies was transferred to newly formed 'independent' governments. Evans and Thorpe 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 (Evans & Thorpe, 2001). Indigenocide serves to analyse 'those circumstances where one, or more peoples, usually immigrants, deliberately set out to supplant a group or groups of other people whom as far as we know, represent the Indigenous, or Aboriginal peoples of the country that the immigrants usurp' (Moses, 2004, p. 27). It 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 scrutinise it further under the four following conditions.

First, the contested question of intentionality and the perennial difficulty to demonstrate intent. Fortunately, the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide already stated that indirect acts of violence and incidental measures, such as the spread of contagious diseases, can also amount to genocide. It means that indigenocide can happen with without the direct and more explicit elimination of social and ethnic groups. Second, and related to the previous item, indigenocide cannot be 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 2014, p. 82). In effect, the historical experience shows that in

almost all indigenous genocides, including the decimation of entire nations in the 16th century in the Americas, most victims perished in the course of short-term clashes interspersed with long phases of low belligerence but sustained antagonism and brutal treatment by the state and by companies or groups of individuals in search of resources, land or labour. The genocide of indigenous peoples is normally lived and endured over several years or decades, during which the victims are not passive but try to react and resist whenever the conditions are ripe (Moses, 2008).

Third, 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 political-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 political economy of indigenocide 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 20th 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).

Forth, it is certainly 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. The genocidal activity is dialectically connected with, and predicated upon, the subtraction of the indigenous world, what will be considered here as *geocide*. The phenomenon of *geocide* 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. It reflects the language and technology of colonisation, which gradually eliminates the remaining opportunities for indigenous people to maintain their collective and

individual lives. Geocide is basically the more permanent driving-force underpinning the socio-spatial relationship between indigenous people and the potential perpetrators of genocide. Furthermore, 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. Massacres involving indigenous people typically occurred during and after a wave of mass immigration and the clearing of land for agricultural purposes, resulting in significant numbers of deaths and contributing for the decline of the native population. In schematic terms, indigenous genocides are predicated upon geocide and the occurrence of massacres.

To be precise, 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. Geocide, in particular, 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. World subtraction, which is implicit in geocide, is more than just the grabbing of land and resources, but entails the erosion of existing or potential social relations. 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 & Jonassohn, 1990, p. 28). It is emblematic that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, passed in 2007, 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. In this sense, 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.

The genocide of native population is, thus, the contingent and concentrated manifestation of more perennial and dispersed forms of socio-spatial violence involved in the eradication of the indigenous world (geocide). The long and gradual unfolding of geocide – according to a political 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. Geocide is the world subtraction caused by the arrival of new groups and the imposition of new socio-economic relations, whilst 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, whilst 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 political-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 precisely the moments when genocides take place. 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.

It is important to likewise consider that indigenous genocides are related to structural and historically persistent disadvantages experienced not only by the ancestral population but also by Afro-Brazilians and wide segments of the working class. It is, therefore, an expression of white supremacy and discrimination against the poor and the non-white. The brutality of those discriminatory attacks is always rationalised in the name of progress and nation building. Already the father of Brazilian anthropology, the physician Nina Rodrigues claimed, in a very influential book published in 1894, that the indigenous population had no aptitude for civilisation and, even when imprisoned and forced to work for the 'superior' whites, would maintain their degenerate 'nature'. Nina Rodrigues affirms that the indigenous individual has a much lower comprehension of morality. It led to a bitter pessimism about the 'mixing of the races' was replaced in the first half of the 20th century by the ideology of 'racial democracy' as a positive and central feature of Brazilian society (Schwarcz, 1999). With the military-republican-positivistic coup d'état of 1889, the mainstream political game was to tacitly disguise socio-spatial differences in the name of formal, liberal liberties. Most indigenous people and Afro-Brazilians secured only formal citizenship, but they were also expected to remain passive workers in farm fields, industries, domestic kitchens and urban peripheries. If the Afro-descendants were associated with the stereotype of fathers of Brazilian music and cuisine, the indigenous peoples were frozen and pigeon-holed in the romantic ideas about primitivism, savagery and closeness to an abstract 'nature'. The situation in Brazil is not different than in other South American countries – notably Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru – where indigenous peoples suffer from the combined power of internal colonialism and foreign neo-colonialism. That is why indigenous movements, in alliance with other types of

grassroots mobilisations, are struggles of resistance and emancipation. It is a perennial struggle for political-economic autonomy and reaction against imperialist forces, which are fundamentally a demand for the re-founding of national states.

The above conceptualisation of the 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. An indigenous genocide is basically a consequence of an attempt to transform and expropriate an indigenous group's whole world through denial of their very existence and undermining of their ethnic identity (geocide). 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. Indigenous peoples are certainly victims of genocide because of who and where they are, which is ideologically transformed into something incompatible with the socio-spatial objectives of people who have become antagonists because of specific historical circumstances. That is the case of Kaiowicide.

Kaiowicide: Consolidating the Power of Agribusiness and Extractivism

Informed by the geocide–genocide–massacre nexus discussed in the previous pages, it can be more easily comprehended that the socio-spatial trajectory of the Guarani–Kaiowa in the State of 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). 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. Each indigenous group is evidently unique and the defining features of the Guarani–Kaiowa include precisely their ability to preserve their language (Guarani) and maintain a relatively large and unified social identity amidst a series of interrelated genocidal attacks. It has been reported in

several documentaries, movies and UN reports in recent years (as the documentary 'Guavira Season' released in 2022) and 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. 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.

The Brazilian state and the country's stronger political-economic players have always tried, if often covertly, to handle the indigenous population through a genocidal device, that is, the systematic endeavour to confine, undermine and interrupt social reproduction and meaningful spatial attachments. Subverting Hamlet's verses, to be 'Indian' in Brazil is not to be Brazilian, according to those in control of Brazilianness. The unspeakable truth – obvious to most – is that the country was formed, and exists in its current form, on the basis of an uncatalogued, but nevertheless immense, number of indigenous genocides. This macabre political-economic predisposition, which is a true cornerstone of Brazil, was bluntly exposed in a document produced by a group of Catholic bishops in 1973, during the brutal military dictatorship (1964–1985), with the expressive title 'The Indian: The One Who Must Die' [*O Índio: Aquele que Deve Morrer*]. Genocide is a generalised crime that was widely committed in the past and continues to be perpetrated in the present, not as something incidental or random, but as a historical necessity for the construction of a highly hierarchical nation in the image and likeness of its 'elite'. Separate from the legalistic requirement to attribute individual guilt, the collective and civilisational responsibilities for the use of genocide as a political-economic instrument are, therefore, evident and easy to determine. Genocidal liabilities are located, for example, in the tradition of manipulating legal codes and, later, ignoring even the few weak articles in the law that could offer some perspective of hope. Particularly those living in remote parts of the Amazon had their best hope precisely in the maintenance of geographical isolation to avoid or delay the pressure from farmers, miners and engineers.

Genocidal trends in the Amazon mean that for those caught in the eye of the hurricane-called-development life is increasingly destabilised by the commodification of every aspect of existence, and the search for food and survival rapidly turned into a daily struggle. The more the economic frontier developed and local production patterns imitated the main economic centres, the poorer and more marginalised the indigenous people became, often leading to genocidal situations in response to resistance from the survivors of frontier-making. Sadly, the national state firmly operates in favour of illegality and widespread impunity, with very few exceptions. The only case in Brazil – and one of only a few in the world – when anti-genocide legislation was used effectively was in 1993, to convict five goldminers for the slaughter of 16 Yanomami from the Haximu community on the border with Venezuela. In total, 22 miners working illegally in the area were involved in the alleged assassination of 80 isolated Yanomami, but these numbers are impossible to confirm (only three very distressed survivors were found). In this ferocious attack, the criminals shot not only young

men but also women, old people and children, including a baby who was hacked with a machete. In a historic decision, the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) convicted the five perpetrators, unanimously upholding the previous decision. However, the perpetrators of the Haximu massacre were quickly released, and one even returned to mine illegally on Yanomami land and was recaptured during another operation to remove miners from the indigenous territory. The Yanomami land, like the territories of most other indigenous peoples in the continent, continues to be systematically invaded, the forest invariably destroyed, the rivers polluted, and the people hounded and butchered, as happened during the Bolsonaro administration and tragically revealed by the new government in January 2023.³

In that context of repeated and unrestrained indigenous genocides, the most recent and ongoing process affecting the Guarani–Kaiowa since the 1970s – described here as Kaiowcide – corresponds to the cross-scale effort to consolidate 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. 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, whilst 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 (geocide).

The expression ‘Kaiowcide’ is useful because of its semantic connotations, as it has the advantage of being immediately comprehensible and connected with the same series of words as genocide and jewicide, as proposed by the linguist Gilles Petrequin and the historian Arno Mayer, whilst it is capable of recording the genocidal tragedy in all its terrible detail, without trivialising or mystifying it (Calimani, 1999). It is, in that sense, comparable also to the diaspora, the oppression and the killing of civilians described as kurdicide, among other similar processes affecting Armenians, Palestinians and other nations (Tololyan, 1987). 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. Whilst new legislation in Brazil, since 1988, 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 many life elements. Despite legal and constitutional improvements in the last three decades, 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). 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.

It is exactly 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 because of the ability and determination of the Guarani–Kaiowa to fight for what they consider legitimate demands. The main argument here is that Kaiowcide is a form of genocide that has occurred exactly 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. In historical terms, Kaiowcide corresponds to the violence and deception of neoliberalised agribusiness (as the present-day stage of geocide), which is both explicit and embedded in aggressive mechanisms of mass production and elitist property rights. 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. 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.

This more recent genocidal phase combines 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 vis-à-vis previous genocides, 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 and *conquistadores* in the past (Chamorro, 2015). Even so, there is a subtle but important difference between prior 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 *bandeirantes* and *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, whilst 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 aetiology 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 politicicide, gendercide and culturicide, was certainly present in the previous two phases of the long Guarani–Kaiowa genocidal experience, but the important difference is that in the past the aim was to assimilate and proletarianise the indigenous population, whilst under Kaiowcide the goal is to contain the possibility of political insurgency 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 politicicide, as the victims have been targeted because of the perpetrators' prejudices against Guarani heritage and ethnicity. Moreover, it is also more than ethnocide (as conceptualised by Mann, 2005) because there has been a clear intention to kill the leaders of the indigenous mobilisation. It also has elements of culturicide, but goes beyond that because Kaiowcide entails forced movement and murder. In practice, all these processes converge and reinforce each other. As a result, Kaiowcide has not only lasted for several years, but has created a self-reinforcing mechanism in the stimulation of novel forms of reaction and counteraction. It is illustrative the following extract of an open letter issued by the community in the Dourados-Amambaieguá I indigenous land (known as tekoha Tey Kuê, Caarapó) on 24 January 2018 (translations by the author):

'No more terror against our communities, no more oppression, no more massacres, no more trying to de-indianise us, no more trying to de-territorialise us, this model has not served anyone until now, if not the powerful in this country, let us live free, being ourselves within our traditional lands. (...) All those who fight in defence of life, do not allow more injustices, do not allow more genocide against our Guarani–Kaiowa people, do not allow more evictions, every Indian who dies is a bit of his history that dies too, join us. For the land, for more life, justice and freedom, we will resist!'

There exists, therefore, 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 supplementary genocidal measures. The agribusiness community and state armed forces certainly 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. The strength of mainstream political-economic trends is entirely dependent on the brutality of the state apparatus, the inscrutability of the legal system and the inflated 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. 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. Highly prestigious leaders live in apparently destitute conditions, whilst retaining voice and influence because of their knowledge, religious status and ability to provide effective guidance.

But it is the very resistance of the Guarani–Kaiowa that further fuels Kaiowcide. It constitutes a coordinated and renovated 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 and regional development model. Distinct from the graphic narratives of other contemporary genocidal processes, the victims of Kaiowcide are not calculated in thousands of deaths. The total number of fatalities in the last four decades, including the murders of leaders and community members using firearms and other weapons, amounts to several hundred victims, which is certainly significant in a population of around 50,000. Nonetheless, this is only a small fraction of the total (mostly unreported) losses due to road accidents, suicides of adults and teenagers, child mortality and deaths related to the miserable conditions in the reservations, encampments and shanty towns. In other words, 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 inadequate 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 by the others 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 has been imposed by the perpetrators of genocide and reinforced by constantly renewed feelings of hatred towards indigenous people. Furthermore, the reductionist *modus operandi* of the agribusiness sector, which reduces ecosystems to farmland and biodiversity to a few varieties of a single crop, echoes the pressures of Kaiowcide.

Similar to other regional and global experiences, the Brazilian society has become increasingly individualistic and dysfunctional because of mass consumption pressures and the growing role played by fundamentalist groups and evangelical churches with a

message of individualism and a focus on personal success (as well as condemnation of central elements of Guarani–Kaiowa identity). The sense of a shared social purpose has been largely eroded by the combined forces of conservatism, individualism and privatisation that have challenged the role of the state as protector and ultimate provider (Sposati, 2018). Very few people have been directly involved in the physical elimination of indigenous persons, but large sections of the population have been indirectly complicit in perpetuating anti-indigenous trends and have indirectly contributed to indigenous genocides including Kaiowcide. Regional development and agribusiness in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul have been established through productivist, short-lived economic goals, whilst most of local society has tended to be intolerant towards ethnic diversity and the conservation of ecosystems (both considered superfluous and unimportant), all of which has been instrumental for the advance of Kaiowcide. All these embarrassing abhorrent trends became even more pertinent after the election of Bolsonaro, who at last provided a ‘legitimate’ reason for the violence and elitism of the agribusiness economy. Sadly, the end of his administration in 2023 did not destabilise the power and the hegemony of the Brazilian political economy that has become excessively reliant on agribusiness and resource extractivism. It means that Kaiowcide is far from over and the daily struggle to continue to exist is fiercer than ever.

A Lived, Daily Struggle to Survive Kaiowcide

In the previous sections it was argued that Kaiowcide is, effectively, the most recent phase of a long process that has, since the 17th 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 that came with the early European invaders that reached the Plata Basin and inaugurated a lasting geocide. Whilst the focus of public policies 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’. Behind a background to the actual genocide, the trend of aggression and world robbery – geocide – intensified in the second half of the last century and 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 and stimulate land grabbing, the collective decision was made to start a coordinated reoccupation of ancestral areas lost to development, which triggered a corresponding reaction from farmers and the authorities in the format and language of Kaiowcide. In practice, it 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 in the midst of a genocide.

The contradictions and immediatist results of agrarian expansion in Brazil are vividly present in the hegemony of agribusiness-based development. Soybean exports are not taxed in Brazil due to the 1996 Kandir Law that exempted from the payment of ICMS tax the exports of primary and semi-finished products and which has become a perverse incentive for further land clearing. Likewise, the introduction of the 2012 Forest Code launched a land registry mechanism – the rural environmental registry (CAR) – to monitor and control deforestation, but the practical results have been negligible because of the lack of regulatory enforcement. The gap between the legal framework and socio-ecological degradation and tensions on the ground widened significantly after the 2018 election of President Bolsonaro, who came to power with a political manifesto that was formally in favour of reducing environmental and social safeguards. The rise of strong neo-conservative platforms (in Brazil, Italy, United Kingdom and USA, etc.) seems to invigorate the prospect of opening new frontiers and expose the old exclusionary rationalities that always underpinned capitalist frontier making.

Because of the multiple difficulties in the small areas where they currently live or seek refuge, the Guarani–Kaiowa are relentlessly propelled into a daily anti-genocidal struggle for social and physical survival. In the words of Quijano (2000, 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 heroic attempt to retake lost land [*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, and according to the same sources, 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. There is palpable apprehension in the air over the feeling that the entire population is under attack and their future being compromised day by day. Kaiowicide is social, psychological, biophysical and existential.

Unlike sister indigenous groups in the Amazon and other parts of Mato Grosso, who fight for the preservation of ecosystems and resources in areas that are relatively consolidated and accepted as ethnic territories, the Guarani–Kaiowa are still in the early stages of the struggle to retake their land from hostile farmers. In the meantime, there is a need to subsist in very difficult material conditions, with almost no hunting or fish left, and limited land and resources to practice agriculture. Hunger and unemployment thrive among a social group living in the middle of what is basically a vast *soyscape* (the landscape of soybean farms) established over land ‘borrowed’ from them. The everyday life of most people takes place in a fuzzy,

bewildering space between the concrete losses of the present and the uncertain configuration of the future. This leaves the Guarani–Kaiowa cornered in an impossible situation and obliges them to become more and more indigenous in order to survive, but the hegemonic reaction of the non-indigenous society is to make them less and less human. Most indigenous individuals, even many living in the few official reservations, long to return to the land of their parents and grandparents. Even those who seem largely integrated in the non-indigenous world cultivate the memory and existential reference of the land lost to mainstream development. The general sentiment is like being in the intermezzo of a turbulent ordeal that has lasted several decades and will hopefully be resolved, one glorious day, with the return to the area from where the family was expelled. In the final document of the annual *Aty Guasu* assembly in 2016, a direct message was sent to the agribusiness sector and their paramilitary militias:

‘Although you are murderers and continue to attack our tekoha, we will not take any steps back in the fight for our lands which were stolen, and each one who falls dead because of you will be another reason to strengthen our struggle. With each shot, a new step; with each grave that is opened, a new land will be retaken. We guarantee that’.

Three years later, at the 2019 *Aty Guasu*, its official declaration, which made direct reference to the genocidal process under way:

‘We see daily the lack of justice and impunity for those who for decades have been using all measures to bring about the genuine genocide of our people. But we do not see murderers of our leadership being tried and convicted. On the other hand, we witness the criminalisation, persecution and murder of our leaders who fight and claim our rights. (...) We also ask all international human rights organisations and societies from all countries of the world to closely monitor and support our reality and our historic struggle for justice and the realisation of our rights in the face of the absurdity of Brazilian indigenous policy and help us prevent further tragedies, a perennial plan of past governments and executed even more drastically by the current administration, to avoid the development of even more genocides’.

Although from the perspective of the Guarani–Kaiowa 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. 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, a group of 24 Guarani labourers, four of whom were aged only 15, and their families, including six young children, were freed by the authorities after secretly contacting an indigenous community leader. The group had been forced to stay on the farm because of unpaid debts and had to live in miserable conditions, sleeping on thin and dirty mattresses in minuscule, cold rooms, with appalling kitchen and toilet facilities.⁴ 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.

Despite all the difficulties, 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. If the reoccupation of farmland became even more dangerous during the openly proto-fascist and pro-indigenous genocide government of Bolsonaro between 2019–2022, this has not curbed the determination of indigenous communities to demand that the state resolve the dispute and allow the indigenous families to return to the land of their ancestors. It could be argued that 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 strong will to be recognised as a distinctive and valued social group. In that regard, the Guarani–Kaiowa may be 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 the tragic consequences of Kaiowcide.

Conclusions

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 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 political-economic legacy (Ioris, 2020b). The Guarani–Kaiowa had to be partially assimilated and their social institutions severely undermined so that they could be exploited through depersonalised 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. Meaningful social and economic justice requires a shift to moral inclusion, what needs to be promoted and sustained at all levels and locations to avoid recreating injustices (Opotow et al., 2005). 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.

A contemporary genocide such as Kaiowicide cannot be judged only in terms of the number of people, the extension of reservations, seats in the parliament or media coverage, but must first and foremost be ascertained by the monstrousness of past and present relations between indigenous and non-indigenous social groups, which in the case of the Mato Grosso do Sul State continue to be based on violence, neglect and racism. Despite the institutionalisation of a new ministry dedicated to the indigenous question by the left-wing Lula administration since 2023, it is unclear if the perverse power of the agribusiness sector will be somehow reduced. This uncomfortable balance between some hope but persistent indigenous genocides is still like a shadow hanging over the Brazilian national government and sectors of civil society. Finally, 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 political-economic processes. There is in place 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. It means that 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 (Cornell & Jorgensen, 2022). The Guarani–Kaiowa are already doing this extremely 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 one day end, Kaiowicide.

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Notes

1. Reported by the Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, 1 May 2019.
2. Brasil de Fato, *Estimulados por Bolsonaro, Fazendeiros Promovem "Dia do Fogo" na Amazônia*. Internet article published on 15 August 2019 [accessed on 12 March 2023, <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2019/08/15/estimulados-por-bolsonaro-fazendeiros-promovem-dia-do-fogo-na-amazonia>].
3. Reuters, *Evidence of 'Genocide' among Brazil's Indigenous Yanomami, says Minister*. Internet article published on 23 January 2023 [accessed on 09 March 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/evidence-genocide-among-brazils-indigenous-yanomami-says-minister-2023-01-23>].

4. Repórter Brasil, *Sem Máscaras e Endividados. 24 Indígenas Guarani São Resgatados de Trabalho Escravo em Fazenda do MS*. Internet article published on 9 July 2020 [accessed on 13 March 2021, <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2020/07/sem-mascaras-e-endividados-24-indigenas-guarani-sao-resgatados-de-trabalho-escravo-em-fazenda-do-ms>].

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