

ABSTRACT

Aerial photographs in which indigenous people are attempting to defend themselves by pointing their bows and arrows toward the airplane are ingrained in the social imaginary when considering isolated communities. As these people occupy territories from the Brazilian Amazon rainforest that are disputed by many players, the prevailing narrative associated with the aerial images is often warlike, with “the dangerous savages” pitched against “the workers and conquerors victimised by a people who do not work”. This article proposes re-examining overhead shots of Brazilian indigenous lands by referencing editorials widely published in both local and international press since the 1940s, thereby transforming these images into visual stigmas that depict peoples in isolation. Conversely, it is analysed how techniques of aerial photography have been employed by indigenous peoples over the last decade and how perceptions are altered when the bird’s-eye perspective is used by groups belonging to the regions photographed. By presenting proposals for reconfiguring the relations between spectators, image-makers and photographed subjects, this work fosters counter-narratives to photographic points of view that have historically served a colonial perspective. Thus, it is argued that indigenous aesthetics are yet to be incorporated into the spheres of knowledge, governance, self-representation and cultural production.

keywords

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY
DECOLONIAL NARRATIVES
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ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE
ISOLATED INDIGENOUS PEOPLE
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The Bird's Eye From Up Above or From Down Below: Changing Perspectives on Aerial Photography of Indigenous Lands in the Brazilian Amazon

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Aerial images in which indigenous people are seen pointing bows and arrows in the air towards the airplane, from where these scenes were captured, belong to the social imagery when considering isolated indigenous peoples, with this kind of picture of the most vulnerable people on the planet having been reproduced over decades. The Brazilian State currently recognises the existence of 114 records of the presence of isolated indigenous people in the Amazon¹. This number may vary depending on the availability of information from FUNAI – Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas (the government agency responsible for the protection of indigenous peoples). Beyond proving the existence of isolated groups of people, their portrayal offers us several readings and reflections about this ‘photographed event’ (Azoulay 2008, 2012) and its ways of reproduction over the years.

The term ‘isolated indigenous peoples’ refers specifically to groups characterised by an absence of permanent relations or infrequent interaction with either non-indigenous or other native communities. This isolation constitutes a right to self-determination for these groups, with historical records showing that the choice to pursue isolation can be the result of encounters with negative effects on their societies, such as epidemics, physical violence, spoliation of natural resources, or other events that render their territories vulnerable, threatening their lives, rights, and historical continuity. Respecting the wishes of these communities depends on NGOs, institutions, civil society, and especially on the government of each country in its commitment to their protection.

¹ <https://www.gov.br/funai/pt-br/atuacao/povos-indigenas/povos-indigenas-isolados-e-de-recente-contato-2/povos-isolados-1>

Apart from classifications in levels of contact and their singularities with respect to different ethnic groups, we will study the imagery of communities that desire total non-contact alongside other groups that, despite continuing to demand the rights of their peoples and their territories, have relationships and are integrated into the surrounding society. When we perceive the power relations established during the 'event of photography' (Azoulay 2008, 2012), another event becomes necessary: that of reviewing the photograph itself in order to have the opportunity to reconsider it from a perspective other than the hegemonic. As Joaquín Barriandos suggests, all the racialising narratives and imaginaries that promote a monoepistemic logic in the midst of cultural globalisation must be contested (Barriandos 2011:25). This article proposes re-examining aerial images of Brazilian indigenous lands by referencing articles that have been widely published in both local and international press, thereby transforming these photographs into visual stigmas that depict peoples in voluntary isolation. Conversely, we will analyse how techniques of aerial photography have been employed by indigenous peoples over the last decade and how perceptions are altered when the bird's-eye perspective² is used by groups belonging to the regions photographed.

² A bird's eye view is an overhead shot taken with the camera positioned at approximately a 90-degree angle above the photographed scene.

The making of visual stigma

A brief retrospective in the history of the representation of Brazil is necessary if we intend to approach the photographic medium. According to Ariella Azoulay, the origin of photography dates to 1492 when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas, at a time when Europeans were encouraged to explore these 'New Worlds' (Azoulay 2019: 24). In the case of the land later delimited as Brazil, therefore, photography would be born eight years later with the arrival of Pedro Álvares Cabral and his Portuguese delegation. In this article we will not delve into the history of the imagetic construction of the country. Rather, we will approach photography as a medium dating from the nineteenth century onwards, departing from the principle that proposing a new understanding of the images depicting indigenous peoples requires a return to the first visual descriptions of these peoples. These early portrayals date back to 1500 with Pero Vaz de Caminha's letter to his king, D. Manuel I, upon his arrival in what would become Brazil. Although it was not an illustrated letter and remained unpublished until 1773, through his text he provided the first foreign visual impressions of the inhabitants of that place:

They were dark brown and naked, and had no covering for their private parts, and they carried bows and arrows in their hands. They all came determinedly

towards the boat. Nicolau Coelho made a sign to them to put down their bows, and they put them down. [...] It was not possible to speak to these people or understand them. [...] they are a savage, ignorant people... (Ley 1943 : 42, 47, 52)

Even without offering resistance, since these were the first moments of contact and the inhabitants were not yet aware of the negative consequences of these encounters for their people, Vaz de Caminha emphasised the bows and arrows and their 'uncivilised' behaviour, while viewing them as non-threatening, unlike subsequent reports, such as the letter from Américo Vespúcio in 1502. When it comes to images, these characteristics have left the realm of the imaginary and taken shape through the series *Cenas de Antropofagia no Brasil* (Scenes of Cannibalism in Brazil), which is considered the first illustration of the country. Without ever having been to Brazil, Théodore de Bry made these engravings in 1596, based on the reports by the German Hans Staden (*Brasiliana Iconográfica*, n.d.) and the collection was translated into several European languages. The images represent the Indigenous as barbarians and devourers of humans. It can thus be noticed that, from the very first illustrated images of Brazil, the construction of a sensationalist dichotomic visual narrative between 'savages' and 'civilised' had begun.

The earliest representations of the population from the country provided the guidelines for how various authors would come to approach the imagery of Brazil over the years. To perpetuate territorial exploitation, the cartographic-imperial rhetoric and the Eurocentric *coloniality of seeing* allowed the totality of the New World, understood as an image-archive, to be deemed a territory populated by natural cannibals and therefore defined as an ontologically cannibalistic territory (Barriendos 2011: 19), despite an awareness that cannibalistic practices were restricted to certain groups and cultures. As for the term 'cannibals' in Brazilian reality, it should be emphasised that it would only be used to refer to the Tupi people, who were actually 'anthropophagous'. Although the two terms have become synonymous, cannibals feed generally on human flesh, while the Tupi ate their enemies exclusively for *revenge* (Carneiro da Cunha 1990: 99).

If we consider photography, we realise even more evidently that the technology was an instrument of colonisation and favoured the creation of subjects to be vanquished and lands to be occupied. With the popularisation of the photographic medium in the 1940s, thanks to its increasing use by the press, it is possible to highlight one specific way of registering communities that can be described as the most hegemonic: from the air, without them knowing that their images are being fixed on film. This history begins in Brazil through the French photographer Jean Manzon (1915-1990), who imported to the country the way of practising photo-journalism by illustrated magazines such as *Paris-Soir*, *Match* and *Vu*. Manzon

joined *O Cruzeiro*, the most widely circulated magazine in the country, after having passed through the DIP (Press and Propaganda Department), the censorship and ideology propagation agency of Getúlio Vargas' (1882-1954) government, where he became known as the president's favourite photographer. He not only knew how to produce the photography desired to meet the interests of the powerful to whom he was close, but also maintained relations with the international press, to the point of selling government propaganda as journalistic content (Rebatel 1991: 46), which pleased the president.

Brazil, at that time, was under the dictatorial regime of the *Estado Novo* (1937-1945), established after a coup d'état led by Vargas. Although the administration shared some characteristics with European fascism, it was not a fascist regime, nor did it seek to replicate any European fascist model, whether Portuguese, Italian, or Spanish. Instead, its nature was authoritarian, modernising and pragmatic (Schwarcz and Starling 2015: 375). It is important to highlight the context that Brazil was immersed in at that time to better understand how images were intended to translate these values, especially through the most visual of them: modernity. Before a country can become modern, it must be imagined as such. The concept of modernity in Brazil was envisioned and constructed in the public gaze through the pages of *O Cruzeiro*. It was an image that depicted the triumphant spirit of a modern, rapidly developing nation. Besides contributing to the successful sales of the illustrated magazine, it was a conception aligned with the aspirations of both the government and the elites. One way to visualise the unfolding of modernity is as the occupation of 'voids' deliberately created to be occupied by construction projects that would enable the country to participate in the global capital order. With a fiction about to begin and a newly forged 'virgin' territory, Vargas launched the *Marcha para o Oeste* (March Westward), which sought to open paths to conquer and exploit the country's midwest region and to promote cooperation with the economically more developed areas near the coast. Thus, under the obstinacy of *order and progress*³, through systematic extermination practices, spaces previously described as empty were dominated. The 'desert' being a product, it is also a condition for the institutionalisation of the state apparatus (Uriarte 2021).

Manzon was the ideal photographer to express the desired project, since he possessed a repertoire and a foreign imaginary capable of framing the image of the country, and an expertise aligned with the formal experiences of European avant-garde modernism that could translate a sense of universal modernity. This construction and unveiling of the country were also much to the liking of the 'war survivor' photographer, who was exploring the country of his dreams⁴. As De Bry's collection was translated into several languages, so were Manzon's images printed

³ Order and progress is the national motto inscribed on the Brazilian flag.

⁴ For Jean Manzon's records of his perception of Brazil, see: Rebatel 1991.

⁵ Although the image may have been extracted from a cinematographic frame taken during the Roncador-Xingu expedition in which Manzon would not have been present, he never denied his authorship and until today the image is credited to him. Therefore, we will treat the images as having been effectively made by Manzon. For more information about this episode, see Maklouf Carvalho 2001.

⁶ The magazine wrote Chavantes, but the correct spelling is Xavante. The Xavante are the indigenous people who belong to the Xavante ethnic group.

⁷ See: Carneiro da Cunha 1992, Celestino de Almeida 2010, Fausto 2000, Pacheco de Oliveira and da Rocha Freire 2006.

in foreign magazines and books. Vargas relied on the photographer and his colleagues from *O Cruzeiro* magazine to document the achievements of his administration, affording Manzon rich knowledge of government affairs and strategy, helping him promote the country's image.

The photographer was given access to the *Roncador-Xingu* expedition – the most representative of the *Marcha para o Oeste* – where the first images of the Xavante people were captured and credited to him⁵. Originally published in the 24 June 1944 issue of *O Cruzeiro*, the visuals conquered the world and were widely published internationally. The reportage 'Confronting the Chavantes'⁶ was born from a reconnaissance flight under the command of Captain Basílio, the former personal pilot of the dictator President Vargas, over the region covered by the expedition. The images reveal the Xavante people trying to defend themselves from the 'flying creature' that flies over their village, pointing their bows and arrows toward the plane, unaware that the real attack taking place is far quieter than the noise of the turbines swooping over their lands. Inside that aircraft is a person who decides to press the shutter button on his camera to shoot them. As stated by Paul Virilo, the visual perspective from above, from watch towers to remote-sensing satellites, has the same function: the eye functioning as a weapon (Virilo 2009:3). [Fig. 1]

While the consequences for the lives of indigenous people caused by encounters with non-indigenous people by land or water are understood⁷, the question becomes what the effects are of contact made by air. In his testimony relating to



Fig. 1 – 'Enfrentado os Chavantes'. *O Cruzeiro*. June 24, 1944. Photograph by Jean Manzon; text by David Nasser. Magazine *O Cruzeiro*/Archive Diários Associados

the flights undertaken for aerial photography over his village in the context of the *Comissão Brasileira Demarcadora de Limites* (Brazilian Boundary Commission) in the 1960s, Davi Kopenawa, a shaman and political leader of the Yanomami people, provides an impression of the terror the plane may have caused among the Xavante people:

Yet what truly terrified everyone was their airplanes, which flew over our houses several times. No one had ever seen any before. The houses emptied out as soon as their roar could be heard! Men, women, and children ran off as fast as they could and scattered in the woods. The elders thought that these unknown flying beings could fall into the forest and burn everything as they crashed. They thought that we were all going to die and sometimes they were so frightened that they even cried as they talked about it! (Albert and Kopenawa 2013: 176)

The action of photographing something from above entails a verticalisation of the image, the creation of a superior, dominant gaze. Indeed, 'superior' literally means 'from above' and also 'better than ordinary', thus denoting hierarchy. This is a point of view that privileges a broad perspective, ideal to devalue both the communities whose bodies are depersonalised targets of destruction (Amad 2012: 71) 'down there' and those 'empty voids' that must be occupied. The images are made literally from top to bottom from this position of authority. Whoever is inside the plane has the power of narration, of silencing who is being photographed (Reubi 2022), and of deciding what will be exploited from those images and consequently from those people and places. In other words, the camera shutter contributes to the reproduction of imperial social divisions and can be defined as 'imperial shutters' (Azoulay 2019: 17).

With the power of narration, the title of the story 'confronting' the Xavante sets the tone of a warlike discourse, in which the non-Indigenous – the crew that was on board, the editors of the magazine, the readers, the State, Brazilians at large – need to confront the 'savages' below the aircraft. The last page of the reportage lists names under the heading 'Last victims of the Chavantes': a list of people who were supposedly murdered by the Xavante. This bellicose narrative that positions the Indigenous as 'dangerous savages', and the white men as 'the workers and conquerors who are victims of a people who do not work', justified the treatment given to those inhabiting areas to be explored by the *Marcha*. A symbol of progress, aerial photography promoted an 'integration' of communities and spaces through a process of conquest, exploitation of natural resources, and various forms

⁸ 'Indians shoot at plane. Tribe of fierce Brazilian savages war against a friendly flier with ancient bows and arrows'. *Life*. March 19, 1945, 70-72 https://books.google.fr/books?id=K1MEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pt-%20BR&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁹ See: Coimbra Jr and Welch 2014.

of violence against the people of the region. Effectively, social modernity, colonialism, and the aerial perspective are related, since this visuality acts as a persuasive means of understanding the world that indeed facilitates its control (Wilkinson 2008: 18). It is thus not difficult to understand the widespread acceptance and dissemination of overhead images at that time. Due to the accessibility of 'the empty lands', the extension of the Brazilian territory, and the scale of the mapping carried out, the top-down view facilitated the expansion of the *Marcha para o Oeste*. This type of perspective allied modernity with the spectacular, justified territorial conquest, and amply documented Vargas' project of taking progress to remote 'voids' forged in the country.

The headline of the *Life* magazine article which published the same images in the issue of 19 March 1945 further reinforces the tension of the encounter of the 'primitive' with the 'civilised': 'Indians shoot at plane. Tribe of fierce Brazilian savages war against a friendly flier with ancient bows and arrows'⁸. The words suggest that indigenous people, without defined ethnicity, using archaic means, attacked an inoffensive – and modern – aircraft. Indeed, planes were envoys of the modern world and usually dropped objects during flyovers as a way of enticing the communities into contact with this modernity. Several groups that resisted these contacts burned the gifts that came from the air. The Xavante are an indigenous ethnic group known for their resistance to such enticement, entailing a critical struggle to guarantee their own survival and the endurance of their culture⁹. These aerial images show the beginning of a process of resistance which is still alive in these peoples, despite the violence which has pervaded the relationship between them and the non-indigenous over many years.

A statement by a farm worker who came to occupy the land inhabited by the Xavante, even if reported a few years after these first contacts, shows how the flyovers to recognise the territory and from where the images were taken were initiating a colonial process over this community:

We spent three years opening up the forest. The Xavante were there... wild, without any knowledge of civilised people! We started throwing food and gifts over their village from small planes, every day at the same time: dried meat, candy, unrefined cane sugar, clothes, red cloths, a blanket made of cheap cloth... we could not give them any nice things. All this to distract the village and make sure the Indigenous stayed where we threw the presents. Meanwhile, Teles opened a road leading to São Félix... and they made their first camp. As soon as the Indigenous noticed the formation of the camp, they came closer. They came in groups. In a short time, the Indigenous had made their village in

front of the woodsmen's camp. And they continued receiving food from the hands of the civilised people¹⁰.

On the other hand, a testimony from a Xavante person shows that these contacts were made to murder the people or, at best, to attract them with the aim of making them contribute to the economic development of the lands they inhabited. The concept of *land* is not always conceived in the same way by different indigenous peoples. Some have a symbolic attachment to their territory based on a mythological and ancestral relationship, and for these groups it is extremely problematic to be displaced from their lands. For others, geographical borders are fluid, mobile and constantly expanding, and they do not define their identity in relation to a particular geography. Nevertheless, in economic and legal terms, land for indigenous people was never defined as a commodity, an object that could be transferred in individual transactions (Seeger and Viveiros de Castro 1979: 104,105). Aware that the land is not simply a commercial instrument, the invaders benefited from the Xavante's labour without offering financial or material compensation. Once the region was ready to create profits for the new occupants, the indigenous people were persuaded to accept being removed from their lands and to occupy other spaces. In this case, the survivors were deported under the sponsorship of the Brazilian military government, and an agrobusiness enterprise known as *Fazenda Suiã-Missu* was installed on their territory, which at the time was the largest latifundium in Brazil:

The indigenous people went to work with scythes, cutting down the forest to make pasture, landing strip for the farmers. Before Ariosto, the farmers had their workers kill the Indigenous. In Ariosto's time, the Indigenous came to the farm, where they received scythes, machetes, axes and food – like flour and unrefined cane sugar. The Indigenous who worked there received cows for the Xavante to eat. The Xavante helped to make the plantation, the airfield. [...] and then a village was built close to the farm. They worked with axes and scythes to make pasture, landing strip, to open up roads, from about 1960 until 1966 when they were taken away¹¹.

The indigenous people who lived on the *Marãwatsede* land were effectively removed from the area in 1966, following its occupation commanded by the farmer Ariosto Riva. After having worked for free for Riva and facing conflict with his employees and suffering hunger, approximately 230 Xavante were transferred by the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) aircraft to a farm 400 kilometres away. One week

¹⁰ Ficamos três anos abrindo a mata. Os Xavante estavam lá... bravos, sem conhecer civilizado! Começamos jogando comida e presentes de aviãozinho sobre a aldeia deles, todo dia à mesma hora: carne seca, bala, rapadura, roupa, panos vermelhos, cobertor de pano vagabundo... não podíamos dar coisas boas. Tudo isso para distrair a tribo e fazer os índios ficarem fixos no lugar onde jogávamos os presentes. Enquanto isso, Teles abria uma picada que saía em São Félix... e fizeram o primeiro acampamento. Logo que os índios perceberam a formação do acampamento, foram se aproximando. Vieram em grupos. Em pouco tempo os índios haviam feito a sua aldeia em frente ao acampamento dos mateiros. E continuaram recebendo a comida da mão dos civilizados. (entrevista de antigo trabalhador da fazenda, cf. *Jornal da Tarde*, SP, 21. 7.71) (apud Anônimo, 1991 : 11). Author's translation. Wenzel, Eugênio Gervásio. n.d. Laudo Antropológico referente à terra indígena Marãwãitsede Xavante. Proc, no 956790 – 5o Vara da Justiça Federal de Mato Grosso. <https://acervo.socioambiental.org/sites/default/files/documents/XVD00319.pdf>

¹¹ 'Os índios foram trabalhar em serviço de foice, de derrubada de mato – para formar pasto, campo de pouso para fazendeiro. Antes de Ariosto, os fazendeiros mandavam os peões matar os índios. No tempo de Ariosto, os índios se aproximaram da fazenda – onde recebiam foice, facão, machado, comida – farinha, rapadura. Os índios que trabalhavam lá recebiam vaca para os Xavante comerem. Xavante ajudou a fazer roça, campo de avião. [...] aí foi feito aldeia perto da fazenda. Trabalharam com machado, foice, para formar pasto, campo de pouso, para abrir estrada, a partir do ano 1960 mais ou menos até 1966 quando foram tirados de lá.' Author's translation. Wenzel, Eugênio Gervásio. n.d. Laudo Antropológico referente à terra indígena Marãwãitsede Xavante. Proc, no 956790 – 5o Vara da Justiça Federal de Mato Grosso. <https://acervo.socioambiental.org/sites/default/files/documents/XVD00319.pdf>

¹² After years of struggle against the attempt to erase their histories, the Xavante were able to return to the area. Their ancestral presence in the region before their displacement in 1966 was officially confirmed. For detailed information about the process, see the study that made use of visual forensic analysis methodologies, coordinated by Paulo Tavares: Tavares 2020.

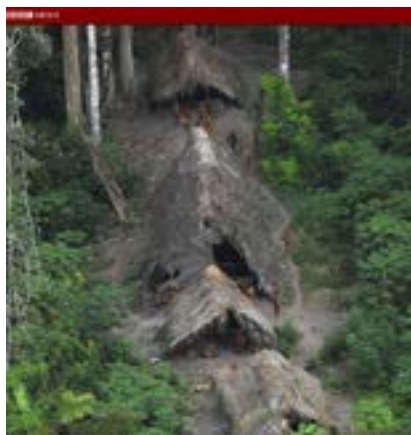
after the transfer, 70 of them died of measles. According to the final report of the National Truth Commission (CNV), from 1964 to 1988 ‘the violations were ‘systemic’ and resulted from actions that aimed to ‘produce demographic voids,’ that is, they functioned as instruments of a practice of governing indigenous populations and territories that we could call a *policy of erasure*’ (Tavares 2020: 20, emphasis in the original)¹².

Historically employed as a form of surveillance and implicitly as a tool of war, the top-down view is commonly used by various countries in the context of military operations: ‘The conflict that drove the development of both aerial photography and aviation concurrently – World War I – was performed as a cartographic war’ (Wilkinson 2008: 20). Besides interests of territorial conquest, exploitation and development, cartography reflects political and economic objectives. In Brazil it was no different, with the aerial perspective facilitating the mapping of territories previously belonged to indigenous people to be expropriated and explored. At that time the native peoples had no rights or guarantees, and their territories were not recognised. The Indigenous People Statute (Law 6001) was enacted in 1973 and the indigenous rights were only expressed in the 1988 Constitution. It can thus be argued that at that time they were considered non-citizens, whose rights, cultural and civilizational specificities were disregarded by the State.

Despite all the current debates about indigenous rights, the practice of taking aerial photographs of remote groups with people shooting arrows at airplanes has continued over the years and still exists in the twenty-first century. In 2008, Brazilian photographer Gleison Miranda produced a series of aerial snapshots of an isolated group in the northern Amazon, which can be viewed as a colour version of the images Manzon made in 1944. The pictures show frightened people, some hiding and others trying to protect themselves from the plane. Although they have their bows and arrows, we can see their position of disadvantage. The relationship of dominance and the vertical sovereignty are clear. The images recorded by Miranda, and published by FUNAI, travelled the world and were published in media such as The Guardian, BBC and National Geographic. [Fig. 2]

These same images are used in the membership brochures and various communication materials of the NGO Survival International. According to their website on 13 May 2023, they are ‘a movement of people from over 100 countries. Our vision is a world where tribal peoples are respected as contemporary societies and their human rights protected. We reject government funding so we can guarantee our absolute independence and integrity.’ The visuals are used as a way to justify the work carried out by the NGO, insofar as they are evidence of the existence of isolated indigenous groups in the world. In terms of strategy, it seems contradictory

Fig. 2 – Photograph by Gleison Miranda/Funai published in BBC News. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7426794.stm>



The tribe and photographed as its members pointed bows and arrows at an airplane flying overhead. Image: Gleison Miranda, Funai.

to use shots of isolated peoples defending themselves against those who produce these images as a form of protection for these same individuals. Is there another way of addressing the importance of demarcating indigenous territories for the protection of the isolated peoples without them having to be subjected to overhead flights to monitor and photograph them and thus prove their existence? For José Carlos dos Reis Meirelles, organiser of the mission that flew over the village and coordinator of FUNAI's Ethno-environmental Protection Front, publicising the photographs is necessary for civil mobilisation: 'I decided to disseminate them because the mechanisms (to protect these populations) have not been working. Either public opinion gets involved or they will die.'¹³ This article does not seek to analyse the work of NGOs or agencies that protect indigenous people, nor whether the photographic monitoring techniques used by aircraft are effective and bring real advantages for indigenous groups.¹⁴ What is being evaluated here are the images, their colonial character, and the narrative attributed to them. [Fig. 3]

The iconic image continued to be reproduced in the following years. In 2014, the photographer Lunae Parracho made new versions of it in Acre State, on the border with the Peruvian Amazon. In the visuals, the indigenous are pointing their bows and arrows towards the plane, the pilot, the photographer and thus to the camera as well. The shots were made available by the international news agency Reuters and can easily be accessed online.

Similarly to Manzon who was President Vargas' favourite photographer in the 1940s, Ricardo Stuckert, the photographer of President Lula since 2003, made new records in 2016 of the same group registered by Miranda, who had since changed location. Even if they had moved away and remained voluntarily isolated, these populations did not escape traditional aerial photographs. Once more they were taken by surprise and demonstrate a resistance to this type of contact. Regarding their attitudes, Meirelles, who was also onboard, stated: 'They are messages. Those arrows mean 'Leave us in peace. Do not disturb''¹⁵. Even though the communication was clear, the photographs were originally published in National Geographic under the headline 'Exclusive: Stunning New Photos of Isolated Tribe Yield Surprises' and were also released in El País and the BBC. According to Stuckert: 'I felt like I was a painter in the last century. To think that in the 21st century there are still people who have no contact with civilisation, living like their ancestors did 20,000 years ago—it is a powerful emotion,'¹⁶ Faced with the adventurous experience and the stereotypical scene of native peoples, it seems impossible not to reproduce that same click from inside the helicopter. Indeed, the flyover was actually part of a year-long project for Stuckert to photograph indigenous villages across the country. [Fig. 4]

The episode led to a statement from FUNAI¹⁷ highlighting the improper and illegal nature of the pictures, since there was no authorisation to fly over the area



Fig. 3 – Brochure of NGO Survival International. Photograph by Gleison Miranda, scanned by the author.

¹³ 'Resolvi fazer a divulgação porque os mecanismos (para proteger essas populações) não têm servido. Ou a opinião pública entra nisso ou eles vão dançar.' Author's translation. <https://g1.globo.com/Noticias/Brasil/0,,MUL583116-5598,00-%20GRUPO+DE+INDIOS+E+FOTOGRAFADO+PELA+VEZ+NO+ACRE.html>

¹⁴ On alternative techniques that use traces, vestiges and reports to prove the existence of isolated peoples and that were used in 1996 in Rondônia, in the demarcation of the Massaco Indigenous Land, see Pereira's master's thesis of 2018.

¹⁵ <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/photography/2017/10/exclusive-stunning-new-photos-of-isolated-tribe-yield-surprises>

¹⁶ <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/photography/2017/10/exclusive-stunning-new-photos-of-isolated-tribe-yield-surprises>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.br/funai/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2016/nota-sobre-a-publicacao-de-imagens-de-povo-indigena-isolado>

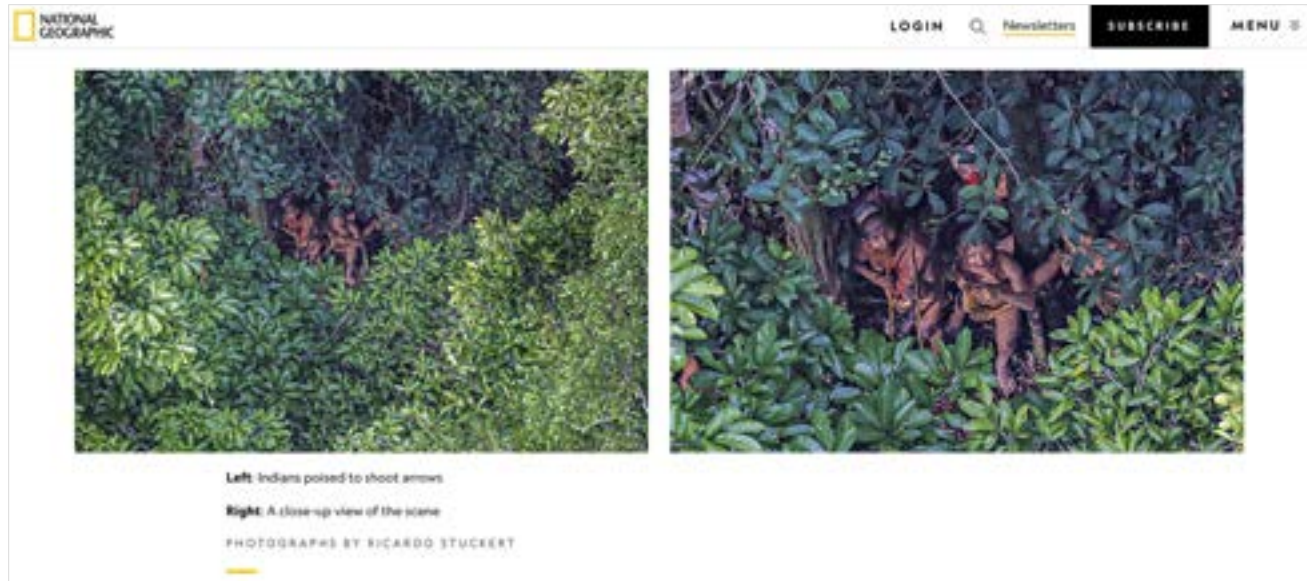


Fig. 4 – Exclusive: Stunning New Photos of Isolated Tribe Yield Surprises. Photograph by Ricardo Stuckert published in National Geographic. Available at <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/uncontacted-tribe-amazon-brazil-photos>

– despite the presence of Meirelles, the agency’s coordinator for over 40 years. Although the report affirmed that FUNAI would take measures to hold the authors and those involved accountable, and to safeguard the indigenous peoples being photographed, the images gained a new prominence in 2022 in the exhibition ‘*Povos originários: guerreiros do tempo*’, which has travelled through Brazil and Portugal. The snapshots are included in the chapter ‘Isolados’ of the eponymous bilingual publication¹⁸ which features images of indigenous people from eleven other ethnic groups posing for the photographer. As controversial as they may be, it can be argued that Stuckert’s photos are contemporary icons, just like Manzon’s, which have also figured in an author’s book¹⁹ and exhibition.

It is pertinent to observe that the widespread dissemination of aerial images as a cultural product highlights the popular incorporation of a military perspective in which those below are the targets of those flying over/photographing, while those above are the targets (even if not particularly threatened) of those below. Indeed, ‘the differences between military and non-military, citizens and non-citizens, those who target and those who are targeted’, as attested by Kaplan, ‘become operational as culture over time, circulating as ways of seeing, modes of making and reproducing art, industrial design and technologies, composing the ground of everyday life’ (Kaplan 2013: 21-22).

Before being categorised as such and up to the 1980s, isolated indigenous people were called *bravos* (angry) or *arredios* (elusive) (Ricardo and Fávero Gongora 2019: 20), the same adjectives given to undomesticated animals. Anthropologist Dominique Gallois explains that the term ‘indigenous peoples in voluntary isola-

¹⁸ Stuckert 2022.

¹⁹ Manzon 1955.

tion' has limitations and was used for political reasons, considering the state's protectionist intervention in the marginalised condition of society in which these groups found themselves. For her, it is important to understand that the autonomy of these groups is conditional on their protection. Since protective measures are something recent, Gallois also notes that isolated peoples do not represent 'virgin societies'. Most of these groups are descended from indigenous (including interethnic) segments that refused the colonial situation or recomposed by fugitives who regrouped in refuge areas. Thus, 'when it is asserted that isolated groups 'preserve' their socio-cultural integrity, it means that they maintain active cognitive and organisational mechanisms through which they are capable of interpreting and adapting to the most diverse and constantly renewed situations' (Gallois 1992:4).²⁰ The statement of Ailton Krenak, philosopher and indigenous leader of the Krenak people, regarding their demarcated land and the survival of his people, can be added to Gallois' theory: 'We live inside a small reserve, segregated by the Brazilian government, in a little concentration camp that the State made for the Krenak to survive. [...] We have endured so much offence... We have been resisting for 500 years'²¹ (Krenak 2018). Considering both analyses, we can recognise some of the reasons behind the use of such aerial photographs in brochures and press articles. They depict the stereotype of the wild and untamed indigenous at the same time as portraying the efforts of the State in promoting the 'preservation' of these communities.

Aesthetically similar and performing a militarised perspective, we can discern that the narrative attached to the images from the 1940s and the 2000s are not very different either. Regardless of the fact that the bodily expressions of the isolated peoples make clear the message that flyovers are not welcome, the first images functioned as a government campaign for *Marcha para o Oeste* and the second as a government campaign for FUNAI. The visual reproduction of these scenes, which primarily depict acts of resistance, helps to justify a 'just war', whose scheme remains the same over the centuries with only surface-level variations (Arruda 2001: 40). Therefore, it can be said that the indigenous people are practically invisibilised in these aerial images, being supporting actors of the *territory* that was once to be *conquered* and is now *protected*.

However, the current advertised 'protected territory' is not exempt from the popular narrative associated with such aerial images that there is 'too much land for too few people,' or that indigenous people are 'slackers who hinder the development of the territory'. This premise was commonly used to justify activities that put indigenous peoples' lives at risk during President Jair Bolsonaro's term (2019-2022). We can highlight the nomination of the missionary Ricardo Lopes Dias, associated with the *Missão Novas Tribos do Brasil* (MNTB), appointed to lead

²⁰ 'Quando se afirma que os grupos isolados "conservam" sua integridade sócio-cultural, entende-se que eles mantêm atuantes mecanismos cognitivos e organizacionais através dos quais são capazes de interpretar e de se adaptar à situações das mais diversas e constantemente renovadas.' Author's translation.

²¹ 'Vivemos dentro de uma pequena reserva, segregados pelo governo brasileiro, num campinho de concentração que o Estado fez para os krenak sobreviverem. [...] Já passamos por tanta ofensa... Nós estamos resistindo há 500 anos.' Author's translation. <https://expresso.pt/internacional/2018-10-19-Somos-indios-resistimos-ha-500-anos.-Fico-preocupado-e-se-os-brancos-vaao-resistir>

²² <https://novatribosdobrasil.org.br> During the preparation of this article, the slogan of the Brazilian website was changed to 'Reaching ethnicities until the very last'. Although it can still be seen on the Ethnos 360 website the intentions to continue the idea of the organisation's founder to 'reach the last tribe in our generation.'

²³ The Vale do Javari Indigenous Land is home to the biggest number of indigenous natives living in 'voluntary isolation' in Brazil and, very possibly, the world. (Marubo 2019: 125)

²⁴ <https://oglobo.globo.com/politica/ministerio-da-justica-exonera-missionario-da-coordenacao-de-indios-isolados-da-FUNAI-1-24768506>

FUNAI's coordination of isolated indigenous groups. The MNTB, linked to the American organisation Ethnos 360, aims to bring its church to all indigenous peoples, even those in isolation, as indicated by its slogan, 'Reaching tribes until the very last!'²² Dias was dismissed from his position by the Ministry of Justice after numerous reports of him facilitating the entry of missionaries into the Vale do Javari²³ and providing precise information about the locations of isolated groups.²⁴ As FUNAI is a State entity, its leadership, budget and commitment to protecting all indigenous people of the country are subject to change with each new government. It is important to note that the images themselves are not directly responsible for the extermination of populations and the predatory exploitation of territories, but they do contribute, together with the continuity of certain narratives, to a social imaginary about indigenous peoples that facilitates the justification and acceptance that these people depend on us for their development and that their territories should be exploited.

This study makes no mention of satellite images because they are not perceptible to indigenous people and thus not truly comparable to the perspective of a picture taken by a person. The cases discussed here concern aerial images that have identifiable authors who take responsibility for their actions. These photographers make a conscious choice to press the imperial shutter or to refrain from doing so. While ethical considerations and laws exist to prevent photographically violating someone's privacy and disseminating such images without consent, these rules are not applied when it comes to isolated indigenous peoples. Despite these photographs being taken in public spaces, when it comes to forests, these areas may be considered the private space of indigenous peoples: 'What was first deemed to be a clear-cut case of ownership of the unending open space above the terrain and buildings that one owned', Kaplan observes, 'became understood as volumes of space that could be carved up and claimed by municipalities, nations, militaries, and international bodies'(Kaplan 2020), and why not by indigenous lands?

When the press reproduces this iconography from the 1940s, it exploits the vulnerable position that these individuals occupy in the surrounding society. This raises the question of what perpetuates the widespread reproduction of these visual stigmas even today. In addition to being sensationalist, generating great curiosity, and ultimately serving the commercial interests of the media, these images highlight the imperial nature of photography, which aims to capture, document, and disseminate everything it encounters. Teju Cole argues that the future of photography is no different from its past: 'It will largely continue to illustrate, without condemning, how the powerful dominate the less powerful. It will bring the 'news' and continue to support the idea that doing so – collecting the lives of others for the consumption of 'us' – is a natural right' (Cole 2019). As this privileged 'us' will

never encompass everyone, the continuity of violence against those who are excluded from this all-seeing global order is inherent.

For centuries, the Brazilian Amazon region has been the target of land-use conflicts involving native communities, illegal extractive industries, monocultural farming, cattle ranching, religious institutions, the army and the Brazilian State itself. Consequently, the region and its ecosystems have been subjected to various forms of violence that affect the lands, forests, rivers and skies, endangering the lives of local communities, the ancestral knowledge derived from life in the forest, and contributing to several ecological imbalances. Despite the devastating consequences, the relentless exploitation of the entire territory persists, encompassing not only the surface but also reaching into the very air above, all fuelled by the unceasing pursuit of occupying untapped areas. In a region where predatory eyes are constantly waiting to strike, one wonders what would happen if the people inhabiting these places had access to the bird's eye view themselves.

The bird's eye perspective from the land

On this battlefield, aerial photography is a tool that has been embraced by certain indigenous communities themselves. Through the utilisation of drones and geo-spatial mapping, the perspective 'up above' is an attempt to safeguard indigenous territories, their way of living, and the area of the planet's greatest biodiversity. By reclaiming one of their colonisers' weapons, these people operate drones as a means of defence and resistance, legally reporting the occurrence of environmental crimes and violations within their lands. These injustices have been endured by several generations and the indigenous people know this from their living experience on the land and from stories told by their ancestors. Consequently, aerial surveillance assumes a significant role in the indigenous struggle to establish a bridge of communication with non-indigenous people through a universal common language: the visual one.

Forms of audiovisual documentation have been present in indigenous territories since the 1980s by means of training projects provided by institutions, particularly *Vídeo nas Aldeias*, a pioneering project in indigenous audiovisual production in Brazil created in 1986. Through collaborative production with indigenous peoples, the NGO is currently a video production centre and an audiovisual training school for indigenous villages. As attested by their work, the production of images by indigenous people was a collective and individual desire. If the attempt to domesticate the indigenous people through the dissemination of their images was



Fig. 5 – Aerial photography from the Khikatxi village of the Kisédjê people, at the Wawi indigenous land. Courtesy of the photographer Kamikia Kisédjê.

common from the 1940s onwards, now they are those who domesticate technology, appropriating photography and video to present their narratives. Today, indigenous authorial works compete for space with productions by large groups (Jesus 2023: 203-205). With the popularisation of drones, the aerial perspective is also present in the scenes captured by these image-makers [Fig. 5].

It is not possible to refer to indigenous peoples in a homogenous way, even among people of the same ethnic group. Following colonial processes, some groups are completely integrated into urban life, while others collaborate with miners that harm their own territories. Thus, the term *indigenous audiovisual* seeks common aspects between various productions. According to Naine Terena de Jesus, an educator, filmmaker, artist, curator and researcher of the Terena people: 'Indigenous production can be categorised between everyday acts and records for family consumption, on the one hand, and productions made for external audiences on the other'²⁵ (Jesus 2023: 203). Thus, there are photographs and videos that deal with aspects of the culture that they consider important to be exalted in their relations among themselves and that aim to continue knowledge and traditions of each ethnic group, such as the complete recording of rituals. Meanwhile, the images taken for consumption beyond the communities highlight how the indigenous people want

²⁵ 'Existe uma categorização sobre tais produções, dividindo-as entre os atos e registros cotidianos e de consumo familiar, por um lado, e as produções realizadas para o público externo, por outro'. Author's translation.

to present themselves outside their group. The productions show parts of their rituals and address historical aspects, stories and the relations with elements of non-indigenous society. Regardless of whether they are created for internal or external consumption, the use of photography and video by indigenous people can be characterised as forms of communication that involve resistance and a desire for self-representation.

Since the overhead standpoint is a tool of control, indigenous communities also employ it for this same purpose. When the bird's eye view is used by indigenous people, there is an inversion of perspective not only in the approach, but also in the visual hierarchy. By positioning themselves literally above the attacks on their native region, they gain the ability to shape the narrative portrayed in images of their lands. The vertical photography employed by drones in the hands of indigenous communities represents a quest for autonomy in the surveillance of their own territories. Through photographic denunciations, there is an attempt to provide evidence and to engage in a dialogue that non-indigenous individuals can comprehend. The aerial photography employed for territorial monitoring could be included in the category of indigenous production that is made for an external public, insofar as it involves an effort to produce images which prove what the native people claim and denounce. This top-down shooting thus surpasses the

Fig. 6 – Aerial photography from Wawi indigenous land, 2021. Courtesy of the photographer Kamikia Kisédjê.



²⁶ <https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau>

boundaries of cultural production and enters the legal sphere by becoming proofs according to the established codes of the juridical field. [Fig. 6]

As previously mentioned, the concept of territory with delimited borders is not an idea that existed in various native cultures. It is a foreign concept that had to be learnt by indigenous peoples in order to be used in their struggles for recognition and demarcation of the lands they inhabit. The technique of shooting from above thus operates for indigenous people as a *forest security camera* against intrusions and harm to their territories. When employed by indigenous peoples, the aerial perspective that is widely used as an instrument of offensive is a means of defence. Contrary to the idea that link aerial vision strictly with State control and violence, Schuster observes that drones, when used by activists, can serve as an instrument of subversion, demonstrating the emancipatory potential of the vertical gaze (Schuster 2021: 29).

Indigenous initiatives using aerial photography for territorial surveillance have proliferated across various regions of the country. Collaborative workshops facilitated by NGOs and involving skilled indigenous practitioners provide training to operate drones and to apply other monitoring tools to ensure the continuity of these efforts by the communities. Noteworthy cases include a collective based in Rondônia and a photographer working in multiple locations.

The Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau refer to themselves as Jupaú and live in six villages in the Uru-Eu- Wau-Wau Indigenous Land in Rondônia, which is also home to the Amondawa, the Oro Win and three isolated groups.²⁶ The conflicts over the Indigenous Land were accentuated during the military dictatorship, especially with the implementation of the *Polonoroeste*- Integrated Development Programme for Northwest Brazil, between Rondônia and Mato Grosso, by the federal government under President João Figueiredo in 1981. The project was based on opening up areas for farming in the middle of the Amazon rainforest with the aim of supporting a new rural middle class from the South and Centre of the country, which would bring progress to the region. 'It was an attempt at agrarian reform without affecting the interests (or lands) of the great landowners. [...] Massacred by centuries of invasions, indigenous peoples were decimated by these migratory fronts' (Roman 2019: 225). Since then, the territory has been constantly invaded by illegal loggers, miners and land grabbers, who illegally sell areas within indigenous lands. These invaders jeopardise the lives of indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation in particular.

Due to such conflicts for land, since 2019, with the support of the WWF – Brasil and the Kanindé Ethno-Environmental Defence Association, the Jupaú people have been trained in the use of drones, GPS devices, mobile phones and notebooks to carry out their own environmental monitoring and territorial defence. Formed by young

indigenous people, the surveillance teams use such equipment to provide more consistency to reports of environmental crimes and to monitor the biodiversity in the region. Through these tools, they can increase their agility, autonomy and safety as they do not need to physically enter to a deforested area and risk running into camps where miners or loggers welcome them with gunshots, for example.

Israel Vale, coordinator of territorial and environmental monitoring at Kanindê, points out that on indigenous land, the residents of the villages tend to retreat at the sight of traces of peoples in voluntary isolation. During training sessions on territorial surveillance, Vale explains that the participants expressed concern about how to handle situations in which they encounter traces or even the presence of their isolated relatives. The form of monitoring used in the application was developed through a participatory process, with the indigenous deciding to incorporate documentation of traces of isolated people and information on environmental violations within their lands (deforestation, timber theft, mining, invasion, illegal hunting and fishing). If traces of isolated groups are found during inspection activities in the territory, the practice of the surveillance team is to withdraw, seeking to avoid conflicts and contact with this people. The protocol upon approaching, encountering traces, or sighting isolated indigenous is to promptly notify FUNAI. While it is acknowledged that drone flights have the potential to identify *malocas*²⁷ or even isolated individuals, Vale emphasises that the indigenous teams understand the sensitive nature of this information, recognising its imperative role in safeguarding those same isolated peoples. Hence, aerial photography has not previously been employed by the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau as a means of documenting the isolated groups within their land. Finally, as Vale elucidates, the aim is for the drone to serve as a tool for the protection of indigenous territory, thereby benefiting the isolated peoples who coexist within these lands.²⁸

The defence of self-determination and the right of isolated peoples to live free, healthy and safe in their own territories is also a concern of the indigenous peoples who share land with them. In May 2023, a forum was held in Aldeia São Vicente in the Kaxinawá indigenous lands of the Humaitá River in Acre for an exchange on indigenous initiatives for the protection of isolated peoples. The event brought together leaders from 12 indigenous peoples (including the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau), inhabiting lands with whom they call their 'distrustful' relatives. The document which emerged from the forum highlights the following issues of what they call 'indigenous protagonism to strengthen FUNAI and SESAI' – the Federal Department of Indigenous Health:

We also demand that temporary agents are permanently absorbed into FUNAI's staff via a specific public recruitment process, and that the work of these pro-

²⁷ A large communal dwelling produced by the indigenous people themselves.

²⁸ All the information in this paragraph was provided to the author by Israel Vale on 7 October 2023.

²⁹ Exigimos também que os agentes temporários sejam absorvidos de forma permanente no quadro da Funai via concurso público específico, e que o trabalho desses profissionais contemple também atividades relacionadas à vigilância territorial, controle de acesso e monitoramento de aproximações, vestígios e avistamentos de indígenas isolados. Pedimos que os aliados se comprometam a continuar apoiando e financiando as atividades de monitores e vigilantes indígenas já em curso, e que a Funai estabeleça acordos de cooperação técnica com organizações indígenas e da sociedade civil a fim de fortalecer tais iniciativas. Esperamos também que as estratégias indígenas para a proteção dos territórios compartilhados com povos indígenas isolados sejam cada vez mais reconhecidas e apoiadas pela Funai e pelo Ministério dos Povos Indígenas (MPI). A SESAI deve investir em ações específicas de monitoramento da situação epidemiológica desse entorno. O protagonismo indígena deve ser cada vez mais promovido e instrumentalizado por meio de formações para uso de tecnologias, como drones, ferramentas de geoprocessamento, entre outras, levando em consideração a remuneração dos envolvidos em tais atividades. Além disso, demandamos a realização de novos intercâmbios, com o objetivo de compartilhar informações e experiências de proteção entre os diferentes povos indígenas vizinhos aos povos 'desconfiados'. Author's translation. https://trabalhoindigenista.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/docfinal_intercambiohumaita_acre_mai2023_vale_230517_111914.pdf

professionals also includes activities related to territorial surveillance, access control and monitoring of approaches, traces and sightings of isolated indigenous people. We ask that the allies commit to continuing to support and finance the activities of indigenous watchmen and guards that are already in progress, and that FUNAI establishes technical cooperation agreements with indigenous and civil society organisations in order to strengthen these initiatives. We also hope that indigenous strategies for the protection of territories shared with isolated indigenous peoples will be increasingly recognised and supported by FUNAI and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples (MPI). SESAI must invest in specific actions to monitor the epidemiological situation in these areas. Indigenous protagonism must be increasingly promoted and instrumentalised through training in the use of technologies such as drones and geoprocessing tools, among others, considering the remuneration of those involved in such activities. In addition, we call for new exchanges with the aim of sharing information and experiences of protection between the different indigenous peoples neighbouring the 'distrustful' people.²⁹

Drones have thus proven to be a significant and requested tool in indigenous advocacy, both for environmental and territorial monitoring, and for the protection of peoples in voluntary isolation. The indigenous communities themselves advocate for the official deployment of this technology by FUNAI. However, they stipulate that those among them who are already proficient in piloting drones for territorial monitoring should be integrated into FUNAI to serve as official agents and duly compensated for their services. This demand reflects, notably, the indigenous aspiration for self-management of territorial protection and also of their aerial representation. In addition to preventing unauthorised access to their territory, the drones used together with the forms created in conjunction with the indigenous peoples function as a tool for documenting the presence of voluntarily isolated indigenous peoples, without the need for unwelcome flyovers to produce aerial photographs that merely reinforces stigmas in the portrayal of the isolated.

Another case in which drones are used in indigenous daily life is through the photographer, filmmaker, educator and activist Kamikia Kisêdjê, who has been documenting cultural and political events of indigenous peoples throughout the country for two decades. He lives in the Wawi Indigenous Land on the border of the Xingu indigenous territory. Kamikia is a leader of his community and a pioneer in the operation of drones by indigenous people in the country. He is a film director and teaches photography and the pilot of drones in other communities in Brazil and abroad. He actively collaborates with independent media that prioritise indigenous rights, and is highly engaged on social media platforms, where he shares



Fig. 7 – Kamikia Kisédjê at a presentation on drone surveillance during an assembly of the Kisédjê Indigenous Association in the Wawi Indigenous Territory, 2021. Courtesy of the photographer Atakuma Suya.

his photographs and videos. The aerial audiovisual production by Kamikia spans between the two categories proposed by Terena de Jesus, documenting both the activities, manifestations, and traditions of his people and relatives, as well as monitoring deforestation of the region he lives and the pollution of the Suiá-Miçu River. Among his surveillance actions, Kamikia's archive of aerial images includes records of criminal fires near indigenous territories, illegal roads opened in the middle of the forest to facilitate access for illegal extractive industries, fires to clear the soil for soybean plantations, and several more incidences of devastation in the areas surrounding his village with a direct impact on their community living. [Fig. 7]

Although the process of colonisation of the Brazilian Amazonian territory over the years is somewhat followed by the press, the narrative of those who inhabit these lands is little considered, with the use of aerial images produced by indigenous people in the context of surveillance rarely printed in the country's major newspapers and magazines. The traditional press continues with the same precepts of the 1940s when it collaborated with the socio-economic exploitation of the region. The mainstream media has yet to fully acknowledge that these photographs, captured by indigenous peoples themselves, represent historical documents generated from an endogenous perspective, and are of relevance to a broader audience, even though they may not please some advertisers. Effectively, it is fundamental that the images and narratives of these peoples are widely disseminated: 'A political imagination is insufficient to enable us to imagine the non-citizen or second-class

citizen as citizen: civil imagination is also needed' (Azoulay 2012: 9). The circulation of these images may provide more information for civil society and promote new imaginaries that reduce stigma against indigenous peoples. This potential civil imagination may even offer significant shifts in reality, placing pressure on governments for demarcations, protection and inspection of indigenous territories and criminalising enterprises that conduct illegal practices in Brazilian forests. The inclusion of indigenous aesthetics in the spheres of knowledge, governance, and cultural production is a starting point when considering historical reparations. Despite the limited space in the mainstream media, indigenous audiovisual production is increasingly being integrated in the artistic milieu through participation in festivals, biennials, and exhibitions in museums and art galleries.

When indigenous people are the protagonists and producers of the aerial images of their territories, there is not only a change of perspective, distance and discourse, but also of purpose and use. The visuals represent the unique temporal relationship of those who inhabit the place being photographed, and the aerial perspective is used intimately with the scene. These indigenous image-makers use the panoramic view from a local perspective, acting as authors but also as witnesses, forming an integral part of the photographed scene. Their photographs depict attentive changes in their environment, privileged by their daily connection to the land. Instead of capturing snapshots from a predatory top-down view that takes advantage of the lack of identification with the place being photographed to merely click and leave, indigenous records make themselves present in the scene being registered, documenting the land from the land itself. In this way, the aerial perspective represents a temporary and necessary distancing to obtain a broad and comprehensive view of their land, as opposed to the aerial perspective serving the purpose of obtaining a macro view, characteristic of what is not visible from the distance at which the territory is experienced.

In this way, the adoption of the elevated viewpoint by indigenous people can raise crucial questions related to the airspace of their lands. This area, characterised as a place of power, holds the potential to expand and serve as a place of governance, resistance, defence, testimony, memory, and expression for indigenous peoples, attesting to what Caren Kaplan calls *the ambiguity of airspace* (Kaplan 2020). When there exists a *civic view from above* (Keysar 2017), it opens up the possibility for the creation of atmospheric policies and the shaping of distinct aerial spaces (Kaplan 2020).

Conventional press photographs are systematically catalogued and typically consulted when there is a need to revisit the subjects initially documented upon their publication. However, it is imperative to recognise that a photograph should not be reevaluated solely based on keywords, as this approach may restrict the possible

interpretations and insights derived from visual analysis. Each image has the potential to be reviewed from countless forms of analysis and perspective, demonstrating the always unfinished nature of the event of photography (Azoulay 2012: 25). To put it another way, the position of spectator, regardless of whether they have been part of the photographed scene, can be attributed to anyone, at any time, and this attitude of reviewing a photographic event is fundamental when we reflect on deconstructing an image of a group of people that has been reduced to non-citizens. The re-signification of the visual stigma in the way of registering indigenous peoples is thus a fundamental task when seeking to revise history and undo the colonial underpinning that permeate the imaginary when referring to the image of the land known as Brazil and its native peoples.

In addressing indigenous counter-narratives in the manner of how their territories are photographed from above, the intention is not to merely 'classify cosmologies that seem excessively exotic to us, but to counter-analyse anthropologies that are excessively familiar to us' (Castro 2018: 73)³⁰. Through a reconfiguration of the relations between spectators, photographers and photographed subjects, points of view that once served as colonial agents can now be employed to pursue historical reparation. In essence, by adopting a counter-colonial perspective toward photographed events, photography itself has the potential to serve as an antidote to its own poison.

³⁰ Classificar cosmologias que nos parecem excessivamente exóticas, mas em contra-analisar antropologias que nos são demasiadamente familiares. Author's translation.

Author's note

This article does not aim to perpetuate the stigmatisation of indigenous peoples in isolation by reproducing their images. The decision of whether to publish them again or not was carefully considered. On one hand, these images are already ingrained in the social imaginary when it comes to isolated indigenous groups and would not need to be reviewed to be remembered. On the other, these published images, taken on various occasions, are easily accessible online and certainly the interested reader could look for them independently. Therefore, the intention of gathering and documenting them in a single article serves two purposes: firstly, this is an academic article in an art history journal that places significant importance on images, and it is thus important that the photographs can be analysed for a deeper understanding of the subject matter; secondly, the article proposes that these uncomfortable images should be re-read and re-interpreted without concealing history, but rather contextualising them and approaching the topic in a critical, conscious, and responsible light. While the negative consequences of a production are alive in the present, it should not be left in the past and viewed as a final product that marked an era.

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