

For a Plural Democracy: Human Rights, Interculturality and Resistance

Por uma Democracia Plural: Direitos Humanos, Interculturalidade e Resistência

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Abstract:

This article elucidates the limitations of the modern conception of pluralist democracy, which was forged amidst the Western republican struggles against monarchy in the 18th century and has profoundly influenced the contemporary notion of the Democratic Rule of Law State. Despite the achievements made for peasants and the bourgeoisie with the Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies of North America and the French Revolution, as well as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the inclusion of non-Western peoples remains entirely absent in pluralist democracy. This form of democracy is guided by proposals of assimilation, guardianship, or annihilation, rather than by the principles of equality and respect for differences. By discussing these dynamics, this article highlights the persistence of such conceptions in the social imagination and the actions of the Brazilian state, as well as the resistance of indigenous peoples. This resistance helps to envision other possibilities for a more inclusive pluralist democracy, one that is more welcoming to diverse peoples, cultures, and their distinctiveness.

Keywords: *Colonialism, Plural Democracy, Interculturality, Human Rights, Resistance.*

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Resumo: O presente artigo aponta limites da concepção moderna de democracia pluralista forjada no calor das lutas republicanas ocidentais contra a monarquia ainda no século XVIII, a qual marca profundamente a concepção contemporânea de Estado Democrático de Direito. Apesar das conquistas alcançadas para camponeses e burgueses com a Declaração de Independência das Treze Colônias da América do Norte e com a Revolução Francesa, assim como com a Declaração dos Direitos do Homem e do Cidadão, a inclusão de povos não-ocidentais está completamente ausente da democracia pluralista. Essa democracia se pauta pela proposta de assimilação, tutela ou aniquilação, e não pelo princípio de igualdade e respeito às diferenças. Ao discutir estas relações, queremos evidenciar a permanência de tais concepções no imaginário social e nas ações do estado brasileiros, bem como a resistência dos povos indígenas, que ajudam a vislumbrar outras possibilidades de democracia pluralista mais inclusivas, mais acolhedoras aos povos, culturas e suas diversidades.

Palavras-chave: Colonialismo, Democracia Plural; Interculturalidade; Direitos Humanos; Resistência.

“I no longer dream,
today I make my life with my own hands”
Milton do Nascimento – Travessia.

Modern Democracy: Its Origins and Limitations

Democracy, far from being a social and political state free from conflicts, is characterized by its ability to coexist with them. This coexistence does not imply, however, ruptures or violence¹ that hinder social harmony. The conflicts with which modern democracy coexists arise from its own premises: that people are free and equal, and therefore capable of thinking and acting for themselves in a shared world. These conflicts stem from the diversity of perspectives, opinions, beliefs, and values. Such coexistence is precariously balanced on the “tightrope” that separates harmony from violence, maintained through shared customs and laws established by participatory decision-making processes that consider most individuals in each community.

This conception of democracy, structured in modernity, centers on the individ-

¹ Examining the debate between Achilles and Agamemnon, the supreme commander of the troops, before the assembly of soldiers in Homer's Iliad, Donaldo Schüler questions whether “military matters of general interest” should be decided behind closed doors. Even if enemies might infiltrate the assemblies, he asserts, the lesson of this first assembly recorded by Greek literature is clear: “the Greek man does not shy away from dissent, he lives with it, he educates himself in it. In dissent, he learns to speak. There is no democracy under the reign of a single discourse. In the verbal skirmish, diversity announces itself, it enunciates itself. Do not expect democracy to resolve conflicts; it cultivates them” (Schüler, 2002, pp. 12-13) (our translation).

ual and is based on natural law theory. According to this view, people are naturally free and equal. They form the civil state to guarantee their inherent rights. Given this natural condition, individuals possess the right to life, the right to freedom in deciding and acting for themselves, the right to equality, protection from arbitrariness and oppression, and the right to acquire what is necessary to live and seek happiness. The State cannot violate these rights and must protect them. These rights also motivated the break from the absolute monarchies of the time. The thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries, who questioned the privileges of the nobility, developed these conceptions. They spread throughout Europe via salons, cafes, pamphlets, and books, fostering republican and revolutionary ideas among the educated and wealthy commoners.

The turbulent social, political, and economic situation in France at the end of the 18th century is illustrative. On the brink of bankruptcy, “the king’s ministers proposed that the nobility and the church relinquish some of their tax privileges” (PERRY, 1985, p. 427, our translation). This proposal was vehemently rejected by the privileged orders. Seeking to resist and weaken the monarch, the nobility pressured him to convene a meeting of the *Estates-General*, which had not met for almost 180 years, to seek solutions for the fiscal and agrarian issues that deeply disturbed the Kingdom’s order. While the nobility and the clergy believed they could use this meeting to strengthen their seigniorial rights and honorary privileges, the Third Estate, composed of the bourgeoisie, professionals, urban workers, and peasants, saw this initiative as an opportunity to gain allies and political visibility.

By convening the representatives of the three estates², the nobility proposed maintaining the structure of the last Assembly, which had occurred in 1614. They suggested discussions in separate chambers for each estate and decisions made by the equal vote of the estates, assuming equality among them despite the significant numerical difference in representation. However, the “third estate,” represented by the emerging bourgeoisie, contested this organization and proposed a *General Assembly* with one vote per deputy. The third estate “had about 610 delegates, while the nobility and clergy together had an equivalent number”. Furthermore, the third estate “could count on the support of parish priests and liberal nobles who sympathized with their positions” (Perry, 1985, p. 429, our translation).

The proposal was not accepted, but the widespread popular support for the third estate was overwhelming, strengthening their initiative. Finding the door of the *Salle des États* closed by order of the king, the third estate, along with some representatives from the other two estates, began to meet in a sports field. In an illustrious gesture of great political significance, they named themselves the *General Assembly* and swore to remain assembled until a Constitution for France was adopted.

² The three estates were: the First Estate (High Clergy), the Second Estate (Nobility), and the Third Estate (People, including landowning or landless peasant workers, artisans, merchants, bourgeoisie, and lower clergy). These groups represented, respectively, 0.5%, 1.5%, and 98% of the French population.

Although this was not the initial task that led Louis XVI to convene the Estates-General, nor was it the task that was effectively carried out, it was in this context that the Assembly decreed the end of feudalism and its privileges. It instituted the equality of all individuals before the law and declared the *Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in August 1789. The preamble of this Declaration is remarkable:

Les représentants du peuple français, constitués en Assemblée nationale, considérant que l'ignorance, l'oubli ou le mépris des droits de l'homme sont les seules causes des malheurs publics et de la corruption des gouvernements, ont résolu d'exposer, dans une déclaration solennelle, les droits naturels, inaliénables et sacrés de l'homme, afin que cette déclaration, constamment présente à tous les membres du corps social, leur rappelle sans cesse leurs droits et leurs devoirs ; afin que les actes du pouvoir législatif et ceux du pouvoir exécutif, pouvant être à chaque instant comparés avec le but de toute institution politique, en soient plus respectés ; afin que les réclamations des citoyens, fondées désormais sur des principes simples et incontestables, tournent toujours au maintien de la Constitution et au bonheur de tous. (*Declarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, 1789)

Despite the fragility of the naturalistic argument, this conception significantly contributed to the recognition of the sovereignty of the people, the legal and structural limits of state powers, and the declarations of human rights. The idea that people are naturally free and equal, even if hypothetical, and can demand that the State maintain this condition as a natural and inalienable right, legitimized resistance against oppression. This is also enshrined in the *Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies*, from 1776:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. (*Declaration of Independence*, 1776)

The break with the order of the *Ancien Régime*, while supposedly signaling the end of institutionalized inequalities and oppression, brought centrality to the widespread demands for social and political inclusion of the people. The storming of the

Bastille, the popular intervention in favor of the grenadiers who refused to shoot at the people, the women's march to Versailles, the imprisonment of Louis XVI and his family in Varennes, and the abolition of slavery in the French colonies by the First Republic in 1794 are just a few examples of the political power that ordinary people began to assert.

These actions publicly expressed their views and demanded that the State recognize people's rights and limit the exercise of state power. However, this same First Republic did not tolerate the boldness of Olympe de Gouges. Dedicated to the struggle for women's political and civil rights, she published several politically themed plays and proclaimed the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*. De Gouges was arrested, tried by the revolutionary tribunal, and executed by guillotine in 1793.

Neither the nascent pluralist democracy nor the declaration of rights provided guarantees for the broad recognition and protection of human rights, which at that time were considered natural for all individuals. The criticisms directed at Olympe de Gouges highlighted that the naturalization, universalization, and abstraction of these rights resulted in their depletion or ineffectiveness. The demands of vulnerable people were countered by the high interests of the economy and governmentality³, as well as the terrible discoveries of 19th-century "scientific racism."⁴

Despite the clamor of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, the division between the interests of the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, and the included and the excluded remains within the structure of states. If there is no longer a ruling caste to which all people are subjected, new forms of inequality and oppression emerge. These new forms of oppression manifest in modern states, both in Europe and beyond, following the processes of colonial independence. They are justified by the will of majorities or groups that, economically empowered, impose themselves on others and direct state actions, legitimizing discourses that exclude those who do not fit into these majorities.

Limits of Democratic Pluralism

The works of Alexis de Tocqueville from the early 19th century highlight the social and political transformations that impact the lives of people both in the New

³ We refer to the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, understanding that governmental action, in addition to territorial administration, also encompasses the control of the population and the conduct of individuals. For further reading on this topic, see: FOUCAULT, M. *Segurança, Território, População*. Curso *Collège de France*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2008.

⁴ Despite the numerous critical studies that exist, especially in Brazil and generally in the Global South, the defense of inequality among people based on supposed particular and defining racial characteristics was widely disseminated from the late 18th century to the early 20th century. For example, as early as 1800, Franz Joseph Gall published "The Anatomy and Physiology of the Nervous System in General and of the Brain in Particular." In this study, he considered it possible to determine personality characteristics and degrees of criminality by the shape of the head. In 1855, Arthur de Gobineau published "Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races," one of the first books on eugenics and racism. Cesare Lombroso, in his early works such as "The Criminal Man" (1876), defended the notion of the "born criminal" based on common and dominant anatomical characteristics and psychological traits, further developing Gall's ideas. In short, the list is extensive.

World and in old Europe. He observes that inequalities have become even more irremediable because, having left the laws, they have strengthened through customs. Despite the fact that the three feudal orders were revoked by the Assembly that declared the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, that slavery was strongly contested and abolished in many states, and that women had begun to demand the recognition of political and civil rights, inequality and oppression worsened even further “in customs, as they faded from the laws” (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 399, our translation).

In 1831-1832, Tocqueville spent some time traveling through the United States as a representative of the French government. He was able to observe the relationship established between the “Anglo-Americans”⁵ – who crossed the ocean in search of a place to live with freedom and respect for the diversity of beliefs and ideas – and the indigenous peoples of the American continent, as well as the enslaved blacks forcibly brought from Africa.

In December 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont—his friend and travel companion—were in Memphis when they witnessed the removal of the Choctaw from their territory. This event occurred because of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which mandated the removal of four other tribes in addition to the Choctaw: Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Seminole. Tocqueville’s indignation was not only due to the fate of these peoples but was strongly directed at the tactics used by the Anglo-Americans to subjugate the indigenous people “in a regular manner and, so to speak, entirely legally” (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 377).

Based on the letters that Tocqueville wrote to his mother about the Mississippi, Brogan writes:

The Americans calculated, he said, that one square kilometer can sustain ten times more civilized men than savages; wherever the civilized settle, the savages must leave: “see what a beautiful type of logic.” So, the Choctaw had to abandon their lands, where they had perhaps lived for a thousand years, and, rewarded with expensive gifts (“bottles of brandy, glass necklaces, earrings, and mirrors”), intimidated by the suggestion of force, they had to drag themselves for nearly five hundred kilometers, without even being allowed to wait for spring (Brogan, 2012, p. 204, our translation).

In the final chapter of the first volume of “*Democracy in America*” (*Some Considerations on the Present and Probable Future Condition of the Three Races that Inhabit the Territory of the United States*), Tocqueville states that, in addition to an immense and complete democracy, there exists *another reality* in America: inequality. Despite

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville became well acquainted with the social and political organization of the United States during his nine-month sojourn on American soil. He knew, therefore, that the same space was inhabited by various indigenous peoples of America, enslaved blacks brought from Africa, and English and Irish immigrants. However, when addressing the democracy existing in the United States, he referred exclusively to the “Anglo-Americans,” emphasizing that democracy was found exclusively among European immigrants. See: Tocqueville. *De la démocratie en Amérique*.

Anglo-Americans, blacks, and indigenous people being mixed on American soil, “education, law, origin, and even outward physical features have created an almost insurmountable barrier between them” (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 368, our translation). They are gathered but not integrated. Democracy reigns among the Anglo-Americans, and “below them appear the black and the indigenous” (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 368, our translation). The word “below” is quite descriptive of the inequality and oppression in which they live:

Oppressed, he may complain, but he only finds whites among his judges. The law, however, opens the jury box to him, but prejudice keeps him away from it. His son is excluded from the school where the descendants of Europeans are educated. In theaters, he could not buy, even at the price of gold, the right to sit next to his former master; in hospitals, he faces similar segregation, (...). Thus, the black man is free, but he cannot share the rights, pleasures, labors, or sorrows, not even the grave, with the one he was declared equal to; he could meet him nowhere, neither in life nor in death (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 398, our translation).

Beyond the inequality among peoples and cultures in North America, Tocqueville observed that inequality and oppression spread in Europe due to economic differences. A few years later, while traveling through England and Ireland, he documented his observations. On May 11, 1835, still in London at the beginning of a journey that lasted more than three months traveling through the interior of England and Ireland, he recorded in his travel diary:

Spirit and virtue itself seem of little worth without money. Money mixes with all merits and becomes a part of them in a certain way. It fills all the gaps that may exist between men, but nothing could replace it. The English have left the poor with only two rights: to be subject to the same legislation as the rich and to equal them by acquiring equal wealth. And these two rights are more apparent than real, for it is the rich who make the law and create, for their own benefit and that of their children, the principal means of acquiring wealth (Tocqueville, 1991, p. 479, our translation).

Regarding women, Tocqueville is not always very kind, although he recognizes and admires the “genius” of some. In the United States, he observed that girls were encouraged to study, think, take initiatives, and take responsibility for themselves, very differently from what happened in Europe, where the education of girls was “timid, secluded, and almost cloistered” (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 713, our translation). This education prevented them from understanding the world and knowing how to defend themselves in the face of difficulties. He also emphasizes that, in the United

States, although men and women “neither have the duty nor the right to do the same things, they show the same esteem for each other’s roles and consider them as beings whose value is equal, although their destinies are different” (Tocqueville, 1992, pp. 728-729, our translation).

When addressing the education of girls in the New and Old Worlds, comparing the forms and their consequences, Tocqueville assumes the becoming of the times. He considers that in a democratic world, women’s education must also be democratic for them to integrate fully. His words, though written from a masculine perspective, echo the affirmation of Olympe de Gouges in the dedication of the “*Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*” to Queen Marie Antoinette. In this dedication, De Gouges asserted that the revolution depends on women becoming aware of the “rights they have lost” and the deplorable condition of their lives. She highlighted the need for a revolution in thought.⁶

Although declarations of rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, have a performative sense that resonates within societies and state institutions, demanding new forms of action, their reach is brief – no more than a starting point. This “originating moment,” however, says little about the future. Any future is merely a possibility. An inclusive democratic pluralism that respects human diversity will not be built on formal equality and the personal successes of individuals, but rather collectively, through the resistance struggles of historically vulnerable and oppressed people and communities. Breaking the asymmetric relationship, which results in the silencing and oppression of the subaltern, means becoming self-aware and then becoming a protagonist, exercising speech and action in the public space, and resisting.

Indigenism and Colonialisms

Despite the 235 years that separate the present time from the French Declaration, which recognizes that “all men are born and remain free and equal in rights,” and the 76 years since the 1948 Declaration, which, at the end of World War II, reaffirmed that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” many situations still exist where the human rights of diverse peoples and social groups are debased and violated. These violations occur due to their differences, often confronted by hegemonic social, political, economic, and cultural positions.

The Indigenous peoples of the Americas have endured centuries of rights violations. In Brazil, this history began in 1500 and went through various phases. It started with Portuguese colonization, legitimized by the Catholic Church, which aimed to catechize and evangelize, promoting the religious conversion of Indigenous peoples to the principles of the true Christian faith and Western ways of life. This facilitated the realization of colonial enterprises. For this purpose, missionary settlements were

⁶ See: Dallari, Dalmo de A. Os direitos da mulher e da cidadã por Olímpia de Gouges. São Paulo, Saraiva, 2016, pp. 111-124.

built throughout the country to gather different ethnic groups and Indigenous peoples. These peoples were displaced either by persuasion or forcibly, freeing up their territories for colonial exploitation.

Given the Portuguese crown's interest in extracting wealth from the colonies, the relationship with Indigenous peoples could be friendly or hostile, depending on their compliance or submission. In cases of resistance, there were persecutions, forced displacements, and justified exterminations. This resulted in the disappearance of most of these peoples during the colonial period.

A new phase began in Republican Brazil at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, characterized by indigenism. This state policy was guided by the concepts of integration and acculturation. Indigenism was one of the many nation-building policies in Brazil, marked by positivist ideas of development and progress.

In this context, the indigenist policies conducted by the SPI (Indian Protection Service), created in 1910 and replaced by FUNAI (National Indian Foundation) in 1967, aimed to protect these peoples while simultaneously managing and overseeing their lives under the pretext of their "relative incapacity." This expression was present in all national legislation until 1988, the year when the current Brazilian constitution was promulgated. Notably, in the "*Indian Statute*," Law 6001/1976, which detailed what was already provided for in previous constitutional charters, the State was assigned the role of guardian and protector of the Indigenous peoples. In practice, this meant making decisions for them, including those concerning territories defined as "properties of the Union."

These territories could be exploited by the State itself in its development projects or by private initiatives, such as agribusiness and hydroelectric enterprises, among others.

Based on this legal framework, cultural differences were understood as backwardness, and Indigenous peoples and their traditional ways of life were seen as obstacles to development. Therefore, they were to be gradually acculturated, civilized, and integrated into the so-called "national communion." While for many years the perspective was the physical extinction of Indigenous peoples through war and declared violence, since the early 20th century, the approach shifted to guardianship and integration.

This new approach presupposed not only cultural conversion but also linguistic unification, involving restrictions on cultural practices, the use of native languages, and territorial displacements justified in the name of development. Consequently, Indigenous territories in different regions of the country were affected by the construction of roads, the implementation of telegraph lines, radio stations, military bases, and airstrips.

The so-called March to the West (late 1930s and early 1940s) and its expeditions are examples of government programs that profoundly affected the Indige-

nous peoples of Central Brazil. These programs aimed to “integrate” and “develop” this region, considered isolated, desolate, inhospitable, and unpopulated, despite the presence of hundreds of Indigenous peoples, ethnicities, and villages living there.⁷

In addition to the national projects mentioned and despite the provision of protection by the State, subsequent processes of occupation in Central Brazil and other regions were even more violent. Accounts and records in the literature document persecutions and massacres of Indigenous villages and communities motivated by agricultural expansion. Rural landowners or land invaders, often with the connivance or omission of public authorities, massacred entire villages. A well-known example is the near extermination of the Avá-Canoeiro people, which will be revisited later.

Some Latin American authors, such as Pablo Casanova, interpret indigenism as another form of colonialism or a type of “internal colonialism.” This concept emerged in nations that, theoretically liberated from European colonial rule, sought to regulate and govern the lives of diverse peoples within their territories. Consequently, for an extended period, both in Brazil and across other Latin American nations, governmental authorities and their representatives assumed the role of Indigenous peoples’ spokespeople, making decisions on their behalf, often disregarding their interests and denying them any opportunity for autonomy or self-determination (Casanova, 2003).

Gersen Baniwa, who belongs to the first generation of Indigenous researchers in Brazil, emphasizes that “protecting” in the context of indigenist policies meant to oversee, “subjugate and dominate” (Baniwa, 2010, p. 39, our translation). Until the late 1980s, Indigenous peoples were represented to the State and Brazilian society in general by non-Indigenous guardians, primarily anthropologists and indigenists. This created a strong dependence and subservience among the Indigenous peoples, which persists even today, despite changes in Brazilian legislation and the political advances achieved by the Indigenous movement.

Government agencies and their representatives, through their guardianship, deprived Indigenous peoples of the opportunity to speak for themselves in the development of public policies and in discussions aimed at guaranteeing rights. Baniwa also highlights catechism and formal education as significant instruments of domination and the denial of Indigenous cultures. Even after the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which established a “new legal and conceptual basis,” introducing the perspective of Indigenous citizenship and recognizing Indigenous peoples as “collective subjects of universal and specific rights” with the capacity to think and represent themselves, Indigenous rights guaranteed in the Constitution are continuously violated. These violations are perpetrated by the Brazilian state itself

⁷ See the report produced by researchers from the Anthropological Museum of UFG, Dr. Rosani Moreira Leitão, Gustavo de Oliveira Araújo, and Michelle Nogueira Resende, based on the development of the project: *Images and Accounts of an Unknown Hinterland: Organization and Technical Treatment of the Acary de Passos Oliveira Collection*, in 2013. This report is available only in print at the Anthropological Museum of UFG.

or by elites holding economic power in the country (Baniwa, 2010, pp. 36-37, our translation).

One could understand, therefore, that the ease with which such violations occur has deep roots in the colonialist mentality and the culture of guardianship that, for decades, legitimized asymmetric relationships and arbitrary attitudes by both the State and Brazilian society in general. Indigenous peoples and their ways of life are associated with conditions of backwardness and inferiority for not adopting the hegemonic development parameters. This consequently fuels attitudes of hostility and intolerance towards them.

Rising from the Ashes and Resisting Colonialism

From the beginning and continuing to this day, Indigenous territories possess a dimension of shared life that “the whites” do not understand. These territories are reduced merely to the dimension of land for production, within the Western extractivist conception of development and the individualistic political thought of citizenship and democracy. The equality envisioned is only formal, ignoring the existence of inequalities and injustices. The socio-historical-cultural particularities and the rights of peoples, social groups, and individuals in their diversity are disregarded.

Regarding the Indigenous peoples of Brazil, there are many examples of injustices and rights violations. If we consider the state of Goiás, for example, there is currently a small Indigenous population. In the past, however, this population was numerous and diverse in terms of ethnic-cultural and linguistic perspectives, according to documentary and bibliographic sources. Historical and anthropological literature mentions at least 30 peoples up until the colonial period. Currently, there are only three peoples with demarcated lands in the state, totaling a population of less than 800 people. Additionally, there is an urban population that, according to the latest IBGE census, exceeds 19,000, about which we lack detailed information due to the scarcity of studies on urban Indigenous peoples in this state and in Brazil. These numbers provide a brief idea of how much the Indigenous peoples of this region have suffered from assimilation and integration policies and the potential for extermination. Next, we present as examples the cases of the Avá-Canoeiro and Tapuia peoples of the state of Goiás, both survivors with distinct histories of relationships with society and the Brazilian state.

The Tapuia do Carretão are not the “typical Indigenous people” idealized by those unfamiliar with the reality of Brazilian Indigenous peoples and the historical processes they have experienced. They live in a single village in the Tapuia do Carretão Indigenous Land, located in the municipalities of Rubiataba and Nova América, in the state of Goiás. They do not speak a specific Indigenous language; instead, they speak Portuguese, or “Tapuia Portuguese,” as described by researcher Eunice Pirkodi Tapuia (Tapuia, 2024). Their origin stems from interethnic relations among

various Jê peoples of Central Brazil (including the Xavante, Karajá, Xerente, Javaé, Kayapó, among others) and from policies aimed at freeing their territories for colonial exploitation.

These peoples were gathered, sometimes forcibly, into a settlement built at the end of the 18th century for this purpose, under the administration of missionaries in the former province of Goiás. The settlement also welcomed enslaved black people fleeing torture and hard labor in the mines. The Tapuia are descendants of a few individuals who remained in the region after the settlements were deactivated at the end of the 19th century. They resisted persecutions and violence and fought for the right to remain on this territory, which was also occupied and coveted by local farmers who invaded their properties, persecuted, and demeaned them.

Despite having their lands demarcated today, they continue to suffer pressures and invasions from local farmers. They often say they rose from the ashes, as, like many other Indigenous peoples in Brazil who were displaced from their territories, they were excluded from the indigenist policies of the Brazilian State, which considered them acculturated. For decades, they fought for the recognition of their identity and faced processes of erasure, rights violations, and all kinds of threats, rebuilding themselves from their Indigenous memories and experiences of a century of colonial servitude.

Currently, they have an important space of resistance in the community school, recognized as an Indigenous school, which adopts an intercultural pedagogical perspective to strengthen their memories and cultural experiences. This approach combats prejudices that challenge the legitimacy of their claims as a culturally specific people (Tapuia, 2024).

The Avá-Canoeiro people of Goiás speak the Avá-Canoeiro language, which belongs to the Tupi-Guarani linguistic family, of the Tupi stock. However, many of the younger members also speak or understand Tapirapé and Portuguese. Traditionally inhabiting the Araguaia-Tocantins River region, they were victims of numerous persecutions and massacres, even being considered extinct until the late 1960s. For a long time, they were in constant flight. They were persecuted by the colonial policy of the former province of Goiás, and their last villages suffered massacres conducted by agents of the agricultural fronts from northern Goiás and the current state of Tocantins in the early decades of the 20th century.

Currently, there are only two small surviving groups of the Avá-Canoeiro people. One of these groups lived for years hiding in the forests and mountains of the northern region of the state of Goiás. Since the early 1980s, they have had their Indigenous land demarcated in the municipality of Minaçu (GO). This group consists of a single family of eight people, including four adults and four children under the age of 10, born from the interethnic marriage of the young Niwathima Avá-Canoeiro with a Tapirapé man.

The other group, which also suffered massacres, moved to the Araguaia River

region during their flight. Currently, they live as a minority in a village of the Iny Javaé people on Bananal Island. This group consists of a single extended family of approximately 20 people, mostly young, born from interethnic relationships. They are reclaiming and retaking their territory, where they had their last villages. A previous generation lived in this territory in pilgrimage until they were forcibly removed in the early 1970s.

After a long process of persecutions, territorial displacements, and institutional guardianships, these communities are fighting for autonomy, their rights, and the expansion of their citizenship. Both groups have their own schools, recognized as Indigenous schools and created belatedly by the Indigenous school education policy of each state. The creation of these schools was an old demand, but for decades it was ignored due to a quantitative mentality that considered them numerically insignificant.

These schools, like those of the Tapuia do Carretão, are considered and used as instruments for cultural and linguistic strengthening. They are in the process of constructing or consolidating their own educational projects, with specific curricular frameworks and intercultural pedagogical proposals. Despite the legal guarantee to develop their own education projects within the context of the national Indigenous school education policy, they face many difficulties. The education systems are not able to develop or support educational policies that are adequate to their particularities (Borges; Leitão, 2024).

In the case of the group from the Tocantins River region, or Minaçu (GO), their land was demarcated as a compensatory action due to the environmental impacts resulting from the construction of the Serra da Mesa Hydroelectric Plant, which affected their refuge and pilgrimage area. For those living in the Araguaia region (TO), the situation was exacerbated by the context of dual acculturation from living as a minority with the Javaé. This further delayed the creation of their own school and the process of recognizing their rights to their ancestral territories. This process is still ongoing, with many setbacks.

The group living in the state of Goiás finally had their land recognized in 2023, but they still face persecution from land grabbers. The group in Tocantins continues to fight for the recognition of their right to the territory from which they were forcibly removed and follows a legal process that has been dragging on for years.

Kamutaja Avá-Canoeiro, also known as Kamutaja Silva Āwa, the first of her people to attend a university course, recounts the saga of persecutions and violence suffered by her parents and grandparents. They were hunted like animals, chased by hunting dogs, and their heads were to be delivered to the instigators—farmers, planters, and land grabbers in the region—as proof of their deaths (Āwa, 2024). Niwathima, despite having taken on the role of a teacher as the one who had advanced the furthest in literacy, has not yet had the opportunity to pursue a university education. She recently completed high school through a youth and adult education

program. Gradually, she is mastering the Portuguese language and learning to write in her native language, whose writing system is not yet standardized, although studies describing it do exist.⁸

Kamutaja, who has been emerging as a young leader in the defense of her people's rights following her university education, emphasizes that her people want to live in peace and security. She asserts that the State needs not only to demarcate and recognize Indigenous lands but also to develop public security policies for the communities.

Proud of her history and the resilience of her people, who were reduced to a small group led by her grandfather Tutawa, Kamutaja understands that to remain Indigenous, it is also necessary to appropriate the "white man's" culture. It is essential to understand their worldview, their laws, the Portuguese language, and the structure of institutions and the State. She, Niwathima, and many other Indigenous people of this land have become or are becoming Brazilian citizens by resisting and for the sake of resistance.

Citizenship, Human Rights, and Interculturality

From 16th-century colonialism to the colonialism of globalization in the contemporary world, cultural diversity has always been a problem to be addressed through "specific policies, whether assimilationist, segregationist, or integrationist" (Dietz, 2012, p. 132) (our translation).

Throughout Latin America, from European colonialism to internal colonialism, hundreds, if not thousands, of cultures and languages have been decimated and erased. They were made invisible due to explicit repression or the pressure of assimilation, integration, and acculturation policies that devalued and belittled them. Fear and insecurity led individuals and families to deny or conceal their Indigenous identities, adhering to the only ideal of equality that seemed possible. This helps explain the emergence of mestizo, caboclo, and peasant identities, as well as the sharp decline in Indigenous population indices in these countries. In Brazil, this population went from millions during the colonial period to less than one hundred thousand in 1970.

The Western tradition, particularly as exemplified by Alexis de Tocqueville's contributions, the advocacy for diverse perspectives as a characteristic of democracy was limited to the pluralism existing among European and Anglo-American peoples. Although Tocqueville stated, shortly after his trip to the United States (1831-1832), that the exclusion of blacks and Indigenous people from democracy in that country is a threat to democracy itself, his position does not seem to admit equal respect for different cultures. On the contrary, the assimilation and subordination of black and

⁸ The information used here comes from the experiences of one of the authors in providing voluntary assistance to SEDUC-GO and the Avá-Canoeiro community of Minaçu, GO, in the creation of the Avá-Canoeiro village school. This assistance has been provided continuously at various times from 2014 to the present.

Indigenous individuals and communities are suggested as instruments for the construction of democratic European culture.

If there is a vehement critique of the actions of Anglo-Americans in Tocqueville's text, there is also the conviction that the one who "attracts all eyes, the first in wisdom, in power, in happiness, is the white man, the European, the man *par excellence*" (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 368, our translation). During his trip to the United States, while writing to his father, he enthusiastically remarks about the dense forests of the "New World," stating that "Nature has done everything... nothing is lacking, except the civilized man; and he is right at the door" (Brogan, 2012, p. 177, our translation). Tocqueville seems to suggest that it is up to this "civilized man" to extend to the New World the liberal democracy born in Europe, considering it a model to be widely disseminated to elevate blacks and Indigenous peoples to the condition of "civilized."

In this context, although Tocqueville opposed the devastating policies toward Indigenous peoples, his critique focused not on the "civilizational" goal itself but on the strategy employed for their removal or annihilation. Tocqueville's criticism of the Anglo-Americans was that they *failed to civilize* the Indigenous peoples properly:

The great mistake of the legislators concerning the Indians was their failure to understand that to civilize a people, it is first necessary to ensure they settle, and this could only be achieved by encouraging them to cultivate the soil. Above all, it was essential to transform Indians into farmers (Tocqueville, 1991, p. 380, our translation).

Tocqueville highlights the Native American peoples' aversion to civilization, attributing this to their inherent laziness, which he suggests is common among all hunter and nomadic peoples. According to the author, the Indigenous peoples consider work not only "an evil but a disgrace, and their pride resists civilization almost as stubbornly as their laziness" (Tocqueville, 1992, p. 380, our translation).

Such a conception remains strong and firm in the contemporary world. There is no hope of toppling it with a single blow; rather, it must be compelled to yield through acts of resistance. These acts may be inspired by the resilience of previous generations who resisted persecutions, massacres, and forced displacements, and are carried forward by current generations who fight for the expansion and defense of rights, using cultural strengthening and formal education as instruments of resistance. This is what the generation of Kamutaja Avá-Canoeiro and the young generations of the Tapuia do Carretão are doing. Both peoples and their leaders recognize the intersection between being Indigenous and being Brazilian. For them, the Indigenous peoples in Brazil have appropriated the legal-political frameworks of the Brazilian state to strengthen their traditions.

The situation, however, is not symmetrical. The notion that Brazil is a multiethnic country and constitutes a pluralist democracy that respects minority and human rights, as determined by legislation and norms, especially since the 1988 Constitution, does not hold up in practice. The effectiveness of guarantees for recognized rights depends on the actual respect for Indigenous peoples as subjects of individual and collective rights and as political actors. It is not sufficient to merely acknowledge Brazilian society as a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual nation, and Indigenous languages as national languages, if there are no strong and efficient cultural and linguistic policies to strengthen these cultures and languages.

The diversity inclusion policies adopted in recent decades, such as the creation of the national policy for Indigenous school education and affirmative actions for university admission, certainly represent progress. However, these efforts, apart from the intercultural teaching degree programs offered by public universities, which develop intercultural pedagogical projects based on Indigenous knowledge systems, resemble more actions of integration and acculturation than an inclusive and horizontal dialogue of knowledge. These actions are insufficient to ensure the continuity, transmission, and strengthening of native languages and cultural practices that make up the diversity of Brazilian society.

The resistance struggles of peoples and individuals in vulnerable situations can be strengthened through transformations in institutions and educational practices. These changes should enable the collective construction of a network of relationships and knowledge based on respect and coexistence among diverse peoples and cultures. Additionally, there should be a horizontal exchange of knowledge, empowering all involved.

Education is an important path of resistance, as self-awareness provokes a revolution in thought capable of fostering other forms of resistance. This point was emphasized by Tocqueville and De Gouges. In this context, social groups and peoples in extreme situations of vulnerability, such as the *Avá-Canoeiro*, deserve special attention and commitment from public authorities and society in general. Due to their history of violence and rights violations, their small numbers, the limited number of interlocutors in their native language, and the lack of autonomy inherited from indigenist guardianship and internal colonialism, they need comprehensive support. This support should aim to strengthen their schools and develop pedagogical projects that address their specific needs. This will contribute to building autonomy and expanding their citizenship through cultural strengthening as a people.

In terms of educational policies, levels of education, recognition, and acceptance of others in their entirety must include, in addition to the basic conditions of human dignity, horizontal conditions of interculturality. It is necessary to consider their knowledge systems and pedagogies, providing mutual learning and growth from which all involved can benefit. Respect for human rights is a necessary condi-

tion for democracy to be inclusive and to advance beyond liberal pluralism, ensuring full citizenship for all in their diversity.

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