

## Presentation via Teleconference

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Debate “Policy Setbacks and Rights Reversals faced by Indigenous Brazilians under Bolsonaro and how to Fight Back”, organized by Clarice Cohn (U. Federal de São Carlos, Brazil) and William H. Fisher (College of William and Mary, USA). SALSA XII Sesquiannual Conference 2019, Friday 28 June 2019

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Thanks to everyone here in attendance. I would like to take this opportunity to also honor a Xokleng Indian who was assassinated, Marcondes Namblá, His murderer was brought to justice in 2018.

Today we can see that there is an open declaration of war against the indigenous peoples of Brazil. Indigenous peoples have responded strongly to this and there has been a stepped-up role by indigenous women in influencing these movements as we have seen among my people, the Kaingang. In 1992, my people in Terra Indígena Serrinha (Rio Grande do Sul) were able to return to their land after the Constitution of 1988 was formally established.

Indigenous peoples and nature are inextricably linked emphasizing a spiritual connection to the land. We need this wholeness to feel complete and this applies to all 305 indigenous peoples of Brazil. In these terms, spirituality and land go hand-in-hand for indigenous peoples.

Currently, we are at a juncture that requires a strong response to the Bolsonaro administration. As noted earlier by Dr. Manuela, Bolsonaro’s Provisional Measure 870 poses a threat to indigenous peoples. Likewise, the new Ministry of Education is undermining advances we have made in the area of humanities and social sciences and wants to eliminate these studies from university curriculums. Additionally, this administration is moving forward to reestablish policies held during the times of Brazil’s Military Dictatorship in that they would like to reembrace an assimilationist agenda for indigenous peoples, imposing forced integration into mainstream society.

My own people (the Kaingang) suffered this process of forced assimilation and this currently resonates with the proposal to reverse the demarcation of the indigenous land area of Raposa Serra do Sol in the Brazilian state of Roraima.

In this respect, how can we not be included in the decision-making process if we were forcibly removed from our lands? How can you silence our voices and not give us a say in these matters?

The previous administrations of Lula and Dilma Rousseff were also guilty of this as they approved and inaugurated the Belo Monte hydroelectric project – but nothing compares to the current administration of Jair Bolsonaro in terms of assaulting indigenous rights. A case in point

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is Bolsonaro's revision and resubmission of Provisional Measures 870 (reedited as Provisional Measure 886).

In light of these threats against indigenous peoples we are gaining more support and solidarity through partnerships. APIB (*Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil*) has been critical in establishing a pan-indigenous mobilization and ARPIN SUL (*Articulação dos Povos Indígenas da Região Sul*) in southern Brazil has also been instrumental in raising awareness and mobilization. Lobbying efforts among these groups have also been very helpful in working with the local and federal governments.

Recently, on June 24, 2019, Brazilian Supreme Court Justice, Luis Roberto Barroso, rejected part of Bolsonaro's Provisional Measure 886, which would transfer responsibility of demarcating indigenous land to the Ministry of Agriculture. Still, there are other concerns as the Bolsonaro administration is also considering reversing the homologation of certain land areas.

The timeframe (*marco temporal*), for establishing indigenous land areas and those of quilombolas (descendants of runaway or abandoned Afro slave communities) is also under attack by the current administration in spite of recent victories in Brazil's Supreme Court (STF). By an 8 to 3 vote, on February 8, 2018, the STF ruled in favor of quilombola communities striking down a constitutional challenge (ADI 3239) questioning land titling procedures as well as restricting land concessions to the year of Brazil's Constitution (1988). As such, land for indigenous peoples and quilombolas would have to be necessarily tied to their presence on their land area on that particular date – ignoring, of course, the fact that many of these communities were dispossessed and expelled from their homelands, particularly indigenous peoples during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, this recent decision in favor of the quilombola communities resonates with future upcoming decisions in these matters as they pertain to indigenous peoples, giving us the necessary confidence and momentum in the face of these aggressions.

Currently, Neoliberal forces are working in earnest to undermine indigenous rights in the name of profit. Namely, the infamous lobby of BBB (*Boi, Bala e Bíblia* – i.e., Cattle, Bullets and Bibles) is presenting a united front in attacking indigenous people. This is not only from a judicial standpoint as there is also a rise in anti-Indian discourses across the nation. Brazilian Congressman Alceu Moreira from the Brazilian State of Rio Grande do Sul, in fact, has been inciting militia groups to act against indigenous peoples especially with the use of media. Similarly, from the same state of Rio Grande do Sul, Senator Luiz Carlos Heinze has been an outspoken critic of indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and the LGBT community. Unfortunately, there is a lot of support for his outlook in civil society and he advocates for the use of arms against what he characterizes as “thugs”. (*O senador defende o uso de armas, caracterizando os grupos como bandidos e infelizmente recebe apoio de parte da sociedade brasileira. – sim foi o que eu escrevi nesta última frase. Caso queira, posso mudar o palavreado um pouco. P. ex. prefere usar a palavra ‘outlaws’ ao invés de ‘thugs’ para retratar melhor o jeito que o Heinze tentou caracterizar essas comunidades?*)

As for us indigenous peoples, we have been here before Brazil was Brazil, or since this country was established as a colony and later as a nation state. Sadly, in the face of this, we have always

been treated as “foreigners” in our own land. And, currently, we can see that the actions and attitudes of the actual administration have transformed government into a state of misrule and disrepair (*desgoverno*).

In 2019 we are witness to a large backlash against indigenous and rural peoples. There is a strong lobby in the Brazilian Congress that is opposed to indigenous peoples and we have to keep mobilizing to defend ourselves and neutralize these actions.

Our recently elected indigenous Congresswoman, Joênia Wapichana, from the state of Roraima, has formed a congressional coalition to enhance the rights and defense of indigenous peoples and to facilitate their engagement and articulation in the political and participatory process. Since the year 2000 with help from abroad, as well, indigenous women now have a marked presence in the current political mobilization. We are also organizing ourselves with the *Marcha das Margaridas*, a movement of rural and riverine women to advocate for our common rights.

Additionally, indigenous scholars and students are more prominent in voicing their concerns to the Brazilian Congress, especially with the assistance of special support and scholarships.

We have gone through much effort to decolonize thought processes and anthropology has been of great assistance in this regard, with the help of other sympathizers. Anthropology engages us through listening, perceiving, documenting and transmitting knowledge and awareness about our people.

Bolsonaro is attacking the hard-earned rights that we had taken for granted and now we see these are being seriously challenged. Currently, underway, is a threat to eliminate SESAI (*Secretaria Especial de Saúde Indígena* – Special Secretariat of Indigenous Health) which would undermine the health and wellbeing of indigenous peoples. This has caused an uproar in our community and protests have seen roadblocks and the promotion of heated public debates regarding this matter.

In view of these actions, we regretfully see that a large part of Brazilian mainstream society is in agreement with Jair Bolsonaro. People older than me could observe that previously there was more sensitivity in Brazilian society in regard to indigenous peoples and we need to be respected more at this day and age.

Recently some factions in Brazilian society have hoisted flags proclaiming *Brasil Acima de Tudo, Deus Acima de Todos* (Brazil before everything, God Above All), a Brazilian paratrooper slogan harkening back to the days of the country’s military regime, a rallying cry used by Bolsonaro’s coalition during his presidential campaign of 2018. This slogan may be meaningful to many people but cannot curtail people’s rights and liberty! During the next four years we cannot cave into the aggressions of this government and it will not defeat us!

