



JOURNALISM FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD



A+





...D HOSPITALIZED FROM SEVERE MALNUTRITION IN SANTO ANTÔNIO CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, IN BOA VISTA, IN THE STATE OF RORAIMA. PHOTO: AMANDA
TERS/FOLHAPRESS

JOURNALISM FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD



A+



PERSPECTIVE

To deny a genocide is to sow the seeds of the next

Faced with the enormous repercussions of the most recent crisis suffered by the Yanomami population, part of the legal community, belatedly and shamefacedly, has now begun to babble: well, now, maybe... As if the signs, and even proof, of the ongoing genocide had not already been offered by indigenous people for many years.



Deisy Ventura

28 January 2023



JOURNALISM FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD



A+





Genocide and denialism go hand in hand. In the 20th century, in particular, the ways that partial or total destruction of certain groups of humanity is denied have evolved to the same degree as the crimes themselves. It is worth noting that the best-known example of denialism, that of the Holocaust, was not invented by Nazi leaders and collaborators when they were tried shortly after the end of World War II. At their trials, the defendants claimed to ignore or to not be responsible for the crimes carried out, but did not deny their occurrence. Rather, the first forms of Holocaust denial emerged in a community of intellectuals with no direct involvement in the crimes, for essentially ideological motives particular to the post-war period. Thanks to various forms of memory recall, the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators against Jews, the Roma and Sinti people, homosexuals and people with special needs were revealed in front of new generations. According to the historian Henry Rousso, the political need to overlook the Holocaust emerged to permit the rebirth of the extreme right in European countries. In



other words, for the direct or indirect collaborators of such a monstrous event to be accepted in the public space, the existence of their crimes had to be denied or relativized, by stirring up controversies where they did not exist, hiding or forging documents, or distorting facts and discourse. Exposing the origins of denialism is essential for a full and proper debate on the genocide involving the actions and omissions practiced by Jair Bolsonaro and several of his collaborators.

While logically different from outright denial, the trivialization of crimes is an important part of the denialist movement around genocides, including the Holocaust. This involves saying that violations “are not as serious” as claimed, questioning the number of victims or even blaming them for what happened; minimizing the damage suffered; and invariably claiming that those investigated, prosecuted or convicted are victims of “hoaxes”, “witch hunts” or other forms of political persecution.



Faced with the enormous suffering caused by the news, especially the images, of serious crimes, denialist movements can be aided by a tendency to deny. I refer to the individual defense mechanism which, in a rudimentary manner, leads a person to substitute an unbearable reality for a fiction they can cope with. Such fanciful versions, of course, are abundantly available in the “infodemic” era. According to the World Health Organization, this phenomenon consists of a significant increase in the volume of information associated with a specific subject, which multiplies exponentially over a short period, with rumors, misinformation and the manipulation of facts with dubious intent. However, for a denial to have major social repercussions, people have to avoid contact with those who contradict their interpretations of reality, and so join together with those who think the same way, as the psychoanalyst Vera Iaconelli describes. The spread of scientific denialism during the Covid-19 pandemic leaves us in no doubt about the remarkable potential of these



movements, including as a social amalgam, formed by those who gather and stick together to deny.

Faced with the recent images of the grave violations of the rights of the Yanomami people, [revealed by SUMAÚMA on January 20](#), and above all, the reaction of the recently invested federal authorities, who have simply allowed their actions to be guided by Brazilian law and the international treaties in force in Brazil, a part of Brazilian society focused its attention on the use of the word genocide by members of the current government, and not the inadmissible nature of the situation being revealed.

What makes genocide the most serious of crimes is the intention to totally or partially eradicate a certain human group. There is no doubt the humanity of the Yanomami was denied – Brazil's federal authorities were fully aware of what was happening in the territories in question, including the number and causes of the deaths. They therefore deliberately



breached their legal duty to protect the life and health of indigenous peoples. They also failed to comply with a duty to stop the illegal activities of third parties that ostensibly threatened the survival of the victims, by obstructing access to health and destroying the natural resources essential to their existence, among other forms of violence.

However, as took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, many prefer to perceive the actions and omissions of the Brazilian government in relation to the Yanomami as negligence or inefficiency, refusing to see in them the intention of causing the death of hundreds of indigenous people. Many others believe indigenous peoples are responsible for their own misfortune by resisting the predatory occupation of their territories. But even among those who recognize the legitimate resistance of the indigenous peoples, the idea appears to predominate that genocides only occur during armed conflicts, and exclusively through mass murders, such as firing squads or gas chambers



squads or gas chambers.

This view, however, is not supported by either Brazilian or international law. According to Article 6 of the Rome Statute of 1998, which created the International Criminal Court, to which Brazil voluntarily adhered, “genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. In Brazil, Law No. 2889 (1956), in particular, provides for almost identical hypotheses. And there has already been a conviction for indigenous genocide in Brazil – the 1993 Haximu Massacre, also perpetrated against the Yanomami people, was confirmed as a crime of genocide by the



country's Supreme Court in 2006.

The responsibility of public agents for illegal actions that may amount to genocide, but are carried out by illegal gold prospectors and other criminals in an autonomous and fragmentary manner, has also been discussed. Article 25 of the Rome Statute leaves no doubt about the criminal responsibility of those who instigate the practice of crimes it typifies, including anyone who, with the purpose of facilitating the commission of these crimes, aids, abets, or collaborates in any way in the commission or attempt to commit the crime, among other definitions. The least that could be expected is, therefore, a proper investigation into the role played by the federal authorities since the initial information came to their attention, in order to ascertain their degree of responsibility.

The outright denial of indigenous genocide is hardly surprising. Yet it should inspire caution. This false



debate, which leads public opinion to consider it inappropriate, in a technical sense, to talk about genocide in order to mitigate the seriousness of the violations committed, and open the way for the persistent impunity of those responsible, has at least two major dimensions.

The first is the horror of the mirror and the reflection. What today is tolerated, tomorrow may become intolerable, and someone close may be involved.

In Brazil the trivialization of the use of words causes greater outcry than the trivialization of the most serious crimes. When it comes to a charge of genocide or crimes against humanity, the negative repercussions are usually aimed at those who denounce the crime, who are treated as suspects, rather than at the possible criminals. Denouncing a genocide or a crime against humanity automatically makes the denouncer a “militant”, whatever their background or history. Their specialist opinion, often



presented in a stereotyped or incomplete manner, will be treated as political and opposed by “non-suspect” experts. Often, the bastions of supposed impartiality represent the most conservative schools of law – either they have not studied the concrete case in depth, or they are not even experts in the field, or both. Rarely, if at all, are the victims or their defenders listened to.

Among legal authorities, who claim to employ expert rigor (always a sign of grandeur and superiority), facile answers emerge, worthy of preparatory courses for job or university applications. There is no opportunity for real debate, so the creation of an environment that encourages investigations with resources compatible with the seriousness of the crimes in question can be avoided. And any competent enquiry must cover a large list of suspects. How many employees, direct or indirect, in how many public and private spaces, are needed to commit crimes of this magnitude?



The result of this contraction is the systematic disqualification of anyone who denounces a crime. To do so is to be punished socially, and disregarded; though if the crime wasn't genocide, what was it? Are those who denied the existence of genocide engaged in a campaign to investigate other crimes? Or have they, curiously, only involved themselves in the public debate to say it wasn't genocide?

It is essential to recognize that, faced with the enormous repercussions of the most recent crisis suffered by the Yanomami population, part of the legal community, belatedly and shamefacedly, has begun to babble: well, now, maybe... As if the signs and even proof of the ongoing genocide had not already been offered by indigenous people for so many years!

Little by little, we witness the “discovery”, by laypeople and experts, that the facts they have become aware of are compatible with an intention to



become aware of or are compatible with an intention to totally or partially destroy indigenous communities in Brazil. And that this occurred with the significant participation of the Brazilian government, both by active and omissive conduct. They discover the criminal form of genocide does not only involve wars and blockades, but includes, among other hypotheses, one or several people being submitted to certain conditions that can lead to their total or partial destruction. That, according to international criminal law, the expression “to kill” can be correlated to the term “to cause death”, and that the presence of intent and knowledge of the crimes in question can be deduced from facts and circumstances. Finally, they discover that certain behavior can correspond to several crimes, that major financial interests represent an evident motivation for such crimes, and that the region in question is occupied by criminal organizations acting with total impunity, and perhaps state sponsorship. These lessons were only not learned previously because for genocide to be recognized, you have to want to learn what it is.



Returning to the mirror, it should be noted that, according to human rights activists, by naming the crime and the criminals, the genocide and those who commit it, President Lula and other federal authorities are breaking with a tradition relating to the image of Brazil. In general, anyone who denounces violations of rights in the country is frowned upon and attacked by state agents, as any denunciation would supposedly damage the country's image abroad. Unethical, this perception is also anachronistic at a time when, for better or worse, images circulate without intermediaries, and the control of international courts by diplomats has significantly eroded. Lula understood that it is the commission of crimes that is serious, not the denunciation. A “positive” image of a country is one which investigates, prosecutes and judges violators. The myth of cordiality needs, once and for all, to give way to the reality of the rule of law, in which rulers, and the military are also subject to the law.



There is, however, a second dimension to the lie – this huge, historic, dreadful, shameful lie that is the denial of the indigenous genocide in Brazil.

Calling genocide by other names, without properly informed specialist knowledge, implies participating in the denialist movement that intends to rehabilitate the Brazilian extreme right in institutional debate and the Brazilian electoral process.

It is vital to understand the most recent images of an old crime in its historical context, taking into account the past, present and future.

When the appalling images of emaciated Yanomami are replaced by new tragedies, we need to continue to call what has surfaced now and what has been happening for a long time “genocide” and “genocidal”. Lamenting, weeping and contributing to rescue efforts is not enough.



Giving a name to this monstrosity is an important part of a wider movement that involves the protection of victims, a clear and definitive tackling of the environmental and economic issues at stake in indigenous territories, and the recognition that the original peoples are today the last bastion of protection for the Amazon region. It also involves demanding investigations, prosecutions and trials, a struggle historically waged by indigenous movements and their supporters, and in which it is our duty to join.

It is also necessary to confront all who feed, directly or indirectly, the movements that invariably result in the annihilation of human beings. It is imperative to recognize the catastrophe that the rise of the far right represents in countries like Brazil, where different historical forms of authoritarianism and exclusion coexist – none of which have ever been confronted as they must. It is time to give a name to the monster, so



these crimes never happen again: the repercussion of the Yanomami emergency needs to be the end point of the indigenous genocide in Brazil.

Deisy Ventura is a professor at the University of São Paulo (USP), where she coordinates the Doctorate in Global Health of the School of Public Health. She is vice-director of the Institute of International Relations, and has a master's degree and PhD in International Law from University of Paris 1. She was one of the coordinators of the study that exposed the Brazilian government's strategy for the spread of Covid-19 that led to the Covid-19 parliamentary enquiry commission in the country's senate.

Translated by James Young





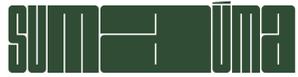
A+



TAGS

Especial Genocídio Yanomami, Garimpo,
Garimpo ilegal, Genocídio Yanomami,
Terra Indígena Yanomami,
Violência contra povos indígenas, Yanomami,

READ MORE



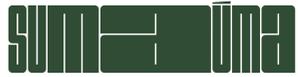
HOW CAN YANOMAMI HEAVEN BE REACHED IF AN IMAGE IS CAPTURED AND SHARED ALL OVER THE INTERNET?

The indigenous people face a dramatic impasse: if they denounce their genocide to the world, they run the risk of not finding happiness after death



EXCLUSIVE: BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT CUT YANOMAMI HEALTH MONITORING AFTER RECORD INFANT MALNOURISHMENT

Figures obtained by SUMAÚMA show the reduction in health monitoring started in the second year of the far-right administration, after officials learned that half of Yanomami young children were underweight.



JOURNALISM FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD



A+

A



YANOMAMI GENOCIDE SPAWNS BRAZIL'S FIRST HUMANITARIAN MOVEMENT FOR RECONSTRUCTION

After four years of destruction of the bonds of community and solidarity by the Bolsonaro government, the health collapse that has already killed 570 children under the age of five in the indigenous land unites Brazilians around a cause that is also a country



HOW DID 570 INDIGENOUS CHILDREN DIE FROM THE NEGLIGENCE OF THE BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT?

The careful steps journalism must take to avoid committing acts of violence while denouncing violence.



'WE ARE NOT EVEN ABLE TO COUNT THE BODIES'

Figures obtained by SUMAÚMA show that during Jair Bolsonaro's far-right government, the number of children under 5 years old who died from preventable causes increased 29% in Yanomami territory: 569 young indigenous children died in the last 4 years from diseases that are treatable

JOURNALISM FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD



A+



NEWSLETTER

Assine / Sign / Subscribase

Name

E-mail

SEND

JOURNALISM FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

JARGON BUSTER

Twitter



THOUGHT SEEDING

Facebook

FRONTLINE DISPATCH

LinkedIn

NATURE RIGHTS

Instagram

INTERVIEW

TikTok

HOWLER

Contato

MANIFESTO

MICÉLIO

OUR VOICE

PERSPECTIVE

SPECIAL REPORT

REXISTENCE

VOICES OF THE FOREST

JOURNALISM FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD



© All rights reserved. Written authorization must be obtained from [SUMAÚMA](https://sumauma.com) before reproducing the content of this page on any channel of communication



A+

