

Land Grabbers: The Growing Assault on Brazil's Indigenous Areas

Under the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, illegal miners, loggers and ranchers are invading and occupying more and more indigenous territory. Brazil's indigenous peoples are increasingly fighting back against the intruders, leading to conflicts and a rise in the murder of local activists.

In June 2021, multiple cars arrived in a village in the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil. Avelin Buniacá Kambiwá and nearly 20 other indigenous families were working on constructing their homes. A man, who goes by the nickname Piauí, emerged from one of the cars and yelled to his fellow passengers and anyone in the vicinity, *"Feathers are going to fly!"*

He was referring to the feathered headdresses of the local Indigenous people. He was outraged, and he wanted them gone. Piauí is a land-grabber — someone who invades Indigenous or public land, or land that simply does not belong to them, before claiming it as their own. They frequently use fake documentation to carry out activities such as illegal logging, mining and real estate speculation.

In 2019 some Pataxó and Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe members lost their homes by the Paraopeba River because a dam at a big iron ore mine collapsed, killing 270 people. Millions of tons of toxic waste got into the river and surrounding communities, leaving hundreds of Indigenous people homeless.

To help these displaced people, the Minas Gerais Association of Japanese Brazilian Culture donated a large piece of land (89 acres of land). The Indigenous families began settling into the newly created village of Katurãma. But Piauí had been eyeing this land for years. Since arriving on their land, the Indigenous residents had been met with gunshots fired into the trees, fires set around the village, and threats to their lives since they settled here.

"Some families left," said Buniacá Kambiwá, a teacher and coordinator of the Minas Gerais Committee to Support the Indigenous Cause. *"They couldn't take it anymore. It's our land, our home, but they were too afraid to stay here."*

Brazil is home to 305 Indigenous groups, and virtually all are in an intensifying battle to keep their land. Some, like those in Katurãma village, have come together after being pushed off their original territories, while others hold steadfast to land that's been theirs since before the arrival of colonizers more than 500 years ago. No matter the

details of their individual situations, they all agree on one thing: The attacks on their land and their lives are getting worse.

The policies of Brazil's nationalist president, Jair Bolsonaro, are the driving force behind the surge to occupy or confiscate Indigenous lands. He assumed office on January 1, 2019, and promised not to give "*one more centimeter*" of land to Indigenous people. Bolsonaro oversaw a substantial increase in the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and launched an attack on the territorial rights of Brazil's Indigenous groups.

The Indigenous people try to protect the borders of their territories and fight against logging and mining. At least 113 murders were committed, and 25 murders were attempted. Since 2019, the number of attacks against defenders of Indigenous rights and lands has skyrocketed.

Yanomami territory, located in Amazonas and Roraima states, is home to 29,621 people living in 367 communities. It has long suffered invasions and attacks from illegal miners who tear up the land in search of gold. According to Brazil's Social and Environmental Institute, an estimated 20,000 illegal miners were on Yanomami land in 2020. But in the last two years, Hekurari Yanomami said, the criminal operations have grown tenfold — and so has their violence.

The miners, he said, now come in large groups, arriving by boat and helicopter with machinery to help them carry out their activities. In areas of Yanomami land that once had two or three illegal miners searching for gold, he now sees as many as 15 men working. They're often armed with military-grade rifles and machine guns. "*We live in fear,*" said Hekurari Yanomami. "*We're always wondering, when will they kill us? [...] The federal government, encourages it.*"

Now, as these Indigenous groups build their thatch-roofed houses in Katurãma and rebuild their lives, they sleep under tarps, afraid the land-grabbers will take over if they leave while the community is still under construction. They've reported the illegal activity on their land and the violence they've faced to both the Federal Prosecutor's Office and the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), but still feel unsafe.

Quelle: Bei dem hier angeführten Text handelt es sich um eine vereinfachte, gekürzte Version des Artikels „Land Grabbers: The Growing Assault on Brazil's Indigenous Areas“ von Jill Langlois, July 22, 2021. Der Originalartikel ist hier zu finden:
<https://e360.yale.edu/features/land-grabbers-the-growing-assault-on-brazils-indigenous-areas>