TREES, VINES, PALMS, AND OTHER ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS

PAULO TAVARES

This arc of trees used to be a village. The end of the row of houses was there, and the other end over there, far away. The village was enormous, so the vegetation that formed inside the semi-circle is as big as the village was. The center of the village was located around here. That's why this forest is in the middle of the village. Here we used to make warã, our collective meetings. ⚹

The ancient villages are disappearing, I'm very concerned about that. I thought the government was taking care of these sites! There are people who don't like us indigenous people that's why we are being expelled from our territory. This region is being deforested for soy and corn plantations. Deforestation is intense nowadays, so before all is destroyed we should create an ecological reserve here. ⚇

We were all displaced from this area, leaving everything behind. And the non-indigenous people took advantage of that and occupied the region, without caring to the fact that we are the original owners of this land. This region is called Suyá. In our language it is called the place of stones. Look at the rocky mountain over there. Next to the mountain there are plenty of yam; this is a very fruitful region. ⇊

The aircraft is flying over a thick jungle; the image captured by the film camera on board shows a blurry picture painted in various shades of dark. Only the highest palms, which stand out from the canopy mass, can be identified from this birds-eye per-spective. The camera pans toward an open field where we see a large human settlement. Its spatial layout is geometrically arranged in the form of a vast arc. The aircraft circles the area, the camera holds on the settlement while the voice-over pro-vides some contextual information: "On the right bank of the das Mortes River begin the domains of the Xavante Indians, the great warrior tribe that became famous for its stubborn resist-ance against all attempts at catechesis. A few kilometers from the river, protected by the dense *cerrados* [biome], we begin to see the first villages of these forest peoples, which they defend with remarkable determination".

Produced in 1947 by the Indian Protection Service (SPI), the Brazilian agency created to govern indigenous affairs, Riodas Mortes is one of the few documents of the ancient settlements of the Xavante. Fifteen years or so after these images were recorded, all of their settlements had been abandoned or destroyed.

From the 1940s to the late 1960s, the Xavante, an indige-nous nation that has lived in the central Brazilian plateaus since time immemorial, were subjected to a brutal campaign of land dispossession and forced removals to create space for cattle and

NUNCA UMA ALDEIA chavante fóra devassada como naquele vôo sensacional de nossos companheiros, em um avião pilotado pelo Major Antônio Basilio. Passearam durante 2 horas sôbre as habitações dos chavantes, que, desesperados, en viavam muitas flechas contra o bimotor de tela de pano, atingindo-o três vêzes.

CHAVANTES NA GUERRA

Fotografias de JEAN MANZON ★ Texto de DAVID NASSER

R ENDERAM-SE os chavantes, segundo dizem, e aproveitando essa oportunidade, vossa revista deseja lembrar a nunca esquecida reportagem de David Nasser e Jean Manzon, "Os chavantes!" Evidentemente, não ficaria bem à gente dizer que êsse feito jornalístico não encontra paralelos nem antes, nem depois, em tôda a história da imprensa brasileira. Seria imodéstia alegarmos que a grande página escrita com o risco da própria vida por nossos dois companheiros foi lida em todos os países, reproduzida por "Images du Monde", na França, por "Life", nos Estados Unidos, e por dezenas de outras publicações. Não ficaria bem à própria revista que patrocinou o feito de Nasser e Manzon chamar a atenção dos senhores para certos detalhes, tais como os 6.000 quilómetros percorridos, desde o Rio até Kuluene, nas vizinhanças do Xingu. Fique bem ou não, seja imodéstia ou não, a verdade é que já não será possível escrever a história dos chavantes sem que a reportagem que hoje vos devolvemos ocupe um plano altíssimo, tão alto quanto aquêle em que colocou a própria imprensa brasileira, porque, como disse o famoso repórter norte-americano Richard Dyer, da I. N. S., "essa façanha jornalística está entre as dez maiores de todos os tempos e depois dela, seus autores deveriam ser aposentados com os honorários integrais."

A CONTECE que o médo de um repôrter é diferente. Êle receia a morte, sente calafrios, jura que não mais se envolverá em assuntos dessa espécie, mas não vai embora. Os chavantes estavam lá em baixo, em sei, o avião fóra atingido, também sei, uma vontade doida de voar para bem longe. E, depois? Lá estavam os olhos investigadores dos companheiros procurando em mim a veia jugular do médo, a que revela as palpitações do coração. Mas, o essencial aí está.

(CONTINUA NA PÁG. 16)

14 de Setembro de 1946 — 9 — O CRUZEIRO

DAVID NASSER   JEAN MANZON   MAJOR ANTÔNIO BASILIO

soy farms. Officially known as "pacification," this campaign was part of a strategy of territorial colonization that the Brazilian state described as "occupying demographic voids". In 1966, at the peak of this campaign, the Xavante communities of the Marãiwatsédé region were deported from their ancestral land. In 1974, the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), the state agency that replaced the SPI in 1968, issued a certificate attesting that this territory was indigenous land no more.

Following the publication of the final report, in late 2014, of the Brazilian National Truth Commission a commission set to investigate human rights abuses committed by the military dictatorship (1964–1985), my architectural practice, in collaboration with the Bö'u Xavante Association and the Brazilian Public Prosecutor's Office, initiated a project to document the sites of ancient indigenous settlements in order to provide evidence of their ancestral possession of this territory. This visual essay shows excerpts of this ongoing project⋀. Our methodology is based on the reading of various media, ranging from historic photographs and films to satellite data to the territory itself. The landscape and its representations are interpreted as documentary mediums, archaeological surfaces that bear traces and memories of the ancestral occupation of the land by the Xavante people.

IMAGE ARCHAEOLOGY

The "conquest" of the Xavante country became a mass-media phenomenon at the time, with sensational photo-journalism stories circulating in popular magazines, depicting the Xavante as peoples and missionaries as redeemers. But these visual records constitute an important source of information about the history of the Xavante territory; through them we can study the spatial arrangement of its ancient settlements.

The research reconstituted the architecture of some of the old villages by working the photographs through a set of digital modeling tools. The villages were traditionally built following a precise circular layout, with the houses distributed in an arc-shaped line forming a great internal plaza. The central patio of the largest village we modeled had a diameter of about 200 meters, though its footprint extended beyond the village's perimeter, defined by the row of houses. The settlements were always situated near streams, with the opening of the arc oriented toward the watercourse. The houses were built as domes structured with wood beams and covered with palm leaves, reproducing the circular logic of the overall urban scheme at the scale of architecture.

Our research also examined a series of satellite images and

Identification of Bö'u, the old center of Marãiwatsédé.

CEMITÉRIO

ALDEIA /
ACAMPAMENTO

D ~ 260 m

Identification of Bö'u, the old center of Marãiwatsédé.

CEMITÉRIO

R = 140

ALDEIA /
ACAMPAMENTO
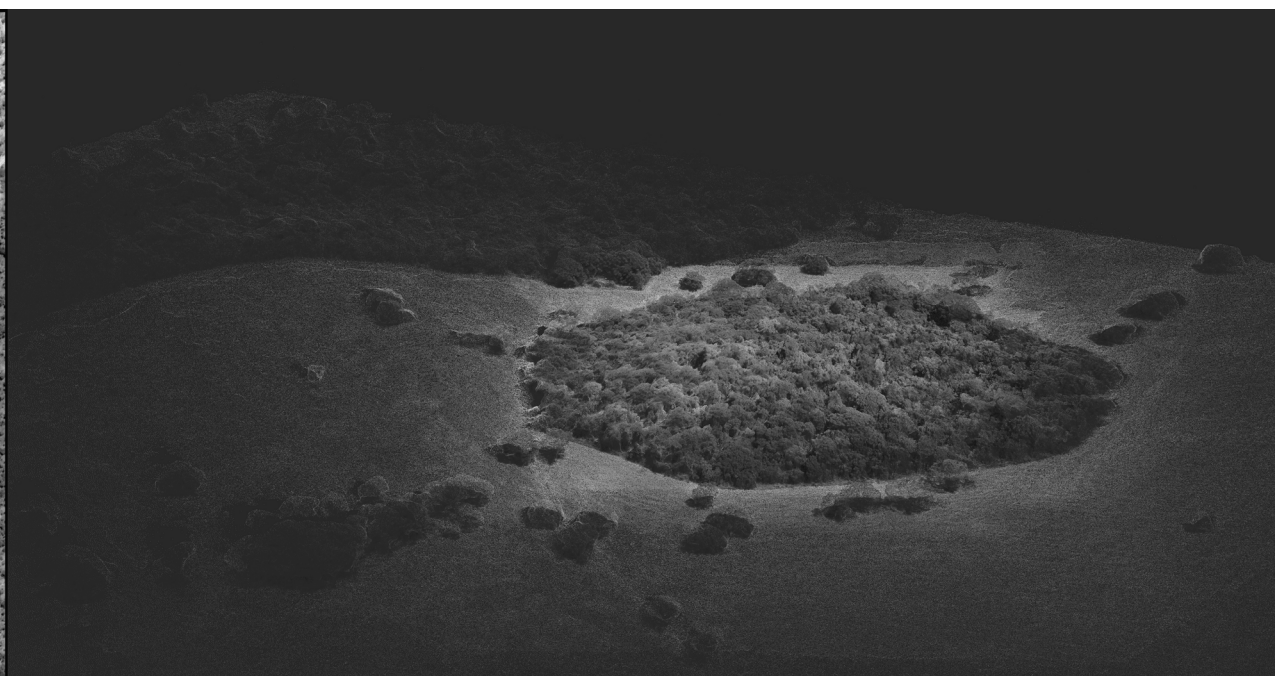
aerial photographs of cartographic surveys. Despite the dramatic transformations in the landscape caused by the widespread deforestation that followed the forced removals, some of the ancient Xavante settlements seem to have been so old and robust that they left lasting marks in the territory, which are still clearly visible in these images.

Our analysis identified several traces on the ground whose shape, size, location, and disposition indicate the former presence of indigenous settlements. These footprints exhibit an arc-shaped layout that bears striking resemblance to the spatial arrangement of the villages reconstituted from the photographs. Inscribed on the Earth's surface like geoglyphs, these are vestiges of interventions in the landscape that were planned according to a cultural pattern consistent with the architecture of the ancient Xavante settlements documented in the archival records.

LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY

In parallel with the exercises in "imagery archaeology," the project undertook a series of field expeditions, together with elders of Marãiwatsédé, to document some of the archaeological sites on the ground. Policarpo Waire Tserenhorã, Dario Tserewhorã, and Marcelo Abaré, the elders who guided us, used to be warriors who led their communities in great geographic expeditions through their territory (a cultural practice called hömono that was totally eradicated by state policies). They therefore have a very sophisticated knowledge of this land, its environs and history.

Such extraordinary, unique knowledge of the territory, typical of Xavante culture, has been documented by various studies, as illustrated in this passage from anthropologist

David Maybury-Lewis's classic 1967 ethnography, *Akwẽ-Shavante Society*: "In their monotonous scrub, where I was unable to tell one bush or thicket from another, and was frequently under the impression that I had traveled through a particular patch of trees only a little before, the [Xavante] can remember the exact place where a kill was made months or even seasons previously and narrate its circumstances in detail." What Maybury-Lewis perceived as an amorphous and homogeneous landscape, the Xavante people identified as specific places saturated with history and memories. In the context of our project, even with the disfigurement of the landscape due to the predatory advancement of pastures and plantations, the elders recognized several archaeological sites, even remembering places where indigenous massacres occurred. The three localities surveyed – the villages of Tsinõ, Ubdönho'u, and Bö'u – match precisely the geographical

Identification of Tsinõ, a village founded in the early 1960s after the communities of Marãiwatsédé were forced to settle next to the headquarters of the Suiá Missu farm.
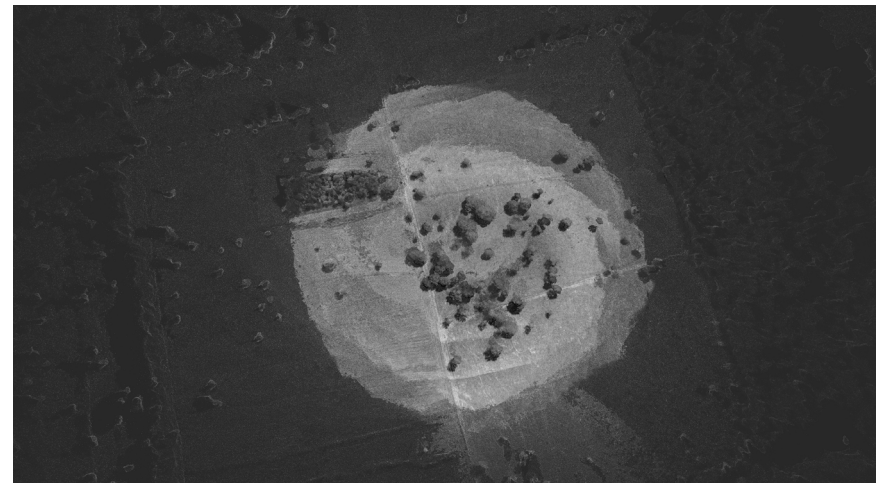
points of the footprints identified in the satellite images.

The ancient Xavante villages can be identified through very peculiar evidentiary signs that are easily recognized by the elders. These include the form and composition of botanic formations, the presence and the disposition of certain trees and palms, and variations in soil type.

All the sites that were documented display a similar remarkable feature wherein a patch of vegetation had grown in the arc-shaped layout of the ancient village. Made of a combination of medium and large trees, palms, and other types of plants and vines, these botanic formations contain certain species that are associated with Xavante ancestral occupation and land-managing systems. Their precise geometry, as well as their species content, makes them stand out from their surroundings and reveals their anthropogenic, "constructed" nature.

LIVING RUINS (THE FOREST AS HERITAGE)

The indigenous past of this territory is recorded not only in the collective memory of the Xavante people, but also in the memory of the Earth itself. In spite of the many different ways these communities have been subjected to what the Brazilian Truth Commission described as a "politics of erasure", their history remains registered in the forest fabric.

The trees, vines, and palms that grew from the fertilized soils of the ancient settlements are the historical landmarks that testify to the ancestral presence of the Xavante in this territory. In many different ways, these botanic formations are the product of the village design, the equivalent to architectural ruins, albeit not dead but living. Can we claim trees, vines, and palms to be historic monuments? Is the forest an "urban heritage" of indigenous landscape management systems?

Most of this archaeological heritage is outside the recognized limits of the Xavante reserves, situated within private fenced lands to which the Xavante people do not have access. As such the sites are in danger of being completely destroyed by the advancement of the agribusiness frontier.

In August 2017, following the presentation of our research findings at the Xavante village of Etenhiritipá, we started drawing a petition to be submitted to the Brazilian National Institute of Artistic and Historic Heritage (IPHAN) and to UNESCO calling for the inclusion of these botanic formations on the list of the protected common heritage of humankind. Our petition contends that those botanic formations should be considered archaeological heritage inasmuch as they represent "architectur-

al artifacts" of the unique culture of the Xavante.

Beyond the urgency of protecting these sites, in interpreting trees and palms as ruins, the petition seeks to probe the liminal relations between natural and cultural landscapes as they have been defined by colonial categories of thought within and beyond the field of architecture, particularly in the way such categories and cognitive schemes have constrained definitions of heritage, memory, and history. Architectural knowledge often blinds us from understanding the deeply human and historical, properly architectural nature of these forest landscapes, and such is the tacit act by which it becomes complicit in the colonial politics of erasure.

Policarpo Waire Tserenhorã describing the archaeological site of Bö'u during field documentation, December 2017.

Documentation of field expedition to the archaeological site of Bö'u.

Documentation of field expedition to the archaeological site of Bö'u.

⚕   Policarpo Waire Tserenhorã describing the archaeological site of Bö'u during field documentation, 2017.

Ȣ   Domingos Tsereõmorãté Hö'awari, field trip, 2017.

⇊   Policarpo Waire Tserenhorã describing the region where the village of Tsinõ is located, 2017.