

The Pacification of the Urubu-Kaapor Indians

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Brazilian Policy in Indigenous Affairs (P. 82-95)

The pacification of the *Urubu-Kaapor* Indians was initiated in 1911 and continued until 1928, when the first members of the Urubu-Kaapor tribe exchanged gestures of friendship with the S.P.I. (Indian Protection Agency) workers, at the Pacification Post on Canindéua-assu Island, on the upper Gurupi River, between the states of Pará and Maranhão.

The first attempt to contact this group was made in 1911 by the Lieutenant Pedro Ribeiro Dantas, who went, with a small group of workers, into the jungle to try to make contact with the Indians. This first attempt failed for lack of continuity, and with the removal of the lieutenant, the struggles between the *Kaapor* and the local population increased. This population consisted of lumbermen, gold miners, and telegraph line construction workers, all scattered throughout the vast territory governed by the Indians, between the Turiaçu, Gurupi and Pindaré rivers.

The attacks of the *Urubu-Kaapor* always came as reprimand for offenses committed against them, and in the first years following Lieutenant Dantas's contact attempt, the small teams of pacification workers who left gifts in places frequented by the Indians did not experience hostilities.

However, the workers on the telegraph line and those who went into the jungle to extract medicinal herbs lived in constant conflict with the Indians; each time they suffered defeat, the *Kaapor* responded with vigorous attacks, and they would stop collecting the gifts that the S.P.I. personnel left for them along the trails and in other places. Sometimes they even destroyed the gifts.

When they learned of any assault by the Indians, the S.P.I. personnel attempted to approach the attackers, but the Indians would retreat into the jungle, making communication impossible. Thus there were alternating periods of hostilities and manifestations of peace on the part of the Indians, who would retrieve the gifts and leave in their place crude wooden models of the scissors and knives which they desired to receive.

In 1915, due to lack of funds, the Felipi Camarão S.P.I. post on the Jararaca river, ceased its activities altogether. This post had been serving the *Tembé* and *Timbira* Indians, and was also seeking to make initial contacts with the *Kaapor*.

Three years later, the Turiaçu monitoring post was created, to stop the conflicts between the Indians and the workers on the telegraph line which connected the cities of São Luis and Belém, Pará, and which crossed Indian territory. These people were particularly notorious for their massacres among the *Urubu-Kaapor*. A certain telegraph agent called Big John, viciously persecuted the Indians, organizing expeditions against their villages and placing the heads of his victims, who included men, women and children, on the telegraph posts as a warning to other Indians not to cut the telegraph line in the future. The S.P.I. reports of that era mention attacks which sometimes are attributed to the *Urubu-Kaapor*, and sometimes to the *Timbira*, who came from the Caru river region. It was evidently not always clear which group was responsible for a given attack.

In this same year (1918), *Urubu-Kaapor* Indians attacked the Indian Post Gonçalves Dias, on the Pindaré river, which aided the *Guajajara* Indians. This was the first attack on that post, which had been set up five years earlier, and was thus registered by the postman.

“João Totoriá, a *Guajajara* Indian, was fishing on the bank of the river when he heard the sound of footsteps in dry leaves. He looked in the direction of the sound, and saw two forms stretched out on the ground. Beyond them three others were standing, somewhat hidden by the brush. Realizing that he was seeing wild Indians, the *Guajajara* Indian ran toward the houses at the post, shouting: “Aúoo, aúoo,” which essentially meant “Wild killer Indian”!. When he reached the patio of the houses, he stumbled and fell, exhausted from the flight. He then got up, and was hit by an arrow in the forehead, which left a wound of 8 centimeters.

When they heard the screams, the friends of the victim, who were making manioc flour, ran to his aid. They saw the assaultants as they were coming out of the patio on the river side and asked them what they wanted. In answer to their question, they were barraged with several arrow shots. More arrows were fired at the *Guajararas*, who again asked what the assaultants wanted. However, when those who were being attacked saw that their assaultants weren't going to give them any answer and that they were taking possession of everything they found in the houses and surrounding areas, they shot twice into the air, hoping in this way to frighten them. The wild Indians, however, paid attention to none of these things and continued firing furiously. At that point, one of the *Guajararas* aimed and fired at the boldest of the attackers, just as he was coming out of a house he had been sacking. At that moment the man in charge of the post, who had heard the shot followed by a scream and the noise of many people running along the bank of the river, arrived at the scene of the conflict. The man who had been shot at was among those who ran away. In spite of all that had happened, he didn't leave behind the objects he had taken from the house he was sacking.

Year after year the S.P.I. reports register incursions of the *Urubu-Kaapor* on settlements of those who collected medicinal herbs, gold miners and lumbermen, as well as on canoes doing commerce on the Gurupi river and other local villages. These incursions resulted in vicious fighting and bloodshed.

The efficiency of these attacks, which often were motivated by a desire to plunder, (the Indians used metal to make arrow points), led the local populous to believe that the *Kaapor* were being directed by criminals who had escaped from the prisons of Maranhão, Pará and even Cayenne, or by negros who were descendants of old slave communities. It was also generally felt that adventurers of all sorts, who were attracted by the rich gold mines of the Gurupi, wanted to maintain the *Kaapor* in a state of war in order to serve their own clandestine gold traffic activities, and thus were responsible for inciting them to plunder. This explanation served principally to justify massacres attempted and sometimes carried out against the Indians.

The press helped to propagate this view of the situation, as can be seen in its account of a nearly legendary figure called Jorge Amir, who was considered to be the leader of the *Kaapor* warriors.

(note 20) See newspaper report in Estado do Pará, 2/26/1920)

This man, who was never clearly identified, supposedly had dealings with a Swedish businessman named Guilherme Linde, who owned a large amount of property on the Gurupi, and who had invested a huge amount of capital in the exploitation of gold in Montes Áureos.

Another common legend of the period was that the *Urubu-Kaapor* were a mixed race of *Timbira* Indians and descendants of slave settlements.

By around 1920, the situation in the entire Gurupi valley had become so dangerous that the state authorities of Maranhão and Pará felt obliged to declare a state of seige in the region in order to protect the lives and property of the non-Indian residents.

Punishment raids on Indian villages, such as the one in 1922 jointly paid for by a state representative and the mayor of Peralva and comprised of 56 well-armed men, were also periodically organized. They went to the upper Turi; after a six-day trek, they assaulted a *Kaapor* village killing two men along the way, which thus alerted the others and facilitated their escape. Early the following morning, with reinforcements from another Indian village, the fugitives surrounded the expedition of men sent to punish them and showered them with arrows. The invaders provoked another flight on the part of the Indians after they had used up nearly all their ammunition, and then burned the village and destroyed the fields before leaving.

In 1927, the pacification efforts among the *Urubu-Kaapor* were begun again, with the creation of the Pedro Dantas Post on Canindéua-assu island, near the place where the Indians crossed the Gurupi, going from the Maranhão to the Pará side. The location was chosen by Miguel Silva, leader of the Felipe Camarão Indian Post, who had worked for the S.P.I since 1911, serving the Tembê and Timbira Indians in the Gurupi area and assisting in the pacification of the *Urubu-Kaapor*.

The group responsible for the installation of this post consisted of 15 workers, the leader of the post—Soeira Ramos Mesquita, a fearful incompetent man who had little influence in the whole enterprise; a carpenter, a man in charge of materials brought by boat; the *Tembê* interpreter, Raimundo Caitano, who was killed by the Indians in 1934; and the pacification leader Benedito Jesus de Araújo, who was the one who made the greatest contribution to the pacification process, and who was subsequently killed by the Indians whom he had pacified, as we shall see later on.

Once a shelter had been constructed on Canindéua-assu Island, (21) across from the Maranhão side, the workers opened a 15-kilometer trail through the jungle, and installed at its end the first hut to be used as a place for gifts, on the right hand bank of the Gurupi.

(21: The Felipe Camarão Indian Post continued to function. In 1929, the General Rondôn Indian Post was founded at the headwaters of the Maracassumé River, not far from the telegraph road. This post was completely separate from those on the Gurupi, and had its own transport system along the trail which had been opened up because of the telegraph line. It had little importance, however, since the Indians didn't seek it out due to their disdain for the other residents of the region.)

A large field was planted on the Pará side and other huts were put up as places for leaving gifts. A white flag was displayed from each of these huts, as well as arrows to indicate where to go to find the central building.

The first hut was found by the Indians a few days after the post had been installed. They broke up the frame and most of the gifts that had been placed on it, taking only a few medallions which

the S.P.I. had engraved with the name of José Bonifácio, their patron, both in honor of him and also to satisfy the Indians' taste for coins and medallions.

In October of 1927, the *Tembé* Indian Manuel Guamá was shot with arrows and killed by the *Urubu-Kaapor* while he was serving as a crew member of the Post's cargo boat, and a short time afterward Raimundo Pereira, one of the workers, was wounded by an arrow.

The main events of 1928, the year in which the pacification took place, were registered in the daily report of the Pedro Dantas Post, and are summarized below:

On January 17, the Indians allowed themselves to be seen and made signs to José Martinho, the Post's hunter.

On February 18, Antônio Bernardino arrived at the Post from Itamoari, and said that Indians had attacked some workers of a man named Bogêa Filho, which resulted in the death of someone named Leóncio. This attack happened in Montes Áureos, where Mr. Bogêa Filho had done an unwise thing in sending men to mine gold. On the following day, some Indians surrounded a worker at the Post while he was hunting near the Canindéua stream, but fortunately he was able to escape.

On June 13, the Indians made signs in front of the Post and on the same day they accompanied the fishermen from Cajoeiro to a place nearby.

On July 7, the *Kaapor* Indians made signs to the fishermen at the Post. On the 11th, the wife of one of the Post workers saw an Indian on the Maranhão side, and that night they showed themselves in front of the Post. The interpreters spoke for a long time with them in *Timbira* and *Tembé*, since the *Kaapor* language was not understood at that time. On the 29th, several Indians appeared in front of the Post and made signs to the fishermen near Camalião Island.

Others appeared near the Canindéua stream and made signs to the leader of the pacification team, Benedito de Araújo, as well as to the interpreter and to some others who were there hunting.

On the 30th, another white flag was put up near the new shelter, in a place where it could be seen by the Indians. On the 31st, these same Indians sought to communicate by means of signs in front of the Post. The *Tembé* interpreter talked with them for some time, thus determining that it was, in fact, a Tupi language which they spoke. The huts were visited from time to time, and it was noted that the gifts were not being picked up by the Indians, probably because they had not found them.

On August 25, the same Indian who had previously been seen by the wife of one of the workers appeared to her again, exhibiting a bow without arrows as a sign of peace, but running away from the interpreter as he arrived.

The Indians continued to make themselves known, both in front of the Post and also to hunters and fishermen. Another hut with gifts was set up nearer the Post.

On September 7, several Indians appeared in front of the Post, and a white flag was raised in that area.

On the 22nd, the same Indian appeared to the woman previously mentioned: this time he was decorated with feathers and wearing a headdress. The interpreter saw him and spoke to him, but didn't receive any answer.

On the first of October, the Indians retrieved all the gifts from the hut nearest the Post, constantly making signs. One Indian was seen in the field and three others in front of the Post. The interpreter continued speaking to them, but didn't get any answer.

On the 13th, the Indians shot some arrows in the direction of the Post, but didn't hit anyone present in the area. Some Indians made themselves known in the place where the previous year they had attacked the Post's cargo boat and afterward they removed the gifts, leaving in their place peaces of bark in the shape of knives and axes, thus causing it to be understood that they needed those objects: their request was granted.

On October 16, around noon, an Indian arrived on the bank of the river and asked for axes in his language. Immediately the Post cargo boat headed in his direction, and the pacification leader took him machetes and hatchets. The Indian moved away, asking that they be left on the beach. The people in the boat obliged, and as soon as they returned to Canind'euua-assu Island, several Indians came out of the jungle and picked up the tools.

On the 20th and 21st, the Indians returned and took away all the gifts, but without talking to anyone. On the 22nd, several Indians came to the same place, calling "catu-camar'a" and asking for clothes and tools. This group was led by an Indian who called himself Remon.

From then on, different groups came to that spot, always taking away with them clothes and tools. The Felipe Camarão Post was sought out for help, since they had run out of all the supplies they could afford to give away.

On the 1st of November Artur Bandeira, one of the officials at the contact Post, arrived at the post and gave gifts to 32 Indians who spotted his canoe from a distance and called out "Catu-camará". Bandeira managed to take three of them to the Post. The following day another group arrived. They were finally willing, after considerable effort on the part of those communicating with them, to have their pictures taken. On the fifth, a group of 8 Indians arrived at the headquarters of the Post: they sang and danced to show their gratitude for the gifts they received.

At the Indians' request, a shelter was constructed on the bank of the river where they were accustomed to coming. On December 15, the first Indian woman appeared at the Post, which by that date had received a total of 94 Indian visitors, some of whom had slept and even spent several days there.

From that time forward, visits to the contact Post became increasingly frequent, occurring almost daily, which meant that an ever larger number of Indians were seeking out the Post with their wives and children, sometimes spending several days there. When there were no gifts for them, they waited in the area for the cargo boat to return from Vizeu.

In 1929, the Post was transferred from the island to the mainland bank on the Maranhão side, and a large wooden shed was constructed, as well as a barbed wire fence and a building for housing Indians.

In April of the following year, Soeira Mesquita, who had the general oversight of the Post, decided to take five *Urubu-Kaapor* Indians with him when he went to Vizeu, in order to prove that he had pacified this fearsome tribe. He needed to go from Vizeu to Belém, so handed the Indians over to the boat crew who would take them back to the Post.

On the return trip the Indians came down with colds, and two of them died in Itamoari. The other three arrived at the Post with the pacification leader, Benedito Araújo, severely ill and weakened. One of them, son of the Arara captain, died a few days later in spite of the treatment he received from the pacification leader as well as from the *Timbira* interpreter, Marcolino. Another group of 25 Indians who had visited the village of Itamoari in a spontaneous gesture of friendship, also came down with colds and contaminated their own village. This flu epidemic spread throughout the whole Gurupi area, affecting the workers at the Post as well as the Indians, and leaving victims among the Indians: the two wives of the Arara captain previously mentioned also died. The majority of the Indians retreated to their villages for fear of this sickness, contaminating them with the germs they carried and greatly increasing the death rate.

. . . “Things were going along in this fashion,” records the daily pacification report, “when we were surprised by shouts of *Urubu-Kaapor* Indians on the Maranhão side of the river asking for passage across to the Post. Only one Indian got aboard, carrying a bow and six arrows, contradicting the established rule stating that Indians were not allowed to come onto the Post armed. As soon as they landed, he gave an arrow to one of the men who had helped him cross, and then headed for the shelter, calling for Araújo, the name by which the pacification leader, Araújo, was known. Araújo, with the kind manner and blind confidence in the Indians for which he was so well known, offered the *Urubu-Kaapor* a seat and began asking him questions. The Indian showed the pacification leader an arrow with a very large blade, saying that he was ready to go kill “tapiira” (tapir). At that moment he put the arrow in the bow, aimed at the yard, and said: “Araú tapiira”. He bent the bow with all his strength, suddenly changed his aim, and shot Araújo in the chest, killing him instantly.

Still armed with four arrows, he went out through the door that led to the kitchen, giving loud war-cries, and went round the shed looking for someone else. He stopped in front of a window and shot an arrow, hitting Marcolino, the *Timbira* Indian. Marcolino ran, although he was mortally wounded, falling a short distance away. A short time later Oropó, who was from the same village as the Arara captain, fled into the jungle. It was later discovered that he, too, had lost his two wives in the epidemic.

The other Indians who had been living peaceably in the shelter for several days, although they had no idea what had possessed their friend to commit such an act, fled into the jungle, terrified.

Not one single shot was fired at Oropó as he fled, although all the workers at the Post were both perplexed and angered by the attack.

In all other cases of massacres of pacification teams the S.P.I. acted in this same way, doing their best to hinder any acts of retaliation, either on the part of their own workers or of others in the vicinity, and renewing efforts at developing friendship. This attitude was seen in what occurred with the Botocudo (*Xoklêng*) people in Paraná, as was already discussed, and in 1942, when Humberto Brighia, an S.P.I. official, was victimized with his family, a total of six people, during the pacification effort among the *Uaimiri* of the state of Amazonas. It was also what happened

with Genésio Pimentel Barbosa and his colleagues, who were clubbed to death by the Xavante, as well as in various other situations.

Repeatedly, efforts at reconstructing peaceful relationships with the Indians were begun again very soon after the attacks, and were the initiative either of the workers who survived the attack, or of the teams who substituted them. In the case of the *Urubu-Kaapor*, the problem was an anti-acculturation movement which developed as a result of the anger over the many deaths which occurred during the first flu epidemic, and which the Indian man Oropó attributed to the medicines given to people by the pacification leader.