

# Waste and disposal in Indigenous Lands: the experience of the Gavião Pyhcop Catiji with solid waste in the Amazon (Brazil)

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## **Abstract**

The volume of solid waste that accumulates in Indigenous Lands in the Amazon today increases the ecological and political problems of the indigenous peoples, requiring reflection and action against garbage coming from urban areas. This article aims to describe how the Gavião people deal with the garbage discarded within the Governor Indigenous Land, identifying management practices and classification schemes according to the Gavião. Over 60 years of disposal in the Governor Indigenous Land, waste has been linked to periods of proximity and distance from the urban centers, requiring specific management practices. The categories 'poisonous waste', 'dangerous waste', and 'our waste' indicate dimensions of agency present in the waste, and imply different ways of dealing with each waste. Reflecting on different human abilities in dealing with waste enables us to take a new look at our problems with petroleum derivatives and human life on the planet.

**Key-words:** Solid Waste, Indigenous Lands, Gavião Pyhcop Catiji, Amazon.

# Lixo e descarte em Terras Indígenas: a experiência dos Gavião Pyhcop Catiji com resíduos sólidos na Amazônia (Brasil)

## Resumo

O volume de resíduos sólidos que hoje se acumulam em Terras Indígenas da Amazônia aumenta os problemas de ordem ecológica e política dos povos indígenas, exigindo reflexões e ações frente ao lixo vindo da cidade. O objetivo deste artigo é descrever o modo como os Gavião lidam com o lixo descartado dentro da Terra Indígena Governador, identificando práticas de manejo e esquemas de classificação segundo os Gavião. Durante 60 anos de descarte na Terra Indígena Governador os resíduos estiveram relacionados com períodos de proximidade e de afastamento da cidade, exigindo práticas específicas de manejo. As categorias *lixo veneno*, *lixo perigo* e *lixo nosso* indicam dimensões de agencialidade presentes nos resíduos e que implicam em modos distintos de se relacionar com cada lixo. Refletir sobre diferentes habilidades humanas no trato com o lixo possibilita lançar novos olhares sobre nossos problemas com os derivados do petróleo e a vida humana no planeta.

**Palavras-chave:** Resíduos Sólidos, Terras Indígenas, Gavião Pyhcop Catiji, Amazônia.

# Waste and disposal in Indigenous Lands: the experience of the Gavião Pyhcop Catiji with solid waste in the Amazon (Brazil)

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## **Introduction**

From 2018 to 2022, deforestation, fire, and illegal mining rates escalated in Indigenous Lands in Brazil. Through Bolsonaro's government, these actions gained strength and legal backing from the State and put the lives of indigenous peoples in the Amazon at risk (Ferrante, Fearnside, 2022; Mataveli et al., 2022; Silva Júnior et al., 2023). But this is an image from above the Amazon rainforest, an image made over the canopy, as remote sensing images are. A silent agent that has been endangering the lives of different living beings in the cities is also inside the world's largest rainforest, adding to the ecological, political, and social problems of the indigenous peoples: plastics.

Industrialized petroleum derivatives, which do not deteriorate over time, have been inside forests and villages for many years, becoming a problem for indigenous peoples and requiring ways to deal with the waste from the city (Arisi, Cantero, 2016). Before being discarded, this waste was once a consumer product. The desire and dependence on industrialized goods have increased among indigenous people over the years (Gordon, 2006), bringing more and more plastic and solid waste into Indigenous Lands.

The image of a village accumulating more and more garbage is an image that alerts us to the extent of the destruction that human beings have wrought upon planet Earth. For some, it could be a warning sign that we have entered a path of self-destruction with no return. But is it? The answer is both yes and no.

In the wake of garbage, or from an anthropological approach to garbage (Colombijn, Rial, 2016), we believe that reflecting on different human abilities in dealing with garbage enables us to take a new look at the ways of producing social inequalities in post-industrial societies and on human life on the planet.

This reflection focuses on the indigenous Gavião Pyhcop Catiji people, speakers of the Macro-Jê linguistic trunk and identified as Timbira people (Nimuendaju, 1946). The Gavião live in the Governador Indigenous Land, in the Amazon portion of the State of Maranhão, and have been living with the adverse effects of deforestation and fire on their lands, these being the major agenda of their struggles (Melo, Milanez, 2017). However, the generation of solid waste promoted by the indigenous people themselves has worried indigenous leaders, elders, and teachers in the villages.

In the last 60 years, the consumption of oil-derived goods has been present in the life of the Gavião people, as well as the garbage disposal within the villages. This article seeks to describe how the Gavião deal with the garbage discarded within the Governor Indigenous Land, identifying what this garbage is, describing solid waste management practices and garbage classification schemes according to the Gavião.

The discussion in this article is derived from ethnographic research (Peirano, 2014) with the Gavião people (TI Governador) conducted in the Governador Village. Some of these meetings took place in the capital of the State of Maranhão, São Luís, during actions of the indigenous movement or in specialized medical care. For the execution of the field research, we carried out "participant observation," understanding, observing, and participating not as opposites but as complementary in the process of learning something from someone (Ingold, 2017). The interlocutors of this work were, above all, village leaders, indigenous teachers, and elders.

We have divided the text into two parts. The first introduces the Gavião and outlines 60 years of consumption and disposal within the Governor Indigenous Land, drawing attention to a political dimension and reproduction of social inequalities established between postmodernity, consumption, and disposal. The second is inserted in an anthropological approach to garbage among indigenous peoples, describing the forms of solid waste management within the TI and some initial notes on the garbage classifications according to the Gavião perspective.

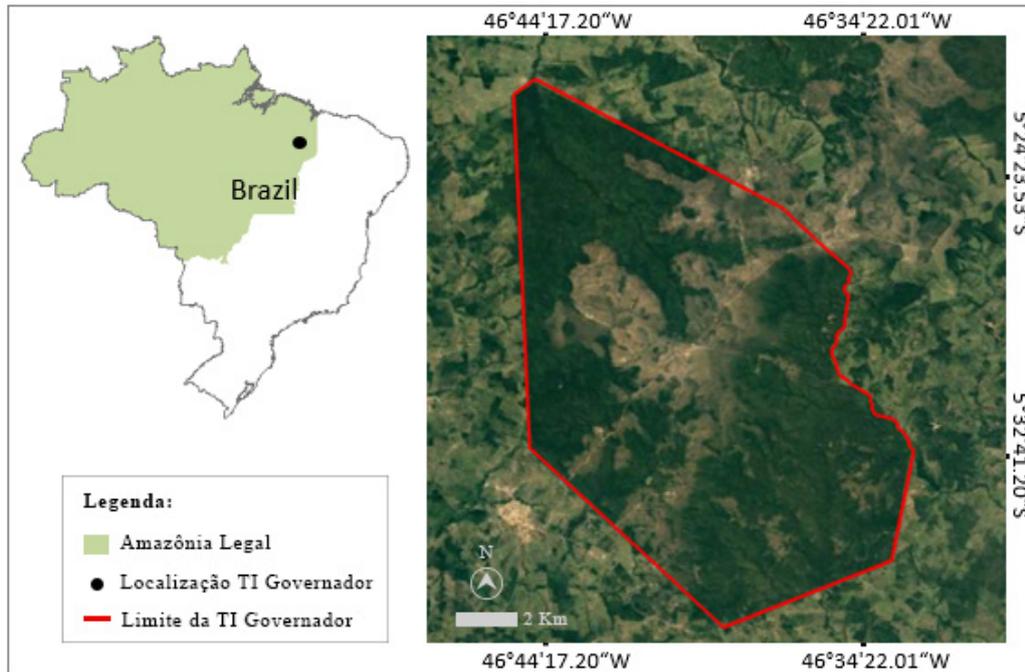
### **The Gavião people, waste and disposal: 60 years of consumption and solid waste management in the Governador Indigenous Land**

The Gavião Pyhcoo Catiji are speakers of a language of the Macro-Jê linguistic trunk and are classified as Timbira peoples (Nimuendaju, 1946). They live near the municipality of Amarante do Maranhão, in the southwestern part of Maranhão State. The region is known as the Pre-Amazon of Maranhão and extends across forested and cerrado areas. Currently, the Gavião live in 15 villages, with an estimated population of 1,200 people, resulting from an intense process of dispersion and concentration of new villages that occurred in the last 30 years within the territory itself (Melo, Soares, 2018).

The Gavião practice agriculture associated with extractivism, fishing, and hunting. All households in the Governor Indigenous Land receive Auxílio Brasil from the Federal Government, and families with children and adolescents between the ages of 4 and 16 receive Bolsa Escola. Besides these sources of income, there are retired people and two groups of wage earners in Governador Village: the teachers and some employees of FUNAI.

We can divide the history of the Gavião's contact with national society into three periods. The first records are from Major de Paula Ribeiro, in the mid-1800s, when he identified 15 groups on the banks of the Grajaú River in Maranhão (Nimuendaju, 1946). The action of the "pacification fronts" coming from the north of Maranhão, Pará, Tocantins, and Goiás in 1850 marked the second period. In 1950, a new "wave" of development hit the Gavião with the construction of the Belém-Brasília highway, bringing "southerners" and the high speculation of the lands around the Governor Indigenous Land (Barata, 1981). The third period is characterized by the concentration and dispersion of villages in the current territory, initiated by the need to remain together in the face of attacks from city dwellers in the 1980s and, later, motivated by the division and creation of new villages in the mid-1990s. This phenomenon of population dispersion was accentuated in the 2000s, when proto-gavião groups separated and returned to old territories once occupied by previous generations within the Governor Indigenous Land, creating new villages (Melo, 2017).

**Figure 1** - Location of the Governador Indigenous Land, Amarante do Maranhão, Maranhão, Brazil



Fonte: Melo et. al., 2022.

The periods that mark the history of contact of the Gavião people with Brazilian society indicate moments of greater or lesser proximity to non-indigenous people and their things. These cycles of closeness and estrangement bring narratives about conflicts and the Gavião's interest in industrialized goods or commodities. As interest in these commodities grew, as was recurrent with other peoples (Howard, 2002), so did the consumption and disposal of waste that does not decay within the Governor Indigenous Land.

To be sure, the Gavião's first exchanges, or purchases, with non-indigenous people, are much older than our records. However, older hunters report that the first "buying expeditions" were carried out around 1960 using as currency seeds of Cumaru (*Dipteryx odorata*), a typical tree in the region with analgesic and bronchodilatory functions. The seeds were collected in the forest during hunting expeditions or specific searches. The exchanges took place in a post of the Indian Protection Service (SPI), about 80 km from Aldeia Governador, in the Arariboia Indigenous Land, where the Guajajara people live and where the first SPI post in the region was established. The objects of interest to the Gavião were mainly metal, cloth, and medicine. The "buying expeditions" brought to the village machetes, sickles, swords, hammers, nails, salt, as well as beads and meters of cloth for making clothes. Another item of great interest was medicine to combat flu symptoms, specifically Aspirin, which arrived in the village in glass and plastic bottles.

In the 1970s, missionaries from the New Tribes arrived in the Governor's Indigenous Land, coming from the United States. Besides being missionaries, they were linguists who studied the Gavião language, translated the Bible, and began teaching the Gavião people to read and write in their own language and Portuguese. The missionaries also had great importance in maintaining the health of the population and treating illnesses with medicines they brought from abroad (Melo, 2017). However, the small paid services that the missionaries demanded from the indigenous population were of great interest to the Gavião. In exchange for small amounts of money, the indigenous people were required to perform various forms of manual labor, from cleaning a piece of land to building a house. The bills that circulated internally in the Governor's Indigenous Land were mainly those that came along with the missionaries. Light bulbs, radios, batteries, rifles, cartridges, and motors became more common and present inside the village, as well as some specific products such as oil, coffee, and sugar, which became objects of interest due to the proximity to the city that grew around them.

In the 1980s, the Gavião people lived this process of consumption of industrial goods intensely. It was the “time of money,” as the elders say. It was when FUNAI demarcated the Governor Indigenous Land, and the community began to receive compensation from the Vale do Rio Doce company due to the environmental impacts caused by the construction of the Belém-Carajas highway. The elders’ accounts tell that a helicopter descended on the village courtyard, from which the head of the FUNAI office emerged, soldiers armed with machine guns and a metal box filled with money. A long line formed, and the money was passed on to the representatives of the families that owned or worked in the “FUNAI field” (Melo, 2017). Electricity reached the Governor Indigenous Land and the school during this same period. Along with electric light and schooling, new consumer needs and desires arrived. Televisions, refrigerators, stoves, bedding, mattresses, containers, fabrics, shoes, perfumes, combs, flashlights, machetes, rifles, ammunition, and bicycles were bought in large quantities. In the case of bicycles, the elders say that it was the most valuable object that one could have in the village. Therefore, many people bought bicycles with their own money. When they broke down or got a flat tire, they were abandoned in a “bicycle graveyard” until they rusted or the weeds made them disappear. It was in the 1980s that alcohol entered with more intensity into the lives of the Gavião people, and along with it, bottles and glass containers that, until today, are a central concern for parents who fear that their children will cut their feet.

This scenario of consumption and disposal was more intense because all the Gavião, who in the 1980s lived in three villages, were concentrated in the village of Governador, where Funai installed a post. The Gavião sought protection as they fled from measles that had decimated an entire village and from attacks by townspeople who set fire to another one in the same period (Melo, 2017).

Between 1990 and 2000, the Gavião began to live with more tranquility and assistance from the State as they began to enjoy the benefits of public policies guaranteed by the Constitution after the demarcation of the land. Access to the money that came from Vale do Rio Doce, public policies on health, education, food, as well as population growth made it unfeasible for all the Gavião to live together in the same village. The houses around the courtyard grew, and another circle had to be built around the initial circle of houses; solid waste grew along with the houses and the population. Motorcycles, chainsaws, fishing and hunting materials, construction materials, and chemicals such as fuel and oil become more present and visible around the village. However, the great transformation that began in this decade is the degradation of the Governor’s Indigenous Land, mainly by loggers, which has caused great changes in the ways of life of the Gavião. Little by little, it became more necessary to resort to industrialized products, especially foodstuffs, to meet the population’s demand for food that continued to grow.

In mid-2010, a process of dispersal of the villages within the Governor Indigenous Land began, driven by different internal conflicts (Melo, Soares, 2018). The increase in the indigenous people’s purchasing power, assisted by social programs such as Bolsa Família and Bolsa Escola marks this period. This decade is also remembered for the intense conflicts with the city dwellers of Amarante do Maranhão, as well as the increasingly dramatic changes in their ways of life, driven, above all, by the environmental degradation of the Indigenous Lands in the Amazon (Silva et al., 2021). Packaging of different products, plastic bags, household appliances, motorcycle parts, bicycles, PET bottles, satellite dishes, glass, iron, and aluminum accumulated in the back of the houses or less busy places in the village. It was around 2015 that electronic waste also became more present inside the Governor Indigenous Land. Cell phones, batteries, and cameras start circulating through the hands of young people and receive the same destination as other waste—the back of the houses.

The years 2020 can be marked by two indicators. The first was the growing invasion of the Indigenous Land Governor, which forced the Gavião to review their hunting, fishing, gathering, opening of fields, and creation of villages (Melo et al., 2022). In addition, the economic crisis driven by the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, which had an openly anti-indigenous and anti-environmental agenda. The second was

the increase in consumer power, and the need for industrial goods, especially protein sources, has made recurrent consumption and disposal of products that did not occur with such large volumes. Today, every week, families go to the supermarkets of Amarante do Maranhão returning with bales of chicken, bags of rice, beans, couscous, sugar, coffee, cookies, snacks, powdered juice, bales of soda, jars of margarine, medicine, cleaning and personal hygiene products, clothes, shoes, and school supplies. Also more present are cell phones, household appliances, children's toys, soccer balls, hunting and fishing materials, bicycles, motorcycles, and car parts like the two trucks from Funai, which have been deteriorating in the village courtyard since the 1990s.

If non-indigenous people have lost the references that positioned them in “post-industrial societies,” those in which the service sector dominates the economy and not industry, it is evident that a society based on consumption produces more waste and discards than it can consume (Eriksen, 2010; Bauman, 2000). This same reality affects indigenous peoples in the Amazon.

In the case of the Gavião, the illegal anthropic action in the Governor Indigenous Land alters their ways of life, which makes them more dependent on industrial goods, especially foodstuffs from the city. At the same time that the Gavião are living with the environmental degradation of their territory and the increase of conflicts with city dwellers, they are living inside the villages with an increase of garbage coming from the city. The image of a village in the Amazon forest accumulating more and more garbage is a good way to think about the production of social inequalities at regional and international scales that occur in the Amazon. But it is also more than that.

### **Experience and perspective with garbage among the Gavião: *poisonous waste, dangerous waste, and our waste***

We know little about waste management in indigenous communities, but what we do know indicates that waste is a problem for indigenous peoples. It is a problem because it has severe implications for the health of these populations (Coimbra, 2014). It is also a problem of another nature because it starts from a conception of garbage different from ours, which triggers a distinct relationship between humans and waste.

An anthropological approach to garbage has given us elements to think about other dimensions of the interactions between humans and their garbage. Something that we believe to be very positive since different viewpoints on similar issues can replace simplistic solutions with contextualized answers and new perspectives (Colombijn, Rial, 2016). In this sense, considering the increase of garbage in Indigenous Lands in the Amazon, we can ask ourselves: What is garbage for the Gavião? What management do they do with their waste? How do they live with industrial waste inside the forest?

For many years of consumption and disposal in the Governor Indigenous Land, garbage received the same fate as food scraps, wood, and natural fibers. It was thrown behind the houses. The villages of the Timbira people are circular, with a patio in the center and radial paths that lead to the houses are placed (Ladeira, 1982). When the families within a house become autonomous, with children and fields, they build houses behind the houses of the older matriarchs (Melo, 2017). Therefore, choosing where to throw the waste is a key issue to ensure the construction of new houses and population growth.

It must be said that not all industrial or natural waste receives the same destination. Artifacts made of feathers and wood that will no longer be used but have a ritualistic value are kept for many years. Objects that have belonged to the same person for a long time are taken to the grave on the day of their burial (Melo, 2017). However, in recent decades, the volume of garbage from the city has increased, and a way of disposing of it is necessary.

The Hawks throw the industrial waste that does not decay into a large hole in the back of the houses. When the hole is full, they burn the waste. What does not deteriorate immediately remains in the hole. Each hole is used for years, but everyone knows that it will not be used forever. If the population is growing, as is the consumption and disposal of garbage in the village, this problem motivates the Gavião to deal with their garbage.

**Figure 2** - Hole where discarded waste is deposited and burned



Source: Produced by the authors

Dealing with waste is not just an issue for the Hawkeye. Liborian (2015) analyzes the presence of such a large amount of chemicals in the bodies of Greenland natives that they could be considered chemical waste. The author will suggest a model approach based on the idea of “miasmas,” theories used to think about the origin of diseases that are considered scattered, non-specific influences on their causes. That is, “miasma provides a material framework for understanding how plastic pollution works in the environments and bodies of which it has become an everyday part” (Liborian, 2015: 147).

In Brazil and on the border with Paraguay, Arisi and Cantero (2016: 381) begin their text on industrialized waste and the experiences of indigenous peoples with the question, “Do indigenous peoples have “problems” with waste?” The text shows how the Matis, in the Amazon rainforest, and the Ava Guarani, in Ciudad del Este, deal with garbage. While the first is trying to address issues with increasing garbage in their villages, the Ava Guarani are finding a way to survive by collecting items from the city’s trash. The authors also present how these peoples develop activities and reflections about garbage suggested by environmental educators, known as the 5 Rs (rethink - refuse - reduce - reuse - recycle).

The way the Gavião people have dealt with their garbage allows a parallel with the authors’ article, presenting activities and reflections about garbage based on the 5Rs approach.

**Rethink.** The concern about garbage within the villages is visible. It is, in a way, general. However, indigenous leaders and teachers have taken the lead, raising this discussion in schools and proposing measures to confront it. For example, the Cultural Environment Gymkhana.

**Refuse.** Chemical pollutants and electronic waste are the target of much concern, but there is no movement to prevent these products from entering Indigenous Land. Cell phones are objects of much interest.

**Reduce.** The Gavião sought through the Plan for Territorial Management of Timbira Lands to reestablish the people’s food sovereignty, precisely to reduce consumption of industrialized food products, consequently

reducing the disposal of plastic inside the villages. Native fruit seedlings were cultivated and distributed to all the villages, seeds, cassava manioc, and equipment were acquired to help in the opening of the fields, as well as 14 flour houses were built with the same objective.

**Reuse.** Many residues are used. Stronger plastic bags remain for years storing personal or household goods. Cans are often used to make cassava graters; after they have been opened and pierced on the reverse side, they are nailed to pieces of wood. Today, bicycles and motorcycles are used until they are completely ruined. The same happens with cell phones, beds, mattresses, fabrics, and household appliances.

**Recycling.** There is no recycling among the Gavião people. But during the Gincana Cultural do Meio Ambiente (Environmental Cultural Gymkhana), held in 2021 and 2022, the garbage collected was taken by truck to the exit of the Governor's Indigenous Land, being deposited in a collection point on Br 277, near the municipality of Amarante do Maranhão. The objective was to remove the garbage that was not produced by the Gavião themselves from their land.

In 2021, thinking about the increase in the accumulation of garbage in the villages, the indigenous teachers and leaders organized an Environment Gymkhana, held at the Indigenous School of Governador Village. The children and youth were divided according to the ceremonial groups they belong to, according to the set of names they receive at birth (Melo, 2017). Adults and elders belonging to each of these same ceremonial groups could assist the younger ones in the tasks. The activities involved traditional knowledge and its relationship with the environment, such as knowledge of their own territory, fauna, flora, and traditional doings. For example, in one of the tasks, the team that returned the fastest to the village courtyard with a bacuri would win a point; in another, the team that first sang a specific song from one of the rituals would be the winner, or the team that first drew buriti straw and wove an artifact would be the champion. In both years, a cleaning task force removed the industrial waste found around the houses and in the village courtyard. A truck took the to the city of Amarante do Maranhão. The competition took place again in 2022, and the proposal was to turn it into an annual event.

The Gavião's concern with garbage, which perhaps the competition best represents, is based on the adoption of a non-indigenous environmental or ecological discourse directed at the issue of garbage within the villages. Environment, recycling, and sustainability are Western categories that do not exist among indigenous peoples. However, ecological discourse is a platform for political transactions between indigenous and non-indigenous people. It has been so for many years in the indigenous movement. The idea of a "natural man" that extends to indigenous peoples, the true son of Mother Earth, the common mother of all living things, feeds into a romantic discourse of naturalistic ontologies about the relationship between humans and nature. Saez (2006: 30) calls the "ecological Indian" this way of thinking of the natural man, the good savage who has not lost the bond with nature and is converted in Western society into a mirror: "muestra nos, vestido de outro, esse Yo que preferíamos ser".

There is a significant difference between Amerindian ontologies and naturalist ontologies about the relationship between humans and nature. The idea that we are all children of the same mother Earth, and therefore brothers and sisters, is opposed to the Amerindian ontogenesis perspective. Indigenous societies spend a lot of time and work in the intense process of body fabrication, which aims to differentiate humans from other living beings that are in constant relationship in this process that begins with birth and only ends with death (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). The hunter Gavião does not stop killing armadillos when the game is abundant because he is concerned about the environmental balance. His concern is *tun jöh pa'hêeh*, the "chief of the armadillos," a type of double (Cesarino, 2010), an image of a body or object that manifests itself outwardly in the absence of the former, appearing to him in the forest and as in an act of revenge, making him "enpanema," i.e., unable to hunt other hunts, make him sick and even lead him to death (Melo, 2019).

Indigenous societies recognize a vital trade that runs through heaven and earth, imposing some kind of order among beings, just as we acknowledge in the ecological interdependence among living beings an order in the relationships among them. The difference of indigenous societies “no estará en la conservación de la naturaleza, sino en su disposición para extender el consumo, simétricamente, a un lado y otro de esa frontera [human x natural] que nosotros hemos trazado (Saez, 2006: 36). As the author states, the ecological discourse finds intellectual constructs in the indigenous world that are equivalent, so we need not dismiss all possibilities for reflection from the “ecological indigenous person.”

We can look even more closely at the garbage of the Gavião. This is because “garbage is not a self-evident object, but a socially constructed category, the result of a separation” (Colombijn, Rial, 2016, p. 20). Certainly, understanding more about what garbage is for Amerindian peoples is a topic that lacks ethnographies and discussion. However, we can point to perspectives that the Gavião have about garbage as categories that guide human actions in view of the agentiality that exists in each form of garbage and its relationship with humans.

For the Gavião, there is no specific word for garbage. When referring to some residue coming from the city, they use the phrase: *cohpe jo’creh pehn ehmpoo quin ehntaa ji*. In a literal translation, this would mean: bad things that come from the white man’s village. The word *amquin* means poison, bad thing, and it is used with other words carrying the idea of poison to the mentioned context.

Many words relating to different kinds of waste, derived from petroleum, are “gaviãonized,” such as *prastico* (plastic). But, some waste gets more attention. Even when discarded, the televisions are called *cohpe carut* (white man’s soul), and the computer is called *cry pex* (intelligent good head).

From our ethnography, we will deal with three categories that the Gavião use to refer to garbage, which formulated in English would be: *poisonous waste*, *dangerous waste*, and *our waste*. Each one of them refers to a type of waste and the impacts they cause on the life of the community.

The *poisonous waste* does not carry the bad thing in itself; that which is harmful to humans appears when it is incinerated and becomes smoke. The black smoke that waste such as tires, plastic, and Styrofoam produce is avoided mainly by children and the elderly. There is some caution when burning these products, but they are burned together with all other waste in the same hole. The biggest concern with poisonous waste is the smoke from burning plastic bags to start small fires. Inside every home, small bonfires are made to cook food or warm the winter days, using plastic as a catalyst for combustion. It is an old practice performed daily by some women for over 50 years.

The *dangerous waste* carries in itself, in the material it is made of, the bad thing. They are shards of glass, usually from alcoholic beverages left in the corners of the village, and canned food of different origins, such as cans of sardines, bean stew, tomato sauce, canned corn, condensed milk, and cans of oil. Pieces of iron, aluminum, and copper wires are also in this classification; they are residues that cause danger. The danger is that children, even adults, cut their feet or hands on this waste, often covered by the bush that grows over it in the villages.

*Our waste* also does not carry in itself its power to impact human life; it manifests itself during its putrefaction, and, unlike the other categories, it carries something positive to all living beings. All waste that originates from the Governor’s Indigenous Land is considered *our waste* and can be reinserted into the very land it came from. The straws of buriti, babassu, carnauba, piassaba, used in handicrafts and to cover houses, the pieces of wood from handicrafts or construction, vines and embiras used in lashings, are thrown in the back of the houses. Many houses have fruit trees in the backyard and small corn and cassava plantations. This type of residue deliberately scattered in this space works as a potent fertilizer. Some of this waste is purposely burned outside the holes to leave the ashes on these pieces of soil for which they have some future interest. The remains of fish and other hunted animals, bones, viscera, and leather, as well as residues of rice, cassava,

flour, fava beans, corn, sweet potato, pumpkin, peanuts, watermelon, banana, buriti, jussara, bacaba, bacuri, guava, mango, and cashew, which are the basis of the Gavião people's diet, serve as food for the chickens, cats, or dogs of each house. These are residues that never accumulate or cause any odor at the back of the houses.

The increase in garbage worries the Gavião people, however, not to the point of creating conflicts among the villagers themselves. They recognize that some families are more concerned about garbage than others, which triggers points of garbage accumulation that, with the winds, spread everywhere. However, the absence of conflict does not hide the imminent danger of increasing garbage and the concern that now surrounds the villages.

## Conclusion

There is little literature in Brazil and Latin America about solid waste management by indigenous populations and even less work on what we could call an indigenous perspective on garbage. But, looking at some of these experiences and conceptions about garbage can create a panorama of this situation in forests and urban villages.

The 60 years of consumption and disposal in the Governor Indigenous Land have accompanied moments of greater or lesser proximity to national society. The closer, the closer to industrial goods and conflicts with city dwellers. The illegal deforestation in the Gavião territory has created an increase in the community's dependence on food consumption goods from the city since this anthropic action impairs hunting, fishing, gathering, and the opening of plantations. With the land demarcated and the gradual access to public policies aimed at indigenous peoples, the Gavião entered a new cycle of consumption that accompanied the process of dispersion and concentration of villages within the territory. This scenario gained strength with government aid from the 2000s on, but by 2020, the increase in degradation and conflicts with city dwellers made it increasingly difficult to live independently and increased the need for industrial goods, especially foodstuffs. This is not a direct relationship, but it intensifies in these moments of proximity.

The Gavião's experiences with waste management in their villages have given them partial control over the situation. Most of the organic waste is still deposited at the back of the houses, often serving as food for dogs, cats, and chickens. Waste that does not easily deteriorate is burned in a large hole at the back of the house.

Garbage is also a problem for the Gavião from a different perspective than ours since it results from a social process of qualification that is different from ours and needs to be investigated. The use of the word *aquim* (bad thing) in sentences that refer to industrial waste makes us think of a dimension of waste agency. This capacity is manifested in the very nature of the waste, as in glass shards, canned goods, and metals classified as hazardous waste. Other times, it is manifested through natural processes subjected to garbage, such as *poisonous waste*, which brings a risk to humans when it burns, like the smoke from burning plastic bags, Styrofoam, and tires. Or, as in the classification of *our waste*, which refers to all the waste produced internally in the Governor Indigenous Land and that can return to the environment, such as food scraps, straws, and wood. In this case, garbage brings positive potentialities to humans since, in putrefaction, it increases the productivity of the soil in the form of natural fertilizer.

If, on the one hand, the increase of garbage inside the villages is an image that reflects the errors of a society based on consumption, on the other hand, the ways these people have dealt with garbage point to practices and perspectives different from those known by educators and environmental managers. The difference here is beneficial; it offers us other ways of thinking and dealing with waste and brings us closer to solving problems that impact both those living in the forests and those in the cities.

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