


# The Maxakali of the Indigenous Lands of Água Boa and Pradinho/Minas Gerais and the crisis of the Indian Protection Service (1910–1967)


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revista

Geo   
USP  
espaço e tempo

Volume 29 • n° 2 (2025)

ISSN 2179-0892

## Hot to cite:

MENDONÇA, K.F.C.; LAROQUE, L.F.S. The Maxakali of the Indigenous Lands of Água Boa and Pradinho/Minas Gerais and the crisis of the Indian Protection Service (1910–1967). **Geousp**, v. 29, n. 2, e-223419, may/aug. 2025. ISSN 2179-0892. Available at: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/geousp/article/view/223419>. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2179-0892.geousp.2025.223419>.en.



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# The Maxakali of the Indigenous Lands of Água Boa and Pradinho/Minas Gerais and the crisis of the Indian Protection Service (1910–1967)

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## Abstract

The Maxakali are a people belonging to the Jê linguistic family, who occupy the territories between the Pardo and Doce rivers, principally in the northeast of Minas Gerais state, and were under the protection of the Indian Protection Service (SPI) from 1940 to 1967. Throughout their historical process, they suffered from a lack of resources, trained professionals, corruption and inefficiency, as well as hunger, poverty, dispossession and violence as a result of the deplorable services provided by the SPI during the last decade of its existence. The aim of this article is to analyse the historical process that led to the end of the activities of the Indian Protection Service with the Maxakali. The methodology used was descriptive *ex post facto* research, based on bibliographical and documentary sources, with the main source being the SPI documents made available by the National Museum of Indigenous People, Rio de Janeiro.

**Keywords:** Maxakali; SPI; Indigenous Lands of Água Boa and Pradinho.

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## Os Maxakali das Terras Indígenas de Água Boa e do Pradinho/Minas Gerais e a crise do Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (1910–1967)

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## Resumo

Os Maxakali são um povo pertencente à Família Linguística Jê, ocupantes dos territórios entre os rios Pardo e Doce, no nordeste de Minas Gerais, que, no período de 1910 a 1967, foram assistidos pelo Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (SPI). No seu processo histórico, além da falta de verbas e de profissionais capacitados, da corrupção e da ineficácia, ainda sofreram com a fome, a miséria, a espoliação e a violência, advindas dos deploráveis serviços prestados na última década de existência do referido órgão. Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar o percurso histórico que culminou com o término das atividades do Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (SPI), junto à etnia Maxakali. Para isso, utilizou-se a abordagem metodológica descritiva, *ex post facto*, e histórica, fundamentadas, principalmente, em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, realizada no Museu do Índio, no Rio de Janeiro.

**Palavras-chave:** Maxakali; SPI; Terras Indígenas de Água Boa e do Pradinho

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# Los Maxakali de las Tierras Indígenas de Água Boa y Pradinho/Minas Gerais y la crisis del Servicio de Protección al Indio (1910–1967)

## Resumen

Los Maxakali son un pueblo perteneciente a la Familia Lingüística Jê, que ocupa los territorios entre los ríos Pardo y Doce, en el noreste de Minas Gerais, y estuvieron bajo la protección del Servicio de Protección al Indio (SPI), de 1910 a 1967. En su proceso histórico, además de la falta de fondos, profesionales capacitados, corrupción e ineficiencia, también sufrieron hambre, pobreza, despojo y violencia, producto de los deplorables servicios prestados en la última década de existencia del citado organismo. Este artículo tuvo como objetivo analizar el proceso histórico que culminó con el fin de las actividades del Servicio de Protección al Indio con los Maxakali. Metodológicamente, se utilizó investigación descriptiva, *ex post facto*, bibliográfica y documental, siendo la fuente principal los documentos del SPI puestos a disposición por el Museo del Indio en Río de Janeiro.

**Palabras clave:** Maxakali; SPI; Tierras Indígenas de Água Boa y Pradinho.

## Introduction

The Maxakali or Tikmá'n, members of the Jê society, traditionally inhabited territories between the *Pardo* and *Doce* rivers, corresponding to southeastern Bahia, northeastern Minas Gerais, and northern Espírito Santo, an area of approximately 360,000 hectares. During the 18th and 19th centuries, with the intensification of disputes over their ancestral territories, these indigenous people came to occupy the equivalent of 6,500 hectares of land in Minas Gerais alone. After much struggle and resistance during the Brazilian republican period, the land was recognized and regularized by the Brazilian state only in 1996.

Throughout the colonial period, the Maxakali suffered from pressure for land due to the degradation of the *Jequitinhonha* and *Rio Doce* valleys, caused by the militarization imposed during the conflict between Dom Pedro I and the indigenous peoples who lived or took refuge in the region's forests, with the *Mucuri* valley as their last refuge (Mattos, 2018).

In addition to the conflicts provoked by the presence and activities of other ethnic groups, such as the Maconis, Puris, and Tocoíós, from the imperial period onward, the Maxakali bore even greater pressure from Brazilians on their territories (Camargo, 2020). This contact resulted in disease, famine, slavery, wars, detention in villages and barracks, social disruption, deaths and murders, among other cruelties used to dispossess the original inhabitants of the *Mucuri* valley.

It is important to emphasize that the Maxakali, like other indigenous peoples, did not remain indifferent or inert to what was happening to them; quite the contrary, as diverse social and ethnic actors, they employed a variety of strategies to protect themselves. According to Mattos (2012), these strategies oscillated between alliances, conflict, simulating assimilation, and resistance.

Requests for protection, whether from the church or from stronger settlers, were also used as were alliances enforced with the colonizers in the face of the Maxakali's self perceived military inferiority (Ribeiro, 2008). The settlements<sup>1</sup> were often the only option for survival. Furthermore, by living in the same place, they could ensure social cohesion (Ruellas, 2015). These strategies are observed in the various accounts of the Maxakali's movement throughout Minas Gerais.

The end of the 19th century was marked by the decimation of the indigenous population by disease. Waves of measles, Spanish flu, malaria, yellow fever, and smallpox epidemics increased the mortality rate of this population after the arrival of the "pioneering caboclos" in the settlements. Maxakali were observed eating earth to rid themselves of vermin (Mattos, 2002). Because they did not adapt to the settlements, they frequently ventured into ancestral territories and, as they liked colorful clothes, were given contaminated pieces as gifts by the colonizers (Paraíso, 2000).

In the face of violence and murder, debates with national and international repercussions were held, seeking to resolve the "Indian problem" (Bringmann, 2015) or, at least, mitigate the violence and the dispossession of indigenous lands (Alves; Vieira, 2017). After all, agrarian conflicts hindered bourgeois expansion into the territories (Laroque, 2007). In this context, the Indian Protection and National Workers Location Service (SPILTN) was created in 1910, which, in 1918, was renamed the Indian Protection Service (SPI) (Bringmann, 2015).

In the first thirty years of the SPI's operations, the Maxakali, although classified as "Indians outside the post<sup>2</sup>", received the agency's "moral protection." During this period, invasions, threats, clashes, and violence, primarily over agrarian issues, between indigenous people and Brazilians escalated. To curb territorial dispossession and reduce the number of conflicts, the Engenheiro Mariano de Oliveira Indigenous Post (PIMO) was founded in 1940.

The SPI's presence among the Maxakali contributed little to improving their quality of life or protecting their traditional territory, and after 1949, the situation worsened. Budget cuts and high inflation rates in the 1950s and 1960s made it difficult to provide the necessary, let alone desired, assistance. The environment for these people was completely transformed. The replacement of the Atlantic Forest with grassland restricted gathering, hunting, and fishing; livestock farming disrupted agriculture by invading farmland and replacing crops with pasture; the excessive number of tenants within the post further reduced indigenous territory. So for this reason, among other factors, the crisis at the PIMO began.

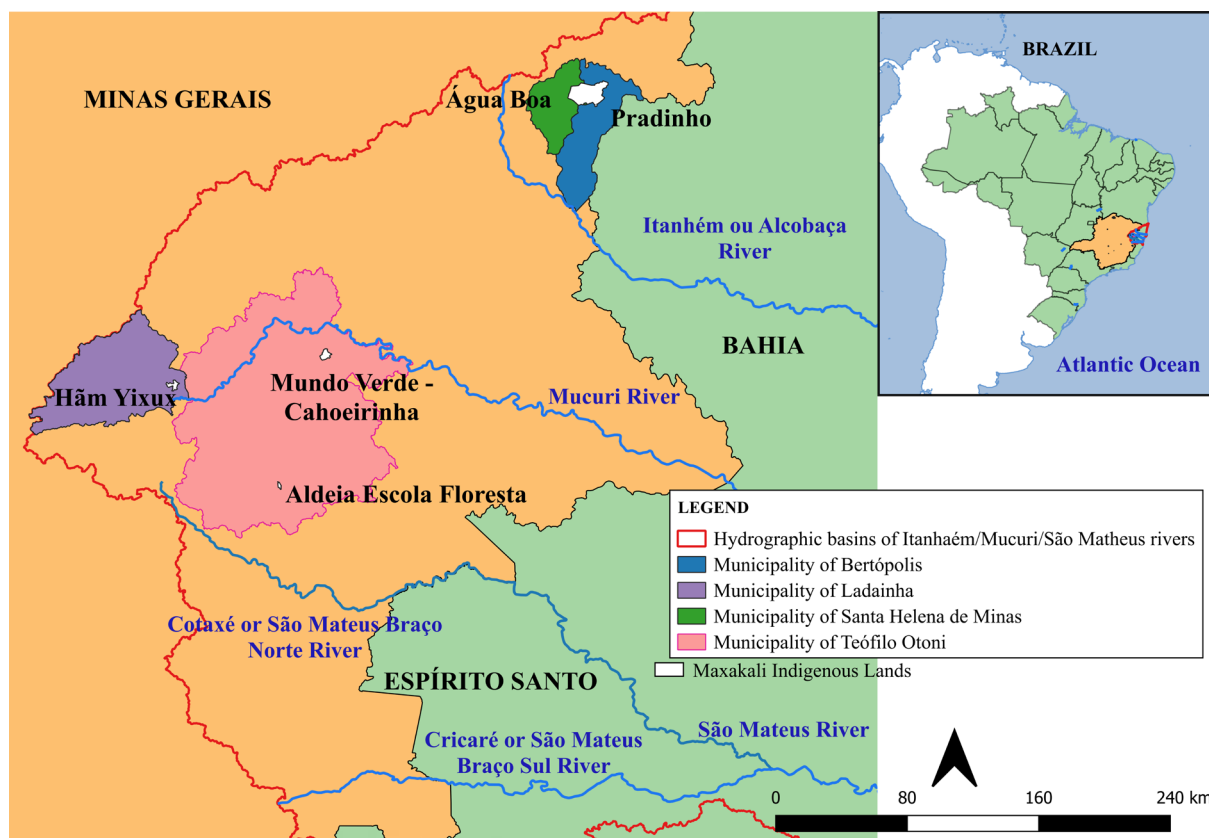
In this context, this article aims to analyze the historical trajectory that culminated in the termination of the activities of the Indian Protection Service (SPI) within the Maxakali ethnic group. To this end, we used a descriptive, *ex post facto*, and historical methodological approach, based primarily on bibliographic and documentary research. The main source of documentary data was from records relating to the Indian Protection Service (SPI), located at the National Museum of Indigenous People in Rio de Janeiro. In addition to this material, articles, theses, dissertations, dossiers, anthropological and research reports, etc., addressing the topic, were also used. For data analysis, authors such as Nascimento (1984), Oliveira (1999), Ribeiro (2008), Mota (2015), Berbert (2017), Simi (2017), Campelo (2018), Pereira (2018) and Oliveira (2024) were used.

<sup>1</sup> Indigenous settlements were establishments created to concentrate indigenous peoples, with the aim of clearing territories for colonial expansion (Bringmann, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous Posts were local bodies responsible for implementing indigenous policy, installed in areas inhabited by the native population and created to facilitate immediate contact between employees and indigenous people (Brazil, 1936).

## Study Area

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Maxakali expanded their territory and began to occupy four areas in northeastern Minas Gerais, which together correspond to 6,555.6 hectares, located in territories within the *Itanhém*, *Mucuri*, and *São Mateus* River Basins. These areas are: Maxakali indigenous land, a union of the *Água Boa* and *Pradinho* indigenous territories, located in the municipalities of *Santa Helena de Minas* and *Bertópolis*, respectively; *Mundo Verde-Cachoeirinha* indigenous territory and *Aldeia Escola Floresta*, in the municipality of *Teófilo Otoni*; and *Hãm Yixux* indigenous territory, in the municipality of *Ladainha*, as illustrated on the map (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** - Location of Maxakali territories, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Source: Produced by the authors, using data from ANA (2017) and IBGE (2023).

It is important to emphasize that this article only covers the territories of *Água Boa* and *Pradinho* and that the Maxakali inhabited these areas between 1940 and 1968. The selected section for analysis is justified by the fact that these territories were the last refuge of the Maxakali in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the location of the Indigenous Protection Service (SPI) operations. As for the *Mundo Verde/Cachoeirinha* and *Hãm Yixux/Aldeia Escola Floresta* indigenous lands, the Maxakali only undertook the reterritorialization processes of these areas in the 21st century; therefore, they did not exist there during the SPI's period of activity.

## The SPI's Initial Efforts Against the Maxakali

The Maxakali had been fighting to maintain and reclaim lands invaded and sold by third parties, without government support, since colonization. However, with the founding of the Engenheiro Mariano de Oliveira Indigenous Post in 1940, they believed they would have the state as an ally in protecting their ancestral territory—at least this was one of the reasons they accepted the SPI's intervention.

Conflicts between the indigenous people and farmers in the region had been simmering for decades. Aiming to calm the situation, one of the first measures taken by the newly established agency was to arrange for the measurement and demarcation of the Maxakali territory. However, the demarcation excluded the *Pradinho* land and maintained the division of the area into two plots, ratifying the illicit sales carried out in the 1920s by Joaquim Martins Fagundes, a former squatter. The Maxakali were extremely dissatisfied with the results of the demarcations. So much so that, according to Monteiro (1992) and Oliveira (1999), they moved to expel the SPI employees, as their territorial rights were unrespected.

It is important to clarify that, for the Maxakali, the meaning of territory is much broader and more meaningful than for western society—a portion of land or a mere commodity. For these people, territory carries the legacy of their ancestors; it is where social and supernatural relationships occur, exchanges with the forest and spirits; it supports identity, culture, and cosmology; a place imbued with power and resistance; the indigenous body itself, from a relational perspective.

Therefore, in addition to expressing their opposition, the indigenous group began to commit robberies and other forms of resistance in order to pressure PIMO officials to communicate their demands to higher-level SPI authorities. Paraíso (1992) identified recurring exchanges of correspondence in 1944 and 1945, while reports from 1946, 1947, and 1950 revealed requests sent to the agency's board of directors for a new demarcation.

To exacerbate the conflicts, in 1953, after several attempts, squatters invaded Maxakali territories (Telegrama [...], 1953). The imbroglio dragged on and, in October 1955, the head of the 4th Regional Inspectorate (4th IR) appealed to the director of the SPI, so that the case received attention, since Inspector Francisco Sampaio had “expected unpredictable events” between non-indigenous and indigenous people (Ofício [...], 1955a, p. 894). Furthermore, the latter, “aware of their rights [were] with the firm and unshakable purpose of preventing the criminal and heartless invasion of the greedy civilized people of that region” (Ofício [...], 1955a, p. 894), that is, there was a premonition of war.

In addition to the appeal to the SPI, the Chief of the 4th IR requested support from the Minas Gerais Department of Agriculture and Marshal Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, then president of the National Council for the Protection of Indigenous, for the preservation of Maxakali territory (Official Letter [...], 1955b). The concern was not unfounded, as the approach of squatters was intensifying the conflict. In 1955, the invaders hired a surveyor to measure part of the land occupied by the Maxakali, but the indigenous people blocked his arrival. However, he promised to “return with guarantees to carry out the measurement” (Report [...], 1955, p. 220).



Therefore, one can imagine how tempers were running high. On one side were the Maxakali, fighting to protect what remained of their ancestral territories, and on the other, the greedy squatters and land grabbers thirsty for land and money. The problem was so acute that it led PIMO officials and the 4th Regional Inspectorate to work hard to ensure the territory was measured and demarcated. It's important to remember that the state created the SPI to reduce conflict over indigenous lands, given reports of violence and dispossession, including from abroad. However, the agency's real objective was to remove obstacles—the indigenous people—to the development of the country's agricultural frontiers (Rodrigues, 2007).

## Increased Violence and Decreased Quality of Life

After the invasions and the attempt to measure and demarcate the dispossessed territory, the conflicts escalated, culminating in the murder of Antônio Cascorado Maxakali, of the *Xatapá* village, leader of the *Pradinho* area. The murder occurred on Nerino Canguçu's farm, committed by Artur Canguçu, the first “element who always intends and has been demanding invasions of indigenous lands” (Carta [...], 1966, p. 922). Antônio disappeared, as his body was burned to leave no trace. Lourenço, a PIMO employee, believed the murder was arranged between Nerino and Artur (CVMG, 2017, p. 141).

As a result, Nerino became “considered the greatest enemy of the indigenous people.” The farmer was identified by Colonel Assídio Índio Brasil as the person responsible for the crime, but he was never arrested. The episode pressured the re-demarcation of Maxakali territory (CVMG, 2017, p. 141). However, the 1956 demarcation did not include the area claimed by the Maxakali. In reality, they felt deceived, and tensions between the indigenous people, non-indigenous, and PIMO officials continued to intensify (Oliveira, 1999).

To exacerbate the agrarian issue, during this time, alcohol consumption among the Maxakali intensified; the non-indigenous people, would ply the indigenous people with cachaça in order to make them addicted to alcohol and dispossess their territory. They would do this to the men to weakening them so they could rape their women. Nimuendajú (1958, p. 58), in this regard, reported the following: “Some time before my arrival, a Machacará man came to Umburanas with his wife. They got the Indian drunk, threw him out into the street, and locked the Indian woman in a room, where she was raped successively by three individuals.” According to the author, other similar cases occurred; however, no information was found as to whether such incidents were investigated or even reported.

A similar scenario was described to the regional inspector, José Silveira de Souza, who reported that “unscrupulous individuals” were supplying alcohol in the region to “take advantage of the weakness of the Indian women.” The names of the victims of rape of indigenous people are not revealed in the documents. However, the encouragement of indigenous people to drink alcohol is repeatedly identified in news reports and reports by PIMO officials, which denounce the intention of landowners to discredit the Maxakali and indigenous organizations in the public eye, thus legitimizing the dispossession of their lands. (CVMG, 2017, p. 143).

It is noteworthy that, among the allegations in the Figueiredo Report, the rape crimes committed against the Maxakali were not mentioned. However, Pereira (2018) reported episodes of sexual violence against indigenous women from the 5th IR, which also went unpunished, without mentioning that the cases were covered up by the SPI and local police. Therefore, it can be argued that part of the miscegenation that occurred during this period was due to the violence committed by officials and non-indigenous people against these indigenous women. This is the cruel side of the execution of the state's "assimilation, integration and civilising" policy, which had miscegenation as one of its "civilizing strategies," as Mota (2015) explains.

Regarding the issue of alcohol consumption, Heurich (2011, p. 78) clarifies that there are those who have a more intense desire to drink; however, "it is necessary to qualify any idea of 'drinkers': ultimately, everyone is a drinker; on the other hand, no one truly is. Getting drunk (-ka'u) is more of a state, that is, a way of acting." In this vein, the Maxakali are described in the literature as a singing and joyful people who enjoy being happy, as it is through this feeling that they connect with the *yãmiy* (singing spirits) – the center of their lives; therefore, they sing to be happy and are happy because they sing.

Hunger, poverty, and disease profoundly marked the 1960s. In 1961, Tubal Fialho Viana, an SPI inspector, twice reported to the 4th IR chief that the Maxakali were in a "pitiful" state, at risk of extermination (Telegram [...], 1961b), and in a situation of extreme poverty (Telegram [...], 1961a). Rubinger (1980, p. 87) described the situation well: "Epidemics galore. No treatment. Rotten clothes on their bodies make you feel sick."

The problem is that the Maxakali's scarcity contrasts with the PIMO's abundance. Graça (2022, p. 113) found that "there is a divide between what belongs 'to the post' and what is within the indigenous people's reach. When wealth is affirmed, its inaccessibility is also highlighted, as well as the scarcity for those in the fields." Therefore, not only was the abundance not distributed to the Maxakali, but the SPI, which exploited their territory and labor, worsened the scarcity.

In the Figueiredo Report, the Commission also described scenes of plagues, hunger, malnutrition, and poverty in SPI posts, as illustrated by the narrative of a nurse at the *Nonoai* post in Rio Grande do Sul. They consist of an "abject and sordid den occupied jointly by dogs, pigs, and a sick woman, in the same infected room. The instruments were completely deteriorated" (Pereira, 2018, p. 78). The situation was deplorable; the indigenous agency was unable to guarantee ownership of the territory, nor the physical, dignified, and humane survival of the indigenous people under its care.

In this context, thefts near the *Água Boa* and *Pradinho* territories became more frequent among the Maxakali. Rubinger (1980) recounted several cases and complaints from neighbors that occurred in 1962 and 1963. Nascimento (1984, p. 99) believed that "looting and pillaging could be seen as a metaphor for hunting and gathering," presenting two main functions: the first guaranteed food supplies and physical existence, while the second referred to the cultural and ethnic survival of the Maxakali, as it preserved group cohesion and the development of ancestral activities.



“Hunting” and “gathering” on the farms yielded good results and also gave the indigenous people satisfaction in feeling in control of the entire dispossessed territory. Tintim Maxakali clarified that “the whole land is ours, and everything the land provides, animals and plants, is ours too” (Nascimento, 1984, p. 102). Cattle hunting was also a form of retaliation against ranchers. This activity would persist for a long time, so much so that, in 1984, Nascimento reached the following conclusion: “The Indians, even with all this official apparatus to guarantee their subsistence, continue to ‘hunt’ cattle. Above all, they are and want to remain hunters and gatherers” (Nascimento, 1984, p. 104).

However, in the 1960s, the Maxakali robbed and looted farms, mainly to stave off hunger. Nascimento (1984, p. 106, emphasis added) drew attention to the word *xũy*, which means hunger or pain in Maxakali. “The expression ‘I am hungry’ corresponds to the expression *ũgtax xũy*, which means ‘my stomach hurts.’” Thus, hunger justified the theft, because pain legitimized it.

Even while witnessing the miserable state of the Maxakali, Tubal Fialho Viana, a PIMO inspector at the time, traded for himself the indigenous labor and branded the cattle with his wife’s initials. “We accompanied Tubal to a place called Vereda, outside the indigenous territory, where he bought three cows for the Post. On his return, he branded them with his wife’s initials” (Rubinger, 1980, p. 67). He bought produce from the Maxakali at very low prices, exploiting them, and then selling them at market prices, reaping disproportionately high profits.

Furthermore, PIMO employees harvested the indigenous crops to sell in nearby municipalities, but did not return the proceeds to their owners. “The SPI employees asked to take seeds to sell, but they didn’t return the money. They said they were going to sell them, the Indians trusted them, and they didn’t return them” (Sueli Maxakali *apud* Berbert, 2017, p. 79). Rubinger (1980, p. 56), in 1962, observed that all the production of the post and of these people was “hoarded by the post or traded by neighboring farmers”.

In this sense, they were also exploited by the non-indigenous people. As another example, “a merchant, Otacílio Bahia, made a fortune buying 11,000 liters of beans for 10.00 (ten cruzeiros); and the most serious thing is that, instead of cruzeiros, he paid in *cachaça*” (Rubinger, 1980, p. 59). Even if the merchant had paid in cash, his profit would have been 990,000 cruzeiros, an 800% return on the amount invested.

Azanha (2005) draws attention to the different meanings of exchange. For capitalist societies, in human exchanges, what matters is the movable (physical or symbolic objects), while in indigenous societies, the priority is relationships, with the movable as a pretext. It is believed that this distinction also applies to the Maxakali, as they continued to exchange, even at a disadvantage. Furthermore, in the warrior system of these people, the enemy is never definitively defeated, allowing new relationships to continue to be forged. Therefore, if they prioritize relationships in war, the same is likely true in exchange.

When they worked for others, they received 75% less for the same work. In 1962, the indigenous people were paid a daily wage of Cr\$50.00, while the non-indigenous farm laborers received Cr\$200.00, according to Rubinger (1980). This same author observed that the Maxakali, in 1963, did not receive a cent for the two thousand head of cattle from local farmers that grazed on their territories, leased by the SPI; when they complained, they were forced to drink.

Two things seem important to me to comment on. The first is that the neighboring whites are constantly deceiving the indigenous people, as if they were incapable of realizing they are being duped. The second, and more curious, is that the Maxakali understand everything and prefer to remain silent... What is behind this silence? I simply believe that the truth never ceases to be the truth because it has not been spoken [...]. (Alvarenga, 2007, p. 38-39).

In 1965, the Director of the SPI signed a contract for six land leases in the PIMO (Report [...], 1967). It was found that the total amount leased in *Água Boa* was approximately 1,760 hectares. Considering that the demarcated area of this location corresponded to 2,369 hectares, the Maxakali were left with 609 hectares for their economic, cultural, and social reproduction. Therefore, it can be stated that these indigenous people found themselves surrounded and squeezed by cows and oxen within their territory and by squatters eager for more land.

Graça (2022), analyzing the history of agriculture among the *Kaingang*, observed that the political and cosmological dimensions of these people were stifled during the SPI's influence and intensified from the 1940s onward in southern Brazil, a phenomenon also observed among the Maxakali. This is because the capitalist way of thinking is contrary to indigenous worldviews. These people do not produce for the market, but for the sustenance of their relatives. Individual enrichment is devalued; for them, self-sufficiency means "maintaining the balance of exchanges with the natural (and supernatural) world, aiming for the safety of their closest relatives and, in the process, replenishing the stocks of human bodies, souls, and 'natural' beings (resources)" (Azanha, 2005, p. 15).

Therefore, it is possible to observe that the Maxakali's relationship with the non-indigenous people was characterized by predation: they controlled their bodies, labor, territory, and trade, imposing paltry payments for their efforts and products. The result was a systematic devaluation of the lives and culture of the indigenous peoples.

Leasing of the territory, combined with hunger and the poor living conditions of the Maxakali, contributed to the 1960s being considered the most violent decade. Descriptions range from fights to murder, with various motives, with crimes committed due to drunkenness and agrarian issues standing out. In 1965, Alcides Maxakali was murdered, stabbed to death while returning from Medeiros Neto, a municipality in Bahia, with his wife. The murder was covered in several newspapers: *Folha de São Paulo*, *Estado de Minas*, *A Gazeta do Espírito Santo*, and *Tribuna do Mucuri*. According to reports, Alcides was killed by Laurindo Pereira Sena, nicknamed José Rolinha, who fled and was never found, sparking outrage among the indigenous people over this and a series of similar murders that resulted in no consequences for the perpetrators, or investigations being opened to determine the facts (Campelo, 2018).

Jeronimo Alves da Silva, a tenant farmer, was accused by Odílio Maxakali of ordering the beating he suffered in 1967. Miguel Lopes da Silva, a PIMO employee, also reported that Jeronimo went to his house armed, where he threatened him and accused him of ordering the Maxakali to kill his cattle (Declaration [...], 1967b). Nerino Canguçu, a farmer in Bertópolis, MG, notified the police department installed in PIMO that João Cego Maxakali had insulted him and threatened him with a fish knife, when he was working in his rice field (Declaration [...], 1967g, p. 6296).

João Cego confirmed his presence on Nerino's property, but reported that there was no field where the farmer claimed he had been confronted, as he had let his cattle graze there. The indigenous man stated that he had been there "only to gather a few bunches of rice that their owner had not used, never with any intention of stealing." He also recalled that Nerino had led the squatters' invasions of Maxakali territory and that he was responsible for the murder of his relative, Antônio Cascorado Maxakali, "which is why a perfect understanding between the tribe and the aforementioned lord was never possible again" (Declaration [...], 1967k, p. 6300).

Juraci Nogueira dos Santos, the wife of another squatter, stated that several Maxakali came to her house in the morning, intending to kill her for having reprimanded the son of Captain Adolfo Maxakali, who had stolen three of her chickens the previous night. He said they fired six shots into the air, broke down the door, invaded the house, and stole "rings, shoes, clothing, the sum of NCR\$30 (thirty thousand old cruzeiros), a sow with three piglets, and crockery in general" (Declaration [...], 1967e, p. 6294).

An indigenous man Manoel Felix dos Santos, also known as Manoel Cacau, alleged that he was beaten and robbed by a group of Maxakali, who took "a shotgun, kitchen utensils, a suitcase, a machete, and several tools. They also noted the destruction of part of his cocoa plantation, as well as the lack of several items of clothing" (Declaration [...], 1967h, p. 6298). Tomé Maxakali confirmed his participation (Declaration [...], 1967j); however, his father-in-law Jacob Maxakali, identified as the group's leader, denied his involvement (Declaration [...], 1967i).

At that time, the situation at the PIMO was one of widespread conflict between the Maxakali of *Pradinho* and *Água Boa*, Maxakali and tenant farmers, Maxakali and SPI employees, and tenant farmers and SPI employees. According to Lourenço, a post employee, the robberies and violence committed by the Maxakali were incited by then on-indigenous people, who intended to usurp their territories (Simi, 2017). They also provided cachaça, so that the indigenous people, in a drunken state, could cause "greater disorder" (Aviso [...], 1966), to demonize them in the eyes of non-indigenous society. Furthermore, they sowed intrigue between the Maxakali and SPI employees, insinuating, for example, "that the money from the leases was for the employees to spend for their own benefit" (Defesa [...], 1968, p. 6273) and "that the government sends them a lot of money and that the employees 'eat it all up'" (Rubinger, 1980, p. 77).

The literature on indigenous peoples is replete with cases reporting theft, exploitation, plunder, cheating, violence, and murder, which was also observed among the Maxakali. The documents analyzed provided a glimpse into the inhumane actions committed by SPI employees and the non-indigenous in the Mucuri Valley. However, no mention was made of holding the criminals accountable; on the contrary, impunity was even encouraged. It is also important to note that not a single line was found indicating that these people had actually endangered the lives of any non-indigenous person.

## The Collapse of the Engenheiro Mariano de Oliveira Indigenous Post

Agrarian conflicts intensified to such an extent that they were even called a “war.” On June 16, 1966, the newspaper *O Globo* reported that Chief Capitãozinho “called on the tribe to prepare for war against whites attempting to invade their lands.” The Army, in response to the Maxakali emissary, offered a guarantee and promised to send a commission of soldiers and police officers to investigate the invasion and promote the protection of indigenous territories (*O Globo*, 1966).

That same month, the *Diário de Minas* newspaper published two reports by Rezende (1966a): the first, titled “The Last Maxakali,” reported that these people were dying of hunger and threatened with extermination due to the various strategies used by ranchers to dispossess and expel their territories. In the second article, “The SPI and the Indigenous Peoples,” Rezende (1966b) reflected on the difficult conditions faced by the PIMO in providing adequate assistance to the Maxakali. Both reports presented the problem without pitting non-indigenous society against the indigenous peoples, unlike other publications, which defended white people and disparaged indigenous peoples.

Unable to tolerate the invasions, violence, disease, hunger, and poverty, on April 18, 1967, the Maxakali rebelled against the PIMO employees and, according to the Minas Gerais Truth Commission (2017), expelled them from the territory. The day began with a group of eleven Maxakali armed with arrows, machetes, and revolvers causing trouble at the post (Declaration [...], 1967c). At nine o’clock, they proceeded to the home of Nazareno, the head of the PIMO, threatening him and warning him that “next time he would have to leave the indigenous territory dead or alive” (Declaration [...], 1967a, p. 6289). They headed to the home of Serafim Ferreira das Neves, an employee, intending to kill his son and his brother-in-law, his wife’s brother, who had also threatened them (Declaration [...], 1967f). When the group arrived at the home of Miguel Lopes da Silva, another employee, they were met by his wife, Ana Lopes da Silva, as he was not there. She reported that the indigenous people invaded her home, “wanting to murder her nephew.” Intending to save him, she pushed him into the bedroom, at which point she was “slightly stabbed in the left hand with a knife by the indigenous man João de Mariano.” After screaming for help, the Maxakali left the house, making threats (Declaration [...], 1967b, p. 6290).

All PIMO employees were threatened in their homes by this group of Maxakali, including, in addition to the aforementioned employees, Lourenço Lopes da Silva and João Cardoso dos Santos (João Vaqueiro). It is worth mentioning that all employees and their families relied on the solidarity of the indigenous women Izabel Maxakali and Benvinda Maxakali, who accompanied the Maxakali group from house to house. After providing assistance to the non-indigenous families, they remained with the group, being beaten by them. It is believed that this is their way of relating to one another, since, if the enemy is definitively defeated, there will be no further paths to travel, nor new relationships to forge (Ribeiro, 2008).

[Serafim][...] had the opportunity to see the Indians Izabel and Benvinda, covered in blood, one of them with a split head as a result of being hit by a stone; he further stated that the beating suffered by the Indians was out of solidarity with the employees threatened by the Indians. (Declaration [...], 1967g, p. 6295).

The recording of the incident that occurred on April 18, 1967, was made by Walter Samari Prado, Virgílio Gonçalves de Oliveira Vellozo, and Hermano Sampaio da Rocha, SPI employees external to PIMO. The Superintendent of the Minas Bahia Aid Agency, Augusto de Souza Leão, was also present at the hearings. It is worth noting that the records of the Maxakali's testimonies were quite limited and practically based on the answers given to questions posed by SPI employees. The shortest hearing included one question to Tomé Maxakali, and the longest was to Adolfo José Maxakali, with five questions. Therefore, the silence of the oppressed was maintained (Spivak, 2010), consistent with the discourse of the time. It was observed that all of the post's employees directly or indirectly mentioned Adolfo José Maxakali's involvement in the events that occurred that day, with the exception of João Vaqueiro, who did not name any indigenous people in his statements, and Miguel Lopes da Silva, although in the case of the latter, his wife testified (Declaration [...], 1967a; Declaration [...], 1967b; Declaration [...], 1967c; Declaration [...], 1967f). Adolfo José Maxakali confirmed his participation in the insurgency against the SPI employees.

In addition to Adolfo, Lourenço Lopes da Silva named the Maxakali rebels: Luiz, Tomé, and Jacob (Declaration [...], 1967c). However, Luiz Maxakali defended himself, stating that on the day of the rebellion, he was in Teófilo Otoni requesting seeds from the Chief of the Auxiliary (Declaration [...], 1967i). Tomé and Jacob, however, were not questioned about their involvement. Interestingly, the day after the mobilization to expel the SPI from Maxakali territory, Adolfo, Luiz, and Jacob were in Teófilo Otoni, celebrating Indigenous People's Day. They visited several schools with Augusto de Souza Leão, Superintendent of the Minas Bahia Aid Agency, and gave lectures on the commemorative date (Declaration [...], 1967).

It is mentioned that PIMO officials were aware of the precarious living conditions experienced by the Maxakali from the early 1960s onward, as they worked and lived alongside them daily. Perhaps for this reason, most of their statements were not accusatory; on the contrary, most sought to justify the actions of these people, considered extremely peaceful. Miguel Lopes da Silva stated that "[...] since 1960, he has witnessed the decline of the Maxacalis Indian tribe, once peaceful and hardworking; he views with profound sadness this situation that has befallen the tribe, [...] he would like to see them return [...] to being that proud tribe of the past" (Declaration [...], 1967d, p. 6292).

The Maxakali rebelled against the SPI, the leaseholders, the squatters, and all the non-indigenous because they lacked the minimum environmental and territorial conditions to sustain their lives. For many years, they suffered from hunger and poverty, malnutrition, and violence. They were prevented from performing *yãmiyxop* because they had nothing to exchange with their singing spirits. Their territories, once vast areas of Atlantic Forest, were now tiny areas of



land, demarcated and covered with grass and cattle. The few public resources allocated for their assistance and protection became increasingly scarce due to low government investment and the devaluation of currency caused by the country's double-digit inflation.

These people were considered peaceful; however, “the nefarious actions of state agents and the plunder” that the squatters promoted (Berbert, 2017, p. 86) for so many years led them to rise up against everyone. This also doesn't mean that they accepted everything without question until April 1967; on the contrary, they expressed their dissatisfaction in various ways, such as looting crops, killing livestock, maintaining their culture, language, and religion, becoming irritated by reprimands, becoming angry when something displeased them, absorbing all the energy, patience, and time of PIMO employees, demanding rights, among other strategies. It was found that the Chief of the Adjutancy had little interest or capacity to act at the PIMO to contain the final conflicts. He took the necessary action by sending telegrams to the SPI Directorate, the Minas Gerais Military Police, and the National Council for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, Leão was informed of the crisis at the PIMO on April 19, 1967, but only arrived at the post on April 21, at 2:00 p.m., along with the Rural Military Police (Declaration [...], /1967l).

The day after his arrival, Leão was the victim of an attack, which, he claimed, was due to Maxakali dissatisfaction with his placement of the police within the PIMO. He blamed the situation on the administration of the Post Chief, Sebastião Domingos da Silva, who granted the indigenous people excessive freedom; on the Director of the SPI, Luís Vinhas Neves, who encouraged leasing (Declaration [...], 1967l); and on the leaseholders, who had the practice of “offering cachaça to the indigenous people and encouraging them to commit crimes as a way of taking their land” (Simi, 2017, p. 50). Therefore, he completely absolved himself of any and all responsibility by attributing the mistakes to others.

Leão's supportive stance in the face of the conflict situation within the PIMO accelerated the definitive installation of the Minas Gerais Rural Police within the PIMO. Thus, on April 6, 1967, the Director of the SPI issued Internal Service Order No. 28, which authorized the provisional installation of the Rural Police at the PIMO, in order to “put an end to the sale of alcoholic beverages, to avoid friction between indigenous people and civilized people” (Order [...], 1967, p. 6379).

However, Captain Manoel dos Santos Pinheiro, along with two sergeants, a corporal nurse, and two soldiers, arrived to remain permanently at the PIMO on May 3, 1967 (Telegram [...], 1967). Initially, the Rural Police “carried out paternalistic work of distributing food, clothing, and utensils” (Mendonça, 1988, p. 17). The “re-pacification” of the Maxakali was necessary; therefore, all initial attention was focused on this task (Berbert, 2017). Thus, on May 4, 1967, shortly after the establishment of the Rural Police, its management was established within the PIMO (Defense [...], 1968), and from that date on, the post's management passed to the Rural Police.

Unlike other public administration agencies, which, after 1964, underwent a process of “militarization” of management, within the PIMO, the insertion of the Military Police represented the “policing of administration,” which consisted of the use of “police methods to resolve problems



and conflicts inherent to its exercise, especially the collection of indigenous revenue and land disputes” (Simi, 2017, p. 28).

Captain Pinheiro began acting to repress behavior considered deviant and impose labor on indigenous people. Those considered minor offenders were punished with imprisonment in their village, while those who committed serious offenses were sent to the Indigenous Agricultural Reformatory in the Krenak village, located in Carmésia, Minas Gerais [...]. (Macêdo, 2017, p. 52).

Perhaps for this reason, from the first months of the Rural Police’s implementation in PIMO, Maxakali were seen wearing uniforms and performing police duties. Furthermore, it is very likely that the leaders of the resistance movement, which took place on April 18, 1967, had been detained (Simi, 2017). In the words of Captain Pinheiro: “I immediately arrested the Indians who were leading the movement (...) and little by little I restored peace in the area” (Jornal do Brasil, August 27, 1972, cited in Corrêa, 2003, p. 133).

Finally, it is worth noting that, when asking Captain Mikael<sup>3</sup> for his opinion on the actions of Captain Pinheiro and the Minas Gerais Military Police with the Maxakali, Nascimento (1984, p. 97) received the following response: “Captain Pinheiro was half good, because he didn’t let the Indians starve, he brought them clothes and food, but he was half bad, because he punished and imprisoned the Indians.” Therefore, the police presence at PIMO resulted in a traumatic experience for the Maxakali, as Captain Pinheiro was responsible for the creation of the Indigenous Guard and the Krenak Reformatory; however, this is FUNAI’s story, as the SPI no longer worked with these people.

## Final Considerations

From 1910 to 1939, the Maxakali fought and resisted, without the support of the government, either at the federal or state level (Minas Gerais), to secure possession of their lands. In addition to the invasions, the usurpers cut down the Atlantic Forest and planted grass in order to deprive these people of their primary means of survival: hunting, fishing, and gathering food provided by the forest. However, despite the actions of the PIMO, as in the case of the Terenas, an ethnic group from Mato Grosso do Sul (Ximenes; Skowronski; Colman, 2014), the exploitation of forest resources by colonizers drastically reduced the biodiversity of the Maxakali territory, altering the indigenous way of life and the ways in which they used and managed resources. The research results showed that the SPI’s activities (1940 to 1967), most intensely in the 1960s, were a period of dehumanization and indescribable suffering for the Maxakali. The Engenheiro Mariano de Oliveira Indigenous Post, instead of promoting integration, as its objectives advocated, served as a front for brutal and systematic exploitation of these indigenous people.

The unpunished sexual violence, for example, which contributed to miscegenation, highlights how assimilation was imposed through force, violating the dignity of indigenous women. The endemic hunger, poverty, and epidemics documented by the agency contributed to the

3 Captain Mikael is a Maxakali appointed by the SPI to form part of the Indigenous Police of the Engenheiro Mariano de Oliveira Indigenous Post, a practice disseminated by the organization throughout the national territory (CVMG, 2017).

deplorable state of these people, with real risks of extermination. The pain of hunger, translated in the indigenous language as “stomach pain,” is a testament to the dehumanization to which they were subjected.

In addition to neglect, economic and territorial exploitation were constant. SPI employees, traders, and usurpers took advantage of the Maxakali’s vulnerability, stealing their ancestral lands and crops, paying with cachaça, and offering paltry wages for backbreaking labor. These practices were not isolated incidents, but rather part of a logic aimed at appropriating indigenous resources and labor at zero cost.

Besides the lack of economic resources and political support, the crimes committed by SPI employees contributed to its dismantling, and this was no different in the case of PIMO. Transgressions were identified in the documents analyzed in this article, such as: undisciplined employees who violated legal principles, squandering indigenous heritage, leasing lands without the Maxakali’s authorization, and the usurpation of indigenous products, livestock, and money, among others, including those investigated by the Commission of Inquiry.

Therefore, widespread predation was not a deviation, but a characteristic of the implementation of the state’s strategy, which revealed the most cruel and inhumane face of indigenous policy at the time. The history of the Maxakali during this period serves as a powerful reminder of the grave consequences of imposing a model of “civilization” that ignores the humanity and autonomy of indigenous peoples.

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Kenia Fabiana Cota Mendonça: Data collection, discussion of results, and text preparation.  
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### Data availability:

The entire dataset that supports the results of this study has been published in the article itself.

### Article editor:

Márcia Yukari Mizusaki

### Financial support:

The publication of this article was financed in part by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) # 401619/2024-9.



**Received on:** 27 June 2024  
**Approved on:** 02 June 2025