

# The enchanting dance of the body of feathers: Tupinambá capes and their return

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For América

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In honour of Célia, her family and everyone I met at Serra do Padeiro and their stories.



Figure 1: Fernanda Liberti, *Three generations of Tupinambás: Rosemiro, Glicéria and Eru*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

The focal point of study in this dissertation is the material culture of the Tupinambá Cape, a feather ornament made by the Tupinambá people of *Brasil*<sup>1</sup> throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. All of the original capes are currently held hostage in European Museums and collections.

According to official government records which run contrary to Indigenous accounts, the Tupinambá were deemed to be extinct. However, the parameters used for classification are methods of cultural violence and racism, dictated by the government and colonizers themselves<sup>2</sup>. Forced to abdicate their ethnic position to survive in the catholic colony, the Tupinambá were disqualified as a people by anthropologists.

This paper will explore their history using as its main references the book *Rio before Rio*<sup>3</sup>. It will focus on the writer's relationship to the Tupinambá people of Serra do Padeiro, from the south of Bahia, who have been an active political voice in the indigenous movement in *Brasil*. Tupinambás see the cape as a manifestation of spiritual strength and a key factor in their reclaiming of identity and territory.

Through a journey of time and travel, this study aims to raise questions and discussions through the lens of an autoethnography on material culture and ancestral knowledge and will stand as an institutional critique of the ghosts of colonial structures and imperialism in the context of the modern European museum.

Museology, material culture, autoethnography, postcolonialism and decolonization

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<sup>1</sup> This paper will purposely address *Brasil* with an S and not a Z.

There is a separation of what we call *Brasil* with an s and with a z, as we associate Brazil as seen with foreign gaze, the colonized country seen from the outside. When we refer to *Brasil* with an S, we are referring to a view that comes from the inside out.

<sup>2</sup> Carlos José Ferreira dos Santos Casé Angatu, "História E Culturas Indígenas"; - Alguns Desafios No Ensino E Na Aplicação Da Lei 11.645/2008: De Qual História E Cultura Indígena Estamos Falando?", *Revista História & Perspectivas*, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Rafael Freitas da Silva, *Rio Antes Do Rio*, 4th edn (Rio de Janeiro: Relicário, 2020), pp. 3-100.

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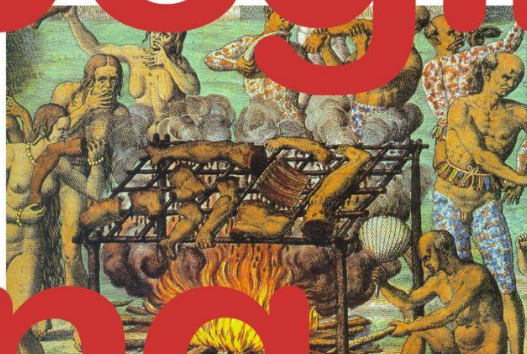
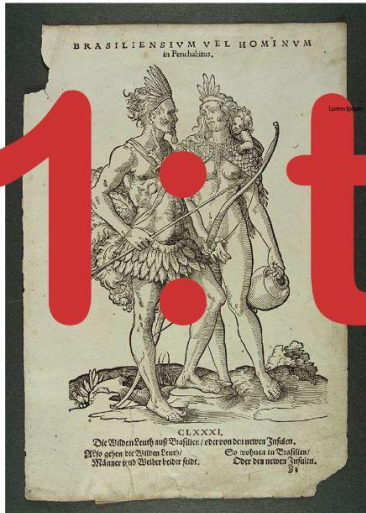
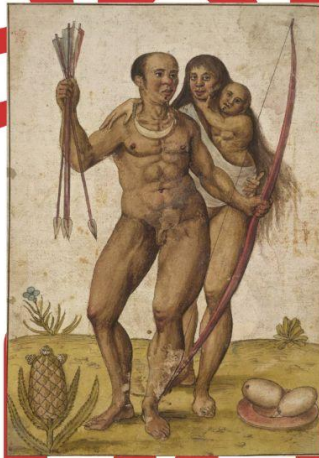


# chapter

# 1: the

# begin-

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# CHAPTER 1 - The beginning

Autoethnography<sup>4</sup> stands at the intersection of three genres of narration and critical reflection that may overlap in any particular work. These include portraits of a social group the author-anthropologist is affiliated with; life-writing or other autobiographical acts that incorporate an ethnographic description of their social group; and anthropological writing that includes reflexive descriptions of research experiences during ethnographic fieldwork.

Growing up in Rio de Janeiro, *Brasil*, I always wondered what the city was like before the Portuguese invaded. How was the landscape before inequality, capitalism, pollution, slavery, corruption, urban violence and neglect? The neighbourhood I grew up in only had a few paved roads until I was a teenager, and I wonder how the canal near my house — that has been polluted since before I was born and houses crocodiles until today — looked when it was pristine. I am still amazed by their resilience in living for so many years in a canal so dirty that rolling up the car windows is completely useless as an attempt to hide from its smell. How glorious it must have been to cross those shores with no buildings or plastic in sight, with an endless abundance of fish and fruits, free for all. How was society before the arrival of capital and greed?

Upon my return to Rio whilst writing this paper, I drove across the Rio-Niterói bridge and I wondered what the Guanabara Bay would be without buildings, without the bridge, and how the first Portuguese felt arriving in such a beautiful place, so different from where they came from, after being at sea for so many months.

The deforestation of the Atlantic Forest of Rio de Janeiro started with the first Portuguese settlers, who used the Guanabana bay as a pitstop for their discovery journeys, and as a workshop place where the native Tupinambás would collect and

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Reed-Danahay, "Autoethnography", *Oxford Bibliographies Online Datasets*, 2017 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0162>>.

cut wood in exchange for a few tools the Portuguese would bring with them<sup>5</sup>. This extraction created chaos in the 1500s Rio as the wood soon became scarce locally, and to fulfil demand the locals had to travel further into the woods for extraction, resulting in contact with previously unrelated communities and unavoidable conflict for the war-inclined Tupinambás. Relationships and landscapes that had been the same for centuries started to change in a way that would have no return. Once the city started developing, it never stopped. Though I was born 494 years after the arrival of Europeans, it still felt like this paradise was something taken from all of us. This was a pristine land - a gift to humanity from nature, squandered, abused and left for destruction. Perhaps this is the reason that *Brasilian* culture is so deeply rooted in its saudades<sup>6</sup> - it is as if there is a collective longing for - and memory of - a glorious and lost past.

Like myself, the Tupinamba also believed in a version of what the Catholics call heaven, which they term 'the land with no evil'. Ironically, when I conjure images of paradise, I picture the idealistic place Rio must have been before the 1500s. The Tupinamba people were known for being the most populous ethnicity on the *Brasilian* coast before European Colonisation. Although the first accounts written by the Portuguese focused on the Tupinambá's anthropophagy ceremonies<sup>7</sup> and their propensity for fighting and war, they did in fact remark upon their culture of handicraft and feather works - although in a very limited way.

The term 'Tupinamba' englobes a number of communities, with an estimated

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<sup>5</sup> Rafael Freitas da Silva, *Rio antes do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Relicário, 2020) p. 320.

<sup>6</sup> Saudade means a feeling of longing, melancholy, or nostalgia that is supposedly characteristic of the Portuguese or Brazilian temperament.

Definition Of SAUDADE By Oxford Dictionary On Lexico.Com, *Lexico Dictionaries* <<https://www.lexico.com/definition/saudade>> [Accessed 3 April 2021].

<sup>7</sup> Hans Staden, *Hans Staden's True History: An Account Of Cannibal Captivity In Brazil* (Germany: Andreas Kolbe, 1557).

population of between 1.5 to 2.2 million. Many of these people were nomadic and inhabited the forests along four thousand kilometres of the *Brasilian* coast. They were decimated as a result of being one of the first cultures to come in contact with Europeans. The majority were wiped out by viruses and diseases unknown to them, and the rest by the Portuguese, French and Dutch who arrived in the next decades and centuries and used the Tupinambá to fight their settlement conflicts. The settlers would force the Tupinambá to burn their sacred objects, join the catholic church and change their names. Due to practices such as these, their culture was almost entirely lost or forcibly abdicated, and only a handful of material objects representing their people are left in existence.

Until recently, their story was being told by everyone but themselves - as the first written accounts of the Tupinambás are all authored by Europeans.<sup>8</sup> This paper seeks to move away from these stereotyped accounts by delving into sources that treat the Tupinambá culture with respect by attempting to understand them in their own right, through the lens of their own culture and ontology, rather than from an implicitly Eurocentric one.

Their culture and lifestyle created an allure that aroused curiosity over the wonders and terrors of the so-called 'New World'. Books by André Thevet (1502-1590)<sup>9</sup>, Jean de Léry (1536-1613)<sup>10</sup> and Hans Staden (c. 1525-c. 1579), whose outrageous titles such as: 'True History and Description of a Country in America, whose Inhabitants are Savage, Naked, Very Godless and Cruel Man-Eaters'<sup>11</sup> became a fever in Europe. There was a large appetite in Europe for their tales from across the Atlantic.

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<sup>8</sup> Amy Bueno, "Their Treasures Are The Feathers Of Birds': Tupinambá Featherwork And The Image Of America." (published PhD, Chapman University, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> André Thevet, *Le Brésil D'andré Thevet*, 1st edn (Paris, 1557).

<sup>10</sup> Jean de Léry, *Histoire D'un Voyage Fait De La Terre Du Brésil ...* (Genève, 1600).

<sup>11</sup> Hans Staden, *True History And Description Of A Country In America, Whose Inhabitants Are Savage, Naked, Very Godless And Cruel Man-Eaters*, 1st edn (Madrid, 1595).



For Reiland Rabaka, the idea of *the savage* and the dehumanisation of native peoples "...serves a dual purpose. First, it allows the colonisers to escape the apparent contradictions between Western values of democracy and equality on the one hand, and the undemocratic and extremely violent oppression of the native population on the other."<sup>12</sup> These stereotypes dehumanised the habitants of the Americas in the mind of the European, and created the foundation for a destructive relationship of disrespect and superiority between the colonizers and those at the other end of their weapons. This dehumanization further served to establish these indiginous populations as *other*<sup>13</sup>, establishing the fundamental psychological basis for racism and xenophobia, a legacy which persists and pervades the thoughts about indiginous cultures across the world to this today.

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<sup>12</sup> Rabaka, R., *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization* (Langham: Lexington Books, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Sundai Sarukkai, "The 'Other' In Anthropology And Philosophy", *Economic And Political Weekly*, 32.24 (1997), 1406-1409.



Figure 2: Tupinambá Cape, National Museum of Denmark, 1980

The Tupinambá's most precious creations were cloaks, made with feathers from the Guara bird (Scarlet Ibis). The outstanding creations boasted bright colours - mostly in red and often with details in black and yellow.<sup>14</sup> Within the Tupinambá communities that were nomadic, the cloaks were usually the only objects that would be transported from site to site - a practice which highlights their cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Buono, *Their Treasures Are The Feathers Of Birds': Tupinambá Featherwork And The Image Of America.*"

significance. Only the *Pajés* and *Majés* (spiritual leaders) could wear them, and only in particular contexts, such as ceremonies or special occasions. They believe the cape provides a link to the ancestral realm during funerary rites, as well as serving as symbols of power and prestige during assemblies and as markers of status during captive–captor rites. Amy Buono, a scholar who has studied Tupinambá feather work in depth, describes the importance and potential spiritual of these rites in the following passage:

“The Tupi connected many bird songs, including that of the guará, to spirits and ghosts. One French missionary—Jean de Léry (1536–1613)—describes, for example, a small grey bird that the Tupi held in their ‘highest regard’ because it was a communicator with the supernatural realm. He further postulates on the greater significance of avian life to the Tupi: But the mystery that I want to mention is this: his voice is so penetrating — even more pitiful than that of a screech owl—that our poor Tupinambá, who hear him cry more often in the night than in the daytime, have the fantasy imprinted in their brain that their deceased relatives and friends are sending them these birds as a sign of good luck, and especially to encourage them to bear themselves valiantly in a war against their enemies. (...) Lery’s account strongly hints that the wearing of feathered garments and bodily adornments may have been a way of ritually identifying with the appearance or behaviour of certain birds for spiritual ends.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite the immense cultural significance for Brazil’s pre-colonial heritage, the native leaders today struggle to claim back what belonged to their ancestors. All of the original capes, created by the Tupinambá before and during the early days of colonization, are currently in European museums and collections. How they were acquired is largely unknown or has been obfuscated, and native leaders maintain that these artifacts were stolen and unjustly acquired. Only one cape had its transport officially documented, brought to Europe by a Catholic Jesuit in 1610.<sup>16</sup> Before the collections within which they currently sit, the capes were kept in the private collections of Monarchs, Curiosity Cabinets (*Kunstammer*)<sup>17</sup>, and mercantile collections from the 15th to the 16th centuries. When I reached out to Mille Gabriel - a

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<sup>15</sup> Amy Buono, “Tupi Featherwork And The Dynamics Of Intercultural Exchange In Early Modern Brazil”, in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence: The Proceedings Of The 32Nd International Congress In The History Of Art*, 1st edn (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009), pp. 291-295.

<sup>16</sup> Archivum Roman Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Rome, Bras. 8-I, ff. 99v-100r, pp. 352-355.

<sup>17</sup> Bente Gundestrup, *The Royal Danish Kunstammer 1737*, 1st edn (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1991), pp. 119-122.



curator from the National Museum of Denmark, where the most well preserved example of a Tupinambá cape is kept; I was met with a friendly reply supplying me with images and references to the acquisition of the cape from a Danish *Kunstammer*. My questions about its original acquisition and prior origin were left unanswered.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, examples of this kind of feather work quickly became popular artifacts among Europe's royalty, as the Tupinambá capes served as interesting and novel artifacts with a unique aesthetic and colour schemes. They were exquisite piece of craftsmanship and design, simultaneously rustic and avant-garde and this captured the imagination of Europe's elite, as it was something they hadn't seen before.



Figure 3: Unknown Artist, *Carnaval of "Queen of America Watercolour, 1599, Watercolour, Klassik stiftung Weimar Collection, Weimar, Germany*

The allure of these artifacts was so strong that even countries that had no colonial connection with *Brasil*, such as Germany, have become a part of the history of these capes. In the year 1599 in Stuttgart, a carnival of cultural appropriation entitled 'The Queen of America' paraded through the streets of Württemberg, as the German Royalty dressed in the sacred capes traditionally worn only by the spiritual leaders of the Tupinambás. They displayed their acquired feathers to a crowd of six-thousand people. The purpose of the theatrical event was to reinforce royal authority and social hierarchy, and as a parade of power and splendour. As depicted in the watercolour painting of this event, the German royals each played a part in this grand spectacle, and each had a specific role and a part to play as they paraded, impersonating the Tupinambá.

The use of these capes in this way served as powerful symbols of power and authority for the royals in Europe. The very story of the capes being transported to Europe to adorn their leaders - who now appropriated them for their own ritualistic purposes, going so far as to enact the ritual dance of exuberance and power that belonged to the Tupinambá<sup>18</sup> - serves as a symbol, reinforcing ideas of European supremacy and indigenous inferiority. The capes were valued and respected much more than the cultures or the peoples from which they came. I maintain that the implicit meaning behind the symbology of this act is a very strong suggestion that whatever value these artifacts had, whether in their craftsmanship or in their power as ritual symbols, their proper place and usage was to adorn the alleged God given authority of European monarchy. It was as if to suggest that the artifacts had finally come home, serving their rightful place as reminders of who the real authorities are - their beauty and their power finally put to appropriate use.

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<sup>18</sup> Buono, Their Treasures Are The Feathers Of Birds': Tupinambá Featherwork And The Image Of America."



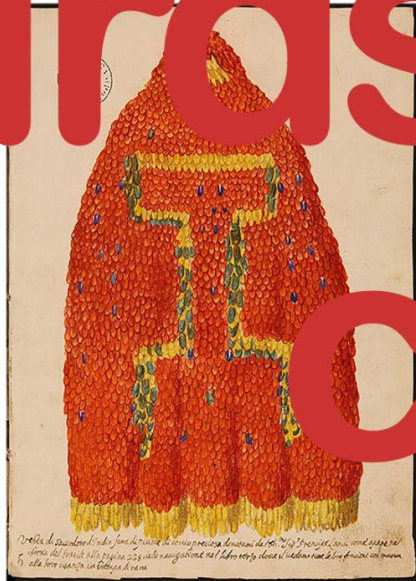
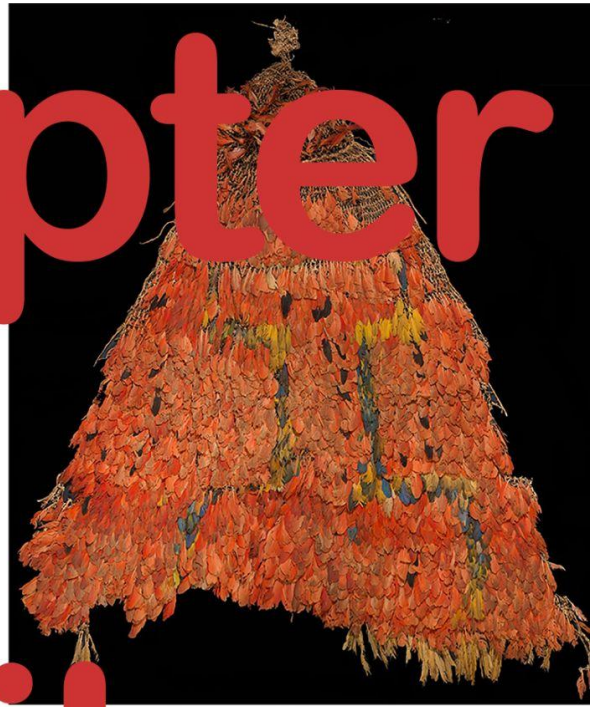
Figure 4: Adriaen Hanneman Royal, *Mary Princess of Orange*, 1655?, oil on canvas, Royal Collection Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Even across the Atlantic, the capes still maintained the power and authority they held for their original creators, although now used towards different ends and by a foreign culture who neglected to include the Tupinambá themselves in this narrative. One wonders exactly how many capes were transported to Europe, as the Tupinambá were the most numerous people in pre-colonial *Brasil*. How many carnivals, parties, balls and events featured European royalty adorned with the sacred clothes of those whose culture they were simultaneously decimating and ignoring? As the European elite partied and posed for paintings, the Tupinambá, and many other native people, were being forcibly catechized and destroyed.



As a consequence of this appropriation by the European elite, couture and fashion in Europe became highly influenced by the feather work, whilst the origin of this aesthetic was obfuscated, and credit never given where it was due. Meanwhile, the hugely diminished Tupinambá who survived the first waves of colonisation, were left scattered and decimated, deprived of their identity, territory and freedom.

# chapter 2: like birds in a cage



## CHAPTER 2 - Like birds in a cage



Figure 5: Livia Melzi, Musée du Cinquantenaire, Bruxelles, Belgium, 2019

“If the bullet and the camera are tools of colonial governance that aim to kill and capture at speed, the museum vitrine decelerates time, enacting slower aggression. The museum is a device of 'colonial remembering' that naturalises white supremacy by creating a difference between 'civilisation' and 'barbarism' — the museum is a tool of empire.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> George Vasey, "Dan Hicks: The Brutish Museums", *Art Monthly*, 2021.



15th September, 2019

It's a beautiful Sunday in Paris, one of those sweaty hot autumn days in which the air is heavy with the scent of life, and the notion that it will be the last one for a while. Tomorrow I must return to Berlin, and I could think of a thousand beautiful and pleasant things to do. However, a less pleasant one was pressing in the back of my mind. I have meant to come to this museum for so long, but is it worth ruining a beautiful autumn day? I have constantly denied visits to the Pergamon Museum, as I have no intention of paying to see looted objects. However, this is different. This feels personal.

Still unsure, I decided to take a shower; when finished, I realized that a song started playing on my phone, entitled 'Tupinamba'. The day plan was set, and it didn't feel like I was in full control of this decision. As I entered the Quai Branly museum, I felt sick, as a thunderstorm of anger passed through my body.

The first thing I noticed about the museum besides its stillness, was the way it was structured, as its sections are divided by continents: America, Africa, Asia and Oceania. Every continent represented - except for the one in which I stood. To me this very fact carried a strong implicit message, which was reinforced by the fact that the museum entry fare was free for young Europeans. It made me remark upon the irony that the only continent whose objects weren't stolen to be put on display there, were the only ones whose people were allowed to enter free of charge! The colonial power structures of access and capital are reinforced as people are charged between nine and twelve euros to see their own looted culture.

What further struck me was that beyond the sunny and warm day outside, the museum lighting was dim, and it was extremely cold. Surely there are conservation

issues in place here. The contrast created by the dim lighting of these large rooms, and the focused light shining onto the artifacts, housed behind glass. Served to create an experience of detachment, of looking in from the outside. Each display pulls you in and transporting you into a far away world - into an experience of the exotic, the different, the 'other'. By showing the pieces in such a manner, we are distant from them. They are untouchable, unreachable. The glass that separates the object from its spectator is the same glass that separates the colonies from the colonizer. We can see what's on the other side, although it's unattainable for us, because of empires and wars that started long before we were born.



Figure 6: Fernanda Liberti, *Cocar Brasileiro dos Baniwa da Amazônia*, created by the author for this dissertation, 2019.

In recent years, the controversial subject of the repatriation of artifacts has been heating up all over the world, involving curators and even state leaders both from former colonies and their colonizers. Many European countries have a history of colonization and imperialism, which resulted in the cultural, economic, and physical extermination of many cultures and peoples of the world. The consequence of these wounds, still fresh in former colonies today, was the destruction of these traditional ways of life. This largely resulted in cultural and physical disintegration and economic and political instability.

Many colonies, and particularly *Brasil*, were used as a sourcing ground from which Europe imported gold, wood, coffee, labour and feathers. 'Our [natural] wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others - the empires and their native overseers. In colonial and neo-colonial alchemy, gold changes into scrap metal and food into poison.' wrote Eduardo Hughes Galeano, in *Open Veins of Latin America*<sup>20</sup>. Our underdevelopment was the key to the development of Europe, and the cultural sector is not immune to this disease. The museums of Europe became not only a public archive of the colonial system and their powers but the epitome of everything that was taken from the global south, both financially and culturally.

Repatriation is a step towards healing the wounds of the past, and serves a gesture of respect and recognition - precisely what was so lacking in these relationships up to

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<sup>20</sup> Eduardo Hughes Galeano and Isabel Allende, *Open Veins Of Latin America* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1997).

this point. The Savoy-Sarr report<sup>21</sup>, commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss the repatriation of African artefacts in French museums, created an uproar in both the world of art and politics. Years since this debate was sparked, only one artwork has yet been repatriated.<sup>22</sup> It brings up the question of how effective these initiatives are. What are the true factors that influence this delay: is it bureaucracy? - an unavoidable part of the culture of museums and collections; or is it a lack of interest in pursuing these proposals through to their end - a silent complicity in maintaining colonial structures?



Figure 7: Livia Melzi, *Archives B #01*, Museum der Kulturen, Basilea (Basel), 2021

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<sup>21</sup> Felwin Sarr, Bénédicte Savoy, 'The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage Toward a New Relational Ethics', (2018), .

<sup>22</sup> Sally Price and Dan Hicks, "The Sarr-Savoy Report – One Year On | Apollo Magazine", *Apollo Magazine*, 2020 <<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/sarr-savoy-report-sally-price-dan-hicks/>> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

There are hundreds of European museums, mostly filled with artefacts and artworks that were collected during the colonial period with many being obtained through questionable means. The United Kingdom with its history of imperialism is certainly not free from the questions raised by this debate. There is a pressing need for debate and institutional critiques surrounding these questions in the UK. The British Museum stands as that main actor in this debate, but less famous museums, such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, also epitomize Britain's persisting colonial attitude to foreign artefacts within the context of the museum. The Pitt Rivers Museum's website boasts: "more than 500,000 objects, photographs and manuscripts from all over the world, and from all periods of human existence. Within these are exceptional objects of ritual significance, and objects made for tourists or trade."<sup>23</sup>

In recent years, as public opinion on repatriation claims shifts, attitudes are beginning to shift from within these institutions. Curators like Clémentine Deliss (former Laboratory of the Weltkulturen Museum Director), Mille Gabrielle (the Danish National Museum) and Professor Dan Hicks (curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum) have written books exploring the controversies surrounding this subject and are actively engaged in addressing the problematic past and the continuing legacy of the institutions they represent.

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<sup>23</sup> "About Us - Pitt Rivers Museum", [Prm.Ox.Ac.Uk](https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/about-us-0), 2021 <<https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/about-us-0>> [Accessed 3 March 2021].





Figure 8: Livia Melzi, *Archives B #02*, Museum der Kulturen, Basilea (Basel), 2020

Despite the efforts of individuals, governments and curators, inside each of these museums there are still countless objects, stained with the blood and tears of many cultures, still pained today by the consequences of being deprived of their own history. The number of such artifacts is so large that most of these museums lack the space to display them all at once, meaning that there are objects of the utmost importance to several cultures stashed away in storage: merely another item in a catalogue, stored in a temperature-controlled warehouse somewhere. Despite the

importance of conservation, anthropology and history, such objects were not intended to be stored away by the living cultures that created them. This is a kind of cultural hoarding that has become almost a caricature of European colonial attitudes, the desire to extract, catalogue and store an extensive number of objects and artefacts, as the keepsakes of an empire who see themselves as the centre of the world, the epitome of humanity and thus give themselves the right to take from everyone else, as if they were simply preserving *their own* history.<sup>24</sup> This is the racism of worldliness<sup>25</sup>: the idea that indigenous people exist within their own particular cultural contexts - from which they cannot break free, and the European, in contrast, does not only have the opportunity - but the responsibility to be general in how they see themselves in the world.

The subject of repatriation complexifies when we explore this subject in the context of *Brasil* and its museums. In 2018, the National Museum of *Brasil*, which was a focal point of study for the Rio de Janeiro Federal University, burned to the ground, together with its two-hundred-year-old collection with over 21 million catalogued items.<sup>26</sup> The extent of this loss is hard to grasp, as the building was also the former residence of the Portuguese royalty - the only monarchy to ever move to a colony. It was as if the British Museum and Buckingham palace both burned down at once. I remember watching the despair of professors, anthropologists and researchers on TV, as they tried to save their life's work with their own hands by carrying them out of the fire. There were recordings of native languages, ethnicities and animals that no

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<sup>24</sup> Clementine Deliss, "Searching For Art's Unknowns: Photography And Forensic Imaging In The Context Of Colonial Museums And Restitution Politics", 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Noelia Bueno Gómez, "A Critical Approach To Hannah Arendt'S Concept Of Worldliness And Its Applicability In The Social Sciences", *Human Affairs*, 26.2 (2016), 201-211  
<<https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2016-0019>>.

<sup>26</sup> Eliane Brum, "O Brasil Queimou – E Não Tinha Água Para Apagar O Fogo", *EL Pais*, 2018  
<[https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/09/03/opinion/1535975822\\_774583.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/09/03/opinion/1535975822_774583.html)> [Accessed 9 June 2021].

longer exist on this planet, and now are only a sparkle in the air that travelled as ash back to the forest surrounding the remains of the museum.

The episode happened just a month before Jair Bolsonaro was elected, representing the beginning of the dark period *Brasil* was about to enter. Since 2004, the museum had been informing the authorities of a fire risk due to the faulty electrical wiring in the building. When the firefighters arrived, there was no water available in the nearby fire hydrants. This episode reinforces the argument many European museums and curators sustain, and which serves as a critique of demands for repatriation: that the former colonies do not have the capacity to take care of their own artifacts. However, the burning down of the original cultures of *Brasil* started long before that fire, and has been an explicit goal of the Bolsonaro government, who has made it his crusade to exterminate all types of funding for the arts and sciences and has adopted anti-conservation policies which threaten the remaining indigenous populations and the demarcation of their land.<sup>27</sup> This phenomenon of attempting to dismember indigenous culture is anything but new, and it started on the day the first ship arrived in *Brasil* from Europe.

The extermination policies adopted by our current government, resemble the ethnic cleansing, catholicization and extermination of culture our indigenous people faced during colonial times. In in *The Wretched of the Earth*<sup>28</sup> Frantz Fanon stated “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.” *Brasil* has a strong

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<sup>27</sup> Théo Manzali de Sá-Kaye, "Bolsonaro's Cultural Revolution", *Americas Quarterly*, 2020 <<https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/bolsonaros-cultural-revolution/>> [Accessed 2 August 2021].

<sup>28</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched Of The Earth* (New York, USA: Grove Press, 2021).

mongrel complex<sup>29</sup> in which it renegades and devalues anything that comes from within. Fanon expanded on this idea by stating: “The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves.” Why do our objects only have importance when affirmed by the foreign gaze and when they are in a museum in France? By stripping the Brazilian people, and more specifically the Tupinambá and other indigeneous peoples of their beliefs, land and artifacts, the colonizers managed to remove their power and identity, and forced them into slavery. Until today, *Brasilians* suffer from this condition of self-loathing, and self-deprecation, they reject the cultural influences from indigenous, *Brazilian* and African origins, and seem to only value influences that come from Europe or the United States.

In an interview with João Pacheco,<sup>30</sup> head curator of the National Museum, I was told that after the fire, many indigenous communities donated objects to help rebuild the museum's collection — a fact that astonishes the European curators he speaks to. In stark contrast to European museums, the curators and anthropologists of *Brasil's* National Museum were able to build a relationship of collaboration and respect with the indigenous peoples of our country - an attitude which I propose should serve as an example for any museum that deals with artifacts sourced from foreign cultures. European Museums, even those who don't focus on ethnographic material, have their origins in curiosity cabinets and royal collections, which have influenced their colonial attitudes. Through *cultural hegemony* - a concept developed by Antonio Gramsci,<sup>31</sup> the European museum relies on racist, elitist and colonial structures to continue existing and thus continuously reproduce these attitudes. Artist Carolyn

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<sup>29</sup> Nelson Rodrigues and Ruy Castro, *Á Sombra Das Chuteiras Imortais* (São Paulo: Companhia das letras, 1998), p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> João Pacheco, Details about the national museum (60 minutes, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> Antonio Gramsci and others, *Antonio Gramsci: Selections From Cultural Writings* (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2014).

Lazard claimed in a recent interview. “Once we abandon the solidity of the museums’ justifications for existing, we might be able to invent new forms and new models of making.”<sup>32</sup> With European museums and collections owning thousands of objects from *Brasil* in storage — I find it odd that there wasn’t any significant effort from them to also help the museum to rebuild its collection. Germany donated one million euros, but no cultural objects currently held in its possession.<sup>33</sup>

I question whether the goal of these collections was ever the preservation of culture. Was the goal to simply to take objects into its possession and control the narratives around them? In a country such as *Brasil* where people struggle to eat, a trip to Europe to experience these artifacts is the privilege of a select few, keeping our own culture out of reach of our people, who are mostly unaware of the richness of our history. The Savoy-Sarr report, expands on the importance of this kind of access:

To fall under the spell of an object, to be touched by it, moved emotionally by a piece of art in a museum, brought to tears of joy, to admire its forms of ingenuity, to like the artworks’ colours, to take a photo of it, to let oneself be transformed by it: all these experiences—which are also forms of access to knowledge—can not simply be reserved to the inheritors of an asymmetrical history, to the benefactors of an excess of privilege and mobility<sup>34</sup>

Future generations of *Brasilians* will be deprived of the experiences that were available in our national museum, they will be deprived of the right to learn about and fall in love with our material culture. They will be deprived of the school visits I had to the National Museum as a child, which I now wish I had paid more attention to. This lack of access goes further than economic limitations; this reality is highlighted by the work of the *Brazilian* artist Livia Melzi, whose recent research involved photographing all the Tupinambá capes in European collections. Melzi’s work critiques the bureaucracies behind these collections which result in a general

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<sup>32</sup> Alex Kitnick, "Point Of No Return", 2021.

<sup>33</sup> "Quase Metade Das Doações Ao Museu Nacional Veio Da Alemanha | DW | 27.08.2019", *DW*, 2021 <<https://www.dw.com/pt-br/quase-metade-das-doa%C3%A7%C3%B5es-ao-museu-nacional-veio-da-alemanha/a-50179182>> [Accessed 2 August 2021].

<sup>34</sup> Felwin Sarr, Bénédicte Savoy, pp 4.



lack of accessibility to the capes.

There are large discrepancies in the accounts of the exact number of capes currently kept in Europe. Some papers state that there are seven, some eleven.<sup>35</sup> Melzi believes that this doubt adds to the complexity of the subject, as the lack of official accounting only highlights the lack of transparency concerning their acquisition on the part of these institutions. These institutions serve as the gatekeepers of access, and it took Melzi around thirty emails to gain the access she needed to photograph the capes at the Università Degli Studi di Firenze in Italy and the Quai Branly in Paris.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 9: Livia Melzi, *Quai Branly Museum, Paris, 2020*

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<sup>35</sup> The known capes are held at: Nationalmuseet Etnografisk Samling, Copenhagen (EH5931, EHc52, EH5933, EH5934, EH5935); Museum der Kulturen, Basilea (N. lvc657); Musées Royale d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles (AAM 5783); Musées Royale d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles (N. 281, N. 288); Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (N.17.3.83); Museo di Storia Naturale, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Firenze (N. 281 e 288); e 'Museum Septalianum', Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano, Milan (unknown number).

<sup>36</sup> Livia Melzi, *About the Tupinambá Capes* (Online, 2021).

Melzi's intentionally sterile and lab-like image highlights the contrast of bright red coloured bird capes and the grey environment that have been their home for many centuries. Their beauty and splendour became the cause of their captivity. The images could've just as well been of a dead bird in a lab being prepared to be taxidermied, preserved and catalogued for display. An artifact which could be very much alive. treated as if already dead - just like the Tupinambá people from which it came.



Figure 10: Livia Melzi, Archive P #07, 2021

The capes in Europe had been exiled for centuries when an exhibition *Rediscovering* (2000), brought to São Paulo a cape kept in a museum in Copenhagen.<sup>37</sup> This was the first time the living descendants of Tupinambás had access to their ancestral work. Nivalda Amaral Tupinambá, a very important figure in the indigenous leadership, travelled from Bahia to see the exhibition. [Figure 12] They could only see the object through a glass dome guarded by a security officer. Right

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<sup>37</sup> Armando Antenore, "Somos Tupinambás, Queremos O Manto De Volta", *Folha De São Paulo*, 2000.

after, Nivalda and the rest of the Tupinambá started a claim for the cape to stay in *Brasil*. Although there was a lot of noise and press coverage at the time, the cape returned to Denmark and never has never returned to *Brasil* since. Reinforcing the idea we previously touched upon - that the European colonial attitude presupposes that the cape's rightful home is with them.



Figure 11: Flávio Florido, *Nivalda Amaral de Jesus and Aloísio Cunha Silva*, São Paulo, 2000

This narrative, however, was about to change. Only six years afterwards, Glicéria Tupinambá, a well-known researcher, teacher, indigenous leader and artist, who gained international recognition when she spoke at the UN to expose the violence and threats her people were facing,<sup>38</sup> decided to claim back ownership of her culture by attempting to make the cape. The first cape made by Glicéria, in 2006, had

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<sup>38</sup> Renato Santana, "Glicéria Tupinambá, A Voz Da Mulher Indígena Na ONU: "Só Cabe A Nós Definir Como Queremos Viver E Morrer" | Cimi", *Cimi.Org.Br*, 2019  
<<https://cimi.org.br/2019/03/gliceria-tupinamba-a-voz-da-mulher-indigena-na-onu-so-cabe-a-nos-definir->

a modest size, contained much fewer feathers than some of the original artifacts, and was done as an offering to the *enchanted*,<sup>39</sup> who they celebrate every year in January. João Pacheco from the National Museum was preparing for the exhibition *The First Brazilians* and asked Glicéria to donate a number of pieces, this cape was among them. Thanks to the way the artifacts in the exhibition were stored and organised, these objects were spared from the fire when the museum burned down. Before donating the piece to the exhibition, she consulted with the *enchanted* who authorised her to give the artifact to the exhibition under the condition: 'You can give one, but you will need to make three more.'<sup>40</sup>

The desire to create these capes came from an accomplishment on the part of Tupinambá of Serra do Padeiro, where her family has lived for centuries. When they managed to conclude the demarcation and reclaiming of their territory<sup>41</sup> They could finally concern themselves with issues beyond their mere survival, such as their art and culture. As Glicéria herself puts it: "we have our territory in [our] hands, so now we need to rescue what else has been taken from us".<sup>42</sup> Like the indigenous people who donated their objects to the national museum, Glicéria knows that art is a powerful resource to communicate her people's struggles, that's why recreating the capes is so important, as it not only rescues their rightful and ancestral material culture, but it legitimates their fights. The aspect of counter-hegemony present in her research is essential as it "creates an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil

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<sup>39</sup> How the Tupinambá refer to the deceased spirits and magical entities in their culture.

<sup>40</sup> Glicéria Tupinambá, Mariana Lacerda and Patrícia Cornils, *Curar O Mundo* (N-1 Edições, 2021), pp. 1-22.

<sup>41</sup> It is very common in Brasil that farmers and governments don't respect the limit of market indigenous land (their right through the constitution), so the community decided to take matters into their own hands and after a lot of fight, managed to fully claim back their righteous ancestral land. Their struggle is expressed in the book: Glicéria Tupinambá and Daniela Alarcon, *Os Donos Da Terra (The Owners Of The Land)*, 1st edn (São Paulo: Elefante, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7.

society in preparation for political change".<sup>43</sup> The new capes brings the Tupinambá back to the international landscape and spotlight, but this time not as the *other* but as the artist claiming back the role of protagonist in their own stories and cultural forms.

The role of photography was essential for the study and the further development of Glicéria's later attempts to create the cape. In the early stages of her research, when she put together her first attempt, Glicéria was unsure of how to proceed in the construction of an object that hadn't been made by anyone alive for many centuries. She used photography, often a colonial weapon of power, as a powerful tool for decolonisation, reclaiming her ancestral knowledge from the vaults within which they were hidden. First, in a lecture by Patrícia Navarro from the Feira de Santana State University (UEFS), then through Livia Melzi's work. Thanks to the record of artifacts obtained from the archives of several museums, Glicéria was able to reference techniques and details from the different capes in Europe, accessing ancestral memories present within herself and other members of her family. By structuring this bridge, the photographs made it possible to fill the gaps created by the years of cultural genocide and abandonment her people endured. This created an interesting connection between a museum's archive and an artist whose rightful knowledge she should never have been deprived of.

The development in Glicéria's work between the first and second capes is striking. Created fourteen years apart, these changes were due to one important factor: In 2018, after making the first, and before making the second cape, Glicéria had the opportunity to cross the Atlantic and travel to France for a lecture and to showcase

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<sup>43</sup> Nicola Pratt, "Bringing Politics Back In: Examining The Link Between Globalization And Democratization", *Review Of International Political Economy*, 11.2 (2004), 311-336 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0969229042000249831>>.



her movie *The Voice of Woman*.<sup>44</sup> There, she was able to visit the Quai Branly Museum where she had her first in-person contact with an example of her ancestor's work.

"Upon arriving, what was wonderful was that the piece, still, had a memory and had something to say. It was waiting for me. I say that it was waiting for me because it gives me so much joy, almost makes me giggle. It had energy there, I don't what it was, an aura, an energy that made me ha. It's the encounter of someone, of something. Very Precious, that encounter was important. Mine and the cape."<sup>45</sup>

Glicéria is very invested in researching the female-driven force behind the capes, as the official accounts from the colonizers and Jesuits scarcely mentions the presence of women and their relationships to these artifacts. In her encounter with the cape in France, she felt the energy of the woman who made the cape, just like she felt the energy of the men who took it away.

For a number of reasons it took Glicéria until 2020 to finally put together a full-body cape with over four thousand feathers. This too happened for a special reason. Rosivaldo Ferreira da Silva, known as *Babau* - the chief representing their community, was receiving an honorary degree from the State University of Bahia (UNEB) and she promised to make the cape for him to wear at the ceremony.

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<sup>44</sup> Glicéria Tupinambá and Cristiane Pankararu, *Voz Das Mulheres Indígenas (The Voice Of The Indigenous Women)* (Serra do padeiro, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Glicéria Tupinambá, Mariana Lacerda and Patrícia Cornils, *Curar O Mundo* (N-1 Edições, 2021), pp. 9



Figure 12: Glicéria Tupinambá, *Cacique Babau para o Outro Céu, Serra do Padeiro, 2020*

Their community is in constant threat of violence and arrest, and often clashing with authorities, resulting in both Glicéria and Babau being imprisoned in the early 2000s.<sup>46</sup> Due to the sanitary restrictions and roadblocks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, they found themselves a decade later, fully isolated and undisturbed by the usual invasions of their land. It is in this context that they finally found the safety and time to focus on the cape.<sup>47</sup> The base of the cape is made of waxed string, composed in a way that resembles a Jererê fishing net, a very traditional method of weaving used by the Tupinambá. According to Glicéria, the sourcing of feathers and the construction of the base were the biggest challenges. After some roadblocks, by combining the knowledge she acquired from her photography, from reading

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<sup>46</sup> The full report on the struggles faced by the Tupinambá people of Serra do Padeiro can be read in a letter written by Rosemiro Ferreira da Silva (Pajé Representing the religious organization of the Tupinambá of the Serra do Padeiro - Glicéria's father) and Rosivaldo Ferreira da Silva (Cacique Babau Representing the political organization) in the article: <https://cimi.org.br/2019/02/tupinamba-people-from-olivenca-reaffirms-resistance-to-bolsonaro-governments-measures/>

<sup>47</sup> For more details on the cape see the online exhibition *Another Sky, 2020*, <https://umoutroceu.ufba.br/exposicao/manto-tupinamba/>

scholarly accounts, from the expertise of her elder family members and from her dreams and her intuition, Glicéria was able to progress greatly in the quality of her creation and in 2020 she completed the first and only known Tupinambá Cape to reside in *Brasil* for the first time in five hundred years.



Figure 13: Fernanda Liberti, *Célias studio*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

## BACK TO THE SUN

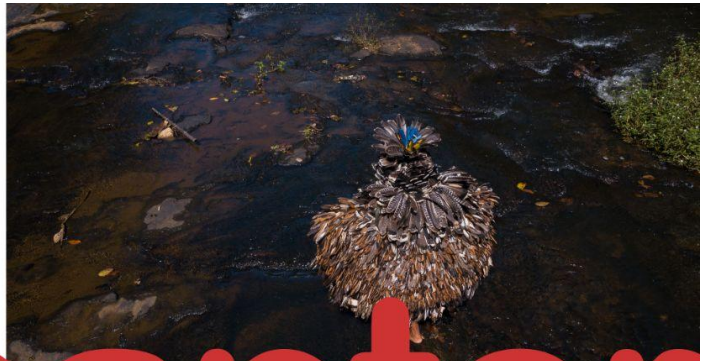
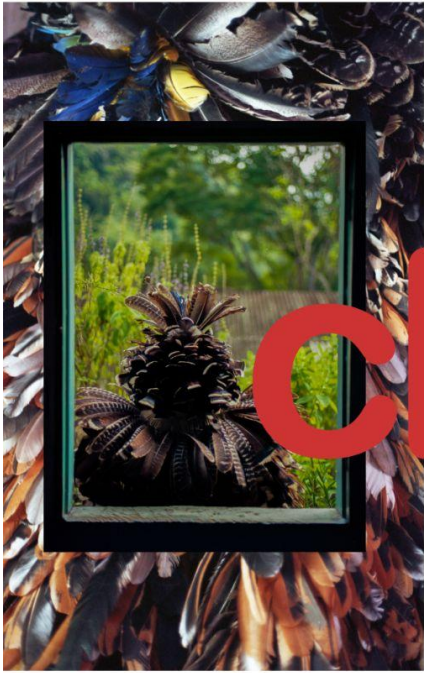
The Tupinambá cape won, bought, stolen, who knows?  
- We do know, it's a nest stuck in the walls of another continent.  
After centuries, regardless of the glass that sucks its oxygen out, the red guará blood and the ocean blue of the araruna, keep something that exceeds the national museum of Copenhagen.  
All cotton and envira, the cape has the dimension of the forest - It's worth paying for a ticket to see the glass, never the spirit that sets into flames the selfishness of the alarm?  
The cape full of spears burns with so much memory. Its place is not here, perhaps, who knows? in the limescale that moulds all bodies.  
image if filled with rarefied air, the cape opened. What thesis put into the table would explain the dead, alive at last, in response to the rapture of souls?  
The cape wants to fly home. The death of its offspring turns its permanence useless.  
It must get lost to accuse its murderers.  
Given this unnamable memory,  
Something will be restarted – the root of what is no longer a tree, but  
Gives fruits – the roar of what is no longer jaguar, but sharpens the claws-  
The humidity of what is no rain drowns the criminal's hand.  
Exiled in a continent where grandparents, to go to the movie,  
Glue their grandkids to the shadow, the cape reflects its nature – rapid  
Urn in snow territory. Around the glass, tongues tassel  
In silence for respect or scorn, don't now – we do.  
In those which the cape was trusted, a song stretches out  
Unaware of its kidnap. A bird flies above the desolate earth.  
An ethnographic movie calls the guilty by name.  
Will there be enough bones to be thrown against the glass?  
The Tupinambá cape is a nest in the world's darkness – breaths in an ocean of mirrors its rage

- EDIMILSON DE ALMEIDA PEREIRA<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, "O MANTO TUPINAMBÁ É UM NINHO NA ESCURIDÃO DO MUNDO", *Piauí*, 2019  
<<https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/o-manto-tupinamba-e-um-ninho-na-escuridao-do-mundo/>>  
[Accessed 9 June 2021].





chapter



3.



encuentro





## CHAPTER 3 - Encontro

### encontro

British English: appointment noun /ə'pɔɪntmənt/

**meeting** If you have an *appointment* with someone, you have arranged to see them at a particular time.<sup>49</sup>

00:00 90/06/2021



on the night of my birthday,  
I slept  
with the cape

in célia's studio,  
I slept  
beside the cape

I saw the fogged picture  
and wondered  
what it was trying to tell me

the cape was the last thing I saw  
as I left  
26  
and the first thing  
I felt  
when I turned  
27

Figure 14: Fernanda Liberti, *Birthday night*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

<sup>49</sup> "English Translation Of "Encontro" | Collins Portuguese-English Dictionary", *Collinsdictionary.Com* <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/portuguese-english/encontro>> [Accessed 6 May 2021].



Figure 15: Fernanda Liberti, *Flight sequence*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

The enhancing dance of the body of feathers managed to seduce me. At the beginning of 2018, I read an article on *BBC Brasil* reporting on *Brazilian* objects that were currently in European collections.<sup>50</sup> One object caught my attention and as I later learned, it was a common reaction to the red-feathered cape. The fascination wasn't exclusive to my eyes, as those capes have passed a diverse set of curious hands in the past years: From the Tupinambá who made them, to the priests and merchants who took them to Europe, to the Royal who wore them for paintings and carnivals to the curators who today carefully handle them in warehouses a few floors below ground. We have all been enchanted.

Our dance started officially three years ago, but sometimes I have the feeling it did before I was born. I was taking both the driver and passengers' seat in this narrative of cat and mouse, searching for it but also allowing it to guide me, through Germany where I lived at the time, to Paris where I naively thought I could just show up and demand to see the cape, back to *Brasil*, where all of this first started many centuries ago.

One thing that was common across all the people I spoke to about the cape, was the description of the *energy* that surrounds these capes. It is clear it holds an energy that attracts and enlists an army of admirers, researchers, protectors and curious souls who are called to it. All of these different narratives follow the same weaving thread, like threads used to hold the feathers in the first place. Glicérias work validated Livia's research, whose pictures she used to decrypt her ancestral knowledge; My work was incorporated into Livia's research in which she compared the Tupinambá

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<sup>50</sup> Mariana Alvim, "Das Peças Indígenas A Fósseis: Os Itens Culturais Brasileiros Que Estão Ou Correm Risco De Ir Parar No Exterior", *BBC Brasil*, 2018 <<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-42405892>> [Accessed 16 June 2021].



Cape in movement which I recorded to one of her previous works of a bird becoming a taxidermy, and hers became a great source of imagery and references for this research. Glicéria then validated my own quest and I was able to provide her with my own sources of research of the Tupinambá of Rio, software exchange and imagery for her presentations and archive. Through this patchwork quilt of equity, collaboration and shared knowledge, we are all connected inside this story, through our works, rights or curiosities. We were all caught in the same net, made of Jererê.

[Figure 16]



Figure 16: Glicéria Tupinambá, *Jererê net / the base of the cape, Serra do Padeiro, 2021*

June 2021

I have never been to Bahia by car before. The reason is the distance: 1200km from Rio. This time, due to a still alive pandemic, a remote destination and a gigantic amount of photographic equipment, it felt like the wisest choice. Not even in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that an article I read online could lead me to the Tupinambá land on Serra do Padeiro, and that's where we were headed. How sad to think that the last time the capes were in *Brasil*, all of this land belonged to them. After a full day and a half going through the veins of *Brasil*, seeing the landscape, the gas price (a scandalous increase in the infamous Bolsonaro government) <sup>51</sup> and the accent change as we moved through state lines, we arrived at lunchtime. The first person I met was Eru (Glicéria's eldest son), who proudly announced his full name upon our arrival, and led us to finally meet Glicería and the rest of the family (as I later on discovered, only a small portion of it) who was waiting for us at her mother's kitchen, Dona Maria. She first met me with a hug and said I was home, and at that moment, I felt so.

There is a special energy in Brazilian countryside kitchens, and D. Maria's is the



perfect example. The way she moves in the kitchen reminds me of my great grandmother, the energy of the matriarch which expands through their hands, into the food they cook then straight inside our souls. Every indigenous elderly person is a living breathing encyclopedia and Dona

ls-petrobras-hikes-gasoline-diesel-prices-2021-07-05/>

Maria is no different. After a pandemic that took away the lives of

Figure 17: Fernanda Liberti, Dona Maria in her kitchen, *created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021.*

so many indigenus elders, it's a blessing she is still around to tell stories and to pass on her knowledge.<sup>52</sup> She harbours a gigantic paradox, of knowledge without formal education, of tough affection, of representing the simplicity and complexity of life all at once.

I wasn't expecting to see any of the capes on the first day. I made it clear to myself that I first wanted to get to know the place and the people who were receiving me. It wasn't a colonial ethnographic visit to catalogue, photograph and leave. I was there and I was present with soul and body. After lunch, Gliceria's friend who was also visiting, professor Augustan de Tugny, asked if we could see the cape she was working on to take some pictures. Since the initiative didn't come from me and I could not contain my excitement, I said yes when he asked me. As I first saw the feathers reach the sun, as Glicéria carefully removed the "A" structure (which she build to hold the unfinished cape) from inside her home, my heart sank funnyly. I had been studying the capes for three years now, and with some luck, access and dedication (and without a pandemic) I would have been able to see one cape in person in an underground warehouse somewhere in Europe, at its best. At this moment, I was seeing it in the sun, hanging by the cocoa tree Glicéria has next door to her house. The cocoa plant, like the cape, once was, a "soon" to be extinct local

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<sup>52</sup> NBC News, "Brazil's Indigenous Communities Mourn Elders' Deaths And The Loss Of Their Knowledge", 2021  
<<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/brazil-s-indigenous-communities-mourn-elders-deaths-loss-their-knowledge-n1259143>> [Accessed 8 June 2021].



figure due to climate change.<sup>53</sup> I could see the wind, gently moving the golden feathers around. The cape wasn't yet finished, but it was alive.



Figure 18: Fernanda Liberti, *The sun as it touches the feathers*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

For the next few days, Glicéria took us around their land to meet different family members who were important in her journey for ancestral knowledge, so we could interview and record their stories. In 2007, the federal police entered their community and burned most of their memories; photographs, objects and artworks; anything found to be 'dangerous'. To record and publish the images, through a diverse range of mediums, such as video, drone, analogue and digital photography was my way to mark this historical moment in as many ways as possible, and to capture it from different perspectives that could give the full scope of the importance

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<sup>53</sup> Glicéria informed me that due to climate change, there won't be cocoa plants in the next twenty years, as they rely on the milder temperatures (as cold as the south of Bahia can be) to exist.

of these creations. By using a drone, I was able to get a birds-eye-view of the cape in movement, in its full magnificence [Figure 19]. The shadow of the afternoon cast through her body, and from above you can be confused with a bird ready to take off but the shadow shows a woman's body. One may agree that the image represents the female energy that guides through the cape. The *flying bird* and its movements differ drastically from the still images presented in Melzi's work, which only highlights the comparison of a flightless bird, stuck in captivity.

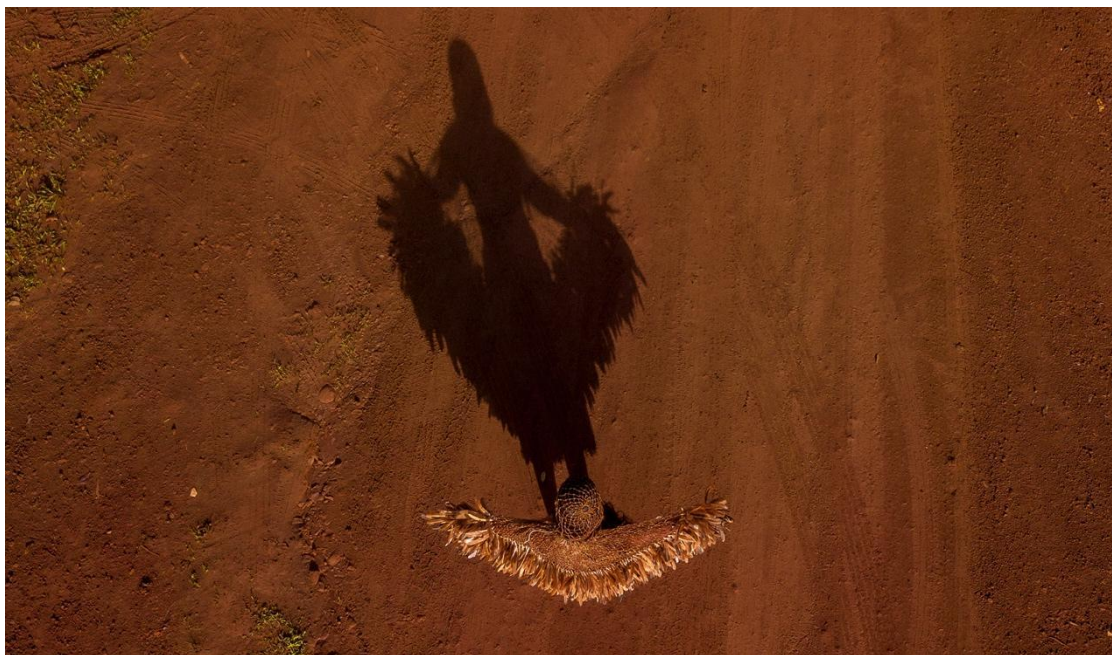


Figure 19: Fernanda Liberti, *Flying bird*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

The new capes are not replicas of the first ones, they are legit in their own right and merely a reflection of their times. Guarás are not so commonly found in *Brasil* anymore, like many other species from when the capes were first made. The feathers are from a diversity of species (peacock, chicken, ducks, whatever was available) collected through months around the community as the Tupinambá don't kill for feathers; like most animals, birds shed feathers in different seasons, they are called

'green' and 'mature' feathers – just like fruits – and once they are mature, the natural process of the bird, they easily remove them without causing any harm. If one attempts to make a cape with green feathers, they will contain blood on their tips, which will be infectious, attracting bacteria that will cause the cape to rot. A perfect ecosystem.

Glicéria waited to show me the cape she made last year for Babau's graduation, the only full-body cape that was finalised when I was there, as she was confectioning three others for an exhibition. I'm not sure if she wanted to make sure she could trust me, or if she was creating some expectation. It was almost our final day, and I was still slightly anxious about getting the perfect images, as I knew we were running out of time. The first time I saw the cape was as Glicéria removed it from the back room of her family's terreiro<sup>54</sup>, surrounded by gigantic images of all the entities I have prayed, danced and sang for in the last years. At that moment, I knew they had guided me there. As Glicéria emerged from the back, and I finally saw the body of feathers, my eyes filled with tears. The emotion was taking over my body, for so many reasons. The cape is magnificent, and this experience was beyond anything I could ever have imagined.

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<sup>54</sup> In native and afrobrasilian religions, terreiro is a worship place.





Figure 20: Fernanda Liberti, *Célias no terreiro*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

The image represents the diversity and complexity of times: Glicéria, wearing her original outfit, which was done only last year, where tradition means innovation, where the present meets the past. From the enchanted to catholic images of saints, African Orixás and traditional indigenous believes, the praying shrive she poses on her knees is the epicentre of the *Brasilian* religious syncretism. The image has a

thousand years in a day, showcasing the diversity of cultures that makes Brazil, *Brasil*.



Figure 21: Fernanda Liberti, *From above*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

I started researching about capes that were unattainable,  
untouchable,  
still.

Of feathers that have been missing the warmth of a body for centuries.

I was now seeing it in movement, embracing Glicéria's body like an incorporation, feeling the energy of the birds that compose it, of the ancestors who guided and are connected to it. Seeing it in movement one can observe the characters it acquired from the different earth-based birds. Chickens, ducks, quick, agile. That's how the cape asked to be.

Although I am not allowed to wear them, I was able to touch, smell, feel, and sleep in the same room as the cape. I could see the colour of the feathers change as they touch



the sun, as the wind connects with its tips, making them slightly dance on their own.  
All of these would have been impossible in a museum.



Figure 22: Fernanda Liberti, *Célia no poço de Iemanjá*, created by the author for this dissertation, Serra do Padeiro, 2021

What I learned from Glicéria in this journey is that overly worrying about objects is very colonial. Colonialism is more focused on objects and possessions than people. To decolonise ourselves we must strip the power from the object and hand it to the



people. Glicéria made me realise my coloniality, as I was too focused on the capes in Europe, on history, on the past. Although she believes those are of high value, her fight is about today. I suggested she should make a project in which she could have access to all the capes available abroad, not only to connect spiritually and artistically but as a collaboration with the museums who gatekeep them, as perhaps bringing some spirituality and emotion to those places. Her reply was 'I would love to, but I wonder if they will think I want the capes back, which I don't. We don't need them here as I can make them. In a way we need them there, as taking care of them is a blessing in a curse itself. Do you know how fragile these are?'

In a way, this research started in the museum and surprisingly it will end in it too: my image of the Tupinambá dancing was chosen to be in the exhibition *Kwá yapé turusú yuriri assojaba tupinambá* (This is the big return of the Tupinambá Cape), which will focus on Glicérias work and research - this is the same exhibition Glicéria was confectioning the capes for while I was there- and mine and Melzi's work as this will be the first time the three of us will meet in person. It will open in the Funarte museum in Brasilia, then go to Casa da Lenha in Porto Seguro.<sup>55</sup> This highlights that my crusade is not about the museum itself, but the colonial and racist legacy still in place in the museums in Europe. The critique extends to the hoarding of objects, the difficulty of access, the extensive bureaucracy and the lack of interest in breaking their problematic structures. I remember the feeling of being a child and setting foot in the Louvre, the magnificence, the classics and history behind each piece which my mother tried to explain with the best of her knowledge. I do not wish this experience

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<sup>55</sup> : The exhibition will happen at Funarte in Brasilia between 16th September and 17th October 2021, to later travel to Casa da Lenha in Porto Seguro, Bahia, in October.

to be abolished, but on the contrary, that it could be accessible to all, especially for those of the global south, whose history and material culture is hanging on those walls or sleeping in their storage, waiting for the next Glicéria's who will wake them up. In The Brutish Museum, Dan Hicks states:

“Or as long as they continue to display sacred and royal objects looted during colonial massacres, they will remain the very inverse of all this: hundreds of monuments to the violent propaganda of western superiority above African civilisations erected in the name of 'race science', littered across Europe and North America like war memorials to gain rather than to lose, devices for the construction of the Global South as backward, institutions complicit in a prolongation of extreme violence and cultural destruction, indexes of mass atrocity and iconoclasm and ongoing degradation, legacies of when the ideology of cultural evolution, which was an ideology of white supremacy, used the museum as a tool for the production of alterity: tools still operating, hiding in plain sight.<sup>56</sup>

In order for the European traditional museum to exist in a postcolonial society, it must dismember it's own structures in order to evolve into a more ethical, accessible and equal embodiment. Following Homi K. Bhabha's theory, it must open it's chambers and archives to welcome people like Glicéria, and to allow native cultures to uncriptograph their stolen memories and objects, to be 'such a space where cultural borders open up to each other, and creation of a new hybrid culture that combines their features and atones their differences.'<sup>57</sup> I ask the reader to imagine what this could look like, as we must achieve this together. In regards to my relationship with the museum, I was given two options by the curator for the aftermath of my work featured in the exhibition: to either have it destroyed or donated back to the Tupinambá community (which I chose the latter). A sustainable cycle like the feathers.

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<sup>56</sup> Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence And Cultural Restitution*, 1st edn (Pluto Press, 2020), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> A. Milostivaya, E . Nazarenko Ekaterina and I. Makhova, "Post-Colonial Theory Of Homi K. Bhabha: Translator's And Translatologist's Reflection", *Proceedings Of The 7Th International Scientific And Practical Conference "Current Issues Of Linguistics And Didactics: The Interdisciplinary Approach In Humanities"* (CILDIAH 2017), 2017, 181-186 <<https://doi.org/10.2991/cildiah-17.2017.31>>.

The tupinambá cape is the proof of the systems that connect us in the universe, and here is mine.

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