

STORY

'Seeds of Resistance': How Some Indigenous Brazilians Are Trying to Save Their Land

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Tupi, 29, became a rainforest defender after a personal process of identity-building that has made her proud of her Tupinamba ethnic origins. She became the first woman in her village to assert that she had faced violence. That was the first step to addressing the issue of gender violence in her village, Sao Francisco, in the Extractivist Reserve of the Tapajos-Aparapiuns rivers. She has encouraged other indigenous women to tell their stories and fight gender violence. Tupi leads a women's support group and has joined the Suraras do Tapajos, a group of indigenous women who defend their identity and the surrounding rainforest territory through activism and traditional music. Image by Pablo Albarenga. Brazil, 2019.

Photographer Pablo Albarenga's project "Seeds of Resistance" highlights the plight of indigenous land defenders in Brazil. Albarenga says that 2017 was the deadliest year for these men and women. Citing statistics from NGO Global Witness, Albarenga notes that more than 200 land defenders lost their lives during that year while trying to protect their communities from mining, agro-business and other projects they see as threatening their existence. Again, citing Global Witness (<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/press-releases/deadliest-year-record-land-and-environmental-defenders-agribusiness-shown-be-industry-most-linked-killings/>), Albarenga says that most of the land defenders deaths happened in Brazil, "with 57 Assassinations; 80% ... against people defending the Amazon."

While Albarenga acknowledges that the data about these deaths illuminates what he feels is an alarming situation, it doesn't do enough; he wants to give a face to the situation. He hopes the images in his project will help to magnify the reasons these men and women, who see themselves as seeds of resistance, have decided to defend their land. As Albarenga told In Sight:

"The data for the assassinations of the land defenders exposes an alarming situation [but doesn't] provide detailed information about the stories and the people behind them, nor about the struggles that are still being faced.

These development projects seek to exploit resources without considering historical-cultural aspects of the territory they occupy and only offer relocation as a solution. For this reason indigenous [people] refuse to abandon their land, even when it has been completely devastated."

Albarenga's "Seeds of Resistance" is an ongoing and ambitious project. Albarenga presents photo composites of land defenders as a way to bring attention to what they are doing. He told In Sight more about it and his hopes for developing it

further:

“Seeds of resistance is a project that seeks to show these stories of struggle in several locations in 50 different locations in Brazil.... By taking advantage of aerial footage, the main characters of these stories were portrayed from above, laying over their territory. Finally, images were composed next to one another to show a higher view of the territory they defend while revealing when possible, the threats they face.”

You can see more of Albaranga's work on his website here (<https://pabloalbarenga.com/>).



Drica, 29, lives in Tapagem, a Quilombo up the Trombetas River, in the Brazilian Amazon. The territories known as Quilombos are home to descendants of escaped African slaves. Those who managed to escape, traveled deep inside the rainforest for protection. They have been established there since the 19th century. Drica is the first woman to have been elected as Quilombola Territory Coordinator, and she represents the five communities living there. The first challenge these Quilombos face is loggers eager to strike deals with the community. A second challenge is a bauxite mine down the river: It has been building dams taking no safety measures, which are putting the entire Trombetas River at risk. But for Drica, the greatest challenge is a huge hydroelectric dam project which will probably be green-

lighted by the government and which will not only destroy the river environment but also displace the communities from their homeland. Right: Drica portrayed lying in her ancestral land. Left: Aerial view of the Rio Norte bauxite mine next to the Quilombola territory, on the Trombetas River. Image by Pablo Albarenga. Brazil, 2019.



Ednei, 20, is a young Arapiun indigenous leader who has recently joined the land guard team at the Indigenous Territory of Maro (TI Maro) in the Maro River. The team carries out regular surveillance beats across the rainforest, watching for illegal loggers and poachers stealing from their sacred land. TI Maro covers some 42,000 hectares of untouched, pristine rainforest. Under the strong leadership of chief Dada Borari, the community has been fiercely fighting to defend themselves from illegal loggers who extract wood from their ancestral land. Since their territory was officially recognized, they have been keeping a close watch. Right: 26 huge precious logs captured by the TI Maro team in one of their beats, now lying by the road track. Measuring 1 to 2 meters in diameter, the 26 logs rot to fertilize the land. Left: Ednei is portrayed lying on the road tracks left by logger trucks driving close to the borders of the Indigenous Maro Territory. Image by Pablo Albarenga. Brazil, 2019.



Dani is an LGBT activist from the Prainha Il community, on the Tapajos river, who fights for her LGBT recognition and also to defend her territory from agri-business expansion. The natural reserve where she lives is surrounded by soybean fields. Left: One of the soybean fields next to Dani's territory. Middle: Dani laying on her land. Right: The area between the rainforest where Dani lives and the soybean fields. Image by Pablo Albarenga. Brazil, 2019.



Joane, 20, leads a group defending the rainforest from plastic contamination in her village, Suruaca, in the Extractivist Reserve of the Tapajos-Arapiuns, in the Lower Brazilian Amazon. Plastic pollution, which is killing the river and rainforest fauna, gets to Suruaca through different means: the packaging of food and beverages they buy to complement their shrinking traditional food chain, waste thrown from passing boats and from the emerging tourist resort across the river. As waste management is nonexistent, Suruaca villagers burn plastic waste daily. Joane is asking authorities to implement a waste collection system and promotes recycling in her village by using organic waste

to produce natural gas and compost to fertilize orchards and lower their dependence on food coming in plastic. Right: Joane lying on the sand, by the Tapajos River shore. Left: Plastic waste close to Suruaca village. Image by Pablo Albarenga. Brazil, 2019.



Larissa is a Borari, indigenous woman which is part of Suraras of Tapajos, a group of indigenous women who live in Alter do Chao, a small town on the Tapajos river. They protect their village from pollution as well as from real state projects. Left: Larissa floating on the Tapajos river in Alter do Chao. Right: Boats that offer transport to tourists in Alter do Chao. Image by Pablo Albarenga. Brazil, 2019.

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