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The case of an Indigenous Community in Brazil

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## Food Sovereignty for Cultural Food Security

THE CASE OF AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN BRAZIL

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### Abstract

*The Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba (CVJ) village represents a unique case in Brazil. For the first time in history, an indigenous group composed of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds (Pankararu and Pataxó) united and proposed to buy land. The singularity of the case is not that different indigenous peoples got together to create a new life, but that they decided to purchase land. Exploring the concept of “cultural food security,” this paper addresses issues of settlement and belonging using indigenous views of food relations and practices as the members of the CVJ village work towards “re-grounding” their homes in a new environment. It proposes that, in this unique experiment in indigenous community building, the decision to purchase land led the way for the CVJ people to assert their food sovereignty, preserve their identity and achieve food security.*

**Keywords:** Brazil, cultural food security, eco-cultural health, food sovereignty, indigenous community development, indigenous identity

### Introduction

Located in the semi-arid, north-eastern region of the State of Minas Gerais, in the municipality of Araçuai in the Jequitinhonha River Valley, the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba (CVJ) village represents a unique case in Brazil. For the first time in history, an indigenous group composed of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds (Pankararu and Pataxó) proposed to buy land for the settlement of a new community. The singularity of the case is not that different indigenous peoples united to create a new life; throughout history, different ethnic indigenous groups

have lived together in Brazil, particularly as a consequence of government policies establishing indigenous reserves on territories shared by many peoples. What makes the case of the CVJ village unique and important is that, by buying land, its leaders decided to break both with the historic paternalistic and colonialist policies of the state, as well as with the prevalent view (shared by many indigenous leaders in Brazil and elsewhere) of waiting for settlement through indigenous rights in the form of land claims (to be granted by the government). The seventy-hectare plot of land where the CVJ village is now settled was purchased from a private proprietor in 2005 using a government program of subsidized loans for small-scale farmers.

The present paper describes the early stages in the process of settlement of the CVJ village and the central role of food in this process. Exploring the concept of “cultural food security,” it addresses issues of settlement and “belonging,” using a multi-ethnic indigenous group’s views of food relations and practices as its members work towards “re-grounding their homes” (Ahmed *et al.* 2003: 6) in a new environment. Information was collected during the researchers’ four visits to the CVJ village between 2006 and 2009. Each visit lasted between one and two weeks, and information was gathered from interviews with individual members of the community as well as from sharing circles, which had the participation of most village members. An earlier draft of this paper was translated into Portuguese and sent to the CVJ village for corrections, comments and suggestions before being submitted for publication.

In the following sections, we first discuss some key concepts, which have helped us understand the process of settlement in the CVJ village. Food sovereignty, cultural food security, belonging and eco-cultural health interact in our interpretation of the importance of the CVJ experiment. We then present a description of main indicators of food insecurity among indigenous communities around the world and in Brazil, delineating the context within which leaders of the CVJ village had to make their decisions. A section on the origins of the CVJ village and early settlement will be followed by a discussion of the central role of food in this process.

A modest goal of this paper is simply to record a unique experiment in indigenous community-building in Brazil. More ambitiously, we suggest that the history of the CVJ village can inspire other marginalized groups to define their own priorities and goals, and to find their own ways of achieving them. We propose that the CVJ village can be seen as a case of how people assert their food sovereignty in achieving cultural food security.

### **Food Sovereignty, Cultural Food Security and Belonging**

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 1996, 2004). Food security is about producing, distributing and consuming food that is healthy and safe for individuals, communities, economies and future generations. Unfortunately, and despite international pledges such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, food insecurity afflicts a growing number of people in the world. Hunger and

malnutrition, poverty among world farmers, “obesity crises” and increased rates of diabetes, depletion of wild fish stocks, soil erosion, contamination of ground and surface water, deforestation and loss of biodiversity are just a few of the problems identified with our modern food system leading to greater food insecurity (Albritton 2009; Morgan *et al.* 2006; Patel 2008; Pollan 2006; Roberts 2008). More recently, soaring food prices coupled with the crisis in the global financial markets and the consequent economic recession, have undermined efforts to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition worldwide. Estimates by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization suggest the total number of undernourished people in the world neared 1 billion by the end of 2008 (UN-HLTF 2009).

Food sovereignty is often seen as a necessary condition for food security. Defined as “the peoples’ right to define their own policies and strategies for sustainable production, distribution and consumption of food that guarantee the right to food for the entire population” (World Forum on Food Sovereignty 2001; see also Patel 2009), food sovereignty is particularly important for food security when we consider that access to food is a basic human right, and more than just the absence of hunger and malnutrition. Food security is also about people being able to acquire food in ways that are culturally acceptable and personally dignifying. Power (2008) proposed the concept of “cultural food security” to complement the more well-established views of individual, household and community food security. The concept can help answer questions concerning the role of culture and identity in guaranteeing food security.

The experiences of the people in the CVJ village highlight the centrality of individuals’ and communities’ actions in asserting their food sovereignty to achieve food security. The case also shows the importance of food in the process of settlement, and in building a sense of “belonging” (Cheong *et al.* 2007; Kaplan 1996) for an indigenous community. Centuries of colonization, cultural dislocation and forced assimilation have created a sense of “loss” and “impermanence” (Wesley-Esquimaux 2007) among indigenous peoples in many parts of the world. Belonging is central for cultural food security. The story of the CVJ village provides an opportunity for us not only to see what belonging looks like in a particular case, but also how it can be built in the process of settlement.

An eco-cultural health perspective can also help us appreciate the efforts of securing cultural food security in the CVJ village. Defined as “a dynamic interaction of nature and culture that allows for the co-evolution of both without compromising either critical ecosystem processes or the vitality of cultures” (Rapport and Maffi 2011: 1044), eco-cultural health is the ultimate goal of the CVJ villagers, as they engage in restoring both their culture and the natural environment of their new home.



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## Food Insecurity among Indigenous Communities

Individuals, households and communities become food insecure when they cannot adequately access appropriate, safe and healthy foods. Inadequate access to appropriate, safe and healthy foods is highly correlated with poverty levels. The 2009 UN’s *State of the World’s Indigenous People* states that, while indigenous

peoples make up roughly 5 percent of the world's population, they account for 15 percent of the world's poor, and one-third of its 900 million poorest rural people (DESA-UN 2009: 21). Hence, not surprisingly, the incidence of food insecurity is higher among indigenous peoples than among their counterparts in much of the world.

Indigenous peoples have also seen a steady decline in the availability of their traditional foods, due to environmental changes, "development" projects (such as mining, dam construction, extensive farming, and pulp and paper plantations), migration to urban areas, and/or "the loss of traditional knowledge and skills related to harvesting and preparing country/traditional food" (Glacken 2008: 1). More dependent on store-bought foods, food insecurity among indigenous peoples in poverty is compounded by high market prices (Willows 2005). Food insecurity can also emerge not necessarily from a lack of (physical or economic) access to food, but from access to unsafe and unhealthy foods, leading to inappropriate, unhealthy diets and deteriorating health conditions. Higher levels of diabetes and a growing epidemic of obesity among indigenous children (Reading and Wien 2009; Seto and Associates 2006) are significant public health issues in many countries. Food security is thus an important determinant of health, quality of life and the wellbeing of indigenous peoples (McIntyre 2003; Salée 2006).

In Latin America, mortality is 70 percent higher, and malnutrition is twice as frequent among indigenous children (DESA-UN 2009: 22). In Brazil, indigenous people are also among the poorest. The 2000 census estimated 38 percent of them lived in extreme poverty, twice as much as the national average. Morbidity and mortality rates were three to four times greater than for the overall population (Brazil Ministry of Health 2002). The First National Survey of Health and Nutrition of Indigenous Peoples (2008/2009) indicates that the infant mortality rate in the country's indigenous population (44.4/1,000) is 2.3 times higher than the national average (19/1,000). The survey also shows that iron deficiency affects 51.3 percent of indigenous children and 32.7 percent of indigenous women (CONSEA 2010).

Key to food security and the general wellbeing of indigenous peoples is their access to land and their close interaction with nature. The following quotes from the *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* attempt to convey this message in different ways:

Because indigenous peoples define happiness as closely linked with the state of nature and their environment, indigenous people's well-being necessarily encompasses their access, management and control over lands, territories and resources under customary use and management, all of which are critical for their own sustainable development (DESA-UN 2009: 30).

The biggest challenge faced by indigenous peoples and communities in relation to sustainable development is to ensure territorial security, legal recognition of ownership and control over customary land and resources, and the sustainable utilization of lands and other renewable resources for cultural, economic, and physical health and well-being of indigenous peoples (DESA-UN 2009: 42).

Many of the most urgent health challenges faced by indigenous peoples, such as illnesses from pesticides and extractive industries, malnutrition, diabetes and HIV/AIDS, stem from the contamination and depletion of their land and natural resources, and from their forced displacement from their territories (DESA-UN 2009: 159).

Access to land is thus central to indigenous cultural identity and food sovereignty.

### Origins of the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba Village

According to the 2010 Brazilian census, the 818,000 people composing the indigenous population in the country are divided into 230 groups of diverse cultures and languages (ISA 2011). Although corresponding to only 0.5 percent of the overall population, the indigenous peoples of Brazil have experienced a demographic resurgence (Perz *et al.* 2008) in the past thirty years. Declining steadily from an estimated 1.5 million people in the sixteenth century to less than 500,000 in the 1970s, the indigenous population in Brazil is estimated to have grown by 11 percent since 2000.

The Pataxó and Pankararu peoples originated from the Brazilian Northeast. Similarities in their histories include numerous expulsions from their traditional lands by various economic interests such as commercial plantations, mineral exploration and hydroelectric projects. The expulsion of indigenous people from their traditional lands has led to a significant migration from rural areas, with one-third of Brazil's indigenous population now living in towns and cities (ISA 2011).

The group of Pataxó and Pankararu individuals who became the leaders of the CVJ village grew up in a multi-ethnic, culturally diverse indigenous reserve. The Guarani reserve had its origins as an indigenous penal colony in the early twentieth century. According to Warren, "in the 1980s with no land to return to [after the penal colony was dismantled], the former prisoners fought successfully to have the area converted into an indigenous reserve" (Warren 2001: 40). At that time there were almost 250 inhabitants with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Besides Pataxó and Pankararu, other ethnicities represented in the reserve included Krenak, Kaingang, Maxakali and Guarani. A fire in 2005 destroyed the reserve, driving its residents out of the only land they had known. The group became reluctant nomads—not an unusual situation, and one that has often pushed other indigenous people to the anonymity and misery of big towns and cities. For a while, the group moved from town to town, looking for opportunities for settlement, until they reached Araçuaí, in the Jequitinhonha Valley. The story is told by *Cacique* (chief) To'ê Pankararu:



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*Fazendeiros* [big landowners], who bordered the Guarani reserve, installed in their fields a "development" project. They started planting forests and forests of eucalyptus to produce cellulose around our Guarani reserve. In 2005, they set fire to clear the land and the fire crossed over to the Guarani reserve, destroying our source of water and our farmland. Facing this enormous disaster, two elders killed themselves. We were devastated. With that, a group of five families decided to start a new life and to find a place where we would not have to leave

it again because of the intrusion of development projects. Moving is tiresome. We had been moving from place to place ... we were fatigued of this life. We decided to have our own land, so we bought seventy hectares in the municipality of Araçuaí, because we do not want to see our children suffering from hunger. (Recorded interview, May 2008)

The new village was named in honor of a Pankararu deity (Cinta Vermelha) and a Pataxó sacred tree (*Jundiba*). According to Cleonice Pankararu:

Cinta Vermelha [Red Belt] is one of the protectors of our Pankararu culture, a religious entity, a religious being for us, who protects the village. He is the one God gave us to protect nature. Cinta Vermelha is the one who stayed to protect To'ê, the *cacique*. *Jundiba* is a sacred tree of the Pataxó people, one with huge roots. It is very leafy. So, when the Pataxó people were being persecuted, it was in this tree that they found protection; the tree hid them. They would make houses within the roots of the *Jundiba*. They would hide and their enemies would pass by and not see them inside the roots of the *Jundiba*. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

Skepticism, mistrust and even open prejudice by many inhabitants of the Jequitinhonha Valley greeted the new indigenous group. When the group, guided by the chief To'ê Pankararu, arrived in the region, many people expected them to die of hunger because of the arid nature of the land and the difficulty of maintaining subsistence agriculture. However, the group persevered and started to change the landscape around them.

The decision to purchase a seventy-hectare plot of land by the Jequitinhonha River went against the practice of waiting for years for government demarcation of indigenous lands, as established in the Brazilian constitution. In the words of *Cacique* To'ê Pankararu, they chose this course of action because:

We couldn't wait for a federal agency ... Before we arrived in this region we were living in the city, renting, often without enough money, with twelve children, who often asked for what was lacking. A better way appeared when we heard about this farm credit program that offered to small farmers, to rural people, the means to get their own plot of land. So we heard about this, looked to see if we could pay and believed we could. So we got into this program to buy land to build our village, to build the future of our families, our children. The strength of our will to build the village, to maintain our culture, traditions and customs, led us to build our village this way. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

Earlier in the process of settlement, Ytxai Pataxó declared the group's intentions:

We are planning to reconstruct the forest around our village with special trees to our cultures. Doing this we can teach our children about our rituals. We moved to this place two years ago and we do not have easy access to our traditional foods. (Recorded interview, June 2007)

Since then, the group has planted a sacred tree for the Pankararu people, the *umbuzeiro* (umbu cherry tree), and are now seeking *jundiba* and *mangabeira* (mangaba cherry tree) saplings, both sacred trees for the Pataxó people. According to the teacher of the community's little schoolhouse, Yamany Pataxó:

... it is important to bring all seeds possible from our ancestral villages, because if we cultivate them here we can teach our children about our rituals and also make our jewelry, which is very important to our tradition as well as to our income. (Recorded interview, March, 2009)

Plants perform an essential function in the spiritual traditions of the CVJ village. Cleonice Pankararu illustrates this with the tale of *The Rain and the Krampiô*, in which an umbu cherry tree plays an important symbolic role:

Once, a group of Pankararu had to flee from a drought. It was a time when dryness was everywhere. There was not a single drop of water in the region. The sun splintered the skin of people and land. The indigenous people wandered across the land, almost dying of thirst and hunger. There was nothing green at sight. Having enough of it, the Oldest Man asked everybody to stop under the branches of an umbu cherry tree that was completely defoliated. There, everybody stayed: women, children, and young people. Then, the Oldest Man called some men and they walked away from the rest of the group. Next, they took their *Kampriôs* [pipes] and smoked, blowing the smoke to the sky. The smoke of their *Krampiô* went higher, higher, and higher, until it formed large clouds. The rain poured down in great amounts and, afterwards, everybody was able to drink and eat at ease. Never again rain became scarce, and all Pankararu returned to their village to cultivate the land and to live in abundance. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

In this tale, one can see important elements of the Pankararu culture and history. This indigenous group used to live in one of the driest places of Brazil and, for centuries, they suffered from wars and droughts. On many occasions, migration was the only escape. However, either at home or going from one place to another, the Pankararu people trusted their elders and religious leaders. The umbu cherry tree is one of the most sacred plants for the Pankararu people and its symbolism reflects the physical structure of the tree. The roots of the umbu go deep into the soil and many of its branches can hold several liters of water. Indigenous peoples in Brazil always knew that they could count on this last resource of water to endure a long drought.

The process of rescuing their traditions started with the decision to purchase the land by the Jequitinhonha River. For the Pataxó and Pankararu members of the CVJ village, buying the land was an opportunity to define their own priorities, to cultivate their own food, to plant their sacred trees, and to reclaim their own culture. Buying the land was a way of asserting their food sovereignty and an opportunity for reconstruction under their own terms. After four years of hard work, by 2009 the



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CVJ village had cultivated fields of corn, a vegetable garden and a few fruit trees. Two hundred native tree species had been planted. A process of eco-cultural restoration was under way.

### Food, Belonging and Eco-cultural Restoration

As they developed ways of producing food and recovering the environment in their new land, the villagers were also learning from each other, and building new customs from old traditions. Coming from coastal regions, the Pataxó people have a strong connection to fishing. A fabulous dinner for the Pataxó means fresh fish baked inside banana leaves. For the Pankararu, traditional hunters from the interior regions of the country, culinary delicacies include a succulent snake barbecue or some fried caterpillars.

The hybrid culture emerging in the CVJ village is expressed in the food stories and habits the two peoples are forging by living together. *Cacique* To'ê Pankararu, talking about the sharing of food tastes and traditions, describes an interaction between himself and his brother in law, Ytxay, who is Pataxó:

Ytxay has been married to my sister for almost fifteen years. We have our customs. They belong to the Pataxó, we to the Pankararu. We tell our stories about food traditions. My people have the habit of eating some things they do not eat. They are from the coast. They know about many things there that I hesitate to speak about ... I eat boa constrictor meat. He said he would never eat snake. I said: "One day you will!" Not because it is bad but because it is delicious. Tastes like fried chicken. It tastes very good. One day he went to the city and I had a snake in the refrigerator. I prepared it. When he arrived, a little hungry, looking for something to eat, there was only the *farofa* of boa constrictor meat [to eat]. He tasted it, ate it all, and thought it was delicious. Afterwards I told him it was a snake he had just eaten. He did not believe me. But, according to him, it was so good he could have eaten more if there were more. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

Ytxay Pataxó counteracts by narrating how his wife, a Pankararu, was introduced to seafood:

Until some time ago, my wife did not know what a crab was. So in my relatives' home there was boiled crab for dinner and she ate it, shell and all. She bit the shell thinking it was soft. She bit into that and into everything. But now, she likes it and knows how to eat it. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

The members of the two groups are also sharing numerous indigenous traditions centered on rituals of fishing, hunting, collecting fruits and cultivating small pieces of land. Domingos Cachimbo, the *pajé* (shaman) of the CVJ village, explains some Pataxó traditional ways of eating that were practiced until recently by his people:

Occasionally the elders would kill a wild pig and we didn't have salt or a refrigerator. The last thing we had to do was dig a hole in the ground, put wood in there and light a fire. We would make charcoal and put the game meat there to roast; that we call *moqué*m. That becomes *moquiada*, roasted—that meat inside. After the meat was roasted there was room to put a basket and cover it. They would not hunt again until that large amount of food was eaten. The people would keep on working and eating, doing those jobs and eating that game they had killed. They would divide the food with everyone working. That's the way they would eat. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

The way of cooking is also a language, serving to express and communicate values and cultures. In the CVJ village people share recipes of Pataxó *mocuqui* (boiled food) as well as recipes for the Pankararu roasted boa constrictor meat and *farofa* (manioc flour fried in butter) creating a culinary bridge for communication between these two cultures. *Cacique* To'ê Pankararu was in his sister's kitchen preparing the famous *moqueca moquiada* (roasted fish in banana leaves), when he and his brother in law, Ytxay Pataxó told the following story about the recipe:

To'ê Pankararu: We're going to roast fish in banana leaves. The recipe is simple. Season it overnight, slash it and on the next day wrap it in banana leaves. There's no secret. Dig a hole in the ground and build a fire. After rolling and tying it all up in the leaf, you put it there and throw live charcoal over it, and leave it alone at fire temperature. I learned this recipe from my brother-in-law, who is a Pataxó, married to my sister. It is their tradition. I learned from them.

Ytxay Pataxó: He has learned, for he has lived with us for a long time, understand? Besides, he married a Pataxó. Didn't he have to learn too? I think of course he had to. This is one of our traditional foods. Not only ours, but of other peoples that make *moqueca*. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

In the process of sharing their traditions through food, the Pankararu and Pataxó people of the CVJ village are creating a hybrid culture, which they believe will be stronger than their individual cultures. Their sharing can be seen not only as a strategy for survival, but also as a form of cultural reinvention, ethnic reconstruction, and resistance to the economic and political forces which have historically marginalized and almost destroyed them (interview with Geralda Soares, local Brazilian researcher and educator, March 3, 2009).

Securing sustainable sources of food has been a central preoccupation of the village leaders. They wanted to use their newly acquired land to produce much of the food they needed. But they also wanted to rescue and restore their food traditions (cultivation, cuisine and rituals) in this new environment. One of the main challenges they faced was in transforming their semi-arid surroundings into productive fields without further polluting ground and surface waterways.



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Ytxay Pataxó became the coordinator of the village's agriculture project. A few years earlier, Ytxay had attended a technical school and obtained a certificate in agricultural techniques. He had realized, however, that most of the techniques taught in that school were inappropriate for the sustainable small-scale agriculture the CVJ village had envisioned:

[The course was] geared for monoculture, mass production and cattle-raising. The techniques they taught us were not what I had in mind. I did not fit in there. The school was working with chemical fertilizers, with dangerous insecticides. So I think that this is not my path: destroying the soil, nature, introducing something that is not good for future generations. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

Looking for a model of agricultural production, which would be consistent with the village's desire to revive indigenous processes and culture, Ytxay learned of an educational project developed by a local non-governmental organization, the Popular Centre for Culture and Development (*Centro Popular de Cultura e Desenvolvimento*, CPCD). As part of the Sustainable Araçuaí Project, CPCD founded *Sítio Maravilha*, a small farm to be developed as a center of reference in social technologies for family agriculture in the region. A central goal of *Sítio Maravilha* is to build the capacity of small-scale farmers in permaculture techniques. Permaculture, the development of an ecologically sustainable agricultural system (Coleman 2004; Mollison 1990), a "systems design approach" to working with nature (McManus 2010), proposes production according to three main principles: care of the Earth; care of people; and setting limits on consumption and waste (interview with the manager of *Sítio Maravilha* in August 2008).

In 2006, Ytxai participated in one of the permaculture workshops offered by *Sítio Maravilha*. He remembers being struck by how the basis for permaculture resembled the principles, which have guided indigenous lives for centuries: collaboration with the planet, care of all living things, and managing waste (recorded interview, March 2009). This practice of integrating agriculture with traditional knowledge, he believes, strengthens the network of living things. For him, permaculture is a reinvention of indigenous traditional knowledge and agricultural system:

We used to practice permaculture in the yard at home, known as the first zone for permaculture. Indigenous people such as my parents would already do this: raise a chicken, plant a banana tree, throw food scraps and other decaying material onto the roots of the banana tree. But permaculture is a more innovative system, with more planning and technology. (Recorded interview, March 2009)

Presently, during the rainy season, the arid landscape slowly turns into green within the boundaries of the CVJ village, as blooming traditional crops, medicinal herbs and sacred trees cover the land. This ecological flourish is also sustaining a cultural

renewal. On the resolve of the group, and its decision to move to the Jequitinhonha Valley, Cleonice Pankararu reflects:

People said: Gee! But you are crazy, are you going to the Jequitinhonha Valley? They say it is the valley of misery, or this, or that. We say, no! It should not be thought as that ... how can a valley of misery produce so many precious stones, gold, diamonds in the Jequitinhonha River? There is constant exploitation such as eucalyptus farms, but it is not a place for misery. What is missing is for people to discover this ... We came here. It has been four years. So we had another view of the valley, one that many don't have, right? They still think it is a dry region that doesn't produce. But people need to know that this here was devastated. They only destroyed! I think one of our obligations as indigenous peoples, as human beings, is to defend life. I think this space here will be for this.

## Conclusion

We present this paper as an attempt to record a unique experiment in indigenous community building in Brazil. The Pataxo and Pankararu of the CVJ village are creating a hybrid culture, rescuing and bringing together traditions from their individual origins. Food is playing a central role in their settlement and community development. Through their food practices, the people of the CVJ village are asserting their food sovereignty, focusing on their indigenous identity to guarantee their cultural food security and restore the environment around them. In the process, they are building their home, a place to belong.

The decision to purchase land in 2005 was probably the most daring and courageous act by CVJ village leaders. This single act of purchasing land represented a sharp break with both the historic paternalistic policies of the state, and with the prevalent view of indigenous rights in the form of land claims. The decision to purchase land was a pragmatic one, driven by the CVJ village leaders' determination to steer their families away from a life of poverty and deprivation in the streets of major urban centers throughout the country—a sad reality for a growing number of indigenous individuals in Brazil. In a heavily ideological and political environment, the leaders of the CVJ village chose to be pragmatic for the sake of their children. As they told us, “We did not want to see our children begging in the streets of São Paulo or Belo Horizonte.” The building of their village in the Jequitinhonha Valley, made possible through the purchase of land, is in itself an ultimate act of defiance. In the words of Cleonice Pankararu: “This is a place for resistance where we have been searching for our rights as indigenous people” (recorded interview, March 2009). The group's move to the valley and the purchase of the land marks the end of a history of victimization, and the beginning of a new collective resolve to preserve their indigenous identity. As explained by *Cacique* To'ê Pankararu:

Our identity is the most important thing that we have. We love who we are. We enjoy painting our faces and bathing together in the river. For us, this is happiness. In our village everything is shared, our life is shared. We do not live



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for material things and do not strive to accumulate things. (Recorded interview, June 2007)

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