

## IDB Brasil's *MARAEY* Project & infringement of Guarani Mbyá Land Rights

### A tale of Cultural Appropriation for a “sustainable” hotel complex in a biological reserve

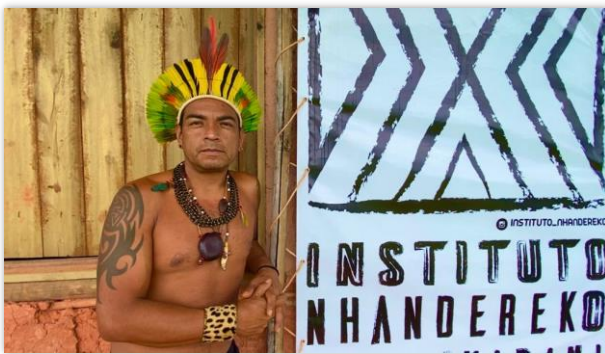
Michelle Mielly, Grenoble Ecole de Management

[michelle.mielly@grenoble-em.com](mailto:michelle.mielly@grenoble-em.com)

In Collaboration with

Tupã Nunes de Oliveira, Instituto Nhandereko

Delphine Fabbri-Lawson, Instituto Nhandereko



Tupã Nunes, Mbyá Guarani leader, co-founder of the Instituto Nhandereko in Maricá, Rio de Janeiro state.

[https://www.instagram.com/instituto\\_nhandereko/](https://www.instagram.com/instituto_nhandereko/)

In Maricá, a town in the Rio de Janeiro state of Brazil, residents of the Mbyá Guarani village of *Ka'Aguy Hovy Porã* (Portuguese as *Aldeia Mata Verde Bonita*) are now facing the possibility of losing access to their lands to make way for a massive resort branded as “Maraey”, a sacred Guarani concept signifying “land without evil”. According to community representatives, the name was appropriated by the Spanish firm IDB Brasil for commercial use without securing authorization from the Guarani themselves.

The deliberate branding strategy deployed—using a sacred symbolic term that refers to native lands while appropriating these very lands—reveals the degree to which cultural appropriation and green-washing are regularly carried out in massive multi-partner deals. [Poised to offer 1,100 high end hotel rooms](#) across three luxury hotels, the Maraey project is located on a narrow strip of coastal wetland in a biological reserve (an APA, [area protegida ambiental](#) since 1984) between Lake Maricá and the Atlantic coastal beach, 41 kilometers south of Rio de Janeiro. While environmentalists assert that the permits delivered to IDB Brasil were illegally granted, [building rights in such areas remain ambiguous and relatively permissive](#) and legal battles pit often-corrupt municipalities and state governments against national courts.

The project is being led by the Spanish firm *Cetya*, commercialised locally as *IDB Brasil*. It has support from two industry heavyweights – US-based Mariott Hotels and Germany’s Siemens – as well as the Swiss hospitality School of renown EHL in Lausanne. While billed as “development with an environmental conscience”, Maraeay would comprise three luxury hotels with a total of 1,100 rooms; as well as an 18-hole golf course, a 1,000-boat marina, a shopping mall, hospital, and much more.

Tupã Nunes, Mbyá Guaraní leader, Maricá, Rio de Janeiro state.  
[https://www.instagram.com/instituto\\_nhandereko/](https://www.instagram.com/instituto_nhandereko/)



Among those interviewed for this report are *Tupã Nunes de Oliveira*, a leader of the Mbyá Guaraní community, coordinator of the Comissão Guaraní Yvyrupa (CGY), and co-founder and president of the Instituto Nhandereko for indigenous cultural revival and preservation, and *Delphine Fabbri-Lawson*, co-founder of the institute. Both described the difficulties that the community faces to preserve its land and traditions.



Eva Guarani (left) with Delphine Fabbri-Lawson (right)  
<https://www.forumpeuplesracines.com/actualites/re tomada-tekoa-mbya-ita/>

**Divide and conquer**

IDB Brasil asserts that it has the required the legal permits to move ahead, yet when asked to provide specific information on the company’s interactions with the community, Maraeay’s CEO, Emilio Izquierdo, shared that an agreement was signed in December 2021 between the company and the indigenous community’s *cacique* or main representative, Chief Jurema. Izquierdo claimed that as part

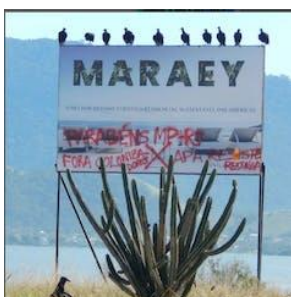
of the agreement, the municipality agreed that it would “look for a public area that would guarantee the permanent establishment of the village”.



Emilio Izquierdo, CEO of IDB Brasil, with Americas Property Awards for the MARAEY project, 2 February 2024  
<https://www.maraley.com/en/news-en/>

The area was apparently purchased in December 2022, in concert with the current mayor, Fabiano Horta. Although proof was requested, no additional information on the transaction was made available by Maraley representatives despite formal requests.

Tupã Nunes stipulated that he and other members of the community had “no knowledge” of the 2022 agreement signed with the chief Jurema, who does not appear to have shared any news of it with her community. According to the Guarani tradition of governance, doing so is a crucial obligation of the *cacique*, and ambiguous dealings of this sort have fostered deep fractures within the community itself. Members discovered the extent of the local government’s involvement and the advanced state of the project only when the bulldozers arrived to clear the land.



A sign for Maraley showing the project’s fraught relation with locals, who fear the permanent degradation of the natural environment and delicate ecosystem. From the *SOSRestingaMarica* instagram pages (Save the Marica Sandbar)

The discovery of numerous irregularities and a series of confrontations between the [community and the construction workers](#) in April 2023 led local courts to [suspend the project](#), despite support from the mayor [Fabiano Horta](#). A 26 May 2023 Superior Court of Justice document [listed a number of](#)

[determining factors](#), including “incessant pressures” on the lagoon’s system and water table and the “illegality of the environmental licensing process”. Maraey representatives have asserted that all licenses were obtained after a “rigorous process” with the State Environmental Institute (INEA).



Guarani Mbya community members demonstrating on 17 April 2023 against the IDB Brasil-Maraey project construction on their lands. Baiaviva.org



Cover of Rio’s *A Tribuna* newspaper 18 April 2023 following confrontation between IDB Brasil construction workers and the Guarani community

[https://issuu.com/atribunarij/docs/a\\_tribuna\\_18\\_de\\_abril\\_de\\_2023/](https://issuu.com/atribunarij/docs/a_tribuna_18_de_abril_de_2023/)

Tupã traveled to Europe in January 2024 and met with officials from the UN in Geneva on 18 January 2024 to denounce the actions of IDB Brasil. When queried on his expectations for potential outcomes, Tupa replied that he seeks “assistance to encourage Emilio Izquierdo to accept to meet him and establish a dialogue”, one that would place “respect for the Guarani people’s human rights” at front and center. Such a dialogue would respect the ILO’s well-known [C169 agreement on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples](#), signed by both Spain and Brazil, which requires at least a dialogue with indigenous communities prior to launching projects that would affect them. The UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous rights immediately contacted the president of the FUNAI to inform her of this specific case.

Two days following this meeting in Geneva, with Tupã still in Europe, Emilio Izquierdo abruptly arrived in the village without prior notice accompanied by a public defender, brandishing a document that apparently provided the proof that he was the actual land owner and had the right to carry out the project. Once more, dialogue was not established and the land title document was not shared with the Guaraní.

In late January 2024, the community decided to transform its governance and change its cacique or chief representative and elected 5 Guaraní leaders to replace Chief Jurema. They stipulated that this now nullifies any prior agreements which would have been signed by Jurema without the community’s informed consent.

**Virtue Signaling**

IDB Brazil maintains that the 54-hectare project will be “sustainable and inclusive”, and the promised facilities include a hospital and schools. However, there will also be mall, an 18-hole golf course, a 1000-boat marina, and 150,00 to 300,000 projected tourists to visit annually.

Bolstered by the work of a sophisticated PR and marketing firm, InPress Porter Novelli in Rio. Maraey has mobilized a rallying message and woven its story to garner collective support – or at least create the illusion of it. Using hashtags such as #JuntosPorMaraey, #VivaMaraey and #TogetherForMaraey, the project has promoted, with increasing intensity, its local support and commitment to sustainability. Maraey’s promoters even proclaim that the site will help preserve fauna and flora.



<https://www.instagram.com/maraeyri/>



<https://earth.google.com/web/search/Maraey+-+Av.+Pref.+Alceb%3%adades+Mendes+-+S%3%a3o+Jos%3%a9+de+Imbassai,+Maric%3%a1+-+State+of+Rio+de+Janeiro,+Brazil/@-22.94636279,-42.88724717,3.81922408a,1462.38377104d,35y,0h,0t,0r/data=CigijgokCTgPad5csDNAETgPad5csDPAGR5dr8AnwDdAIYGXsNvKSVPA>

Yet the Maraey website and communications are surprisingly silent on the Guarani communities now living in the reserve, despite a crescendo of protests and declarations against the legality of their operations. Google Earth maps of the area show both the presence of construction equipment on the indigenous lands as well as telltale signs of deforestation and intensive land clearing in the adjacent area.

Coverage in Spain's *El País*, on [France 24](#) and other [international sources](#) has laid bare the tensions behind the Maraey project. Local political opposition [recently asserted](#) that "this company has been trying to occupy Maricá's reserve for almost 20 years. The resistance of civil society and environmentalists to denounce this massacre of fauna and flora is what allowed its partial preservation." Summed up in [words of one local resident](#):

*"They say it will create jobs. But fishermen don't want jobs in the hospitality industry. Can you imagine a fisherman on a golf course? Golf is for millionaires, for people with money. Fishermen want a healthy, clean lagoon. It's our livelihood."*

### **More precarious than ever**

Today, the community finds itself in a highly precarious and vulnerable situation. Members live in constant fear of bulldozers arriving to remove their homes and destroy their village. Their lake and canal have been polluted due to the building activity despite two rulings by the Supreme court of Brazil forbidding further construction on this indigenous land. Temporary buildings, containers, and construction equipment brandishing the "Maraey" brand remain implanted on indigenous lands. IDB Brasil continues to massively promote its project internationally with the support and complicity of

the Marica municipality, as well as the Labor Party senator and former mayor of Marica, Washington Quaqua.



**Instagram Post 30 November 2023**

Maraey CEOs David Galipenzo (last on right) and Emilio Izquierdo (second from right) attending a public hearing chaired by Brazil’s Tourism Commission, including Washington Quaqua (second from left) former mayor of Marica, and currently national secretary of Planning, Sustainability and competitiveness in Tourism.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/COP8rQRu858/>

Given the indigenous community’s resistance to this much-hyped project, the municipality has left it in a dramatic state of affairs. The temporary building provided by the city hall for the children’s school can no longer welcome pupils because of electricity problems. The water supplied to the community is erratically delivered by the municipality and is not potable. The city hall’s promises for digging a water well to ensure regular water supply have never materialized. The local forest system has been greatly impacted by repeated attempts to re-initiate the construction work, leading to deforestation, the destruction and desecration of the indigenous cemetery, and the impossibility of the group’s cultivating certain traditional plants used in foods, medicines, and rituals.

Yet during this period, never has a call or meeting attempt been made by IDB Brasil to initiate a dialogue with the community.

Maraey is a business-to-consumer, highly marketed resort-to-be presented online in ways that lead partners, consumers and future tourists to imagine themselves in an eco-sustainable, socially responsible tourist paradise. It is a case of textbook blue- and greenwashing, convincingly presenting itself as a privileged (future) site of [fauna and flora preservation](#) developed in harmony with the land and its people. Yet we know this is simply far from the truth.

As pressures increase for greater transparency on MNCs sustainability goals, there is reason to believe that they will always find the legal and PR means to minimize their risks and continue business as usual. Corporate Law firm specialized in ESG and sustainability reporting offer abundant online advice to firms on how to avoid conduct leading to litigation (i.e. misleading carbon claims or social responsibility claims) and remind firms that recent OECD guidelines may trigger a [‘greater focus on human rights due diligence and consumer representations under the guidelines’](#)). In addition, the *International Financial*

*Reporting Standards* (IFRS), after creating the ISSB (International Sustainability Standards Board) in 2021, [has recently called for greater scrutiny on non-climate related reporting](#) (e.g., societal and social issues). So whereas it seems that consumers and shareholders are increasingly sensitive to human rights abuses and indigenous land disputes, the MNCs will continue to do everything within their power to continue business as usual, practicing virtue signaling while extracting resources and expelling native peoples like the Guaraní Mbyá from their lands through a logic of erasure and progressive elimination.

This report has been adapted from a longer article published 9 November 2024:

<https://theconversation.com/bluewashing-how-ecotourism-can-be-used-against-indigenous-communities-212485>

**Michelle Mielly** is Professor in People, Organizations, Society, Grenoble École de Management (GEM) France  
[Michelle.mielly@grenoble-em.com](mailto:Michelle.mielly@grenoble-em.com)