

Ana Hupe

SLASH-AND-BURN

Contágio
2025



Background

The starting point for this small publication was the CORRESPONDENCE with Cecilia Vilela, the curator who invited me to inaugurate the project Casa Tomada, taking over a 27m³ cube in southeast London.

Cecilia, in London or Paris, and I, in Berlin, Halle, Salvador, São Paulo, and Rio, exchanged long emails for months to discuss the exhibition. At first, the correspondence consisted of lengthy speculations about possible paths to take. They grew shorter as the opening date approached until they turned into audio messages, which are more in tune with today's fast-paced rhythm.

The occupation of Casa Tomada goes against this rhythm; it seeks a pause, a space for reflection, for silence, for reading, remembering, and making associations. A cube where one can be alone amidst works made with the analog techniques of batik and sewing. Batiks are drawings made with resist techniques, meaning they prevent the dye from passing through when immersed in a color bath. In this case, I used melted candles.

Gathered here are some excerpts from the correspondence with Cecilia, as well as images that served as references for the batiks. Most of them are early 19th-century paintings in Brazil by Jean-Baptiste Debret (1768–1848) and Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–1858), and other foreign artists who were the first to record images of Colonial Brazil. The initial focus was on urban coffee culture, which expanded to the incipient commerce in the cities, where *ganhadeiras* (independent female vendors) sold everything. The records are reminiscent of open-air markets in West Africa.

During the research for this project, I traveled through Bahia, whose capital, Salvador, was the first capital of Brazil. I consulted the city's archives to research coffee, which is why most of the original documents gathered here are related to coffee cultivation in Bahia.

Finally, this publication is an opening of the process that led to the exhibition, a diary of discoveries in archives and of the artistic practice itself, weaving together theory and practice to shed light on episodes from the past that continue to inform the hierarchical relationships between countries to this day.

Coffea arabica, Linn

Drawing by José Joaquim Freire (1760–1847), made during an expedition in the Amazon between 1783 and 1792

Watercolor, glue; 34.5 x 24.5 cm

Collection of Biblioteca Nacional, Brazil

HERBARIUM MUSEI
HIST. NAT. MUSEI
1853. MAY 13



Elm. Dendro.

Arbore. de Caff.

Herb.

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COLONY
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4. SLASH-AND-BURN [COIVARA]

"If the worker doesn't have documents, they must go to the meeting and prove they are a worker by **SHOWING** their **HAND**. A worker's hand is different from a boss' hand."

The title of this research project, exhibition, and book was inspired by *COIVARA*, a newspaper made by and for coffee workers in Bahia, from 1980. They organized a strike against the working conditions of coffee harvesters in Vitória da Conquista and Barra do Choça.

2. Principais reivindicações

Das trinta e uma (31) reivindicações apresentadas pelos trabalhadores, destacam-se:

- a. Diária de Cr\$220,00 cruzeiros;
- b. Cr\$45,00 por lata de 20 Kgs de café colhido;
- c. Adicional de 25% sobre o trabalho perigoso (-);
- d. Salário da mulher igual ao do homem;
- e. Ônibus para transporte;
- f. Um turno de trabalho para as crianças;
- g. Cumprimento da legislação trabalhista como: 'mãe, 13º salário, férias etc.).

3. Deflagração, desenvolvimento e motivos da greve

Após a votação do Acordo Coletivo de Trabalho, no

CONFIDENCIAL

2. Key Demands:

Of the 31 demands presented by the workers, the following stand out:

- a. a daily rate of CR\$220.00;**
- b. CR\$45 per 20kg can of harvested coffee;**
- c. 25% additional pay for hazardous work (unhealthy conditions);**
- d. Equal pay for women and men;**
- e. Buses for transportation;**
- f. A single work shift for children;**
- g. Compliance with labor laws (such as formal employment contracts, year-end bonus [13th salary], paid vacation, etc.);**

3. Start, unfolding, and reasons for the strike:

After the collective bargaining agreement was voted on...



A GREVE CONTINUA

- A PARALISAÇÃO DOS CATADORES DE CAFÉ TOMOU NOVO ALENTO COM A GRANDE ASSEMBLÉIA DE TRABALHADORES NA SEXTA-FEIRA, DIA 16, EM BARRA DO CHOÇA E A GRANDE REUNÇÃO DO DIA 18, EM VITÓRIA DA CONQUISTA.

- O COMANDO DE GREVE E OS TRABALHADORES CONSCIENTES SAEM QUE O PRINCIPAL MOMENTO DA GREVE É ESTE, PORQUE O CAFÉ ESTÁ / TODO AMADURECENDO E A MÃO DE OBRA, ASSIM, TORNA-SE MAIS IMPORTANTE, E PORQUE VAI HAVER NOVO ENCONTRO ENTRE SINDICATOS LEDE PATRÕES E DE EMPREGADOS NESTA QUARTA FEIRA (DIA 21 de MAIO).

- TODO CATADOR DEVE PARAR, POIS SÓ PARANDO É QUE CONSEGUIRÁ A VITÓRIA. O BOLSO DO PATRÃO SÓ VAI ABRIR, SE TODO CATADOR DE MONSTRAR QUE É AMIGO DO TRABALHADOR E NÃO É PUXA-SACO DO PATRÃO. ATÉ QUARTA-FEIRA, À NOITE, OS COMPANHEIROS SERÃO INFORMADOS SE HOUVE ACORDO OU SE A LUTA DEVE CONTINUAR AINDA MAIS FORTE.

THE STRIKE CONTINUES

THE COFFEE PICKERS' STRIKE GAINED NEW MOMENTUM WITH THE LARGE WORKERS' ASSEMBLY ON FRIDAY, THE 16TH, IN BARRA DO CHOÇA, AND WITH THE LARGE MEETING ON THE 18TH IN VITÓRIA DA CONQUISTA.

THE STRIKE COMMAND AND THE CONSCIOUS WORKERS ARE AWARE THAT THIS IS THE MOST CRITICAL MOMENT OF THE STRIKE, BECAUSE THE COFFEE IS ALL RIPENING AND, THUS, THE WORKFORCE, BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT; AND BECAUSE THERE WILL BE A NEW MEETING BETWEEN THE EMPLOYERS' AND EMPLOYEES' UNIONS THIS WEDNESDAY (MAY 21ST).

EVERY PICKER MUST STRIKE, BECAUSE ONLY BY STRIKING WILL THEY ACHIEVE VICTORY. THE BOSS' POCKET WILL ONLY OPEN UP IF EVERY PICKER DEMONSTRATES THAT THEY ARE A FRIEND OF THE WORKER AND NOT A BOSS' BOOTLICKER.

BY WEDNESDAY NIGHT, THE COMRADES WILL BE INFORMED WHETHER AN AGREEMENT WAS REACHED OR IF THE STRUGGLE MUST CONTINUE EVEN STRONGER.

5. CORRESPONDENCES #1

Ana, 28 August, 12:52 (BR):

Hi Cecilia, good morning!

I thought it was great like this, mysterious.

About the title, I came up with an idea—see what you think:

Slash-and-burn [COIVARA]

Translation of the word COIVARA, which is the traditional Indigenous soil management technique of burning the land to prepare it for new planting. The ash from the burning becomes natural fertilizer. After the burn, it's necessary to wait a few months for the soil to regenerate before receiving a new plantation. This technique was misappropriated by agribusiness—they don't wait for the regeneration period before planting, which exhausts the land.

I found this word in a document from the early 80s about a strike by coffee growers in Vitória da Conquista and Barra do Choça (Bahia)—it was a movement newspaper.

I like the sound of it in English, but maybe it's too revolutionary for what the exhibition offers? What do you think?

Other words I've noted down:

BLENDING – has to do with coffee and cultural mixing

Coffee-House

Sesmaria – which was a sixth of a plot of land, donated by the king of Portugal to a farmer who made the land productive. It's a word from colonial Brazil, but I liked the idea of opening a little unproductive coffee annex in London—though it doesn't work in English. Just sharing my thoughts.

SIP – a word with a nice sound that could work in combination with another?

That's all for now.

Kisses,
Ana

Cecilia, 29 August, 16:25 (London):

Hi Ana,

Ah, a breath of fresh air. Publishing the announcement of our project yesterday gave me a breather. There's still so much to do, but it gave me a sense of an accomplishment. Now, about the title: I loved it. I know it's not finalized yet, but I really like this option. I think *Slash-and-burn*, in English, also has a strong sound and weight to it—it carries energy, you know? And it seems to hold within it a certain ambiguity: a satisfying and attractive sound, but also a potential violence.

I think the name alone creates confusion about whether it's good or bad, which extends to the practice itself. That confusion about intentions. It seems like one thing, but it's another, yet it's appropriated and transformed into something else entirely, as ancestral knowledge of the land is co-opted by predatory intentions and distorted.

Moreover, I think a title that draws attention to the land also reiterates the taking of the house—this time looking at the land-world. (It's curious—as I write this, I realize that in the article about Frank Bowling, I talk about how his attention is on the “ground-landscape as opposed to territory delineated by humans, against humans, and for dispute.” I think that's partly what I'm referring to here as well.) And your work is, in any case, looking at this land-world, connecting the coffee fruit and the implications of its cultivation and circulation with the dynamics of the Atlantic triangle.

Furthermore, I would be much more inclined towards the title in English, as you yourself seem to suggest, since we already have the estrangement of *Casa Tomada* in another language. Now, about that newspaper—what a find, huh? The design, the discourse... do you know exactly what year this is from? The shape of people's feet caught my attention. Ah, and here I ping back to you the phrases from it that I enjoyed the most.. They have the punch of a dark roast espresso:

“The coffee is all ripening and, thus, labor becomes more important.”

“Every harvester must stop, because only by stopping will victory be achieved.”

“At night, the comrades will be informed whether an agreement has been reached, or if the struggle must continue even stronger.”

Now, a parenthesis: When I started reading your comment about coivara, I remembered that a representative from one of the communities participating in the project Land Body Ecologies—a research project I was part of from 2022 to 2024—is named Sway [Siwakorn Odochao], and he is from the Pgak'you people (pronounced 'pacunhau') in northern Thailand. He wrote a text (which is here: <https://wellcomecollection.org/stories/intertwined-with-air>) explaining the importance of the burning process for the circulation and fertility of the land—but also precisely how it must be accompanied by rest. There, in Ban Nong Tao, his people wait seven years to reuse a plot of land...

they always rotate every 7 years, allowing the land to grow back into forest before planting again. He speaks of fire in order to talk about air and rest.

"On a day with light winds, the different families surround the plot so we can put out any wayward sparks. The ground is still wet from early rains, so the fire lasts for no more than one hour. People accuse us of burning forests and polluting the city with this smoke, but they don't understand. Fire is integral to Pgak'yau culture. We use it sparingly and with respect. Ash from the controlled burn fertilises the soil, repels insects, and helps cultivate many different crops. Once the controlled burn is over, we sprinkle rice, sesame, chilli, pumpkin, potatoes, tomatoes, beans... many different seeds. When the rainy season starts, the seeds start sprouting within seven days and we wait until November to harvest, weeding every once in a while. After harvest, the land stays fallow for seven to eight years until it regenerates back into a forest. The tree stumps we cut down regrow to the height of seven men, germinating from the existing root. We cycle between seven plots of land every year, so there's a never-ending circle of feeding and growing."

I have always associated Sway with another sense of time. I think it's because he always emphasized, in much of what he said, the importance of operating on the land's time. This idea of time and rest that slash-and-burn brings as a necessity—I think it connects deeply with the space of contemplation/pause/retreat that you are proposing for the cube when you place a table, a chair, and both coffee and readings for those willing to engage. I think the reading space created inside the cube and the slash-and-burn in the soil both deal with a hiatus that consolidates cyclical formations. I say this thinking that your installation isn't just about contemplation or pause, but it comes along with all the sensory stimulation that the fantastic-phantasmagorical embroideries and the pile of coffee-earth will bring to the space. So there are these sensory and more bodily stimuli (sight, smell, touch) from these latter elements, but then there's also the pause and the moment for deeper, more introspective engagement in the reading, which is also more mental/rational.

Anyway, I think your entire installation might ultimately embody the very rest that the land needs for the burning to be nourishing. A rest or a pause to reorganize as a whole/wholeness. The actual catching of breath, the respite. And that seems to come full circle when we consider how coffee consumption in big cities is fuel for the productivity of the world most of us are forced to operate in.

A kiss,
Cecilia



Vases en bois destinés a contenir l'eau / Vases faits en terre cuite destinés au même usage, 1835

Lithography edition by Thierry Frères after J.B. Debret

Collection of Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo



SLASH-AND-BURN

Ana Hupe

BOOK CONCEPT

Ana Hupe

TEXTS

Ana Hupe and Cecilia Vilela

POEM

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CAFÉS DO BRASIL

JUTAL
ISO 9001
FREE HYDROCARBON