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"WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AT WAR": AILTON KRENAK'S FORCED-DISPLACEMENT NARRATIVES OF GRIEF

Ana Carolina de Carvalho Mesquita[1*]
[1]Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, SP, Brasil

Abstract

Narrative transits in the Americas have come to include both the ecological turn and Indigenous authorship. One such transit refers to the dispossession of Indigenous lands in South America, which has given rise to forced migrations resulting in genocide and onto-epistemicide. In Brazil, Ailton Krenak's books materialize a broader set of Amerindian narratives that point to the loss of one's land as the very destitution of one's identity, bringing forth his people's relational ontology—a fundamental non-divide between the land and its many beings. Through an operation of ontological translation, they address Western audiences' own grief in the face of an impending "end of the world" brought about by climate change produced by capitalist overexploitation. Mobilizing Judith Butler's notion of grievability, this article claims that grief, at once material (the land) and immaterial (identity), transforms Krenak's texts into forced-displacement texts that, instead of a lament, call for a change in human existence on the planet and redefine territory and belonging.

Keywords: Ailton Krenak; grievability; migration in the Americas; relationality; climate change.

*Pesquisadora de pós-doutorado na Unicamp com bolsa Fapesp, estudando translingualismo e exofonia na literatura contemporânea. Tradutora e escritora, é doutora em Teoria Literária e Literatura Comparada pela USP, com tese sobre os diários de Virginia Woolf. Atualmente realiza estágio pós-doutoral na Universidade de Alberta, Canadá. Email: carolmesquita@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8498-5457.

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The critique of war emerges from the occasions of war, but its aim is to rethink the complex and fragile character of the social bond and to consider what conditions might make violence less possible, lives more equally grievable, and, hence, more livable.
Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*

Ou você ouve a voz de todos os outros seres que habitam o planeta junto com você, ou faz guerra contra a vida na Terra.
Ailton Krenak, *A vida não é útil*

Introduction

Narrative transits in the Americas are related to wider political, historical, and social contexts, which in more recent years have come to include both the ecological turn and Indigenous authorship. While these narratives engender a variety of ways of seeing the Other in geopolitical terms, they certainly do not circulate on equal footing, being subject to relations of power. If any transit, including that of narratives, implies displacement, one of its most overlooked kinds in this context is the forced migrations experienced by Indigenous peoples in South America within their own territories, due to state violence, land dispossession, and disrespect for land treaties, all grounded on the ingrained notion that Indigenous lands are "vacant" – that is, pure potential for exploration. Therefore, in the dispute of narratives circulated by Western[1] sovereign subjects and racialized, subaltern, colonized subjects, while the American continent is historically seen as shaped by migration, voluntary or not, it is more often than not associated with settlers' migrations: the forced displacement and land destitution undergone by many native populations due to settler violence is often overlooked. Such displacement, however, shapes Indigenous identities and challenges preconceived Western notions of belonging based on the idea of land as solely territory instead of a body-territory, as it is seen by Amerindian relational ontologies. This puts into question the limits of Nation-states and offers different ontological conceptions of land as belonging and kinship, not merely as a place of dwelling, much less of exploitation. Therefore, the seizure and/or lack of protection of Amerindian ancestral lands and the forced displacement of Indigenous peoples that results from it are not limited to juridical injustices or physical aggression: they also signal a profound onto-epistemicide. Such violence shapes narratives that speak of a grief that is, at once, material (the land) and immaterial (identity).

This is the case of the Brazilian Indigenous writer Ailton Krenak's[2] books. They integrate a broader set of Amerindian narratives of forced displacement that ultimately question what it means to belong to what has historically come to be known as the American continent because the narratives that shape it, subject to colonial power relations, have not circulated evenly. North-American

philosopher Judith Butler's (2009, *Frames*; 2025, "Grievability") notion of grievability is mobilized to propose a model in which grief can be seen at the core of Ailton Krenak's forced-displacement narratives, albeit a grief that is not experienced as a lament, but as a call for resistance. Krenak and Butler are read here as, respectively, South- and North-American thinkers, their geographically opposite positions within the hemisphere itself modeling the asymmetries of circulation this article addresses. In Butler's concept, the terms *grief* and *grievability* reference the lives that matter enough to be lamented if lost, and the value of life only emerges under conditions in which its loss would count; therefore, grievability can only be applied to "life that matters" (*Frames* 14).

It is noteworthy that Butler's notion of grievability was built in the context of the Iraq War to analyze how state violence and media framing in the United States produce populations whose deaths do not register as loss. Grievability was forged partly through a site of exception*, in a U.S. base in the Caribbean (Guantánamo Bay, geographically in Cuba, part of the Americas, but juridically a no-place)*, to determine who counts as killable versus mournable. However, I argue that the concept can also be applied to other "frames of war," namely, the one that has been waged for more than five centuries in the Americas against Indigenous and more-than-human populations. Within such a framework, it is also noteworthy that Krenak's works, addressed as they are to non-Indigenous audiences, bring forth his people's cosmology of a fundamental non-divide between the land and its dwellers, showing them as deeply grievable. They now find a significant place of circulation among Western audiences because the grief they express troublingly mirrors Westerners' own grief about the "end of the world" due to the environmental destruction brought about by capitalist overexploitation of the planet. Climate disaster (fires, floods, droughts, etc.) is forcing Westerners to inhabit, without their colonial subjugation, a structure of loss Indigenous peoples have lived with for centuries. In other words, the planet (or, in Krenak's terms, the land and all its beings)[3] has now also become grievable for Westerners, although not for the same reasons.

Can Butler's framework, concerned with the loss of human life and its differential recognition, allow the extension of grievability to land itself as a *lose-able* body, or in Amerindian thought, as *body-territory*? If so, how can this alter the ways we approach migration narratives within the American continent, when it comes to Indigenous peoples? If narratives in the Americas act as critical cartographies that may redefine geographical, identitarian, and cultural borders, then extending grievability to body-territory may be a possible way of redefining those borders in terms that exceed a purely geographical scope.

Relational ontology and onto-epistemic violence in Krenak's forced-displacement narratives

"Rivers, these beings that have always inhabited worlds in different forms, are the ones who tell me that if there is a future to imagine, it is ancestral, since

it is already present in the here and now" (Krenak 2022, *Futuro* 8).[4] With this statement, Ailton Krenak opens his 2022 book *Futuro ancestral [Ancestral Future],* foregrounding both a paradoxical conception of temporality – which challenges dominant linear models of time – and the absolute centrality of rivers as more-than-human beings for the Krenak people. The gesture is therefore not metaphorical. In 2015, seven years prior to the book's publication, the Doce River, the most important river for the Krenak people, known in the Krenak language as Watu and regarded as their grandfather, was devastated by one of Brazil's most catastrophic environmental disasters. The collapse of a dam in Minas Gerais operated by the mining company Samarco, controlled by the multinationals Vale and BHP Billiton, released toxic mining tailings that contaminated more than 600 kilometers of the river basin. The destruction was so severe that the river was officially declared dead.

As Ailton Krenak later recalled in an interview: "We had neither water, nor fish, nor a place for our rituals and festivals. The children could no longer play there [*in the river*]" (Krenak 2020, "War"). For the Krenak people, the tragedy cannot be understood solely in environmental, economic, or social terms; it was also a familial and cosmological disaster. When governmental pressure mounted on the companies to provide reparations, one proposed solution was the relocation of the community, but they refused. "*The river is an extension of our family*. We're going to stay here to watch over it", Ailton Krenak stated, remarking that such a position can be "incomprehensible to minds dissociated from the idea of belonging to a place" (Krenak; emphasis added). Krenak was pointing to a fundamental onto-epistemological divide: the difficulty, within dominant, capitalist, and Western frameworks, of apprehending that, for Amerindian peoples, humankind is intrinsically unseparated from the world.

> It is *consubstantial* to the world or, rather, *objectively* 'co-relational' with the world, relational *as* the world. There is no 'correlation' between epistemology and ontology, thought and Being, but *real immanence between existence and experience* in the constitution of a relational multiverse. (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2016, 106; emphasis in original)

As observed by David S. Walsh (2015), the ontologies of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas possess similarities despite their historical and cultural diversity (see, for example: Astor-Aguilera 2010, 197, 213; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Scholarship addressing indigenous ontologies as distinct from Western ontologies has been increasingly referred to as the "ontological turn", in which both anthropologists and Indigenous scholars (Astor-Aguilera; Descola 1996, Detwiler 1992; Harvey 2005; Ingold 2000; Kopenawa and Albert 2013; Morrison 2002; Viveiros de Castro; Shorter 2009; to name a few) demonstrate that Indigenous ontologies are relational (qtd. in Walsh, 231). The Cartesian dichotomy of "nature" and "culture" – the predominant narrative scheme in the Western world used to

justify the domination and exploitation of the land and all its beings – is therefore "not applicable to indigenous ontologies of the Americas and the Circumpolar North, instead positing ontologies wherein Indigenous peoples engage directly with and within their environment" (Descola, Ingold, Viveiros de Castro qtd. in Walsh, 227). Rather than as a resource to be explored at will, then, the world is understood by Amerindian peoples as kin – as a multiplicity of beings to whom one is related and with whom one must negotiate in multiple contexts.

This adds to forced migration an additional layer of violence for Indigenous peoples, for their relational ontology means that the deprivation of one's land is, in truth, something beyond reparation. Ailton Krenak ("Arte", 2025) addresses this fact in a 2025 interview, making a remark about a protest organized in 2019 by Indigenous women of different ethnicities in Brasília.

> They were carrying an enormous sign which read, "Our Body, Our Territory". Very likely, the retrograde mentality supposed they were talking about the protection of their own body, of their intimacy, when in fact they were invoking the territory. It is a body-territory. A body-territory is the possible cure for this cognitive, sensory abyss in which we put ourselves, where our body was separated from the land's body. (Krenak, "Arte")[5]

A person's body and their territory, in a relational ontology, are inseparable; therefore, when one is under threat, the same holds true for the other. When trying to express this idea to his listeners and bridge a gap between his cosmology and theirs, Krenak references *corpo-território* (body-territory), a concept introduced by Maya-Xinka feminist Lorena Cabnal (2010) to address the interconnections between Indigenous lands and bodies as sites of domination, extraction, and exploitation. Krenak then uses the term "abyss" to refer to the ontological and non-transposable divide in Western thought between "nature" and "human beings" that enabled the engendering of a war between the two, in which the latter are seen as entitled to control and exploit the former, suggesting that the notion of *body-territory* could be a way out of this war, which is at the origin of the current environmental crisis.[6] However, this would require a massive "cognitive and sensory" effort, to use his words. With that, he refers to an ontological translation matter that is at the very core of his texts, aiming at making Indigenous bodies and lands matter – or, in Butler's terms, to be equally grievable by "those in hegemonic positions, or according to an established episteme" ("Grievability", 10).

A matter of ontological translation: the ongoing war as more than one

The appeal of ecological and environmental narratives among Western audiences since at least the end of the twentieth century has intensified in response to the planetary threats posed by the environmental crisis. The consequences of human-driven alterations are no longer perceived as belonging to a distant future;

they are felt in the here and now, and the window for reversing their effects is rapidly closing.

The heightened interest in Amerindian thought signals a crisis of the "humanist"[7] optimism, emerging from a growing distrust of the prevailing epistemic framework – characterized by firm beliefs in notions of progress, development, and human entitlement. It is important to note, however, that such optimism was never shared by vast populations on Earth, notably Indigenous peoples (see Danowski and Viveiros de Castro). This crisis ironically portends the ruin of our global civilization precisely because of its uncontested hegemony, for unlike previous crises, it threatens to largely destroy not only the peoples who are not at its origin and who have historically been deemed disposable beings, but also – and this is of utmost relevance to the present discussion – those who *are*, and who belong to the dominant, Western, capitalist civilization. This period, understood as a new geological era marked by the predatory actions of human beings upon the planet, was coined as Anthropocene by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, a term that has since become popular among both scholars and common readers.

The idea of the Anthropocene underlies the widely disseminated feeling that the "end of the world"[8] is near, a sentiment of grief translated into diverse names that seek to define the anguish produced by the perceived loss of entire ecosystems, places, species, and ways of living.[9] In 2005, the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht coined the term *solastalgia* to describe the suffering caused by remaining in a degrading territory. The concept surpasses mere "ecological grief", as it implies a lament for a "lost future" brought about by the accelerating catastrophic consequences of human overexploitation of the planet (Albrecht 2005).

Efforts to conceal that the Western apocalypse is a byproduct of the crisis of the "civilized" world have been abundant, however, aiming at decoupling environmental protection from strategies of social violence and exclusion. In cinematic narratives, for example, the catastrophic end of the world is explained by calculations, scientific terms, meteors, or connections between the Sun and the planets, but never "by the relationships between people, between countries, between rich and poor, between men and women, between Whites and non-Whites. *The disaster comes to save the colonial oikos*" (Ferdinand 2022, 127; emphasis added). What Malcom Ferdinand makes startlingly evident in his *Decolonial* Ecology, then, is that the disseminated, feared end of the world is not exactly the fear of the planet's destruction, but rather – and much more profoundly – the threat posed to the reproduction of "the masters *oikos*:" "its home, its ethnic, social, and sexual composition, its income, and its way of inhabiting the Earth" (Ferdinand 125), all of which have now been shown to be at unprecedented risk.

To the Krenak people, the idea of solastalgia or the anguish surrounding the "end of the world" as perceived in the Western imagination is nonsensical. For Amerindian peoples, the end of the world already happened, five centuries ago: more precisely, on October 12, 1492. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro observe that, because they have been facing the apocalypse for so long, "[…] Indigenous

people have something to teach us when it comes to apocalypses, losses of world, demographic catastrophes, and ends of History" (141).

Even if the fear of the apocalypse is one of the underlying reasons for the current willingness among Westerners to listen to Indigenous writing, the citizens of privileged societies have been consuming it through their "ecological" or "environmental" frameworks, dissociated from the many different conflictive causes that engendered the urgency for protection in the first place. This is because Amerindian peoples "have increasingly adapted Western environmental rhetoric to their cosmologies, conceptual vocabularies, and existential projects, and re-translated the latter into a modernized language whose political intent is unequivocal" (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 126) to be heard by Western audiences. Such modified language includes using terms such as "environment," "nature," or "ecology," which are not originally present in their own languages because these concepts simply do not exist in them.

"Once the talk about 'ecology' appeared in the cities, our words about the forest also began to be able to be heard there. The white people started listening to me," explains Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert (396). He adds, however, that "long before these words existed among them [*the White people*] and they started to speak about them so much, they were already in us, though we did not name them in the same way" (Kopenawa and Albert 393):

> If we had books like they do, the white people would see how old these words are! In the forest, we human beings are the "ecology." But it is equally the *xapiri*, the game, the trees, the rivers, the fish, the sky, the rain, the wind, and the sun! It is everything that came into being in the forest, far from the white people: everything that isn't surrounded by fences yet. The words of "ecology" are our ancient words, those *Omama* gave our ancestors at the beginning of time. […] The white people who once ignored all these things are now starting to hear them a little. *This is why some of them have invented new words to defend the forest. Now they call themselves "people of the ecology"* because they are worried to see their land getting increasingly hot. (Kopenawa and Albert 393; emphasis added)

Contrary to recent criticisms, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (195) note that when adopting a modified vernacular, Amerindian peoples aim not at erasing their own cosmologies or "assimilating," but at making the civilization that claims to have invented politics (believing such an invention distinguishes them from all other societies) understand that human politics is but one department of a broad cosmopolitics, and that this places them on equal footing with all other beings with whom they necessarily share the same space and conditions of existence. This is why Krenak's works (including the best-sellers *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World, Life is Not Useful*, and *Ancestral Future*) have frequently been read through the lens of what Western literary criticism labels "ecocriticism."[10]

Yet this categorization risks reducing the scope of his intervention by inserting it in a framework that alienates it from Amerindian thought: the dissociation of

"nature" and "humanity," and the unfolding idea that now "nature" is in danger and humans must protect it, a viewpoint that "reflects a Western ecological ontology wherein nature is either dominated or managed" (Nadasdy qtd. in Walsh 230). When Ailton Krenak opts to address his texts not to his own community, but to a non-Indigenous readership, what he is calling for is not environmental conservation, or at least not just environmental conservation, but a profound transformation in prevailing modes of human existence on Earth, which must include a change in the relation of human beings with the environment.

The urgency he articulates is therefore not environmental militancy; it defies the very onto-epistemological premises that sustain modern Western capitalist societies, grounded on ideas of human superiority and extractivism as development. Based on solid hierarchies of value that include the values of different lives, be they human or more-than-human, these notions determine which lives can be the subject of grief and, therefore, institutionally protected, as pointed out by Butler (*Frames*; "Grievability").

With his texts, therefore, Ailton Krenak not only denounces environmental and genocidal crimes against Indigenous peoples and their lands but foregrounds a matter of ontological translation, which is not theoretical and does not pertain to mere interlingual equivalence, but rather constitutes a framework that enables fighting-thinking back. "We are at war, your people and mine. We have been at war for five hundred years," said Krenak in an interview ("War"). The ontologies and epistemologies lying at the core of Western thought that sustain the secular war waged against nature are the same that legitimate the ongoing five-hundred-year war against Indigenous peoples in Brazil, including the Krenak, since they act as frames of the same war.

Unfolding the frames of war: Butler's grievability and the relational ontology in Krenak

In the onto-epistemic arena, the translation noise between Western and Amerindian ontologies acts to validate extermination and justify the destruction of body-territories, because epistemological frames determine which lives will be recognized as such in the first place. Judith Butler (*Frames*; "Grievability") analyzes the multiple ways in which racism, coercion, and violence are used to define a differentiation of ontologies that precisely enable the onset of wars, whether military or epistemic, for "if certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, *not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames*, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense" (*Frames* 1).

Butler is primarily concerned about how the conditions of creation and circulation of epistemologies within human social practices enable a hierarchization of the rights to live. In that sense, she maintains that the focus of her discussion is the "human life;" therefore, it would make no sense "to focus on what is distinctive about *human* life," even though there is "no firm way to distinguish in absolute terms the bios of the animal from the bios of the human

animal" (*Frames* 19; emphasis added). However, she also asks, in an open dialogue with Donna Haraway's thought: "How does one object to human suffering without perpetuating a form of anthropocentrism that has so readily been used for destructive purposes?" (*Frames* 76). Butler concludes that "humanness" is, then, a "shifting prerogative."

> Do I need to make plain in what I consider the human to consist? I propose that we consider the way 'the human' works as a differential norm […[when we now proclaim as human some group of beings who have previously not been considered to be, in fact, human, *we admit that the claim to "humanness" is a shifting prerogative*. […] The term 'human' is constantly doubled, exposing the ideality and coercive character of the norm: some humans qualify as human; some humans do not. (Butler, *Frames* 78; emphasis added)

Ailton Krenak's works compel us to consider a dimension of the unfolding of this ontological problem (what is human, and what is life) that could be seen as a prolonging of Judith Butler's argument, since for him the issue is clearly not limited to which human lives are recognized as grievable, concerning more-than-human beings as well. If, within Amerindian cosmologies, rivers, stones, mountains, animals, and other entities are not inert matter but invested with personhood, when Ailton Krenak spoke of a five-hundred-year war between "your people and mine," the antagonism does not refer exclusively to Indigenous and non-Indigenous humans; it concerns body-territories – the human and more-than-human beings that have been rendered ontologically secondary, exploitable, and disposable. Butler hints at that when she considers Donna Haraway's question of whether we ever become human (*Frames* 78), but rather than closing the matter, she considers it to be "a differential of power" that we must learn to read and to oppose:

> She [Haraway] is at once positing a 'we' outside the norm of the human, and questioning whether the human is something ever accomplished. […] I would suggest that this norm is not something that we must seek to embody, but a differential of power that we must learn to read, to assess culturally and politically, and to oppose in its differential operations. (Butler, *Frames* 78)

This deeper ontological conflict is central to considering both the contemporary reception of Krenak's works and the broader visibility of Indigenous Brazilian writing over the 2020s. As observed by Viveiros de Castro, the very idea of the Anthropocene calls into question the notion of *anthropos*, or of a "universal human being" capable of acting as one. Arguing that the ethnopolitical situation of the "human being", understood as an intensive and extensive multiplicity of peoples, must be recognized as the core of the Anthropocene crisis, he maintains

that what we have is a broad diversity of political alignments among different peoples, human and more-than-humans. All possible ideas of a "human unification" would therefore lie under "what we could call a multiple hypothetical mode, and will depend on negotiating capacities once the 'war of the worlds' […] has been declared" (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 126). Brazilian Amerindian thinkers such as Ailton Krenak and Davi Kopenawa intervene precisely at this juncture, exposing the epistemic foundations that are at the center of the overexploitation of the planet in their forced-displacement narratives of grief, in which relational ontologies act precisely as an opposition to the "differential of power" mentioned by Butler.

Butler (*Frames* 18) reminds us, furthermore, that the very term *ontology* cannot be conceived as existing outside political organization and interpretation, for the ontological problem of what a life is remains inseparable from operations of power. It is thus a problem of material manifestation: it is not possible to first define a body's ontology and only subsequently the social significations it assumes. To be a body is already to be exposed to social configurations. Therefore, a body's ontology is necessarily social, always given over to others, to norms, to structures of recognition – and this could apply to body-territories as well.

Conclusions

The notion of grievability as exposed by Judith Butler can be seen at the core of the form, circulation, and content of Krenak's works. Contrary to what would be most common in Western narratives of that same tenor, however, grief does not take the form of a melancholic discourse in Krenak's narratives, which address topics such as forced migration, capitalist overexploitation, and Indigenous ways. Rather than donned in self-pity, in them grief is used as an energetic translation of onto-epistemological frames that view the whole world (or, better saying, *worlds*) as grievable: as lives that matter, in Butler's terms. It is thus a sense of grieving not anchored in sterile laments, nostalgia, or even solastalgia, but in that which can enable a radical conception of new modes of life and living, modes that, for five centuries, have meant resistance and survival for the Krenak people. Though these new frames do acknowledge the aforementioned "war of worlds" (and the possible end of some of these worlds), they can function in libertarian terms, as what Krenak defines as "colourful parachutes in our collective fall". "Let's put our creative and critical capacity to use making some colourful parachutes to slow the fall, turn it into something exciting and edifying", he says, referencing the idea that all beings that share the planet are "falling", at risk of ceasing to exist – if not physically, then at least in their previous ways of existence (Krenak 2020, *Ideas* 31).

Grieving is, then, articulated in Ailton Krenak's discourse as a complex field of recognitions that are structured around a non-anthropocentric view of "human," "humanness," and "humankind," or, in Butler's argument, in terms of "a potential," a "living sense of what might be lost."

> My topic is not about grief as something that follows upon a loss, but grievability as a potential carried by the living and the dead. I am here less concerned about the capacity to grieve someone or something that we care about after we have lost them, but rather a living sense of what might be lost. (Butler, "Grievability" 9)

Thus, Krenak's narratives dislocate core notions of humanity, nature, environment, ethics, and *anthropos*, as well as the traditional functions of mourning, as they were crystallized in the Western world. Although employing the same common words as his audience in Portuguese, these do not mean absolutely the same things in his cosmological terms. What Westerners call the "natural world," "nature," "environment," or even "the planet" or "the world" is, within Amerindian relational ontologies, a multiplicity of intrinsically interconnected multiplicities: animals, lakes, spirits, and other more-than-human beings are conceived as distinct kinds of "peoples." In other words, they are regarded as political entities with equal rights. Therefore, when the Krenak people declare that the Watu river is their grandfather, it is not a poetic device or a touching metaphor, but a cosmological assertion of ethical relationality, which bears in itself the claim that belonging is always a collective experience. "We have been living in a world where we are forced to dive deep into the earth to be able to recreate possible worlds," says Krenak; "However, in world narratives in which the human being is the only one to act, their centrality silences all other presences" (Krenak, *Futuro* 22; emphasis added).

Alluding to the colonial logic by which Indigenous peoples have historically been perceived as "almost human," he suggests the existence of a parallel of non-grievability with the low status attributed to more-than-human beings within Western ontologies.

> This other possible 'we' disrupts the centrality of the human being, because the entirety of existences cannot be declared by the anthropocentric statement that marks, names, categorizes, and disposes of everything, including of others, similar to us, that are considered almost human too. (Krenak, *Futuro* 9)[11]

Ontologically speaking, for the Krenak and other Amerindian peoples, the world cannot exist devoid of humanity, which for them means, at once, alterity and relationality between all beings, invested as they are with personhood. "Let's listen to the rivers' voices, because they speak. *Let's become water, in matter and spirit*, *in our movability and in our ability to change course*, or we will be lost" (Krenak, *Futuro* 14; emphasis added).[12]

The relational ontology expressed in Krenak's works resonates with Judith Butler's argument that there is no life without the conditions of life that sustain it, and that those conditions are pervasively social, and establish not "the discrete

ontology of the person, but rather the *interdependency* of persons, involving reproducible and sustaining social relations, *and relations to the environment and to non-human forms of life*, broadly considered" (Butler, *Frames* 19; emphasis added). The point would be

> to reconceive life itself as a set of largely unwilled interdependencies, which implies that the 'ontology' of the human is not separable from the 'ontology' of the animal. It is not just a question of two categories that overlap, but of a co-constitution that implies the need for a reconceptualization of the ontology of life itself. (Haraway qtd. in Butler, *Frames* 76)

The very notion of grievability, as coined by Judith Butler, can therefore be extended to a kind of concept of ontological relationality. She observes that, due to its dependence on a network of relations and proper conditions for its existence, it is not possible to speak of a "life in itself," of an ontology of "life in itself." Being relational, grievability is not an attribute that belongs to singular persons, for it "characterizes the *relations* between persons or, better yet, the *relational or social dimension of personhood* itself" (Butler, "Grievability" 9; emphasis added). There would be at least two reasons why this is so, in her understanding: one, a person is always grievable for another, which means that grievability can only arise within intersubjective relations; and two, being grievable depends on historical conditions in which different levels of grievability are epistemically established and distributed accordingly (Butler, "Grievability" 9). In the center of the concept of grievability, then, dwells the notion of relationality.

If for the Krenak people the end of the world has been a lived reality for centuries, it is only natural to view Ailton Krenak's narratives as fundamentally permeated by loss: the loss of his people's land, their memory, language, families, and even the very rights to live in accordance with their own cosmology. It is a multifold loss that has been compelling them to fight to reclaim these very things for their future, which is also embedded in his statement that the future is ancestral. In the cyclical time, his people's ancestral past can indeed become their future. It is in this sense that his narratives troublingly resonate with his Western readership's fears of losing that which he and his people have already lost in the five-hundred-year war that the same Westerners have waged against them: their world, which they have nonetheless been recreating for centuries.

"If we are to make broader social and political claims about rights of protection and entitlements of persistence and flourishing, we will *first have to be supported by a new bodily ontology*", says Judith Butler, one that implies "the rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependency, exposure, bodily persistence, desire, work and the claims of language and social belonging" (*Frames* 2); and we add, one which can include body-territories, as shown in Krenak's forced-displacement narratives of grief. Likewise, the message his narratives imply goes unequivocally *against the logic of preserving* a world

that is already lost, because it is a world that, to exist, requires at its core a violent power imbalance: the minimization of precariousness for some peoples, while precariousness is maximized for others who are not deemed human (or, at the very least, not "as human"). Ailton Krenak's message is definitely not one to save the colonial *oikos*; rather, it states that the frames of war must change if we want to stand a chance to put our colorful parachutes to use.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT: Does not apply.

End notes

1. In this article, for the lack of a better term, the term "Western" will be used to broadly designate that which belongs to, or is characteristic of, the dominant, capitalist civilization, instead of the term "White", although both terms bear their own specific set of problems.
2. Ailton Krenak's people, whose origin is the region known today as Vale do Rio Doce, in Minas Gerais, Brazil, were nearly decimated in the twentieth century and forced to continuous migrations to survive. Forcibly separated from one another, they almost lost their own language and traditions, and only in the last thirty years were they able to return to their land, thanks greatly to Ailton Krenak's own activism. His books, best-sellers in Brazil, have been translated to thirteen languages worldwide, and in 2023 he was the first Indigenous person ever elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters, the country's most prestigious (and canonical) literary institution.
3. In Portuguese, the word for the name of our planet, "Earth", and the word for "land" are the same: "terra". In this text, the term "land", when employed to refer to Indigenous lands, means not only the territories but also all the beings that inhabit them.
4. In Portuguese: "Os rios, esses seres que sempre habitaram os mundos em diferentes formas, são quem me sugerem que, se há futuro a ser cogitado, esse futuro é ancestral, porque já estava aqui". Given the difficulty of accessing English editions of Krenak's texts, all quotations of Futuro ancestral in this article will be provided in my own translation.
5. As noticed previously, it is important to observe that in Portuguese the word "terra" can mean "the Earth" (the planet) and/or "land". In Portuguese: "Elas estavam carregando uma faixa enorme onde se lia, Nosso Corpo, Nosso Território. Muito provavelmente a mentalidade retrógrada achou que elas estavam discutindo a proteção de si, uma proteção da intimidade do corpo. Na verdade, elas estavam era invocando o território. É um corpo-território. Um corpo-território é a cura possível desse abismo cognitivo, sensorial, que a gente se meteu nele, onde o nosso corpo foi separado do corpo da T(t)erra."
6. For the sake of simplicity, this is the term used in this article, alongside "climate change" – even though this is not strictly an environmental crisis, but one produced by predatory human actions upon the environment. In this sense, it is a civilizational crisis, as has been pointed out by Danowski and Viveiros de Castro. For recent data on the accelerating degradation of the planet, see, for example, William J. Ripple et al. (2025). Ripple, William J., et al. "The 2025 State of the Climate Report: A Planet on the Brink." BioScience, vol. 75, no. 12, Dec. 2025, pp. 1016–1027. https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biaf149.

7. The term "humanist" is in quotes because it largely refers to a Eurocentric humanism that implied a project of "homogenization" of humankind via a "civilizing process," a frame of thought inherited from colonial practices.
8. At least of the world of the so-called "global civilization;" the idea of multiple worlds in coexistence will be addressed throughout the present article.
9. For specific data concerning the rise in psychiatric cases in European countries related to this feeling in the last two decades, see Hélène Comtesse et al. (2021). Comtesse, Hannah, et al. "Ecological Grief as a Response to Environmental Change: A Mental Health Risk or Functional Response?" International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, vol. 18, no. 2, Jan. 2021, article 734. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020734.
10. The LCSH cataloging of the English version of Ideas to Postpone the End of the World, for example, lists: "Nature—Effect of Human beings on;" "Human ecology;" "Global environmental change;" "Nature conservation;" "Environmental protection." Library of Congress, "Ideas to Postpone the End of the World," Library of Congress Cataloging Record, OCLC 1159858985, accessed October 13, 2026, https://search.worldcat.org/title/Ideas-to-postpone-the-end-of-the-world/oclc/1159858985.
11. "Esse outro nós possível desconcerta a centralidade do humano, afinal todas as existências não podem ser a partir do enunciado do antropocentrismo que tudo marca, denomina, categoriza e dispõe – inclusive os outros, parecidos, que são considerados quase humanos também."
12. "Vamos escutar a voz dos rios, pois eles falam. Sejamos água, em matéria e espírito, em nossa movência e capacidade de mudar de rumo, ou estaremos perdidos."

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