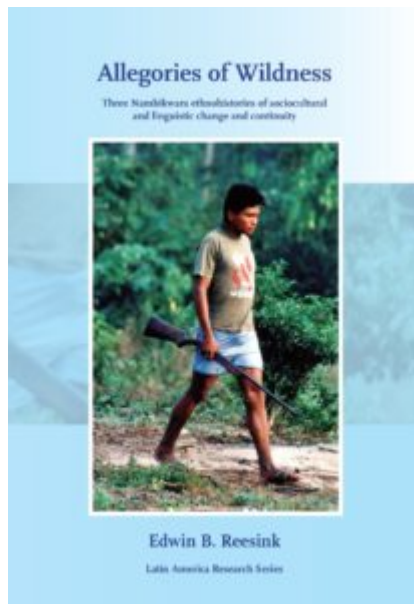


Allegories Of Wildness ~ A Final Summation



The awful unfolding scene of the future

It is difficult to predict the future. After completing work on the three *Nambikwara* peoples above I decided to try to establish a few parameters and attempt to limit the scope of what future scenarios may come into play. This brings to mind the volumes of memoirs written by Sir Winston Churchill on his participation in the tremendous and costly events of WWII. Here, only a few years after the appalling events that left so many dead and engendered the reality of the very word genocide, Churchill pondered what way, exactly, his experience could aid in avoiding human tragedy. He believed that he did not write history, that was the work of a future generation, instead his goal was to make “(...) *a contribution to history which will be of service for the future*” (Churchill 1964a: preface; orig. 1948). His account offers a fascinating inside view of a war that brought entire nations into servitude and threatened the existence of a sovereign Great Britain. Many European countries suffered from the Nazi occupation and domination of their lands and, in reality, their attendant transformation into German colonies. Churchill, and according to his account, the entire British people, were determined even at the most difficult time of the War in the mid-1940s to continue the fight and never to surrender and accept the loss of freedom. This utter resolve, he clearly affirmed, is a matter of sentiment and values, not merely the expression of any kind of *material interests*. The feelings of the subjugated peoples and the *indomitable spirit* for their liberty as a free British people of these times show the force of ideas and values related to ethnic self-determination. I suggest that simply by transposing this historical experience, the author and these European peoples should appreciate the longing for autonomy and admire the resistance and resilience of the *Nambikwara* peoples whose histories are discussed in this book. The fact is, many people do appreciate this and these are the people who pressured governments to act in accordance with their professed values and insure that laws are obeyed. Of course, the ethnocentric values of

civilization and *progress* in the pre-eminent evolutionary framework conflict with other values and by attributing *primitiveness* and *backwardness* to indigenous peoples that, for many people and all governments, *justify* the suspension of their own pre-eminent notion of self-determination. The Nambikwara congeries and other subjugated peoples think otherwise. These peoples have their own goals and plans for the future.

History is shaped by the unfolding of intersecting multiple causalities and the permanent, simultaneous occurrence of a multifold contingencies and accidents. Human history is both determined and indeterminate by structural causes and open to human agency. The present shapes the future but the scene of the future remains fundamentally open-ended and obscured, especially for the embedded participant. "*The veils of the future are lifted one by one, and mortals must live from day to day*" (Churchill 1964b: 209). In prospective, science, the main crux that needs to be ascertained is the weight to be attached to the diverse factors contributing to permanence (structural continuity), or transformation (structural change). The larger issue at stake here can hardly be addressed and the particular prospects for the different Nambikwara peoples have already been outlined above. Still a few additional remarks are required. Continuing along the lines of Churchill's experience, he recounted that before the War, in 1932, he had an opportunity to meet Hitler in Germany, an encounter suggested by a man who was likely the German leader's emissary. During Churchill's conversations with this man, he expressed his astonishment about Hitler's policy towards the Jews. He said he understood such posture if any Jew had done wrong, committed treason, or wanted "(...) *to monopolize power in any walk of life; but what is the sense of being against a man simply because of his birth? How can any man help how he is born?*" (Churchill 1964a: 71). True enough, this issue addresses the fundamental question of deprecating and hating all people of a certain social category owing purely to their classification and identification as a certain people. The intermediary must have relayed this doubt, and Hitler apparently considered this sufficient reason to cancel the appointment. In this way the two future enemies never met face-to-face.

The fixed obsession with the Jews as the scapegoat of all evils, and hence a people to be removed from all humanity, reached the point of the notorious, modern and systematic attempt to annihilate this *inferior race*. To describe the attempt and the incredible number of deaths, the term *genocide* was invented. The concept of

genocide that evolved from the Nazi attempt to exterminate an entire people within their country and conquests remains somewhat ill-defined but it seems apt to assert that the perpetrator defines the target people and then attempts to annihilate the whole or a substantial part of them (definition by Palmer 1998)[i]. This still happened very recently, around 1985, in the Corumbiara region of Rondônia near the Latundê when the village of one people was ambushed and only a few escaped (now known as Akunsun; for some time it was believed they were Nambikwara). There were also cases where “(...) *unintended genocidal consequences are noted by the perpetrator, and are continued or increased when genocide is attempted but fails*” (Palmer 1998: 90). In this sense the accumulated knowledge of the deleterious after-effects of making *contact* with uncontacted peoples, or fragments of peoples, were and are all too well known that, in this sense, it can safely be asserted that all of the segments of the Nambikwara ensemble suffered from genocide. In the case of the telegraph line affecting the Sabanê, maybe the practical difficulties of that time may be seen to attenuate the lack of assistance, but the gradual abandonment represents the lack of political will. Building a road through the Sararé territory with no land set apart, and no constant sufficient medical aid provided, was a clear act of genocide. Not furnishing the Latundê with real medical assistance for various years after contact almost destroyed their chances of continuance as a separate people. As Price said, epidemics as *natural causes* conveniently hides the real cause, and it is quite debatable whether at the time this attitude was mere neglect or worse. If the Akunsun massacre is a case of, let's say, societal genocide, definitely facilitated by the weak state presence, the Nambikwara ensemble suffered from colonial genocide perpetuated by the purposeful state negligence. In general, official policy considered the *obstacles to progress* posed by inferior *savage Indians* as unworthy of any major investment. Formally including the subordinate group within the state as *Brazilian citizens*, and maintaining a façade of *acting in the best interests* of the victims, actions which are thwarted by *circumstances beyond control*, is a larger typical pattern of colonial genocide (Palmer 1998: 92-3). Unworthy of being allotted enough funds, these Indian peoples contributed with an enormous amount of wealth to Brazilian society. Imagine the value of appropriating some 90% of the best lands of an area approximately 500 km² along with the wealth generated by timber, gold, cattle, and crops. Compare this figure to the costs of efficient *protection*. Unquestionably, the Indians' contribution to riches of Brazil immensely exceeds the costs incurred.

At the height of this pattern the actions of Price and the Nambiquara Project prevented extinction of most segments of the Nambikwara ensemble. The intertwined combinations of conceptions, values, and material interests almost caused this congeries of peoples to disappear. The history of Brazil abounds with such cases: "*Not seldom in the annals of the past – how much more often in tragedies never recorded or long-forgotten – had brave, proud, easy-going states, and even entire races[ii], been wiped out, so that only their name or even no mention of them remains*" (Churchill 1964c: 229-230). This observation is correct, yet not only states undergo this fate, although the modern ideology of the nation-state considers this recent creation to be the main actor of history. The fact of being *citizens of the state* was a foreign notion to the *Indians*, it confers the obligation to apply other values of *Christian civilization*, today most significantly joined with the notion of *human rights* (also a Western creation stemming from WWII). These rights and values are brought to bear on the modern state. In the arena of international politics the issues of human and minority rights provide a framework of protection to the sensitive question of treatment of minorities within the nation-state. These rights counteract the strong internal sociopolitical forces that favor the unleashing the material interests within Brazil that are predisposed to continue the pillage of Indian natural resources. The territories and lives of those peoples officially included as *Brazilians* by the state, but actually sentimentally excluded as fellow citizens by the very large majority of this people. This would be in consonance with the expansive logic of a supposedly naturally superior capitalism. That is, to the benefit of these national, capitalist and regional interests the Indians are politically included in the nation-state, but in terms of ethnic sentiments, they are very much ethnocentrically excluded, hence sentimentally outsiders and not worth of *exaggerated rights*.

The contradiction between being simultaneously excluded and included generates the thorough ambivalence of granting certain rights and a degree of Indian autonomy while ultimately still preserving the right to shape the course of events. The state and the nation take for granted their *natural right* to appropriate the *Indians*, the *Indigenous Territory* and all natural resources that are within the national borders. This exemplifies the essence of a colonial regime initiated by the *taking of possession* by Cabral, this act implies abolishing the Indian peoples' political autonomy. The self-determination of peoples used to be evident to Churchill, who characterized the Nazi regime as an obviously aggressive colonialist and oppressive domination. When the Germans were about to conquer

France, he understood the crucial question to be “(...) *if France was still expected to fight on and thus deliver up her people to the certainty of corruption and evil transformation at the hands of ruthless specialists in the art of bringing conquered peoples to heel*” (Churchill 1964c: 160-161). The evil transformation mentioned here noticeably relates well with a system of interethnic domination that at the very least results in ethnocide. Structurally speaking not much difference prevails between this view of conquered Europe and the system of internal colonial domination of *Indian* peoples within the state’s self-defined bounds and rights. The difference lies principally in the ambivalence and contradictory rights in existence that correlates closely with France’s role, but the same rights and status are not extended to peoples enduring internal colonialism. The ambivalent and ambiguous rights contest the accepted notion of conquest and nationalism to challenge the excesses of subordination manifested in genocide, ethnocide and linguicide[iii]. The future will be forged from the clash of interpretations, interests, and legal rights that might enable the Indian peoples in Brazil to regain some control of their territory and their sociocultural and linguistic autonomy, thus strengthening the possibility of their growth as ethnically and culturally distinct peoples within the framework of the Brazilian state. The legal framework poses serious limitations to the expression of self-determination, although the law gives certain essential rights it also limits the autonomy of the Indian peoples. The current law does leave some room for the legal and political contention of important infringements of Indian rights and permits Indian political strife as a valid method to insure a larger measure of autonomy.

As seen above, over the last decades the ambiguous attitude of the state has slowly and reluctantly tilted in favor of a more respectful policy towards the *Indian communities*. Although the process has had its successes and failures, it is overall best thought of as an uphill battle where the correct implementation of legal rights always and continually provokes strong ethnocentric feelings and political actions (or worse) on the part of the social categories *hardest affected* by these so-called *privileges* of the unworthy. In general, and to the distress of many ethnocentric conservative proponents and intellectuals of progress, even without direct interests in Indian resources, the Indians will survive into the present century. Genocide as an option is ruled out and will be increasingly condoned less by the state. Ethnocide and linguicide, however, are still accepted by important parts of Brazilian society but legally it has become difficult to propose such

discriminatory action as official policy. In a way, *respect* for alterity even within the structural constraints of domination could suffice to permit the Indian peoples to vie for the recognition of a package of rights that grant a fairly large measure of autonomy with the respectful assistance of state's interpretation of a less impositive Indian policy. On the other hand, the dynamic equilibrium between the material interests complemented by ethnocentric common sense and the alternative collective human right of Indians to exist, does not spell an easy route towards this goal. Within a spectre of prospective possibilities the current dominance and the strong disposition to impose sociocultural models of living and economic *development* will still be going strong and it remains to be seen if providing a larger political space for the dominated to decide their own future will continue long enough.

Words in collision

Language and thought in connection with the sociocultural creation of social life create a subject matter that constitutes the heart of the anthropological enterprise. More importantly, the intricate recursive relation between language as lived words and reality in the sociocultural realization of a multiplicity of lived worlds constitutes the essence of human agents. Languages do not map reality, even if they do not exist in a material vacuum. And yet, in a real sense, within these constraints, language constitutes the reality of each speaker and people. In this manner it seems safe to say that any language fabricates its own unique construal and a unique way of structuring reality. This uniqueness of each language is a powerful argument in favour of continued efforts to preserve endangered languages and promote language maintenance. Simultaneously, every language is fundamentally equal to all others, and all the advanced criteria of establishing any kind of hierarchy of superiority and inferiority between languages are based upon arbitrary standards. The most common opinion about translatability that linguists adhere to states that all languages can express everything originally enunciated in any other language (Lyons 1981: 305; 308-11; Hill and Mannheim 1992: 384). Nonetheless, ethnographers know too well that all efforts to portray the full complexity of a language's classification systems and its articulated concepts of another language are cumbersome and extensive exercises of denotation and a mesh of connotations. At any rate, the loss of any language means the loss of the many complex socio-cultural encodings of accumulated knowledge, loss of a unique, irreplaceable perspective, and the privation of the proper and fluent means of expression of one particular culture,

knowledge of the kind the Nambikwara prided themselves with. Furthermore, even if the relation between reality, language, thought and mind is a debated issue, there is a growing body of research that supports “(...) *the proposal the particular language we speak influences the way we think about reality*” (Lucy 1997), implying that the language spoken influences memory, perception, day-to-day thinking, and behavior. It seems a weak form of the sometimes misunderstood Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has gained some acceptance (discussed by Hill and Mannheim; 1992) and hence the loss of any language signifies not only the privation of a specific way of thinking and lived worlds for the people concerned, but also an impoverishment for humans as a whole. As Sapir wrote, “*The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached*” (apud Hill and Mannheim 1992: 385)[iv]. “*The world of image and concept, the endless and ever-shifting picture of objective reality, is the unavoidable subject-matter of human communication, for it is only, or mainly, in terms of this world that effective action is possible*” (Sapir n.d.: 39).

Unfortunately, it seems that the unfolding scene of the future does not look so bright for language maintenance. Social worlds in collision are also *words* in collision. Presently, it is predicted that thousands of languages will soon die and some researchers suggest that 90% may vanish within the current generation[v]. A recent and simple mathematical model of language competition attributes the main cause of language shift to status. In this model Abrams et al. started with the assumption that when languages in the same social space compete, there is only one winner. They also suggested that for successful co-existence of multiple languages, there must be clear boundaries between dominant language areas. They added that language planning can reverse the process of language loss essentially by elevating its status. In light of this, the model demonstrates the possibility of a dynamic equilibrium of persisting bilingualism (Abrams and Strogatz 2003). Indigenous Territories may provide the possibly necessary language refuge. The recent trend towards a larger respect for alterity, countering the former (and partially still present) shame attached to speaking an inferior dialect, may provide the stimulus to endorse the normal tendency of the older generations to transmit their own mother tongue[vi]. Perhaps the previous disposition towards multilingualism can be grafted on a renewed positive evaluation of language maintenance of the native language, joined with the advent of bilingualism of Portuguese for the newer generations. This desired situation differs for the three cases in that the Sararé mother tongue would be

complemented with the necessity of the *national* language, the Sabanê urgently need revitalization for the reversal of language death, and the Latundê require weight attached to bilingualism and a sizeable improvement of the current educational situation.

Within this basic model, status only relates to economic and social opportunities and accordingly the results are provisional when dealing with the forces that shape an interethnic system of domination and subordination that is as complex as that of the Brazilian indigenous population. Indeed, when reviewing again the three Nambikwara cases, only the Sararé seem to be in a clear position to maintain their new Sararé language, recently forged from previously different dialects. Furthermore, as the Sararé case demonstrates, history transformed the previously segmented village/village-set model of the Nambikwara ensemble and therefore the currently existing named units should be treated as different peoples, each with different trajectories and particular needs, and not as a monolithic unit called *Nambikwara* (Reesink i.p.). Consequently, as defining the limits between languages is fundamentally a political and sociocultural act, each contemporary people which is an heir to one or more ancestral groups should be considered as possessing its own proper language (as Latundê and Lakondê in Telles 2002). This is in agreement with what is known of their previous language ideology, which stressed the language differences between the former groups. From the discussion for each people and language a few issues worthy of serious consideration arose. The Latundê need to emerge from the constant official neglect they endured and very likely some active assistance may be required to assure their ethnic survival and, by extension, the language. The Sabanê will maintain their ethnic identity, language loss does not fatally impair being Sabanê and *indianidade* although the dominant society does not hold these people in high regards. It appears that only a program of a concerted effort of specialists and Indians of the remaining core of elder speakers directed at the reversal of language shift and loss can effectively guard the language from disappearance (and, naturally, in some unknown measure, the culture). Such programs exist and apparently in a similar situation one of them increased the number of younger speakers, although it remains to be seen if the core of surviving speakers suffices (Farfán 2001: 186; if not, then only a curator model of the actually extinct language may be feasible, Furbee and Stanley 2002). Solutions then do exist[vii]. The problem here once more concerns the basic neglect and lack of political will within the interethnic system of domination. Policy makers and politicians still

predominantly presume that the Indians will *naturally* be attracted to *civilization* and their language and culture will disappear as *a matter of course*. The recent increasing international attention to language rights (with important declarations that may help stimulate further official action), and the promotion of the notion that a truly democratic society is obliged to optimally develop its diverse linguistic and cultural riches, help the cause of preservation (Paulston 1997).

Nambikwara history moves within the larger framework of Brazilian history and that must be viewed within the continental and global historical processes. As such, predictions are more complicated than those that only take into account local and national observations. International laws and rights tend to promote language and cultural maintenance. A significant internal Brazilian support sustains the long-term effort of a social movement with the increasing active participation of the victims. Marx suggested “*Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted*” (Marx 1973: 146). The truth of this statement for the recent histories of the Nambikwara peoples needs no elaboration. Marx added that “*The traditions of the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the minds of the living*” (ib.: 146). He may have overestimated the point. Nambikwara tradition was unprepared for the onslaught of Brazilian society but proved to be surprisingly resilient to overcome the immense losses sustained. The weight of history bears mostly on the interethnic system of dominance and the enormous pressures from the regional society to cede their most valuable resources (land, gold, mahogany) at ridiculous terms of trade. Having been assured a fraction of their territory, and as there was some demographic recuperation, the most pressing problem now seems to be the economic articulation of a system of local village sustenance with the capitalist mode of production. There is no easy solution to this problem of accommodation between lived worlds so distant in economic principles. Given the Nambikwara resilience to pass through difficult periods a tenuous hope for creative adaptation may be held out when this process is shaped within the framework of tendencies that may be more favorable. In this case, when the Nambikwara “*(...) conjure up the spirits of the dead to help them*” (ib: 146), the tradition and the guidance of the ancestral spirits already manifested their value. If, with such guidance and the benefit of reasonable conditions found at the more inclusive sociopolitical contexts, the Nambikwara peoples succeed in making their own history rather than being shaped by the history of others, then they stand a

chance to maintain their ethnic, sociocultural and linguistic identities. If this were to happen, it would be a positive mark on a record otherwise blemished by violence and injustice. Lévi-Strauss[viii] once made a statement that both Price and Churchill (had he been able to remove himself from the evolutionary perspective that allowed violence against the uncivilized) would have ascribed to: “(...) *I am an Americanist and Americanists are constantly confronted with the observation that we have destroyed our own object of study or at least reduced its size. Thus we constantly approach the South American Indian with both the attitude of the scientific observer, trying to be objective, and the consciousness of being part of a civilization that has committed a kind of unpardonable sin – in my opinion the greatest sin ever committed in the history of humanity, which is to have destroyed or attempted to destroy half of the richness of humankind*” (interview in Massenzio 2001: 419).

As seen above, apart from the evident material interests that haunt and assault the Indigenous Territories within the logic of expansive capitalism, the contradictory values and conceptions of *Western civilization* shape the future (Brazil considers itself firmly anchored in the West). It is little known that Lévi-Strauss noticed the ravages of the “*destructions at a distance*”, aside from the destruction caused of the epidemics there were the possible negative effects related to the introduction of metal tools long before actual *contact* (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 370; originally a 1961 lecture). Moreover, contrary to an ahistorical notion like *underdevelopment*, he adopted Marx’s proposition that the development of the *developed* countries was facilitated by the plunder or *primitive accumulation* of other continents, like the Americas. To describe this centuries-old process, Lévi-Strauss wrote that this was done “*by means of violence, oppression and extermination*”, or “*a situation created by brutality, pillage and violence*” (ib: 369). This vision of the vanquished Indian peoples differs from the usual one trumpeting triumphant national history, and is capable of expressing an encompassing framework for Indian histories. These words denote a debt towards Indians peoples generally unrecognized, but still formulated in the analytical terms prevalent in the West. Still, Western languages have their limits. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, “the limits of our language” are the limits of our world. This leaves open the question of which bounds of which language are the limits of which world? Or, conversely, the limits of which world are the bounds of which language? Words are configured to signify worlds of value judgments and the exercise of power. In some combinations of power in interethnic systems, several

differently constructed sociocultural worlds have a future. The recognition of a peoples' right to existence, like that of the Nambikwara ensemble, precedes the highly theoretical question of the bounds of any peoples' world and the richness of human linguistic and sociocultural creativity. The value of these languages and worlds stems from the very uniqueness of human inventiveness as expressed by Nambikwara peoples. Lévi-Strauss emphasized that this lesson of respect for others derives from historical experience and should orient all prospective action. The creation of conditions for the effective exercise of the ultimate value of self-determination is primary[ix]. This belief is not as modern as may be believed. Sapir already wrote in the thirties of the twentieth century: *"the deliberate attempt to impose a culture directly and speedily no matter how backed by good will, is an affront to the human spirit. When such an attempt is backed, not by good will, but by military ruthlessness, it is the greatest conceivable crime against the human spirit, it is the very denial of culture."* (apud Wolff; 1974: 101). If this idea was to be followed constantly, the world would be a different place. The Latundê, Sabanê and Sararé finally could freely plan and realize their own unfolding scenes to lift the veils of the future, and freely pursue the bounds of their languages within their own transformed, lived worlds.

Notes

[i] The concept was developed for the Nazi intent to eliminate the Jewish people but the Convention of 1948 but the definition expands to include targeted groups as defined on a national, ethnic, racial, religious basis. Hence there is some controversy about the applicability of this term in various cases. This discussion leads too far from the modest objective of this chapter, but it may be noted that there are two subsidiary goals besides murder: (i) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to group members; (ii) Deliberately inflicting living conditions calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part (Stein 1996). Both can be seen as demonstrated in above in the previous Parts.

[ii] Note that here *races* is used to refer to *peoples*.

[iii] By analogy, such a term predictably was to be invented after the former two. Apparently it was coined in 1988 (Skutnabb-Kangas apud Farfán 2001: 185).

[iv] For one of the most interesting and convincing examples of the influence of language on the life and culture of a people see Witherspoon (1977). See also Brody (2001) for an anthropological perspective on the language of hunter-gatherers, world view and translatability.

[v] Other sources are less radical but estimates still indicate a decrease of 50% to

80% in fifty years (Farfán 2001: 185).

[vi] As the case analyzed by Kulick (1998) shows, unconscious factors may cause the language shift even when the older generation favors language maintenance in their own village. As said, the model is simple and reality is more complex. For a general overview of Amazonian languages, see Queixalós and Renault-Lescure (2000). One notes the almost complete absence of anthropologists in this stocktaking and effort to analyze language shift. As this is a strongly sociopolitical phenomenon, anthropologists should get involved on much larger scale.

[vii] Not surprisingly the Farfán (2001: 191) noted that conventional schools in Mexico customarily depreciate native languages and contribute to their extinction. The current bilingual monitors certainly will not be sufficient for the Latundê and Sabanê. For a general introduction to the problem and solutions, see Crystal (2002).

[viii] In the same interview Lévi-Strauss considered the substantial world population growth as the most striking change of the 20th century. He spoke of the enormous crowds he saw in Pakistan that attest that humankind is, after all, only one species and that just as the world began without humans, so shall it end without them. Near the end of his life, Price also became interested in overpopulation and concluded that the population surge is bound to result in a crash that may leave no survivors (Price 1995; 1998; 1999).

[ix] It is superfluous to suggest that academics must in some way follow Price's outstanding example.