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## Sentinels and Entrepreneurs: Advocacy and Development in Brazil

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## **Sentinels and Entrepreneurs: Advocacy and Development in Brazil**

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In this article, I discuss, firstly, the importance of Sandy Davis' activism for the growing international indigenous support movement from the 1970s through the late 1980s, and the strategies that were deployed during the global campaign in support of the Yanomami Indian Park. Secondly, I look critically at some of the models for indigenous support advocacy being implemented in Brazil today, for the sake of understanding what has changed in the ways indigenous support organizations develop partnerships with indigenous movements. What has changed in the ways indigenous and indigenist organizations in Brazil understand their goals and the means for attaining them? What are some of the advances and shortcomings of current "sustainable development projects" as implemented in the Amazon region today?

The idea here is to bring constructive criticism to bear on indigenist approaches currently deployed in the Northwest Amazon of Brazil, an area where I have done field and archival research since 1976. Sandy Davis had a very valuable perspective, in my view, on the limitations as well as the priorities of support work that are important to consider. My research has demonstrated the need for (1) incorporating shamanic cosmo-visions and their relation to ecology in the planning and execution of "sustainable development projects"; (2) evaluating with greater clarity indigenous views of their history of contact and the kinds of strategies native peoples have deployed as means towards their survival and "empowerment"; (3) taking into account pre-existing religious and political divergences within a single population of indigenous peoples; and (4) the risk of privileging a sector of an indigenous population and not including others as "project" beneficiaries. Before examining each of these, I shall briefly contextualize his work during the emergence of the international indigenous movement, and all through the civil wars in Guatemala in which thousands of Mayan Indians perished. To the extent possible, we'll look at his record at the Bank and what "pushback" Sandy had to deal with. Despite the numerous instances in which he could help, as Maritta Koch-Weser said of Shelton Davis in a letter cited by Uquillas:

I recall that it was not at all easy for you, in moral terms, to agree to do any work with the World Bank—initially as consultant, and later for many years as a staff member. You

were and remained highly distrustful and vigilant regarding the institution at large. You knew that you represented the exception, not the rule. (Uquillas, see article in this issue) His courage and rectitude, hard work and purpose, and his promptness to engage in battle were the outstanding features of Sandy's way of being useful to the indigenous movement, ability to engage top intellectuals among native peoples and gain a sense of his mandate to help, to fight against, or to analyze critically.

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF ADVOCACY WORK**

The decade of the 1970s witnessed an unparalleled flourishing of indigenous and advocacy organizations throughout the world, as well as regional, national and international meetings to define and sharpen the new ideology and praxis of the indigenous movement (as discussed in Wali's article, this issue). The Barbados I Declaration of 1981 (IWGIA 1981) was a landmark statement defining the responsibilities of social scientists with regard to indigenous peoples' struggles. The late 1970s early 1980s witnessed the convergence of new, global NGOs comprised of indigenous leadership and non-indigenous supporters, as well as new spaces in global forums where indigenous leaders could bring to the attention of the world the violations of their rights. Examples of these include The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Affairs, which issued the "Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," passed in 2007. This key document established a "universal framework for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the indigenous peoples." The International Decade of the Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004) likewise was an important period of advances in several areas affecting the indigenous rights movements.

Subsequently, any discussion of notions such as "indigenous self-determination" or "sustainable development," for example, has to be based on indigenous understandings of these terms, not on external definitions. This is recognized worldwide; for example, a recent report on Native North American Nations' Economic Development concluded with the following statement regarding economic development on indigenous reservations:

[T]he lesson is quite general across Indian Country...Foreign systems of government that do not fit with a people's own standards as to how they should self-rule are prime causes of nations in trouble. The critical concern is that any endeavor that the tribe embarks on—be it an economic development project or setting up a new governing institution—should match the tribe's current indigenous ideas—be they remnants from older traditions or products from a tribe's contemporary experience. Studies have repeatedly shown that economic development fails where cultural match is low, but thrives where cultural match is high. (Dreveskracht 2011)

How has the anthropologist's relation to their research community changed? How have researchers become more involved and in different ways from what they once did? How have the native peoples themselves assumed greater control over

their own histories and resources; how has this re-arranged the boundaries between the native community and external researchers?

## **THE ARC AMAZON PROJECT: PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS**

I did not know of Sandy's work in 1978 when I emerged from the Northwest Amazon rainforest to write my dissertation. One day, a little note came in the mail from Sandy saying he wanted to get together to discuss my research. He was looking for an "Amazon specialist" to work with him. He probably had heard of my work from professors at Stanford, several of which had been students of David Maybury-Lewis from the time of the Harvard Central Brazil Project in the 1960s. When Sandy asked if I would be willing to coordinate the "Amazon Project," I jumped at the chance. I had had some contact with North American Indian movements at that time (the First "Longest Walk" in 1978, for example) and had concluded most of my thesis. For years, I had silently harbored a revolt against the "ethnocide" to which the peoples with whom I had worked in the Amazon were "subjected" by both catholic and protestant missionaries, some of them from the U.S. I had no idea where to go with this personal revolt and was unprepared for doing indigenist support work. Sandy was a mentor for me, and in a major way.

Briefly stated, the work of the ARC "Amazon Project" meant mobilizing North American support for the Brazilian movement on behalf of indigenous rights, especially land and health. Research was largely focused on the analysis of journal clippings and other documents directly from field situations in the Amazon. Publications such as the *ARC Bulletin* and the *ARC Newsletter* partially served these objectives. Far more important was Sandy's understanding of how anthropological knowledge could best be put at the service of indigenous peoples' struggles.

Sandy's friendship with the late John Mohawk and Jose Barreiro, the current Research Director at the Museum of the American Indian, both leading activists and intellectuals of the national and international indigenous movements, facilitated the forging of alliances among North and South American indigenous leadership. There was a network among NGOs of constantly circulating information on different situations in the world at that time. Global connections were beginning to solidify with the creation of a few important internet networks, such as the Emergency Response International Network (E.R.I.N.), which co-published our book *Native Peoples in Struggle* (Wright and Barreiro 1982).

While Sandy was a visiting scholar at the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), he conducted a study of international

mechanisms for protecting the human rights of forest-dwelling Indian peoples in lowland South America. In the resulting book, *Land Rights and Indigenous Peoples* (Cultural Survival 1988), he affirmed that the most important lowland South American Indian case considered by the IACHR was that of the Yanomami people in Brazil and Venezuela (Davis 1988:41).

Throughout the late 1970s early 1980s, NGOs in Brazil and Latin America, the U.S. and Europe organized an efficient and well-functioning global network focused on the situation of the Yanomami. This network could easily mount campaigns overnight in which hundreds of support letters on behalf of the creation of the Yanomami Indian Park in the 1980s and 90s literally inundated the offices of the Brazilian government.

The ARC used various forms of international pressure in this campaign: publications of course, but also actions based on international accords, treaties, or paralegal forums of international justice. Sandy and I co-edited a booklet about this campaign, *The Yanomami Indian Park: A Call for Action* (Wright and Davis 1981), which contained several key documents of international actions that had been completed. The first, titled “The Fate of the Yanomami People: ‘Indian Archipelago’, ‘National Reserve’ or ‘Indian Park,’” was a statement prepared by the Brazilian Commission for the Creation of the Yanomami Park (CCPY), and presented to the Fourth Russell Tribunal in Rotterdam, Holland, in 1980. The second was a Complaint filed on behalf of the Yanomami by five professional organizations: The American Anthropological Association, Survival International, Survival International-USA, the ARC, and the Indian Law Resource Center.

The political significance of the American Anthropological Association’s signature, as well as the expertise of the Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC) were decisive in the action taken by the IACHR to communicate to the Brazilian government of its violation of Yanomami land rights protected by the “American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man.” At that time, the Brazilian government recognized the legal document and actually took steps towards correcting the situation.

The third part of the document consisted of letters of support by major professional organizations, petitions signed by dozens of well-known writers, religious and legal authorities, professional associations in Brazil and the U.S., and Brazilian Indian leaders. The little booklet is illustrated with reproductions of drawings by Yanomami living along the highway that cut through their villages in the early 1970s, as well as photos by the internationally known Swiss-born photographer Claudia Andujar, the Coordinator of the CCPY in São Paulo.



**Figure 1: Yanomami family, victim of the Northern Perimeter Highway.  
(Photo: Claudia Andujar)**



**Figure 2: Sick Yanomami woman being removed from area by helicopter during gold prospectors' invasions. (Photo: Claudia Andujar)**

It was a tremendous satisfaction to have been able to deliver in person the Complaint to the Inter-American Commission's Assistant Executive Secretary David Padilha, as it was to have contributed to the preparation and completion of the document; and to have presented the CCPY's Declaration to the Fourth Russell Tribunal. Sandy Davis certainly could have done all of this himself but, with characteristic humility, he chose to delegate this tremendous responsibility to a less experienced co-worker. The very fact that the IACHR/OAS notified the Brazilian government that it was in violation of the OAS Declaration, had a notable impact. At that time, there were no inter-community Yanomami political leaders, and much of the support work came from the global network that had been forming since the late 1970s[I].

The hopes for a positive solution by the Brazilian government that would detain any further invasions of Yanomami lands were shattered a few months later in early 1981. An invasion of Yanomami lands by 45,000 illegal gold prospectors—more than twice the total Yanomami population in Brazil and Venezuela—had catastrophic results. It took a massive effort on the part of the government to take them all out, and to dynamite illegal, clandestine airstrips throughout Yanomami territory. All of this could have been avoided, of course, had the federal government had the foresight to see what was about to come and, more importantly, the *political will* to take action. It is not too far from the truth to state that the disaster occurred precisely because there were sectors of local government that allowed, and even encouraged, the tragedy to happen. Over twenty percent of the Yanomami population in Brazil died as a result of the

inaction of the Brazilian government during the years since the invasion had begun.

Eventually, the Brazilian government did set aside an area the size of the contemplated Yanomami Indian Park; nevertheless, there was a hidden agenda as often happens in such large demarcation projects. In the CCPY Yanomami Bulletin *Urihi*, we wrote:

All-powerful interests of national security and development were planning the occupation of Yanomami territory, cutting it up into pieces, and then cutting off health supplies to the Indians. (CCPY, *Urihi*, 1986-7; CCPY, 1979:29)

The Brazilian federal government had a project to create a series of small “island reserves” of indigenous lands, in between which would be “corridors” where mineral prospecting and other forms of predatory development would be allowed. This project too had to be fought until it was tabled like so many other government attempts to deprive the Yanomami of their rights to a *continuous* land reserve.

Despite the herculean efforts of the CCPY, even today, the health situation in the region continues to be disastrous, with poor administration and local corruption in governmental health agencies. In the end, international protest and human rights accords proved to be adequate only for “buying time” until a Yanomami leadership could directly take the government to task for its inaction. Davi Yanomami, the first and most important of the emerging leadership, has done an immense service to his people through his constant and direct mediation with the government over many years. Davi is a shaman and has always brought his understanding of Yanomami cosmology into his political work, effectively utilizing the beliefs of his people as a Yanomami “call to consciousness” for the Brazilian government to change its indigenist policies and help defend the Indian people from the miners.

## HYDROELECTRIC DEVELOPMENT

Hydroelectric development presented another critical situation in the Brazilian Amazon that cried for attention in the early 1980s. Of special interest, then as now, were the large-scale hydroelectric dams being contemplated throughout the Amazon Basin. Brazil has already demonstrated that large-scale hydro-development faces special problems in the Amazon, as exemplified by the ecological disasters of the Tucuruí hydroelectric dam, and most especially, the Balbina dam which flooded the reserve of the Waimiri-Atroari Indians and is widely recognized as a structural failure (Aspelin and Coelho dos Santos, IWGIA 1981; Wali 1982; Wright 1982). The ARC, through its own publications and contributions to other NGO journals, was particularly active in forging links



among national and international NGOs (International Rivers, for example, and Rainforest Action Network) concerned with the impacts of exploiting hydropower on the environment and native peoples. The ARC organized a panel at the annual Conference on Rivers in Washington D.C. on “International Hydroelectric Development Projects and Indigenous Peoples” in 1982. The panel included, among others, Robert Goodland of the World Bank; a Native North American leader representing the Cree of Canada; and Dr. Charles Drucker, who had done fieldwork in the Philippines.

Regarding deforestation, the ARC actively continued its “monitoring” through news and field reports of the growing problem in the Amazon. Sandy was especially committed to the work of influencing multilateral banks to implement policy reforms based on a thorough overhaul of their development models. Special issues of the *ARC Global Reporter* and the *Cultural Survival Quarterly* were devoted to native strategies for resource control as the key to self-determination and “grassroots development” projects.

In 1982, Sandy and the coordinators of Cultural Survival, the Indian Law Resource Center (coordinated by Tim Coulter), the Multinational Monitor (coordinated by Ralph Nader) co-sponsored a conference on “Native Resource Control and the Multinational Corporate Challenge,” specifically focusing on strategies for monitoring and confronting corporate actions (Swenson 1982). One major outcome of the conference was its demonstration that indigenous peoples had indeed arrived at the centers of nation-state power and were seeking fundamental changes in the ways multilateral lending institutions and multinational corporations (MNCs) especially must abide by international human rights agreements. The Conference’s relative success in drawing the public’s attention to the threat of MNCs to Indigenous Peoples worldwide encouraged the ARC to re-dimension its work. The ARC then launched a new journal, called *The Global Reporter*, to reflect its growing commitment to analyzing and influencing processes of globalization at that time.

Sandy kept the Amazon work going, focusing on the Grande Carajás Project in the northeastern part of Brazil, which was a precursor to what is happening today at Belo Monte (see Schwartzman, in this issue). The Brazilian government was announcing the Project as a top-priority, strategic solution for the problems of the northeast and the entire country. The first issue of the new ARC publication *The Global Reporter* was dedicated to an analysis of the Grande Carajás Project, and in the same issue, Sandy wrote a significant piece on the social and historical roots of the tragedy taking place in Guatemala with the Mayan peoples. The second issue of the journal focused on the Mayan refugees in Florida along with several of the papers from the international panel on hydroelectric energy development and indigenous peoples.

Since external, financial support for the ARC was increasingly harder to find, Sandy decided to close the Amazon Project temporarily in 1982-1983, although he re-opened it several years later after his move to Washington D.C. to work with the World Bank. By that time, I had moved to Brazil and was working with several indigenous support NGOs, as well as being active in the formation of a nucleus of researchers in the “new field” of “ethnohistory” at universities in the state of São Paulo.

Confrontational advocacy was still the order of the day in the late 1980s, particularly with the proposed construction of hydroelectric dams on the Xingu River, specifically the Babaquara and Cararaó dams on the upper Xingu River. A major document on *Hydroelectric Dams on Brazil's Xingu River and Indigenous Peoples*, edited by Leinad A. de O. Santos and Lucia M.M. de Andrade (1991), was published by the *Comissão Pró-Índio de São Paulo* (in Portuguese and with English translation by Cultural Survival). The document and the campaign associated with it had a significant role in the government's decision to “put a hold on” (but without cancelling) the construction of several large dams in the Xingu River Basin.

Despite the extensive documentation presented in that book, after twenty years the Brazilian government brought the project from the “desk drawer” out again on the table, and declared that it was practically a *faite accompli*. The construction of a series of major dams on the “Great Bend” of the Xingu River, without any previous conversations with the local communities of indigenous peoples and riverine dwellers. Hanging in the balance today, consequently, are the lives of thousands of extremely poor and oppressed peoples to which the government has virtually turned its back.

It struck me as coherent with his vision when Sandy announced his decision to work at the World Bank. The ARC's closest connection within the Bank had always been Dr. Robert Goodland. It was undoubtedly due in part to his urging and persuasion that Sandy decided to accept the challenge of seeking to change policies from within the institution. To be sure, some looked skeptically at the move, and Sandy's views of what was possible at the Bank were tested as never before. Many of his co-workers, including Maritta Koch-Weser and Dr. Navin Rai, Head of the Indigenous Peoples Program of the World Bank, an indigenous person from Nepal, expressed their immense gratitude and admiration while recognizing that the work presented at times insurmountable obstacles. The tremendous good that Sandy and his colleagues were able to do on behalf of indigenous and other traditional peoples' rights was never in itself sufficient to break down the deeply entrenched and vested political and economic interests of the local power structures, for which local popular resistance was a necessary though at times fragile and vulnerable complement.

It was a great honor to have been able to work with Shelton Davis at the ARC. Even if for only a few years (May 1980 to March 1983), they marked my life and work for the more than two decades that I lived in Brazil.

## “ETHNODEVELOPMENT” AND “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”

As important as advocacy is for the guarantee of land and health rights, equally significant are the ways in which indigenous communities can be supported in ensuring their future, which involves their perceptions of the environment as a source of wellbeing and happiness, “managing the world and its resources,” or what is called sustainable development. The challenge is how to reconcile the cosmo-vision of a peoples, expressed and understood by “peoples of local knowledge,” with a “project mentality” characteristic of charitable foundations, multilateral lending institutions, and government agencies? There is little basis for successful dialogue between these two. Alaka Wali’s points are well taken when she says (in this issue):

Amazonian cosmovisions view the natural, “supernatural” and human as of a piece, in constant interaction and in social relation to each other (c.f. Descola 1992). In this way, stewardship of the environment must be governed by the cosmological principles from which wellbeing is derived—again very different from the perspective of Western Conservation organizations. If this new type of “cosmopolitics” (de la Cadena 2010) can gain a foothold, it could potentially provide a more fruitful path to the defense of indigenous lands and livelihoods, grounded in the reality of the indigenous experience. To date, this strategy is still emerging and it remains to be seen where and how it gains strength.

And further:

For Amazonian indigenous peoples, however, *wellbeing has a specific definition based on cosmological principles that govern social relations* (c.f. Belaunde 2010; Chirif 2007). *Wellbeing in many Amazonian societies depends on maintaining kin and friendship relations based on systems of reciprocity.* (My emphasis)

This approach incorporates indigenous understandings of “wellbeing,” the land of the ancestors, and reciprocity, into the model of sustainability. Indigenous cosmo-praxis is seen as the source for conceptualizing “sustainable development” projects. The term “ethno-development” means a respect for the environment; resisting the monumental development projects funded by international lending institutions. These were usually accepted by countries of the Third World, more for political reasons than for real economic and social motives.

The notion of “ethno-development” is based on the engagement of local human, technical, and natural resources as a way of gaining self-sufficiency in development while protecting the environment. The term emphasizes that populations affected by development have to participate in all phases of planning

and implementation. Base communities are thus “empowered” instead of being forced to accept the technocratic sort of top-down and often predatory development.

Today, another feature has become an integral component in any project involving what Fikret Birkes has called “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” (see especially his *Sacred Ecology*, 1999). No “sustainable development” project in contemporary circumstances can survive for any length of time unless it has well-integrated into it the metaphysics of a people, indigenous religious traditions among Tukanoan-speaking peoples can be understood through what Western scientific knowledge has called “systems theory.” The “resources” of the universe are constantly “depleting,” and it is the responsibility of human societies to “regenerate” those resources through a periodic approximation with the primordial world.

The shamans among the Baniwa people (neighbors of the Tukanoan-speaking peoples) are considered “guardians of the cosmos” (Wright 1992a, 1992b, 1998, in press) who keep watch over food supplies (fish, game), and regulate the use of these resources. This regulation occurs in the upper levels of the cosmos and is put into practice through such forms of behavior as ritual fasting by the shaman and observance of appropriate conduct in relation to the spirit-world. Disruption of such regulation—as, for example, in sorcery on a people’s food resources—provoked warfare in the past, and sorcery accusations even today. These metaphysical dynamics are important considerations—far from being “archaic” as some NGOs surmise.

Indigenous eco-philosophy was recently recognized by the Colombian government as a “non-material patrimony” (heritage) which is a step towards sustaining natural resources. This measure was acclaimed by anthropologists as “quite an enlightened way to deal with issues of biocultural diversity in Amazonia and of safeguarding the knowledge of the Shamans for all the right reasons” (Anon. 08/2010) (Resolution “*Lista Representativa de Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial del ámbito Nacional*”, Bogotá, D.C.). According to the measure:

*Hee Yaia ~Kubua Baseri Ketí Oka, the Curing-Knowledge Words of the Jaguar Knowers of Yurupari, condenses sacred knowledge that was given to us from the beginning to take care of our territory and life, and is manifest through rituals, dances and chants, management of sacred places, elements and sacred plants. This is the cultural manifestation that is being strengthened internally and that this decree intends to protect. (Resolution “Lista Representativa de Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial del ámbito Nacional”, Bogotá, D.C)*

For a people which seeks to regain their religious beliefs, the foundation of their societies, this means: (1) a recognition of the belief in the non-material underpinnings of the material world; (2) the importance of a stewardship relation in guarding and renewing the earth, as well as a celebration of the earth as “home” to all living species; (3) a greater responsibility towards the future generations of

humanity; (4) celebration of, and respect for, all forms of life and the diversity of lifeways; and (5) support for the pervasive system of reciprocity that is the foundation of “wellbeing” (Hugh-Jones 1989; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976; Berkes 1999; Wali, this issue; Wright, *Mysteries...*).

## NGOs AND “PROJECTS” IN THE NORTHWEST AMAZON

Sandy Davis had a certain view on NGO-indigenous political relations, with regard to the appropriate time when NGOs should perceive that the problem for which they were called in to assist is under control, and there is no need for continued external presence. The time is ripe for the NGO to “self-destruct,” because of the danger in NGO/indigenous leaders’ relations becoming one of dependency (“patron/client”), or even “competition” between the NGO and the indigenous organizations. Instead of both being “partners,” one (the NGO) is “competing” for ways to invest in sustainability and use the natural resources to create an alternative economy, with brand names, patents, etc. This sort of relation is far from the original idea of “partnership” among equals. In this section, I focus on the relations between indigenous movements and non-indigenous NGO support movements taking as a case study the Northwest Amazon.

After gold prospectors were expelled from the Yanomami territory in the early 1980s, many of them moved directly into the Northwest Amazon: Tukanoan territory at the Serra do Traira and then Baniwa territory (Buchillet 1991; Wright 1991) were invaded by countless gold prospectors, wreaking havoc wherever they went, and several large state corporations (Wright 2005). Since the FUNAI was not capable of dealing with the immense problems of land demarcation, resource wars, communications, and health without help, the Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI) stepped in and became one of the main organizations to fill a gap of leadership and administration in the region. Proposals for establishing a single, continuous indigenous land reserve had in fact been made by indigenous leadership as far back as the early 1970s. In 1987, the CEDI was instrumental in assisting the indigenous peoples’ efforts to get their lands finally demarcated, facilitating meetings between high-level government officials and the indigenous leadership. Its success in building alliances, and in the complicated demarcation process, are well-known.

In the same year, the regional indigenous movement solidified into a confederation known as the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Rio Negro (FOIRN), with its headquarters in the municipal capitol of São Gabriel da Cachoeira on the upper Rio Negro. Throughout this time, local indigenous associations were being formed overnight, united by territory, or by common ethnic ancestry, profession (an association of indigenous professors, another of

artisans), gender (indigenous women's associations such as the AMARN, described by Chernela in this issue), and in the case we are considering, by religious affiliation.

Today, there are over sixty local associations, frequently geographically-based political associations with a common history. This division is partially based on historical distinctions that have characterized the ethnic group since the mid-nineteenth century, combined with language and dialect differences. With the increasing mixture of ethnicities in any given community, however, the ethnic and historical criteria have been blurred, giving way to the associations' geographical locations and political positions with regard to the Whites (non-indigenous Brazilians of the region). The history of conflicts with White people, prophet-led movements, labor migrations during the rubber boom, and the division between Catholics and Protestants are all important factors to be taken into account *before* any external "sustainable development" is introduced.

Indigenous history demonstrates very clearly that a large percentage of the northern Arawakan native peoples in the region converted to Christianity in the 1950s and 60s, introduced by North American missionaries (Wright 1981, 1998, 2005). The conversion movement led to serious divisions between "believers" (*crentes*) and the "traditional" communities. The *crentes* are located along the banks of the Içana River and parts of its tributaries, while the "traditionals" are located at the headwaters of the main tributary, the Aiary River. Violence characterized their inter-relations in the early years of the conversion movement; sorcery spiraled such that even today, the memory of these conflicts is potentially volatile.

One of the key elements to the NGO's success over the past fifteen years has been its alliance with the growing environmentalist movement in Brazil. The organization previously had built its name on its consistent and strategic support for indigenous rights. As a result of its history of leadership, the NGO—which changed its name to the Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA)—was generously funded by religious and philanthropic foundations, national and multinational corporations with philanthropic views, national research associations, and national banks. It has used those resources to expand, like a corporation, throughout Brazil. Thus, from a small one-room office in 1984, it became a nationwide agency on the model of corporate indigenism, a style that is successfully done when the knowledge and skills of business administration and marketing are joined with career indigenists trained in relevant disciplines, but more than anything else, adept at political analysis, with far-reaching strategies, control over a vast archive of information, and systematic organizing capacity.

For all intents and purposes, the same NGO came to assume the role of the nation-state in the Northwest Amazon region. This was, on the one hand, a promising change from the long history of exploitation of the indigenous peoples

by independent merchants and the extractivist economy. But, the changes introduced since the 1990s have markedly affected the indigenous political movement in unexpected ways.

The ISA served as principal consultant to the regional indigenous association and together, they embarked on complex, regionally integrated programs to promote “sustainable development” projects in the area—aquaculture, agro-forestry, marketing baskets through the “fair-marketing” approach, and what is called “differentiated” education. The ISA used a “pilot project” approach in which—once having selected a community where the greatest potential existed of extensive investments turning out well—all efforts are made to train local leadership in the methods and techniques of managing and administering the projects. Once a base of “qualified leadership” has been identified, then these leaders would serve as intermediaries between local communities and funding agencies. Typically, they are young men, who speak Portuguese fluently, hold high prestige in their communities, are politically astute, and have an “entrepreneurial” outlook for their community’s or people’s future. These indigenous “entrepreneurs” are both facilitators of change and yet, they run the greatest risk of being de-legitimized should they lose their support in their home bases, or are directly affected by traditional means of repressing the accumulation of power, i.e., sorcery.

## **THE PAMAACLE COMPLEX: “SUCCESS STORIES” AND THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD**

The “educational complex” at *Pamaale* is not exactly a permanent village but rather an NGO creation that has received large investments from Norwegian foundations, with the support of the largest and foremost NGO working today in the Northwest Amazon. It (the NGO) has focused its investments in the *Pamaale* community as one of its “pilot projects” for well-integrated “sustainable development.”

The communities of the middle Içana region, where the *Pamaale* community is located, were among those involved in the “religious wars” of the evangelical communities in the 1950s and 60s against the communities of the upper Aiary, guided by their pajés (shamans) (Wright 2005, 1998); consequently, few elders of the villages on the mid-Içana today remember the ancient traditions in any great depth. It is not clear either whether the chanters among them even use tobacco (prohibited by the *crentes*), though they do know orations for curing sicknesses.

Overall, the evangelical tradition continues to dominate in this region; the elders in the communities of the area cannot really revitalize what they gave up or

threw away decades ago in such a traumatic way. The younger generation, however, led by several charismatic leaders, who have strong support from the NGO, is actively forging a new culture of educated “entrepreneurs” who celebrate the school calendar with revitalized dance-festivals. Since they are *crentes*, however, there is no drinking of fermented beverages, *caxiri*, which was an essential feature of the traditional dances.

Over the past twenty years, the NGO has invested heavily in the *Pamaale* community in the following ways: (1) an aquaculture project which was linked to the school as a source of food for the students; (2) the installation of a small hydroelectric dam at a nearby stream to generate energy for the school; (3) a well-equipped school with computers, projectors—a lot of things that other schools, less favored, do not have; (4) a National Research Foundation-funded project on “The Trails of Knowledge” for the young students; (5) telecommunications with a satellite dish (the only one in the region). And in many other ways. The *Pamaale* community has received more funds from external foundations (Norwegian) than any other Baniwa or Kuripako community in the entire region.

The location of the differentiated school is the historical, ancestral settlement of a single important phratry, the *Walipere dakenai*, who today are predominantly evangelical[3]. That is one clear indication of the favoritism being played out in benefitting this phratry and marginalizing others, such as the upriver Hohodene communities of Ukuki and Uapui on the upper Aiary River. These two “traditional” communities are among the few today who are engaged in projects to “revitalize” their traditions such as initiation ceremonies and shamanism.

Among the NGO’s justifications for the preference of one indigenous association over another was its great “distance” from the villages of the “traditionals,” and that there were not enough local collaborators to cover the whole area. In other words, for convenience’s sake. Considering the substantial financial resources available at that time (in the millions of Brazilian Reais, as demonstrated by its annual reports available online), this was a questionable justification behind which was its almost exclusive support of the integrated development complex at the village of *Pamaale*.

Why were the *Walipere-dakenai* of one association being so privileged? In no small part, it was due to the leadership of two brothers: Bonifacio Fernandes and Andre Fernandes, both from the same village of *Walipere-dakenai*, both ex-coordinators of the OIBI (Indigenous Organization of the Isana River Basin); one became Director of the FOIRN and the other Vice-Director, and now one is the vice-prefect of the municipal government while the other has started his own NGO in Manaus. Andre is a very successful interlocutor and intermediary between his communities and the White people. However, his vision of the ideal “way of life” does not extend much beyond those communities where there is evangelism; the OIBI orbit.



Today, these and other Baniwa leaders occupy governmental positions at the municipal, regional, and federal levels, through which they have gained power to channel financial resources back not only to their communities but to the whole region as well. This initially produced tensions with the elder generations, because the young leaders were gaining power that their community elders perceived as a challenge to their traditional authority (see Garnelo 2002; Wright 2009a, 2009b). The role of the NGO in supporting certain *chapas* (voting tickets with allied leaders) and not others has been significant.

There are numerous ways in which outside observers can see this reshaping of indigenous identity through the “differentiated” school at *Pamaale*. The dance festivals held at *Pamaale* is one good example. In the dances performed today, the young adult men and women adorn themselves with body paint, feather headdresses, woven skirts, and necklaces, somewhat like the ancestors’ ways, which they seek to revitalize. The body paint and decorations with heron feathers, however, are altogether distinct from the old ways of adornment, as illustrated by photos from the early 1900s, the end of the 1920s, and the 1950s. The men today play the (non-sacred) flutes; the women accompany them, somewhat like the old ways. Their festivals, however, are held to celebrate, for example, the “first ten years of the school.” This is a reflection of the NGO’s image (which also celebrated the first ten years of its existence in 2007) that has been incorporated into the community’s self-image.

The young adults seek to incorporate the successful role model of the ISA style of life as researchers and administrators, utilizing elements of the old culture in order to show that, while modern and technologically instructed, they still respect some of the traditions. Note, however, that the young adults do not dance to remember the way the *jaburu* stork danced in ancient times, nor do they use the rattles that accompanied the taking of *caapi* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*, or *yaje*). Nor the *surubim*-flutes, considered to be the hallmark of Baniwa identity by the traditional elders.

In other words, the ritual process displayed at *Pamaale* is not one characterized by the remembering of the primordial roots in order to produce new generations, as the community of Ukuki does, but rather, the indigenization of an essentially exogenous model of time and identity in the production of graduating classes of students. In the 1970s, the elders of Uapui would say, “the evangelicals only want to become like Whites.” At that time, there was no other stable and accepted model of the Whites which could be successfully incorporated into the social and ritual process, except for the *crente* cycle of rituals. Today, however, the dances at *Pamaale* celebrate the “new Baniwa” entrepreneurial culture (the conjunction of “sustainable projects” with the “differentiated education”), added onto the pre-existing layer of the *crente* identity. In other words, the “ancestral

way of life” as interpreted by the *Pamaale* students, employs some of its symbols but at the service of the new identity.

This transformation, still in process, can be seen to have its advantages and its problems. The great advantage is that the students demonstrate that there is a certain space for both layers of identity to co-exist. The fact that the school has lasted ten years is certainly something that should be celebrated. The problems, however, stem from (1) privileging and favoring one cultural formation economically, politically, and socially, while marginalizing others; (2) ignoring altogether the possibility of regenerating the shamanic worldview in favor of an indigenized evangelical ethic and support for the Western scientific mode of research; and (3) stimulating the formation of competing cosmologies and cosmopraxes. Without addressing these problems, the future is very uncertain; one day, the funding may very well not be renewed. Then what?

Several years ago, the *Pamaale* students participated in a festival hosted by the Ukuki community for the combined inauguration of the “House of Adornments” and initiation rite. What began as the “traditional dances” of the *Kwaipan*, ended up as a discussion about the problems of the *Pamaale* school, in typical indigenist meeting style. “The meeting was interesting,” the chief of Ukuki said, but

Their culture [i.e., of the students] referring to the dances was no longer like the dances of old and rather like a remembrance of the dances of our ancestors; the cultural dances took a long time to be presented to other people from other villages, in short, it was a commemorative *fiesta* just for the sake of having a *fiesta*. The meeting was more to solve problems of the indigenous schools. (Interview by the author. 10/2008)

Another feature of the new cultural formation at *Pamaale* has been, I believe, to shift the sources of knowledge about the environment and ecological resources over to well-trained individuals whose perspectives privilege the Western technical and administrative know-how and less the knowledge of the original ecologists, the *pajés*. Since most of the students come from evangelical families, and the leadership of the OIBI is evangelical, it comes as no surprise that little credence is given to the *pajés*’ ecological knowledge.

The sacred stories of the Baniwa demonstrate the *pajés*’ critical role in securing food resources for the communities under their protection. Phratries sometimes went to war because of one shaman’s upsetting the cosmic balance in food resources. The *pajés* have the responsibility of ensuring that no sorcerer penetrates the cosmos and casts a spell to make the fish die, or kill people. In one of the first and most important “creation stories,” the Great Tree of Sustenance, the source of all food for humanity, was also the source of all shamans’ powers, *malikai* (Wright 2009; Cornelio et al. 1999; Hill 1984, 1993). Shamanic knowledge and power is inseparably intertwined with the cycles of food production. This is an important relation which has been virtually ignored by the *crentes* and the ISA.

The communities of the middle Içana region gained a foothold early on in the national and international markets through the sale of baskets and other artwork, and a supposedly Baniwa brand of pepper. The communities of the Aiary did their best to participate in the basket production but, for various reasons, were unsuccessful. So, while the middle Içana bloc had its projects funded, headwater communities of the Aiary have waited for years until an opportunity appears.

Thus, among the Baniwa of the mid-Içana, the logic of market values—competition, quality management, business administration, rewarding “achievements,” celebrating “commemorative” events modeled on the ideas of “success stories”—has become rooted in forming and reproducing the new entrepreneurial culture among those communities targeted for benefits. This, however, has presented more problems than solutions, as I’ve shown in regard to the Baniwa “Art Project” (Wright 2009).

As the “Art Project” began to lose its strength (due to a variety of reasons, among them, the greater attraction of extractivist labor, which the Baniwa have done since the eighteenth century, potentially more lucrative than the more demanding and tedious work of weaving baskets of all sizes and shapes), a new “Baniwa Pepper” project began with the selling of a type of pepper that the Baniwa leadership claimed was specific to their culture. The NGO again supported the project. The initiative, however, caused a great deal of “resentment among other ethnic groups” of the Alto Rio Negro, as the Director of the FOIRN pointed out (Unesp interview, 2011), who affirm that the pepper is not exclusively the property of the Baniwa. The type of pepper commercialized is common throughout the region; therefore, the Baniwa cannot have claimed it as exclusively their own.

The communities who are not explicitly included in funding, express their historical frustration at exclusion—especially when substantial funds from foreign countries are not distributed evenly—for this has been the seedbed of envy, humiliation, and jealousy in a society that seeks to be egalitarian. Often, the funding organizations are not even aware of such differences because the community or leaders in power gloss over the existing discontent. How do the marginalized communities perceive this situation? A year ago, the chief of the Ukuki community stated in interview that:

The only thing that affects the region is when pilot projects are elaborated covering the whole region, and the communities (like ours) are not contemplated when the project is approved. (LF-RMW interview, 2010)

The *Pamaale* school complex stands out in the Northwest Amazon region as a reference point for the relations between the Baniwa and the outside world. A large contingent of people along the Aiary River is not content with this situation. They ask: why can they not get a piece of the cake? Why is just one place singled out to receive benefits? Furthermore, the local history of relations amongst communities of affinal phratries on the Aiary and Içana was already marked by

stories of treachery and sorcery accusations. The Hohodene consider themselves to be the more “traditional” communities, in contrast with the Walipere-dakenai of the middle-Içana communities who have traveled much further down the way to becoming a success model in the eyes of the exogenous population.

Consequently, despite the appearances, there is great resentment in the area, which has reinforced the long-time division between Catholics and *crentes*. The communities of the upper, backwaters region of the Aiary feel that the favored “way of life” is the technocratic, bureaucratic, administrative, “scientific” way that they see unfolding in *Pamaale*. The upper Aiary river communities would also like to have a guaranteed supply of food in their communities. They would also like to have a kind of school like *Pamaale*, with computers, laptops, etc. They believe these innovations can co-exist with their traditional cosmologies. Why then are they not contemplated when the resources are distributed? Such marginalization can produce resentment among a people which has been disadvantaged for centuries.

Ideally, projects should be relevant to the greater “health and wellbeing” of a *people*, not one community or one association. Health and wellbeing are defined by Baniwa sacred stories and *practices*, and not by money or marketability alone. The Baniwa sacred stories of creation tell of various moments when the ancestors of each phratry received the fruits of the primordial Tree of Sustenance, the first tree of manioc and cultivated plants, and the primordial sources of fish (Cornelio et al. 1999). While there may have been differences in the resources that each phratry received (one phratry received more than another of a food resource, or of shamanic power), nevertheless *all phratries received a portion*. The idea of one phratry benefiting and the others not at all runs against the original ethics of resource distribution.

As the current Director of the Federation (FOIRN) observed in a recent interview:

The ISA [Instituto Socioambiental], who supported the development of the [pepper] project together with the Baniwa, has a very strong presence in the region. I would say that they even compete with the FOIRN on other matters. Their active presence is very great, because they are intellectuals who make up the ISA, they are not indigenous. So, they have influence in the region, and things end up being guided by them. (Unesp interview, 2011)

The Director of the FOIRN went on to clarify that:

The ISA has helped us a great deal, but at certain moments we get worried. If I am your partner, I think that I have to keep you informed of what I am doing, discussing, and not creating exclusivity in the region—we *have to prioritize all the regions* [my emphasis]. But in fact, I think that we are losing space in that sense. If there is an action that has to be led by the indigenous people, it is the FOIRN that is the representative. It’s the FOIRN that has to discuss it. Now, on the question of assessment and consultancy, I see another situation. For example, we don’t have an indigenous lawyer, we don’t have an indigenous doctor. We need these professionals in order to contribute, but on the question of the

struggle of the indigenous peoples, I think that it should be headed by the indigenous peoples. (Unesp interview, 2011)

In various similar cases reported in Latin America, this kind of relation has produced either *dependence* (“patron/client”), or “competition” between indigenous and non-indigenous associations. Instead of being “partners,” as in the beginning, one (the NGO) “competes” with the indigenous organization for ways to use the natural resources and create an alternative economy, with brand names, patents, etc.

Evidently, greater attention could be given to finding culturally-appropriate, non-hierarchical means for distribution of available resources to assist indigenous peoples to make their own decisions, based on their criteria, and not that of “marketable projects.” Indigenous religious traditions and specialists provide a privileged understanding of “cosmo-praxis” which must serve as the springboard from which sustainable development projects are formed. It is a question of equitability, the key to opening the door to harmonious conviviality.

Summarizing, the strategies of the NGOs we’ve discussed were based on distinct views of how indigenous struggles can best be supported. First, the ARC had as its working objective: “a public-interest research organization dedicated to making anthropological ideas and knowledge relevant to some of the most pressing social problems of the modern world.” This meant above all, but not exclusively, indigenous peoples’ struggles with the multinational corporations. Sandy held a certain view of this struggle which some characterized as “Manichean,” i.e., the multinational corporations and the governments were the “evil,” and indigenous peoples were the “victims.” This sort of approach was appropriate for a certain time and context.

Once beyond those stages, then the need is greatest for a culturally-appropriate, non-hierarchical distribution of available resources to assist indigenous peoples to make their own decisions, based on their own collectively-generated criteria. Sandy Davis dedicated much of his intellectual production at the Bank grappling with the problem of social exclusion, seeking ways to include as many members of a community as possible fully in project elaboration and realization. He also believed that indigenous religious traditions, and specialists provide a privileged understanding of “cosmo-praxis” which could serve as the springboard from which sustainable development projects can be formed. In the case of the Northwest Amazon, however, indigenist politics have produced a situation that is, instead, grounded in competitive success stories, which have as one undesired consequence the marginalization of communities not “chosen” as beneficiaries of change.

## NOTES

1 The little booklet was complemented by a short 30 min. film titled “The Yanomama: a People in Crisis”, which I co-edited based on footage by the Consolata missionary John Saffirio who had lived with the Yanomami as missionary for decades and had done his dissertation at Pittsburgh in Anthropology. Saffirio had witnessed the devastating effects on the Yanomami communities of the Auaris River, whose villages unfortunately were in the route of the Northern Perimeter highway. The film was a tool to use in talks at local high schools, colleges and universities to educate the public about the Yanomami situation. We also organized an exhibition of Yanomami drawings, by people who lived along the highway, called “Worlds in Collision” at Tozzer Library, Harvard University, in 1985. The film and drawing illustrate how brutally their worlds had changed after the building of the highway.

2 Baniwa society is comprised of three major phratries—the Hohodene, Walipere dakenai, and Dzauinai—each with ancestral connections to certain rivers, or parts of rivers where they make their settlements today. Each has its ancestral place of origin. Internally, the three main phratries are subdivided into a number of sibs related amongst themselves according to a model of agnatic siblings, who were the first ancestors that emerged from the creation places. The ancestral siblings are ordered hierarchically from elder brother to younger brother sibs, which determines up to a certain point, ceremonial roles, political power, and economic wealth. The eldest of the siblings is considered a “chiefly” sib, the next eldest a “warrior” sib, the next, a shaman sib, and finally, the “servant” sib.

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