The Hyperreal Indian

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> How to fight injustice without creating injustice? (Fuentes, 1988)

An affair to remember

On 9 May 1990, 123 Tukano men, women and children were expelled from their land in the upper Uaupés region by twenty-eight soldiers of the Brazilian army. The Indians were panning for gold in the Pari Cachoeira III Indian Area, a small patch of land near the Colombian border, that had been allotted to them by the military a year earlier. Claiming the Indians were involved with gold smuggling and, as an extension, with drug traffic and Colombian guerrillas, the soldiers forced the Indians out of their homes at gunpoint and made them walk for days along heavily flooded paths carrying all their belongings to the villages of relatives. The military affirmed that those 123 Indians were out of the 'Indian Area', even though cement posts announced that a demarcation had taken place around them. To crown the expulsion, the army men burnt the Indian houses and destroyed their gold panning equipment.

I heard outraged accounts of this story from colleagues in Brasilia before I got the details from three Tukano men who went down to the capital three weeks after the incident to demand of federal authorities that steps be taken to correct the injustice done to their people.[1] The three Tukanoans also told me about the reception they had from one of the members of the Indian support organization they first approached to ask for help. The negative reaction they got from this white man, who was there to assist the Indians in coping with breaches of human rights, was the trigger for the following analysis about the changes that have occurred in non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[2] But before going into it, I must give some background information about the three Tukanoans.

Those same Indians who were now denouncing an arbitrary act by the

military had two or three years before come under heavy criticism and even rejection from white indigenists and other Indians for having made agreements with a mining company and with the military in charge of the Calha Norte Project.[3] The Paranapanema mining enterprise offered the Indians the service of expelling thousands of illegal gold prospectors from their land in exchange for its right to mineral exploitation on an industrial scale. The military promised the Indians schools, hospitals and funding for economic development in exchange for a huge reduction of their traditional lands in the Uaupes region.

After long years of crusade through endless halls in Congress and in the federal government, in an exhausting and demoralizing struggle to get their lands properly demarcated, the three Tukanoans and their faction finally decided to accept the military proposal to have their territory cut up into small parcels. At least, they reasoned, the Indians would have schools, hospitals and other services as well as royalties from the mining company which, by the way, had the backing of the military.

That agreement cost the Indians a long and bitter ostracism by the indigenist 'community'. But that was a calculated risk, and they took it without the innocence of the uninformed or ignorant, for all along they were aware of the possible repercussions of their agreements with the very sectors that epitomize 'the enemy'.

Two years later they felt betrayed both by the mining company and by the military. Paranapanema abandoned the area saying that the region's resources were not economically worth the investment, leaving the Indians with the imminent threat of reinvasion by placer miners. The military, claiming that their funds had been devoured by inflation, failed to build the promised hospitals, schools and economic projects, and instead erected their own outposts throughout the area. Worst of all was the Indians' feeling that their 'co-option' had been for nothing, especially after the incident at Pari Cachoeira III. Their ethical immolation, as it were, at the stake of the indigenous-indigenist movement had served no purpose. After all, what they had done, debasing themselves in the eyes of their peers, had been for the cause of Tukano well-being and the tranquillity of a demarcated territory, unsatisfactory as it might be.

The three Tukano men proceeded to tell me that their encounter with the representative of the Brasilia NGO had the character of a police interrogation: how many Indians were involved in guerrilla activities, in narcotraffic, in gold smuggling? Had their traditional trails through the forest to Colombia (where many of their relatives live) been enlarged to facilitate drug traffic? Even the legitimacy of their claims about the official

status of Pari Cachoeira III was called into question. They were told that by bringing their complaints to the capital city they were jeopardizing their case because they were 'poking the beast with a short stick', that is, they were pushing their luck too far with the powerful in government by nagging them with their petty problems. They had their dealings with the Paranapanema mining company and with the military 'thrown in their faces'. In the end, they were told that the NGO could do nothing for them until all its members had a meeting to discuss the case.

Disappointed and disoriented the three Indians looked for old ac-quaintances from their 'co-option' days. They contacted Romeu Tumá, the director of the Federal Police, whom they had met during their nego-tiations with the Calha Norte military (they had helped him burn up their traditional coca (*ipadu*) plantations and handed him their shotguns); they turned to journalists and anthropologists (including those they had prohibited from going into their area during their interlude with the powerful) and, with their help, ended up at the Attorney General's office, the official and legitimate body that, since the 1988 Constitution, has been charged with assisting the Indians in their legal claims.

The incident as reported to me by the three Indians and by a few angry anthropologists and journalists, plus my own experience with indigenist activism, have prompted me to reflect upon the way the indigenist scene in Brazil has been transformed in the last decade. It is not my intention to pass judgement on either whites or Indians, nor to pursue an exegesis of the case (I do not, for instance, have the NGO representative's version of it). What I want to do is to take that occurrence in Brasilia as one of those privileged social dramas that are laden with meaning, allowing us to unveil sociological, political and symbolic dimensions that might otherwise remain unnoticed in the dim light of semi-awareness. Some context, however, is required so as to bring out the significance of this social event.

The focus of my attention is the indigenist activities of the secular, non-official support group organizations that have sprung up from among civil society in Brazil in the last twelve years. Important as they may be, neither the official indigenism as practised by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), nor the Church's brand (via the Conselho Indigenista Missionário – CIMI) will be included here. My purpose is to examine the trajectory of lay associations from rather amorphous and humble beginnings to a formalistic maturity, and what has happened to the figure of the Indian since the support groups metamorphosed into bureaucratic bodies.

The end of 'communitas'

The contemporary phase of civil activism in the field of indigenism, to all intents and purposes, began in 1978. It was triggered by the federal government's threat to 'emancipate' the Indians. What that meant was to legally declare them non-Indians and thus exempt the state from the duty of protecting them as well as their traditions and their lands.[4] Drafted by the former President Oeisel and publicly defended by his Minister of the Interior, Rangel Reis, the emancipation decree worked as a catalyst in bringing together into the same arena a wide gamut of professionals, such as anthropologists, lawyers, journalists, artists and churchmen, among others. Taking turns as solo and choir on the politically inflamed stage of indigenism, they alternated with Indian leaders, who seemed to spring up on the public scene as if by magic, to monopolize the media. It was the heroic moment of present-day indigenism. Nurtured by the success of their protests, that led to the shelving of the emancipation bill in 1980, the Indians created the União das Nações Indígenas (Union of Indigenous Nations), while the whites organized a plethora of Indian support groups. Practically every state capital in the country had its ANAI (Associacão Nacional de Apoio ao Indio) or its CPI (Comissão Pró-Indio). But, like *Blade Runner* replicants, they were as if programmed to be short-lived. With a few exceptions, such as the São Paulo CPI, the Acre and Porto Alegre ANAIs, none of the support groups created at that time survived the end of that heroic moment.

Initially, there was a climate of 'communitas', if I may appeal to Turner's convenient expression (1969), when excruciatingly long meetings going on far into the night took place in church basements or in the domestic spaces of enthusiastic militants. That phase, however, was predictably short, as befits 'communitas', that realm of anti-structure which stands out for its ephemeral liminarity. The *esprit de corps* that surrounded the activists was like ideological parentheses which at once united them in a single body and set them apart from the rest of the world. With the constancy and consistency of a cloud, it began to fade away with the first signs of internal strife and later with the quest for a more structured organization that would give the indigenist movement a more solid sociological presence.

In 1982 signs of divergence between Indians and whites were already perceptible. By then the Indian movement had grown to be pan-Indian, reaching out to all regions of the country and to most indigenous groups. In that year, during the first national meeting of Indian leaders held in Brasilia, most of the anthropologists and other activists present rebelled against the Indians when they invited as a lecturer the President of the

Indian Foundation, Colonel Leal, who was also a member of the National Security Council. At a time when opposition to the military was growing fast, the Indians' idea of bringing a National Security colonel to honor their meeting was felt by the activist whites as a slap in the face. After having helped the Indians with fund-raising and organization of the event, they claimed the right to tell them what was right and wrong, who were the good guys and the bad guys. Several whites said they had been betrayed by the Indian leaders who trampled on their political principles. The message inserted in such a reaction could be read – and actually was by some observers – as this: we, whites, help you, Indians, and in turn you, Indians, must do what we, whites, think is correct. Actually, that attitude echoed a common procedure in those days, which was to use the Indian issue as a channel to air criticisms against the military regime. The Indian question was never as politically hot as, say, the workers' movement in São Paulo. The 'Indian' theme was then one of the very few political issues one dared raise without being caught by censorship and reprisals against freedom of expression.

But until 1985, with the advent of the so-called New Republic,[5] the white indigenist movement managed to keep an appearance of unity by suppressing internal differences, for example, between Church members, lawyers, anthropologists and journalists. They were still united against the common enemy, the military. During civilian Tancredo Neves' presidential campaign between November 1984 and March 1985, it seemed that at long last the dream of indigenist activists participating in the drawing up of an official Indian policy was about to come true. There was the expectation that the movement would leave opposition to become part of the government. But Tancredo's death and the rise to power of the Sarney administration demonstrated in a matter of a few months that there was nothing new about the New Republic. The indigenists had to suffer the bitter taste of a crumbled utopia (Fundação Nacional Pró-Memória, 1988). By the first half of 1985, it became clear that the military era of indigenism was anything but over. Quite the contrary, the militarization of Amazonia and the Indian issue intensified as the 1980s unfolded. The common enemy was alive and well in their olive-green splendour.

However, the chimera of power had brought the first discord in the harmony of the indigenist movement. Not even the awareness that Indian support groups would continue as usual in opposition to the eternal military was sufficient to stifle squabbles and competition between some of them. The united front of a few months before showed rips that were hard to mend. During the Constitutional Assembly of 1987–88, the prolonged lobbying by indigenist groups dispelled the appearance of peaceful

collaboration. A bitter argument developed between São Paulo indigenists and CIMI over the use of the term 'Nation' to define indigenous societies, a notion that infuriated the military who perceived it as a plot against national sovereignty. CIMI's insistence on maintaining that term cost them a long defamatory campaign by anti-Indian lobbyists. But by then there was no longer an *esprit de corps* that might prompt all concerned to join ranks against the fierce attacks on the Church. Since then CIMI and the Church at large have been seen as quasi-enemies by some lay support groups. At the same time, each Indian support organization has gone its separate way.

But what interests me here is not the disagreement between support groups. I wish to call attention to the trajectory of these groups from informal gatherings to professional entities. As we look at the surviving Indian support groups in Brazil, and perhaps elsewhere, we see a pattern forming through the repetition of the same route toward bureaucratization which in turn unveils a curious transformation in their mutual relationships, from organic unity to regimented uniformity. This is the process of routinization of what Weber called charisma and that we may paraphrase here as routinization of heroism.

En route to the office

The moment of dissillusionment with the New Republic was also the time when indigenist organizations began to consolidate their bureaucratic apparatus. Professionalism in work relations and financial commitments to international funding agencies created the need for structures that would be appropriate for the management of an unprecedented amount of resources both in terms of money and personnel. Many new employees had no experience whatsoever with Indians, but possessed technical skills which were indispensable in getting the new bureaucratic machine to work smoothly.[6] Computerized information created a network with foreign agencies that turned complex live issues into instantly digested shorthand messages. The need to rally support for indigenous rights from various quarters of public opinion produced a sort of international *lingua franca* of indigenism in which subtleties were deleted and messy political games pasteurized. And so we reach 1990 with an indigenist panorama that has little to remind us of the solidarity, agitation and civic rapture of the seemingly remote days of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The Tukano episode in Brasilia, like a potent floodlight, comes in to illuminate two different theses, one from a classic author of sociology, Weber, the other by an *enfant terrible* of postmodernity: Baudrillard. In a

here-and-now fashion, that event highlights the outcome of the passage from political bricolage to technical professionalism and its offspring, the simulacrum, or, if you will, from medieval to postmodern procedures in a flash of time. Let me take it step by step.

Weber tells us how crucial the creation of the *Kontor* or *bureau*, i.e. the office, was in the history of bureaucracy, which began in the Middle Ages. It was then possible for new specializations, attitudes and situations to emerge and with them an ethical outlook. The office, says Weber, is a 'vocation' that is expressed in 'the devotion to impersonal and functional goals' (Weber, 1978: 957–9). Granted that Weber had in mind medieval despotic regimes rather than a harmless handful of well-meaning people such as those involved in late twentieth-century makeshift indigenism in Brazil, what is striking is that in either case personalism played a very strong role. In the Middle Ages as in the early 1980s the options remained basically the same: bureaucracy or dilettantism (Weber, 1978: 223). In fact, it practically stopped being an option when the first support groups took on the configuration of non-governmental organizations – the now ubiquitous NGOs – with their emphasis on efficiency, thus driving the lingering dilettantes out of existence.

Although the efficiency factor is the hallmark of bureaucracy, today's popular image of it is quite the opposite. One speaks of it as red tape, a confusion of entangled papers that clog up the flow of citizenship. 'To feed the bureaucratic machine' means to waste precious resources with little benefit besides perpetuating the *bureau* system.

In fact, it is not loss of efficiency that plagues bureaucracies (when that happens they are no longer bureaucracies but fall into some sort of perverse *bureaucratitis*). In a number of cases, it is the bureaucracy's own ethics that take priority over everything else. Although a *bureau* exists as a means to achieve some goal that is different from its own existence, the running of it creates such a complex web of rights and duties that it is not uncommon to find that much of the effort is put into the running itself at the expense of the goal to be achieved. Taking the Indian support NGOs as an example, the contrast is apparent between the old and the new formats. Whereas in the early days of civil indigenism the goal of defending indigenous rights was never lost sight of and the means were improvised, flexible and pragmatic, now the main concern often is with the means, such as fund-raising, accounting, salaries, high-tech equipment, report-writing and, in some cases, publishing. The NGOs may be very efficient in doing all that, but the flesh-and-blood Indians have been edged off stage.

The path to bureaucratization may be as inevitable for NGOs as for other organizations in the West, but in the case of indigenous support

groups, given their raison d'être, i.e. the defence of indigenous peoples in their right to be different, the uncomfortable coexistence between disjointed means and ends is particularly conspicuous. The logic of the *bureau* being characteristically alien to Indian societies, it is not uncommon for gross misunderstandings to arise between Indians and friends of the Indians. What is to be done about the Indians' otherness, that is so resistant to domestication by the logic of the *bureau*? How to control it and render it compatible with the 'impersonal and functional goals' of bureaucratic organization? How to overcome the disjunction between the organizational impetus of the NGOs and the need to act in the interface between indigenous and white polities? The Weberian 'vocation' of the office seems specially inappropriate to deal with the interethnic question for the simple reason that the Western 'rationality' it cherishes is at odds with both the ethos of most indigenous cultures and the 'irrationality' of most Indian–white relationships.

In following their Western destiny toward bureaucratization and, at the same time, dealing with Indian rights, the NGOs seem to have found a way out of the dilemma by creating a bureaucratizable Indian. Flesh-and-blood Indians would have to either be kept at arm's length, or have their wild otherness – a potential source of disorder – filtered and tamed, and be transformed into model Indians.

Bureaucratization may have meant greater efficiency – not always achieved, *malgré* Weber – but at the cost of a wide and still widening gap between NGOs and the social world and worldview of the Indians. The gap may become an abyss and, as such, it may soon bring the NGOs into question. It seems paradoxical that the explicit commitment of the indigenist private machine is to the flesh-and-blood Indian, but its working tool is the model Indian. The 'real Indian' would have to be relegated to a remote source of ideological raw material that would justify that commitment.

Indeed, the 'real Indian' is getting farther and farther away and becoming increasingly unintelligible from the point of view of the technical and administrative rationale of the NGO office. It is as if there were two opposing forces in tension, the real needs of real Indians embedded in the irrationality of contorted and controversial relationships in the interethnic arena, and the office mystique generated by the need for resource management required for the self-maintenance of the office.[7] Caught up in this tug-of-war, the NGOs seem to have forged for themselves an ontological autonomy vis-a-vis that which was both their origin and their purpose, i.e., the rights of real Indians, regardless of their idiosyncracies or cultural particulars.

Furthermore, in their oscillation between the ethics of human rights and the impersonality of bureaucratic practice, the NGOs run the risk of falling prey to an extremely nebulous social and symbolic field where individual morality becomes confused with the basic guiding principle of advocating for the Indians as subjugated peoples. Such a confusion was very apparent in the case of the three Tukanoans. It is as if by practising condemnable acts these real Indians dishonoured the NGOs, even if those acts were motivated by the desire to meet the needs of their own people. By reprimanding the three individuals, that friend of the Indians in Brasilia was also withdrawing support to the 123 dislodged Tukanoans deep in the Uaupés jungle.

From the time when the workplaces of alternative indigenist action were our kitchens and living rooms until today, when NGOs have computerized offices, the whites' Indian cause has been pursuing its Weberian destiny which is now on the verge of imploding into what Baudrillard has called *simulacrum*.

> It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again the real will have to be produced . . . (Baudrillard, 1983: 4)

It results from the perhaps totally unconscious construction of a simulation of the real Indian, the model that by anticipation replaces the lived experience of indigenous peoples. It is a model that moulds the Indians' interests to the organization's shape and needs. Again, the treatment of the Tukanoans in Brasilia exposes a tendency that has been around for a while in the indigenist circuit, namely the fabrication of the perfect Indian whose virtues, sufferings and untiring stoicism have won for him the right to be defended by the professionals of indigenous rights. That Indian is more real than the real Indian. He is the hyperreal Indian.

From generic to domesticated Indian

Such is the Indian of many support organizations. If my comments are not intended to – and in fact do not – invalidate the merit of the NGOs' efforts in defending the human rights of indigenous peoples,[8] they do point out the dangerous course that at least some NGOs are taking. While older support groups have changed their approach in order – in their view – to best serve the cause of human rights, new ones have come into existence with an already made up bureaucratic agenda. But for most, especially the well

established, defending Indians has become a sort of business enterprise, complete with market competition and publicity.

Since Darcy Ribeiro's frustrated prophecy of the generic Indian (1970: 222), that ethnically hollow prisoner of the interethnic war, to the golden years of hard work to raise a pan-Indian awareness, and now to the bureaucratization of private indigenism, the Indian has been the target of a peculiar ethic on the part of his white allies. As in the Indianist phase of Brazilian literature, when nineteenth-century writers such as Jose de Alencar conjured up an Indian character that was to feed into the nationalist dream, the contemporary version of the friends of the Indians also portrays him with a generous dash of romanticism. In fact, he is required to display, if not redeeming exoticism, at least an invincible integrity of principles: die, if need be, as the hero of official indigenism, Marshall Rondon, would say[9] but never surrender to greed over your lands, never succumb to the bribes of the powerful, never capitulate to corruption, always denounce injustice. The more stoic and resistant to temptation, the more deserving he will be of white solidarity. Co-option was not made for Indian use.

Virtuous principles, ideological purity, willingness to die heroically for cherished ideals are no more than white fantasies. Indigenist activists who cultivate such an image do not seem to realize that, by demanding it of the Indians they are, in fact, creating a model of perfection of the honourable, incorruptible Westerner. The contrast between the martyr Indian and the sold-out Indian is a facsimile of the contrast between the honest white and the corrupt white.

Ribeiro's generic Indian was the intellectual creation of a forecast catastrophe. He depicted an amorphous mass of uprooted individuals with no specific identity wandering about the fringes of Brazilian society carrying the weight of a demoralizing stereotype which at one and the same time discriminated against them for being Indians and for pretending to be whites. As an idea, the generic Indian did not take off for lack of social and historic resonance. Like a hologram in search of an operator, it crumbled into the void of its own fiction.

In turn, the hyperreal Indian of many NGOs, this obscure object of defence, is an appropriate working hypothesis for the professional activist. The model Indian, even though the projection of an illusion, has become the NGOs' ethical hologram. On that day in May in the NGO's office in Brasilia, the white man in attendance expected to see a hologram of the model Indian, but in came three real, problematical and embarrassing Tukanoans upsetting the routine of the office. Strange occurrences such as this are apt to recur: officials of pro-Indian NGOs evict flesh-and-blood

Indians who interrupt their work in defence of the Indian. Their request for help could not be met until the white directors got together to decide whether or not to take up the case. It was necessary to weigh the pros and cons of a potentially harmful association with such volatile actors of contact politics.

The formalistic personas of present-day NGOs are one more manifestation of what C. Wright Mills called *managerial demiurge* in referring to the bureaucratization of domains such as academia (Mills, 1956). They also illustrate how means can take priority over ends, in a replay of the *Bridge on the River Kwai* syndrome. After all, what are the painstakingly built works for if not to be enjoyed in their own right, even if one forgets the original reason for their existence? It becomes a sort of blind alley, an obstructed ethical road where 'the hypersimilitude would amount to the assassination of the original, and therefore, to pure nonsense' (Baudrillard, 1981: 162). Rigid structures are created for the management of very often considerable resources that make possible the production and maintenance of the simulacrum of the Indian: dependent, suffering, a victim of the system, innocent of bourgeois evils, honourable in his actions and intentions, and preferably exotic (that is why the Yanomami are so popular among NGOs). The Indians thus created are like clones made in the image of what the whites themselves would like to be. Over and above the real Indian, the model Indian comes to exist as if in a fourth dimension, a being with whom one enjoys having close encounters of any kind.

Flesh-and-blood Indians are not themselves immune to simulation. Brazil is not lacking in examples of indigenous personalities who play up their hyperreal role on the interethnic stage at the same time as transporting NGO rhetoric to their communities, if they still live in them.

It is the model Indian that justifies funding and personnel for his defence, for otherwise, how would it be possible to convince financing agencies to contribute to the defence of recalcitrant Indians who manage their own alliances with whomever they choose, including some of the clearest opponents of the Indian cause? As most Brazilian NGOs operate with funding from foreign NGOs or governments, they are thus accountable to agencies for whom the Brazilian Indian is a vision evoking paradise lost, ecological disasters and First World guilt. Foreign agencies would have difficulty accepting that their money was being spent on Indians who were involved in objectionable compromises. Caught between Euro-American imagination and the demands of real Indians, Brazilian NGOs find themselves in a tight squeeze that has forced them to opt for institutional security, as the surest way to please their financial sources and thus get things done smoothly. In doing so, they are obliged to keep clear of ignoble

savages in their real-life dealings. In such a context, it is not surprising that NGOs have developed a selection process that favours well-behaved Indians who are more apt to reinforce the Western image of the suffering, helpless and noble savage.

It should be emphasized that there are fundamental differences between NGOs concerned with indigenous peoples. For instance, environmental NGOs tend to regard the Indians from opposing viewpoints: one sees them as predators and therefore excludes them from ecologically protected areas, even at the cost of eviction. The other naturalizes the Indian, reducing him to yet another endangered species, or to the role of custodian of nature. Indigenist NGOs contest both positions and focus instead on the ethical and political responsibility of both civil society and the state to defend the historic rights of indigenous peoples to traditional land and ethnic autonomy. They are less interested in the Indians' place in nature than in their mis(-)place in the Western world. In fact, this difference in perspective has led to a mild antagonism between indigenist and environmentalist NGOs.

There is also in Brazil at least one indigenous NGO, UNI (União das Nações Indígenas), that has an Indian as president and an agenda mostly oriented toward raising political awareness among young Indians without, however, grassroots involvement. From its São Paulo headquarters, in recent years, UNI has closely followed the pattern of white NGOs, in that it has increasingly emphasized fund-raising, development projects conceived and planned in its city office, and a tendency to adopt the simulacrum of the model Indian. Like many other NGOs, UNI has shown a special inclination to cherish the Yanomami as the epitome of the defenceless, 'pure' Indians in search of protectors.

I am excluding from the category of NGO a number of indigenous associations that are arranged along different lines from the bureaucratic template. They have no 'office', no full-time personnel, nor a managerial agenda. Furthermore, their undertakings are designed to bring together Indians with similar experiences and grievances. They are concerned with local people facing specific problems in specific contexts rather than with the generalized simulacrum which is the object of urban indigenism. Such associations still retain much of the old verve. They are run by people who have had prolonged first-hand contact with indigenous peoples from various regions of the country and are familiar with the diversity and contradictions of village life. The real Indian is not lost on them. But it is highly probable that they too will follow the path of routinization and bureaucratization if they are to survive, given that factors such as competition for funds favour impersonal, technical, efficiency-oriented

organizations. Bureaucratization is possibly a structural inevitability. If that is so, the figure of the hyperreal Indian is bound to spread like a symbolic metastasis in a mounting process of conformity and uniformiz-ation to a point when indigenous grievances and NGO responses will become virtually undifferentiated.

Obviously, this is not an individual process, as it is not the fault – or perhaps even choice – of any particular NGO for adhering to it. If it is structurally unavoidable, they can hardly escape it. The system in which the NGOs are situated operates in such a way as to generate an increasing complexity which may eventually lead to its own involution. It is symptomatic of this trend toward over-elaboration that NGOs are being created with the sole purpose of administering the finances of other NGOs, as in a corporate dream or science fiction nightmare. Whether the trend will continue in the direction of ever-increasing managerial sophistication, or whether it will degenerate into a machine gone berserk, a postmodern sorcerer's apprentice, is not yet known. What seems clear is that looking into the eye of the flesh-and-blood Indian is not on the agenda of these new managerial NGOs of the fourth kind.

Intimate enemy or remote friend?

We could hardly blame the three Tukanoans if, after being so un-generously treated in Brasilia, they repeated bandit Salvatore Giuliano's famous words: 'God protect me from my friends'. But they continued their pilgrimage through offices, hallways and living rooms requesting the help of whites to whom they had been anything but friendly. Such are the meanders of interethnicity, that turbulent flow of conflicting interests, forever creating oppositions that wind up contradicting each other.

Here proximity and distance show themselves to be categories even more relative than we had imagined. For colonized peoples such as once British-ruled East Indians, the white colonizer has become what Ashis Nandy (1983) has called the 'intimate enemy' who, hated as he may still be, is now ingrained in the new Indian self-awareness. But for 'nationalized' peoples such as indigenous populations, the sympathetic white is a 'remote friend' who takes on the role of defender, but who in general has no existential, intellectual or social intimacy with the Indians. It is their model rather than themselves that is the working instrument for the militant indigenist.

The relations between Indians and indigenist whites, who are allegedly enlightened regarding Indian affairs, are not close enough to permit the crossing of interethnic barriers. Collaboration between Indians and

indigenists is possible, but it is never a 'mechanical solidarity' in the Durkheimian sense, for it never happens between equals sharing a universe of sameness. An organic collaboration would also be unlikely, for it would first have to put the whites through the test of dealing directly with the real Indian. Since the functional interdependence that characterizes organic solidarity presupposes the interaction of elements that are different but of the same order, it would be necessary to abandon the hyperreal Indian or, conversely, to create the hyperreal indigenist, a likely possibility that has not yet come true (or has it?). What seems to be real enough, however, is the tendency for unequal, power-laden relations to develop, according to which the Indians to be defended become subaltern to the defending whites.

There are, to be sure, many points of convergence between members of NGOs and Indians, or the term 'Indian support NGOs' would be empty. After all, there are things to be done by whites on behalf of the Indians: writing documents, lobbying in Congress, securing funds for community projects, denouncing injustices or launching information campaigns to be used both internally and abroad. However, the reciprocal although true is not true in the same way. The indigenist NGOs owe their existence to the fact that the Indians are exploited by the national society at large and, until recently, had no proper channels through which to place their grievances.[10] If, by some unimaginable miracle, all Indian claims and needs were satisfactorily met, the NGOs' mission would come to an end and so would they. It is in this sense that the NGOs depend on the Indians for their survival. But their dependence is not on the Indians who pick fights, drink, accept bribes, deceive and go out of their minds in fits of frustration. As mentioned earlier – and here comes the paradox that inhibits organic collaboration – the bureaucratic machine of the support groups is fed by agencies oriented around ethical standards that are part of the Western value system. These standards, in turn, are instilled into the national NGOs, requiring that their concern be with ethically correct Indians. Thus, the NGOs depend not on the Indian, but on their own model Indian.

This kind of collaboration does not seem to be limited to indigenism.[11] It is even possible that it is an inescapable consequence of the 'defence of human rights' phenomenon in which the generic human being replaces the complex individual with both its noble and ignoble dimensions that fall out of bureaucracy's control. It is as human beings of the indigenous kind that the Indians are eligible for protection according to the precepts of the Universal Bill of Rights (Ramos, 1990b). This may be the only feasible way to raise collective awareness and bring visibility to political actors in the national and international arena. One either creates the generic human

being that is intelligible as a focus of public interest, or one risks having that focus fade out in the myriad of multivariant and incomprehensible alterities that populate the world. To leave individual and ethnic specificities undigested and ignored by the public at large is to create an ethical and political vacuum, thus surrendering the cause to the reasons of the nation-state. From this perspective, the effort and efficacy with which the NGOs have conducted their advocacy work must be duly acknowledged.

Suspicion

I don't think it is by chance that very few ethnographers are full-time professionals in indigenism.[12] Anthropological training includes one basic principle that might well be an antidote for the simulacrum virus, that is, a disposition to suspect, to distrust fixed truths. The questioning we do as our working routine has vaccinated us, at least in part, against that. On the other hand, our profession – here I am referring specifically to ethnography – puts us constantly in intimate contact with real, concrete Indians, with their virtues and their vices, their complexities and ambiguities, but never empty, never a perfect model of themselves, never 'frozen, cryonized, sterilised, protected *to death*' (Baudrillard, 1983: 15, his emphasis).

In this respect my comments are more akin to what Baudrillard calls 'anti-ethnology', implying the ethical and political commitment of ethnographers to the peoples they study, than to a scientist approach to indigenous cultures. Critical of ethnology *qua* science, he castigates it for following the 'logical evolution of a science which is to distance itself ever further from the object until it dispenses with it entirely' (1983: 14).

The complicity that is often created between the Indians and their ethnographers, often misunderstood by professionals of indigenism, comes from that common experience of ontologically unveiling each other. It is on the 'reality' generated from that experience that we build up our ethics regarding indigenous peoples, rather than on an image idealized by an aseptic and formal distancing. If ethnographers are frequently the source of ethnographic raw material for the products of professional activism it is because we are perceived as a first-order phenomenon, more accessible than the Indians themselves. When we translate our lived experience among the Indians to the language of symbolic consumption of alterity, we make available abridged images of those Indians that will be vicariously lived by the industry of indigenist activism. Our proximity with real Indians makes us into their surrogates. It is as if the NGO universe has created a space, a vacant position to be filled preferably by the model

Indian, failing that, by the ethnographer, as ersatz of the real Indian and, if at all possible, the real Indian himself.

It is apparent that what has been said here does not entail an apology for professional indigenism, but neither does it carry a negative judgement. Unlike criticism, a critique such as this aims at clarifying certain issues that have been kept obscure or not addressed at all. My analysis reveals, however, a concern for the future of indigenist activism in Brazil and elsewhere. In spite of the growth of the Indian movement in Brazil and of the increasingly audible voice of the Indians themselves, they still need the support and assistance of the whites. If that task is to be carried out with awareness, one must be on the alert for problems such as the constitution of an indigenist ethic, the distortions that the virus of simulation can impose on that ethic, and the change of priorities between means and ends leading professionalization to risk the loss of sensitivity, spontaneity and the sense of historical justice that accompanies the defence of indigenous rights. Obviously, one should not confuse political engagement with its bureaucratization. The latter may be a necessary medium for the exercise of the former, but it is wise to avert the risk of overturning the very premises that legitimate indigenist action.

Anthropologists and indigenists were together in the heroic phase of contemporary indigenism in Brazil. It seemed like an ideal partnership and a sensible and efficient division of labour: the ethnographers producing first-hand empirical information and analyses and the professional indigenists feeding the pertinent ethnographic accounts into the political circuit of interethnic contact. But episodes such as that involving the Tukanoans have made us rethink our association with professional indigenism. They have made us aware of the fact that our ethics do not always coincide with theirs. The ethnographer's allegiance is ultimately with the Indians themselves, real people going about their lives in a flow of ups and downs, and also with the principles of anthropology, especially the respect for diversified otherness. The habit of constant reflection, a part of our *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1974: 191), makes it difficult for us (and should actually preclude) to let final and established truths crystallize in our minds. Our commitment is to make explicit what was not explicit before. This paper has made me stop to think how professional indigenism has come into existence, how it has developed and where it seems to be going. In a word, it has been an exercise in anthropoligical suspicion.

NOTES

1. The case was filed at the Attorney General's office on 1 June 1990. The petition, No. 147/90, was addressed to the Army Minister, Carlos Tinoco Ribeiro Gomes.
2. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proliferated in various countries in the 1970s and 1980s. They are non-profit organizations and, as the name indicates, are independent of specific governments. In fact, they have come into existence as an attempt on the part of civil society to minimize the effects of predation on peoples and resources perpetrated either by private enterprise or by national governments. They fill in the gap between the interests of powerful economic concerns and those of environmentalists and ethnic minorities by operating in areas neglected by the state. Some NGOs have acquired considerable political stature and as a consequence have become strong lobbyists both with national states and international organizations, such as the World Bank, or the United Nations. They exist to pressure governments to obey the laws that protect the most fragile segments of national societies. Unlike minority support groups in the past, today's NGOs are distinct for their international, supra-state forums and networks and, in many cases, for the amount of human and financial resources they manage.
3. Calha Norte is a military project drawn up in secrecy in 1985. A year later, it became public and left speechless those concerned with its implications for the welfare of Amazonian Indians. It requires vast sums of money for the installation of a string of military outposts along the 6711 kilometre long strip of Brazil's north frontier. Its rhetorical emphasis is on national security against foreign incursions, guerrilla warfare and narcotraffic, as well as on the aspired to Brazilian hegemony in the region. Among the problems the Calha Norte project was to create for the Indians was the drastic reduction in their traditional territories (Ramos, 1990a).
4. Among the most comprehensive texts written on emancipation is the book edited by the Comissão Pró-Indio, a São Paulo based NGO (1979).
5. New Republic refers to the early transition phase from military to civil government. Although popular vote was still in the future, the prospect of having civilian Tancredo Neves elected by an electoral college created a climate of civil enthusiasm and optimism during the second half of 1984 and the first half of 1985, until Tancredo's death in April.
6. One cannot help evoking the reaction of a BIA employee in Washington, DC, as he lambasts affirmative action for bringing in incompetent Indians to work in the federal agency for Indian affairs. In his view, the BIA should maintain its priority for

technical skills favouring educated whites, Japanese or Blacks, rather than Indians who may know a lot about Indianness, but don't know anything about running a *bureau* (Feraca, 1990: 271–89).

7. In a nutshell, 'You need to spend money to raise money', as a spokesperson for a newly created environmental NGO in the United States expressed herself in an interview for the American Airline's magazine, *American Way* (15 November 1991: 76).

8. A clear example of the effect of perseverance in the face of official reluctance and private antagonism are the efforts of the Committee for the Creation of the Yanomami Park (CCPY), a São Paulo based NGO, for fifteen years engaged in the defence of Yanomami land rights and instrumental to the recent (November 1991) official granting of nearly 9.5 million square kilometres to the Yanomami in Brazil as their traditional territory.

9. Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, the founder of the Brazilian Indian Service in 1910, is the quasi-mythical father figure of indigenism in Brazil who ardently adhered to the principle that the helpless Indians need the protection of whites against other whites. See his rich autobiography edited by Viveiros (1958).

10. As of 1988, a major slice of indigenous rights has got out of NGOs' hands into the Attorney General's office. Article 232 of the new Constitution delegates to the latter the duty to take on any indigenous claim filed against private or public individuals or groups. It is rather ironic that this article was included in the text of the 1988 Constitution thanks to the untiring efforts of several NGOs. And yet it has had the effect of pre-empting a very important political space previously occupied by support groups. Although the NGOs' activities are not now and were not then limited to legal-juridical battles, it was no doubt one of their most important platforms.

11. Anthropologist Teresa Caldeira has called my attention to the fact that something similar occurs in the women's movement of Brazilian cities.

12. One ethnoglogist has even stopped collaborating with one of the major Brazilian NGOs after having repeatedly heard from them, perhaps half-jokingly, that the Indians she studies are too spoiled by acculturation to be worth bothering with.

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