Introduction

> Someone coming into a strange country will sometimes learn the language of the inhabitants from ostensive definitions that they give him; and he will often have to guess the meaning of these definitions; and will guess sometimes right, sometimes wrong.
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953)

Then we came across the Paranopyperewa river. They became enraged again.

– "Firstly we're going to kill. Our enemy is lurking in this dense jungle," they said.

At this point the late Tapi'awa became really angry.

– "I'm going to kill the great enemy before anything else, my kinsfolk, I haven't pierced anyone with my arrows, I haven't yet spent my rage-against-people," he said.

This is a passage from one of the many narratives on war conflicts that I collected during my fieldwork with the Parakanã, a Tupi-Guarani speaking people who inhabit the interfluve formed by the Tocantins and Xingu Rivers in the state of Pará, Brazil. When I began my research I was not exactly looking to study warfare or shamanism. In fact, I was too young and ignorant to know what I was going to study. The only plan I had in mind was to learn anything they might want to share with me. It took me a long time to begin to understand their stories. But as soon as I started to grasp the language, I would keep my tape recorder on; while the hours passed, they recounted long and detailed narratives on past war events or their dreams about enemies. As time went by, my research became focused on understanding why enmity occupied such a central place in their social lives, and how violence, predation, and familiarization could be internal and indispensable to their own definitions of how the world works.

By taking indigenous warfare as its theme, my research inevitably waded into an ethical and political quagmire. The imputation of violence to native peoples was a commonplace strategy for justifying their

reduction, expulsion, and extermination during colonial history. Notions such as "just war" and "rescuing captives" played a crucial role in that context, and the specter of anthropophagy served frequently to legitimize the enslavement of Amerindians. The problem, though, is the present, not the past. The image of savagery is still one of the weapons used to attack indigenous rights and lifeways, part of an ideological and practical struggle that continues unabated.

One must be aware of the silent continuities of colonial discourses. From the outset, indigenous warfare made a strong impression on the European imagination. When the Portuguese arrived at what would become Brazil, they encountered a vast Tupi-Guarani population distributed along five thousand kilometers of the Atlantic coast. This population shared the same sociocultural complex, centered on revenge warfare and ritual anthropophagy. The importance of these practices in indigenous social life, reported by Europeans of different nationalities and backgrounds, has been a dominant motif in Western accounts of Amerindian societies ever since. Yet this motif has never functioned in isolation. The European imagination has always swung between the image of the cannibal immersed in a state of chronic warfare and the noble savage living in natural freedom. Although antagonistic and apparently irreconcilable, these motifs eventually combined to define a mental attitude and a field of meanings, generating a schema for classifying and dominating the indigenous populations of the Americas.

The twin images of the noble and cannibal savage do not belong to the past alone. Anthropology is also its producer and product. Innocence and violence, abundance and scarcity, nature and culture, predation and reciprocity, communal sharing and self interest are terms that we combine and recombine on the basis of a single conceptual schema for which the conquest of the New World provided a fertile testing ground. The unease and fascination elicited by indigenous violence and peace are part of a primitivization device triggered by a diffuse but enduring conception that Amerindians are closer to nature (whether natural or human) than ourselves. Anthropology has frequently asked them to act as a measure of our own ways, so we can, as Rousseau put it, discern "what is original and what is artificial in the actual nature of man" ([1755] 1989:41).

Escaping this discourse means rejecting the stark alternative given to the "savage people of America" by Western thought: serving either as phantasmic tokens in a critique of our own values or to reaffirm, by means of contrast, these very same values. In this sense – though in this sense only – it makes little difference which pole is chosen: the noble savage or the cannibal barbarian. Quick to acknowledge the historical damage perpetrated in the name of the latter, we often overlook the effectiveness of the former. Yet there is nothing more paternalist than asking Amerindians to be essentially

good, a mindset that turns them into mere victims. Victimization is a form of denying the autonomy of the other, an attitude informing the authoritarian – though supposedly benign – models of relationship between the state and Amerindian populations.

The image of natural kindness can be as corrosive as the stigma of bestiality. Both served the purposes of the colonizers: native violence to justify the war of conquest and enslavement; native innocence to encourage their conversion into members of the flock of God. In our postcolonial world, some strands of anthropology have tried to rid themselves of any vestige of this colonial inheritance. Paradoxically, though, this expurgation is frequently pursued in an equally colonialist form by purifying indigenous social practices, deciding which of them have the right to exist in the non-European world of the past and present. Consequently, native warfare and cannibalism have been reduced to mere figments of the Western imagination or the unfortunate by-product of European expansion.

In the 1920s, Brazil was home to a cultural movement that rejected the dichotomy sustaining this political imagination. Trying to circumvent both nationalist regressionism and Europeanizing mimetism, Brazilian modernism used cannibalism as a positive metaphor, invoking sixteenth-century Tupi anthropophagy as a machine for opening onto the other, devouring the different and producing the new. This Brazilian cultural movement can be seen as a counter-discourse to the surviving ideological legacy of colonialism. Literary anthropophagy captured the deeper sense of literal anthropophagy, namely that of the constitution of subjects through the violent appropriation of principles of subjectification, which are, by necessity, external in origin. Cannibalism seeks to mobilize the other's perspective in order to reproduce the self, expressing the ambivalent interconnection between a centrifugal, heteronomic desire and the need to constitute the self as an internally multiple subject (Fausto 1999a). This is the meaning captured by modernist authors in their attempt to overthrow the romantic depiction of the Indian. By transforming the specter of cannibalism into a positive conceptual machine, the modernists threw an entrenched colonial discourse into complete disarray.

I have no intention of eulogizing warfare and violence in this book. My argument is simply that we should avoid basing any value-laden discourse about ourselves and others on the opposing ideas of innocence and violence. After all, how do we define whole societies, countries, and peoples according to this criteria? Is Brazil more cordial than the United States? Are Germans more disposed to violence than people from India? Or is Chinese society crueler than Iranian society? None of these questions makes much sense. However, the same restraint often fails to apply when we turn to indigenous peoples, whether Amerindian or otherwise. We require them to function as models: of kindness or barbarism. If any counter-discourse

is possible, it depends on refusing both a redeeming victimization and a demonizing accusation. This refusal is the necessary condition for constructing less asymmetric relations with the original inhabitants of the Americas, relations based on values capable of founding a social space of dialogue, justice, and peace, which are exclusive neither to ourselves nor to indigenous societies.

On War

In focusing on indigenous warfare, we also wade into a theoretical quicksand, since defining what "indigenous" might mean here is far from easy. Colonization profoundly altered the conditions in which Amerindian populations lived. The conflicts, trade, slavery, epidemics, and catechism transformed native systems, introducing new objects and new relations. The impact of European expansion on native warfare practices was wide-reaching and long-lasting, although they also varied according to place and period (Ferguson & Whitehead 1992; Whitehead 1990). There were wars of resistance, wars involving the capture of enemies to be exchanged for metal tools, others that resulted from the movement of populations in flight, or others still motivated by "traditional" values that took place in now "untraditional" sociodemographic contexts. So what kind of warfare are we actually dealing with in this book?

I confront this problem in two ways: first, through a detailed historical examination of the conditions in which the Parakanã opted for either war or peace during the twentieth century. The Parakanã are a recently contacted Tupi-Guarani people of southeastern Amazonia. My fieldwork started a couple of years after their acceptance of state administration, and I followed them for almost a decade. I interviewed many people who had taken an active part in warfare conflicts, killed enemies, lost relatives, and captured women. Based on this data, I try to identify their motives and the context in which the armed conflicts took place. The result is a description embedded in social history, but also imbued with a deep sense of long-term cultural forms. Thus, I also confront the problem of defining the nature of warfare that I analyse in this book through a comparative analysis of indigenous practices and representations in different contexts and temporalities, looking to identify a complex set of systematic assumptions recurrently associated with warfare behavior and a cannibal symbolic. I focus on this symbolic framework and how it interacted with historical events in structuring the Parakanã-lived world during the last century.

The definitional problem is not limited to the category "indigenous," since defining "war" is no simple matter either. In Parakanã, there is no exact equivalent to this word. The most specific term associated with bellic activity is *warinio* or *warinia*, a cognate of *guarini*, from ancient Guarani,

which Montoya translates as "war" (1876). In Parakanã, the term designates the act of seeking out enemies, and it is rarely used. Armed combat is not designated by a specific term. To make war is to "attack" (*-pakang*) the enemy, and the events are described by a myriad of verbs that indicate the type of violent action involved. What unites these acts is their shared objective: All are forms of killing. The generic verb for this action is *-joka*, which applies to any situation in which the life of a being is taken, without specification of quality or quantity. Some verbs, employed metaphorically, are applied more narrowly to the killing of human beings, such as *-mokajym* ("to make lose, forget") or *-apiji* ("to tie up"), both meaning "to kill." These verbs can receive the suffix *-pam*, indicating a large quantity or completeness, as in *oapijipam*, for example, "He killed all of them."

Nevertheless, none of the verbs or any narrative resource enables a distinction to be made between the types of armed conflicts in terms of their scale. Whenever I finished recording a warfare narrative, I would ask about the numbers involved, including the total number of victims and killers. However, the Parakanã focus not on what makes all the adversaries alike and countable, but what distinguishes them: the physical features of each one, their ways of talking, singing, or moving. What matters is not just killing, but appropriating an individual history, even when this is inscribed in the bodily forms observable in a fleeting moment. War is not a question of killing just any kind of other. The other has to exist as a particular subject for the act of killing to prove productive.

The absence of a specific term for war, as well as the absence of any quantitative distinction of the armed conflicts, poses difficulties in terms of defining their precise nature. The anthropology of war commonly distinguishes between two types of armed conflict: on one hand, the use of force by collective, politically autonomous subjects who clash violently over public interests; on the other, a private, almost individual mode of violence between people connected by kinship. The distinction is based on a series of dichotomies – public versus private, political versus domestic, collective versus individual – that gives rise to binary typologies, such as the classical opposition between feuding and warfare (Otterbein 1973:923–4). Most of these typologies fail to allow impure combinations: If and when they exist in the real world, they are transitional and necessarily unstable forms. The problem with using such theories to study so-called primitive warfare is that *only* transitional and hybrid forms appear to exist.

First of all, we face what Hallpike (1973:453) called the "boundary problem," questioning the functionalist assumption that the limits of societies are unambiguously defined. The distinction between intra and intercommunity violence demands a prior definition of the limits between the inside and the outside – a far from trivial undertaking in the contexts of nonstate sociopolitical formations. In the abstract, the limits are

determined by political autonomy, as we can read in Malinowski's definition (1941:522): War is "armed conflict between politically independent units." Identifying these units is the crux of the problem. We tend to veer between identifying them with a localized (though transitory) community and trying to match them to larger population sets whose limits are defined by the presence or absence of conflict. As Langness notes, "the public affair most widely used by anthropologists to define the largest polities has been warfare" (1972:925). Thus war defines the polities, which for their part define what is legitimately taken as war. The circularity is evident.

Second, we face what I call the "public revenge problem." Our typologies are founded on an opposition between war and private revenge. Yet the latter only becomes private where juridical regulation of interindividual and interfamilial conflicts exists; in other words, when there is a state apparatus determining when a type of armed conflict belongs to the kinship domain rather than the public sphere (Vernant 1985:11). Indigenous societies, however, in practicing warfare according to a criteria of scale, may conceive of war as an interminable series of acts of revenge, which are not private but necessarily public and socialized. Such was the case of the sixteenth-century Tupinambá, who thought of their conflicts as public vendettas, although the Europeans saw them as wars.

Third, we face what I call the "collective individualism problem," which reflects the difficulties posed by the individual versus collective dichotomy. Take, for instance, a minimalist definition of warfare such as Mead's: "recognised conflict between two groups *as groups*, in which each group puts an army (even if the army is only fifteen pygmies) into the field to fight and kill, if possible, some of the members of the army of the other group" (Mead 1940:402, my emphasis). How do we know when groups are fighting *as* groups? The limits between individual and collective are far from clear, especially in egalitarian societies characterized by a great degree of personal autonomy. Here armed conflicts are frequently individualized, even in formal situations involving hundreds of people, as is the case of the "ritual battles" in New Guinea (Heider 1991:104, Koch 1974:77). As for the Tupinambá, a sixteenth-century chronicler describes "two or three thousand naked men on either side" fighting "in disorderly fashion with many of them losing control in similar fights because they lack a Captain governing them, or any other military officers whom they must obey at these moments" (Gandavo [1576] 1980:132).

If at this scale there is little coordination of collective actions, and revenge seems to be a basic warrior idiom, what should we make of the raids of one, two, or three dozen archers against an enemy village, a frequent pattern in Amazonia in the twentieth century? This typological swamp – where we find anthropologists classifying the war pattern of one group as intervillage warfare and a fairly similar other as individualistic

feuding (Ferguson 1989:182) – shows how the dichotomies of political/domestic, public/private, and collective/individual are inadequate analytic tools for describing the phenomena of violence in these societies. For these reasons, I use the term war quite broadly throughout this book. I classify as a war event any and all encounters between indigenous groups who perceive themselves as enemies and that results in physical violence, irrespective of the size of these groups or the scale of the violence. In this category I equally include a planned attack on any enemy village or a skirmish between hunting parties in the midst of the forest.

The Book

In May 1999, I returned to the Parakanã village of Paranatinga for the last time. After four years away, I was excited about the prospect of seeing friends and hearing their news. I would have the chance to meet the headman Arakytá again and listen to old and new stories in the *tekatawa*, a place where the men gather every evening to talk. The village, though, was not the same. Half of its population had left and two new settlements had been founded. Arakytá was now blind and the *tekatawa* was a pale memory of the meetings in which I had participated a few years ago. The long silences were broken by fleeting remarks, and the *tekatawa*'s spatial morphology, previously delineating differences in age and patrigroup, had dissolved. My first reaction was one of nostalgia but also uncertainty. Had I deluded myself about this recent past? I quickly realized, though, that the Parakanã sociopolitical forms where in flux, again.

It was not the first time this had happened. More than a century ago, a small Tupi-Guarani group living in the Tocantins basin experienced a conflict over women and split into two populations. These I call the eastern and western Parakanã. For almost a century, the two blocs led parallel lives, only interacting with each other through warfare. When contacted in the 1970s and 1980s, they were markedly distinct in both their subsistence patterns and their sociopolitical organization. The eastern group practiced a fairly diverse horticulture, lived in a large communal house, were divided into exogamic moieties, had an institutionalized headmanship, and had been engaged in defensive warfare only. The western group, on the other hand, were organized into nomadic bands, lacked any horticulture, had neither an established headman nor social segmentation, and were still actively engaged in offensive warfare. In less than a century, the two blocs had assumed quite different social configurations.

How do we explain these changes? Which group – if not both – has transformed and in what direction? What mechanisms produced these transformations? These are some of the questions explored in the first three chapters of this book. My approach is informed by the theoretical concerns

with history and social action that marked anthropology from the 1980s onward (Rosaldo 1980, Sahlins 1981). I take up Ortner's challenge, set down in a pioneering article in which she observes that although she had chosen the concept of practice to describe the main anthropological trends in the 1980s, she could have equally chosen another key concept: history. Yet merely historicizing anthropology – "if by history is meant largely a chain of external events to which people react" (1984:159) – would obscure the main question: How do we reintroduce social agency into our descriptions without projecting a voluntaristic and unstructured scenario?

My analysis of Parakanã historical changes is an ethnographic response to this question. It involves a microsociological reconstruction of the mechanisms informing the constitution of two different social systems after the group's breakup at the end of the nineteenth century. I intend to show how these transformations resulted from the intersection of both internal and external factors within particular historical situations, shaping and being shaped by human agency. Rather than seeking an all-encompassing set of determinant forces (the world system, the environment, etc.), I describe how small changes occurring in various areas of Parakanã social life produced cumulative long-term effects and redefined the very context in which agents took decisions. This ethnographic case invites us to rethink the way in which most anthropologists have described processes of change in Amerindian societies after the Conquest of the New World.

This is not, though, a historicist book. As the chapters unfold, the emphasis shifts from the "modes of process" to the "modes of form" (Bateson 1980). One of my aims is to visualize forms in history and the history of forms, without implying that, since they exist in history, forms do not exist at all. Although the cosmology and social organization of an indigenous people emerge from a particular history, they also result from a being-in-the-world mediated by long-term sociocultural forms. Indeed the very fact we can study the flux of Parakanã sociopolitical form is itself a by-product of specifically Tupi-Guarani features, such as the low yield of segmentary principles and the nonmechanical character of their social norms.

The book's passage from process to form is accompanied by a shift from the comparison between the Parakanã blocs to a wider analysis of their relations with the outside permeated by a cannibal symbolic: relations woven through warfare with human enemies, through shamanism with nonhumans, and through a combination of both with whites. In examining this relational field, I turn to one of the major themes of Amazonian ethnological studies: the constitutive role conferred to alterity in the production of Amerindian social life. I do so, however, not to reassert the preeminence of the Other over the Same, but to connect exteriority and interiority within the same economy. My argument is simple: Instead of opposing predatory relations with the outside to productive relations on

the inside, I seek to understand how external predation is converted into internal production. Or more precisely, how the consumption of others results in the making of kin.

My goal is to move beyond the opposition between an Amazonian ethnology focused on predation and alterity and another focused on production and identity by converting these analytical foci into different moments of the same analysis. I shift emphasis away from the notion of reciprocity toward the notions of consumption and production in search of a common idiom that can account for both the destruction and production of persons and, in particular, elucidate the movement through which the first leads to the second. I call this movement *familiarizing predation*, the conversion of a predatory relationship into a protective one, employing the Parakanã case and other empirical examples to show how this dialectic is central to the comprehension of Amerindian warfare, shamanism, and ritual life. I thus include warfare within a general economy, which makes it comprehensible as a mechanism for social reproduction.

In the final chapter, I return to the relationship between the Parakanã and the whites, first examined historically in the opening chapter. Now I explore the topic from a different angle, combining the structural analysis of myths with an investigation of events occurring during the contact process. I look to reunite the two dimensions explored by this book: one historical and particular, the other structural and general. I examine how certain enduring representations are actualized in specific sociohistorical contexts to motivate collective actions (sometimes with surprising results, such as the Parakanã asking the Funai agents responsible for "pacification" to disinter dead people in order to resuscitate them). I explore the associations of whites with shamanic power, as well as the ways in which Amazonian peoples have conceived white peoples' capacity for violence, relating it to images of jaguars and cannibals.

The Research

The encounter of an anthropologist with a people is always a mixture of a deliberate search and unexpected chance. Today I recall myself huddled over a map of Amazonia, a list of names of indigenous groups by my side, searching for a people to research. But it was in a bar some time in 1987 that I first heard of the Parakanã, then recently contacted. The latter was music to my ears, since I was looking for an isolated spot where I imagined I would find "real" Indians and an "authentic" field experience.

I arrived at Altamira, in the state of Pará, in February 1988. Altamira is a Janus-like city: part facing the river, the other facing the road. Its port, previously a stopover for boats transporting rubber, waned in importance as it succumbed to the dust and trucks plying the Transamazonian

highway. On reaching the city, the Xingu River curves to the right and flows in a narrow channel before sweeping round and flowing toward its mouth. A landscape of green shores still lines its clear waters upriver, dotted with a few riverside dwellings. In the rainy season, the Xingu flows calmly and smoothly, but as the river level falls, porous black rocks, whirlpools, thick growths of sarandi plants, and rapids appear. These shores were once occupied by indigenous peoples. Depopulated during the Conquest, they received a small influx of inhabitants during the rubber boom. When the latter subsided, the region was again abandoned until logging fever erupted in the 1990s.

The journey from Altamira to the Bom Jardim River, a small affluent of the Xingu where the Parakanã then lived, took four days to reach by boat. When I arrived at Apyterewa village for the first time, the Parakanã had accepted state administration four years previously. The only link with the city was the monthly visit of the boat that brought a few trade items, and took away ill people who would bring news from the city on their return. This state of relative isolation would change rapidly in the ensuing years, but this was the atmosphere in which the present book began. The first phase of research took place in this region, where I stayed for eight months between 1988 and 1989. The second phase spanned from 1992 to 1995 when I completed another eight months of research, this time remaining mostly in the Parakanã Indigenous Land in the Tocantins region. I also made two brief visits in 1996 and 1999.[1]

The experience in the Tocantins villages differed from that in the Apyterewa. The Paranatinga village, where the eastern Parakanã then lived, could be reached easily by car from Tucuruí, a town that served as the base for building the hydroelectric dam on the Tocantins River. Along the Transamazonian highway, farms and pastures rather than forest-lined shores dominated the landscape. The four days' travel upriver were replaced by a few hours' trip, including a forced stop at the village (today a town) of Repartimento. The latter is an important reference point for the Parakanã of Paranatinga, who visit the town to sell assai, rice, maize, and chickens; to buy matches, batteries, tapes, and fishing hooks; and to drink guaraná and eat cookies. Relations with the local population were cordial but involved little verbal communication. As the Parakanã had yet

1 The Parakanã live in two different Indigenous Land (*Terra Indígena* is the official designation of indigenous reservations in Brazil). The first is the T.I. Parakanã, located in the Tocantins basin in Pará state, with an area of 351,000 hectares. The land is demarcated and officially recognized. In March 1999, the total population was 475 people, distributed between five different settlements, three belonging to the eastern group and two to the western group. The second area of 773,000 hectares is the T.I. Apyterewa, located in the Xingu basin, also in Pará. It was only demarcated in 2007. In May 1999, it had a population of 248 people living in two villages (Apyterewa and Xingu). All its inhabitants are from the western bloc and were contacted between 1983 and 1984.