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# Landscape of Resistance: The Fronts of Economic Expansion and the Xavante Indigenous People—Brazil

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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## Abstract

This article has the objective of identifying and reflecting upon the sociocultural strategies that allowed the Xavante Indians, after centuries of cultural spoliation and territory expropriation, the development of different adaptive mechanisms that guaranteed their reproduction. Here, the attempt is to show that those sociocultural strategies and mechanisms were decisive in the maintenance of its territory, social cohesion, and relative cultural autonomy. Likewise, as a specific objective of this article, one intends to identify which of those cultural changes are perceived in the landscape, seeking a deeper comprehension of the appropriation mechanisms developed by those people in the interface with the Brazilian contemporary society. The proposed methodology to reach the said objectives has been built upon extensive multidisciplinary bibliographical surveys, interviews, and field observations that made feasible, among other things, a more refined construction of the Xavante historiography and a more precise understanding of the social organization variation of those people. Finally, it is proposed here to view the Xavante people as the main subject of their decisions, capable of offering resistance to the progress of capitalist expansion fronts upon their territory and, above all, capable of maintaining their sociocultural cohesion deciding on the course of their own development.

**Keywords:** American Indians, Xavante, landscape, territory, culture, resistance

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## 1. Introduction

The history of the colonizer is not the same as that of the colonized. The history of the native Americans throughout the centuries has been told under the “foreigner” point of view, under the point of view of one who needed to justify and legitimate his presence and his possession. The colonized history version, however, has been attenuated whenever possible to the point where fair voices have become small whispers and then silenced.

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To tell the history through the colonized is to echo voices that were trimmed or forgotten, means to renovate the knowledge about a history that has been well grounded throughout time, but could not crystallize all the possibilities or the circumstances of every historical fact. Giving voice to the Indians means reviving their ancestors, renewing the hope in the present time, and stimulating their future blossom.

This article tries to echo those voices and values the tenacity of native American people who, even in front of cultural spoliation and territorial expropriation, lived on with ability and courage. Even though each contact and indigenous integration process has been unequal, multifaced, and full of specificities in time and space, such voices will be here spread through the dissemination of the Xavante people's history, who even in face of wars, diseases, and genocides, was able to elaborate political strategies which allowed, among other things, the maintenance of their social cohesion and relative cultural autonomy.

The Xavante Indians name themselves *A'uwe*, which means "authentic people"; they are genuine inhabitants of the Cerrado biome, which comprises a huge territorial extension in the Central Brazil Plateau. Among the Xavante, the group that will lead this research is concentrated in the São Marcos Indigenous Land, a reserve fully located in the city of Barra do Garças, in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. Through historiography and analysis of the adapting mechanisms developed by that group throughout their contact with the national Brazilian society, the nature of native Americans' resistance to advancements of the national states and the capitalist system itself will be shown.

This article, however, aims to investigate which sociocultural and spatial changes (voluntary or not) contributed to the adaptation, and at the same time, resistance of the Xavante before the national society and the economic advancements over their cultural territory and resources.

## 2. The landscape and the Xavante

The landscape encompasses both material and immaterial dimensions. It is the result of social relationships and cultural symbolisms that are materialized and piled up in space throughout time. From the mediation between the Xavante culture and its relationship with the natural world, complex, cultural landscapes full of symbologies have shown up, which can be hardly explained or understood in their totality and essence with a look formed in another cultural, historical, social, and spatial context.

The so proposed research is clearly limited, mainly concerning the contextual position of the researcher in relation to the matter being researched. Here, there is not an attempt to attenuate neither the liability nor the insecurity regarding the presented data. However, surely, there is a conscience that the scientific analysis that is to follow "suffers" of partiality, non-neutrality, and westernization.

The approach to the Xavante culture in a context external to its reproduction, according to scientific methods and philosophical-ideological matrices may lend to the objectives of this

research; however, stripped of any illusion, this article does not intend to explain the Xavante culture in its totality, mainly because to the Xavante society, any effort in that direction would be useless.

The researcher, being a result of time-space in which he lives has, for example, limitations of language that, inevitably, derived from ideological symbolisms and power relationships he was “exposed to” during his intellectual development process [1]. Thus, any analysis performed by the researcher in an environment exotic to his formation environment should, admittedly, be made without aspirations to neutrality and his observations should be conscious of his ideological, social, and historical partiality.

The interpretation of the Xavante landscape thus cannot be restricted to observations of materiality or empirical works, but should contemplate, before anything, the historical, spatial, social, cultural, and political processes subscribed in that landscape. The intended landscape idea here does not consider the materiality or the visible as an end, but as one of the possible means of seizure of the cultural processes engendered by the landscape.

The creation of material or nonmaterial symbols, according to an ideological social organization, together with the power relationships and even the individual passions, represents other possible means of cultural appropriation of the space, which allows for a broader conception of the landscape formation process [2].

The point that divides this analysis is precisely that of interpreting the Xavante landscape under an external optics of ideological capitalist matrix and, cosmologically, trying to understand the importance of maintaining the millenarian symbols of that culture for the contemporary society. The first effort of that research will, therefore, be to lecture about the capitalism role in the formation of the Xavante cultural landscape, identifying its main mechanisms of action and its expansion activities.

### **3. The capitalist expansion fronts and the formation of the current Xavante landscape**

The capitalist system is extremely dynamic during certain periods and inevitably expandable. The stationary state of capital reproduction is logically incompatible with the perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production [3]. The accumulation need sets up a dynamic characteristic to capitalism, causing the space and time barriers to be unlimitedly overcome for the sake of capital reproduction and its surpluses. The addition of new areas, in that context, caters to a vital demand of the capitalist system because, in its essence, the colonization brings in new resource sources, inaugurates new markets with manpower reserves, and creates potential consumers.

In that sense, larger profits mean growth in the capital mass that aims for cost-effective implementation and the trend for overaccumulation exacerbates, but then in an expandable geographical scale. The only escape lies in the continuous acceleration of the creation of new productive resources [3]. From that, one can deduct an impulse inside the capitalism to create

the world trade, to intensify the exchange volume, to create new needs and new types of products, to implant new productive resources in new regions, and to place all manpower, everywhere, under the capital domination.

The organic need for expansion of the capitalism produces significant space and social changes as the capitalist mode of production destabilizes and replaces the previous mode of production. The capitalist model, consequently, starts to create new symbols, to restructure social and power relationships and ends up imposing a new space organization. The materialization derived from that restructuring consolidates a new landscape and hegemonizes the new production mode. The resulting landscape responds to other signs, making any material or ideological remnant of the previous model devalued or stigmatized, becoming a “residual landscape” [2].

The nonappreciation of alternative landscapes to the capitalism or the self-stigmatization of those landscapes as “residuals” is part of the cultural and sociospatial weakening and breakdown necessary to the capitalist expansion. The nonrecognition of pre-existing space contexts and the steamroller effect of the expansion activities open the necessary path to insert a new production mode which, through a new appropriation of resources, deconstructs the previous relationship models.

The consolidation of that production mode is followed by a cultural landscape that rewrites and is rewritten by a new social economic dynamic. The hegemony, at last, arises from the thorough or an almost complete elimination of the previous cultural symbolisms and social relationships. Only a dilution that is carried out under a conditioned coexistence is left to the residual landscapes.

The Xavante landscape and territory, by that perspective, should not be recognized by the capitalism as a parallel force, but as an obstacle to the insertion of new areas, creation of markets, and, consequently, impediment to the reproduction of capital. It should be seen as a remnant of a past cultural and economic model, which was replaced due to its “inability” to cater to new social demands.

Everything previously constructed by the Xavante should be, inside the capitalism, relativized, or even distorted, in an attempt to downgrade the Indian way of relating to nature. Likewise, the symbols and marks given to the space by the Xavante must be perceived by the capitalists as remnant of a distant past and at present without the necessary strength to resist the inevitable capitalist headway. The possibility of profit, capitalism’s main target, superposes any millenarian culture or its principles. The ancestral lands are, through a capitalist optics, underutilized available resources that sooner or later will give in to the market “needs.”

At this point, a more detailed recognition about landscape appropriation and territory formation experienced by the Xavante in the interface with the national society becomes necessary. In this way, it is possible to identify the true circumstances of the change of the production mode paradigm to achieve a real spatial and temporal understanding of the capital movements and the changes in the Xavante landscape over the centuries of contact.

In that sense, there are two relevant moments during that process: the first consists of a large period of territory expropriation and deconstruction of ancestral landscapes performed by the action of several capital expansion fronts in a row that ended up reducing that people to a rarefied mosaic of reserves; the second consists of a neocolonization process of those remaining lands through new harassments motivated by the metamorphosis and the new needs for accumulation and production of surpluses.

#### **4. From the first contacts to the appearing of Xavante reserves**

The main economic activities that vectorized and consolidated the implantation of a capitalist production mode in the ancestral Xavante territories, already from the XVIII century, derived from a mercantile and colonial matrix, having, for this, the function of subsisting the markets outside the Indian territory. Among those activities, it is possible to highlight the primary ones: agriculture, livestock, and mining.

Another important economic activity in the period were the *Bandeiras* and *Entradas* (military expeditions with the aim of imprisoning Indians to make them slaves, besides the search for precious metals and gems) which allowed the recognition and opening of paths in the colony hinterlands, as well as establishing contacts and “pacifying” several ethnic groups who inhabited those hinterlands. Although those pioneering activities did not consolidate the occupation, they enlarged the horizons and the economical possibilities of the colony.

The colonization internalization promoted by those activities were marked by two interconnected and subsequent movements. At the first moment, the livestock activity took on a prominent role through the sugar economy that, during the XVII century, promoted a large accumulation of surpluses for the sugar mill lords and, at the same time, stimulated the internalization of other activities, thus creating an economical synergy through the demand for other basic products.

Activities like livestock and the detention of Indians guaranteed the supply of meat, animal traction, leather goods, and the necessary manpower for the plantation, harvesting, and sugar cane processing in the sugar mills. Based on that, it is possible to affirm that the livestock and the *Bandeiras* represent, simultaneously, the mainstay of the coastal sugar activity and the vectorization of the mercantile capitalism in the colony backlands during that period.

The second moment is precisely marked by a consequence of the internalization of those support activities. The incessant search for the detention and enslavement of Indians guaranteed not only the manpower supply but also revealed important gold and other precious gems deposit in parts of the travelled backlands. The ascension of the mining activity creates a new economic synergy under which the livestock internalization deepens, generating new mineral discoveries, and taking with it the mixed farming agriculture.

Mining emerges circumstantially in that period as an articulating element of the precious metal discoveries that led to significant migratory movements toward the extraction sites in



the colony backlands. Those movements, in their turn, started demanding expressive amounts of food, clothes, tools, among other items. Therefore, mining behaved as a centrifugal activity during that period, which from a nucleus, it irradiated through space as a model of spatial, social, and ideological organization, embodying a form until then unknown of occupation and space organization in the colony backlands.

And that is how the Xavante territories began to be transformed as they started receiving indirect flows irradiated by the nucleus of colonial occupation. The XVII and XVIII centuries pastoral fronts reached lands surrounding the Xavante, who, without any desire for contact—by their own strategy or not—started their first large migratory movement beyond the Tocantins river, where contacts with new pioneering activity fronts only occurred between the XIX and XX centuries [4].

The discoveries of gold and diamonds in the territories, which nowadays belong to the states of Mato Grosso and Goiás, did not take long to happen, when, by 1720, alluvial deposits were discovered and promptly aroused the greed of many, stimulating the arrival of new expansion fronts in the valleys and interfluves of the Tocantins-Araguaia River Basin. The lands inhabited by the Xavante once more got in the way of the economic advances.

Contradictorily, the more pronounced expropriation of the Xavante lands guaranteed the maintenance of a part of its territory, once from there, a long process was initiated and culminated with the creation of their reserves. The reduction and delimitation of the Indian territory symbolized a vital “concession” for the capital expansion, as that mechanism simultaneously eliminated the “element of discord” and opened up the way for the settlement of the economic activities necessary for the accumulation and production of surpluses.

The “submissions” of the people belonging to the Akwen Group happened gradually and were conditioned to numerous conflicts that produced significant losses both for the Indians and the settlers. Those conflicts, above all, served as a purpose to show how dissatisfied those people were in relation to the attempts not only to insert them in the Indian village policy but also to exhibit the military power of those nations and their ability. The Xavante, after numerous conflicts, were reduced to the Indian villages of Mossâmedes and Pedro III (in the Carretão croft), near the rivers Carretão Grande (current São Patricio river) and Crixás, between the years 1784 and 1788.

Even so, the “submission,” although it symbolizes an important victory over the gentio (pejorative way of referring to the Indian people by the settlers), would be the first step only of the pacification process, the second being to make the Xavante people “weaker” in order to discourage or even inhibit insurrections. In this sense, the first measure adopted was the fragmentation of the group in two distinct villages, dismantling the tribal orders and making it difficult to organize any type of offensive. The first Indian village created was the Pedro III, in the Carretão croft, on the border of the Carretão Grande River, and the second, near the Crixás River, named Mossâmedes.

Although the measure was vehemently opposed by the Xavante, it was implemented anyway due to the lack of structure of the first village to receive such a large number of Indians. Thus,

the people fragmentation, besides being inevitable, efficiently attended the purposes idealized by the Crown of undoing the Xavante cohesion.

The process was concluded through hunger, mistreatment, and diseases that symbolized the fastest and more efficient ways of disaggregation and eradication of the Xavante people in the villages. A measles epidemic may have been the main cause for the death of a significant portion of the villagers, causing the few remnants to flee to hinterlands not yet occupied in the search of a new start.

The failure of the Indian villages brought back the political and territorial uncertainty in the Province of Goiás and reestablished ancient conflicts between settlers and Indians, which required the development of new Indian people control policies by the colonial government. As an answer to those new demands, the Crown invigorated the military force policy against the Indians through the May 13, 1808 regiment. The Goiás government, in its turn, abiding by the designated guidelines, created "military prisons" that were aimed at sheltering those who were captured in combat, be them Indian men, women, or children.

The imprisonment policy built around thirteen prisons in the Province of Goiás only, and one of those was especially constructed to shelter the groups Xavante and Xerente. The Santa Maria do Araguaia military prison had the objective of isolating those groups from the crescent colonization and navigation that was happening in the Araguaia River Region.

That prison represented an emblematic moment in the history of some people that inhabited the central Brazil region, in particular for the Xavante, because besides not submitting to the prison, they also banded together with the Xerentes and Carajás to form a coalition of Indian nations to attack the prison. At the end of conflict, in the year 1813, the Santa Maria do Araguaia prison was destroyed, thus sealing the destiny of those people who, in the face of such insult, would not be able to inhabit the land in the confluence of the Araguaia and Tocantins Rivers anymore.

The years after that episode were of intense persecution and conflicts which forced the allied ethnic groups to disperse while searching for new lands out of the colonial influence. In that period, several reports about the Xavante dispersion in the north of Goiás appeared, an attempt of isolation that failed due to the greed of the settlers who put down roots in that part of the territory.

The impossibility to remain in their ancestral territories made Xavantes and Xerentes go looking for new spots inward the hinterland, so they crossed the Araguaia River westbound. Between 1850 and 1890, large migratory movements of the Xavante ethnics group gradually happened toward the lands that these days encompass the Mato Grosso state. The Xavante groups by the end of the XIX century began their search for "redemption" in the Mato Grosso lands, first, crossing the Araguaia River (or *Öprè*) and second, the Cristalino River to, finally, cross the Mortes River (or *Owawe*).

Thereafter, a series of displacements and socio-spatial changes in the Xavante society took place, which culminated in the establishment of three distinct regions of occupation on the West bank of the Araguaia River, between the Cristalino and Mortes Rivers.



## 5. The New State, the Westbound March, and the come into being of the Xavante Indian Lands (or reserves)

As the Brazilian economy entered and deepened itself into the finance and industrial sectors in the second quarter of the XX century, the economic expansion fronts grew through the accumulation and appropriation of large areas in the country's backlands, providing the necessary resources for the economic and urban growth of the large industrial centers. Brazil, in that way, abandoned the structure based solely on the production of primary agricultural products meant for export and started diversifying its economy, urbanizing part of its territory and stimulating new investments (both national and international) in a growing domestic market.

The Midwest and Amazon lands, in that context, gradually start taking part in the national economy, their main function being that of subsisting the emerging urban-industrial economy through the supply of ore and agricultural and livestock products. However, the integration of those regions and their resources in the economy directly depended on policies, from the state or not, that would enable an effective occupation of the unexplored territories and the rationalization of production.

The New State, in that sense, was majorly responsible for taking measures and creating the adequate conditions for the movement of the economic expansion fronts in the backlands. The new-state government was characterized, among other things, by a totalitarian leadership, political centralization, and strong interference in the civil society, carrying out policies of developmental characteristic such as incentives and subsidies for the industrial economic growth and, above all, creating several mechanisms for the accumulation of capital.

In the core of the new-state's developmental policies, the "territorial integration" figured as an imperative and immediate demand due to a need for consolidation of the new urban-industrial production mode. The main state policy in that direction was the idealization and attainment of the "Westbound March" that consisted of opening paths through the cerrados of Central Brazil for the construction of landing strips and military bases at first and allowing large-scale economic occupations in another moment.

As per the official speech at that time, such a policy would make feasible the supply of staple food, amend regional economic injustices, protect the national frontiers, and determine a unified national identity under the sign of a single mode of production, the capitalist. The lands of the Midwest region and, consequently, the lands of the East Mato Grosso occupied by the Xavante started being trespassed by the state through institutes like the Fundação Brasil Central (FBC) which, in its turn, through initiatives such as the Expedição Roncador-Xingu (ERX), put into practice the Westbound March.

The New State, through its racial integration policy, sought to expand the capitalist mode of production by viewing the territory as a resources space with predefined vocations, ignoring the existence of "places" or "landscapes" with previous sociocultural dynamics. The selective and ideological view of the landscape contributes for a reductive and homogenizing

interpretation of distinct Indian cultures. In that way, the lands the Xavante used for hunting, harvesting, and planting were viewed by the state according to their commercial potential for agriculture and livestock, for instance [5].

Lands that were considered as historical and cultural references were assigned by military strategists as national safety zones or as solutions for land ownership conflicts. Complex modes of production and kinship nets that structured communities were disregarded or simplified in the attempt to rationalize the production and the social organization of the Indians [5]. The political-economical context where the contacts with national Brazilian society and the Xavante are resumed in the middle of the XX century, produced intense territorial harassments, uncompromising, and, at a certain point, voracious.

The methods and the “characters” utilized to resume the contacts between white men and Indians were since then the most diverse and, although all had the same goal in essence—to appropriate the Xavante lands—many were the searched objectives. Starting by a couple of Salesian preaches Fuchs and Sacelotti, who, in the attempt to catechize and convert the Xavante to Christianity, were killed near the Mortes River in 1934.

Many contacts followed that, alternating between state bodies or representatives, like the Indian Protection Service (IPS), and civil organizations, through which deaths and murders kept on happening on both sides. An example of that was the case of an IPS team led by Genésio Pimentel Barbosa that was killed near the Mortes River by a group of Xavante while attempting to attract and condition them.

The situation begins to change only in 1946 when an IPS group of Indian culture supporters and backland specialists led by Francisco Meirelles was able to establish a pacific contact with one of the Xavante group on the west bank of the Mortes River. The group attracted by the IPS was led by the chief warrior Apowe who transferred the Indian village to the East bank of the river and installed it near the Indigenous Post of São Domingos.

In spite of the contact having been accepted by only one Xavante group, the news that the pacification had been finally reached was spread very fast through the official communication media, causing “The Westbound March” enthusiasts to feed their greed for the “new” lands. That greed did not take long to materialize as in the beginning of the 1950 decade the Xavante lands started being occupied, even with the promise of the state government to create reserves.

However, the continuity of those pacific contacts was conditioned to the promise by the state government of Mato Grosso to create those reserves. The state government guaranteed a temporary title of property to the Xavante (1950), due to expire in two years, during which period the SPI should inspect a large area on the left bank of the Mortes River and establish the reserves limits. But before the expiry date, the lands were already being cut up and sold by the state government itself, so after two years the left bank of the Mortes River was almost completely divided into lots.

The emerging of reserves, in that context, symbolizes an important milestone in the Xavante social and economic formation, as they are, at the same time, the mark of the territory expropriation

and the most striking feature of the conditioning imposed by the capital needs. To know the historical implementation process of those reserves is, therefore, an important stage to understand the current Xavante landscape.

The São Marcos Indigenous Land, main spatial slice of this research, in spite of its specificities, has its development thoroughly inserted in that paradigmatic change of subjection to the capitalist mode of production, attending to a single spatial restructure mechanism. Even so, taking to pieces the creation process of that reserve in special is an effort necessary to justify the option for that area.

The most striking episodes derived from this conditioning process and expropriation of the Xavante territory happened during the period of appearance of the TIs, and many of them were precisely linked to the appearance of the São Marcos TI. Between 1956 and 1957, populations from the Xavante villages, Parabubu and Wedetede, fleeing from persecutions of settlers and farmers, sought shelter with the Salesian missions of Sangradouro and Meruri, which already sheltered Indians from the Xavante and Bororo ethnics groups. That migration, however, meant death for a large number of that group, mainly through diseases like measles [6].

Later, other cases of persecution exploded, causing more Xavante groups to look for shelter in the missions, which led the Salesians, at a given time, to opt for the creation of a new mission, attached to Meruri, fully devoted to the Xavante. That is how the São Marcos was born [6].

By the end of the 1960s, the tension between Xavantes and farmers increased, leading the Federal Government to compromise to the creation of a series of reserves to guarantee the integrity of those people. The territory created by the capitalism, therefore, is a place of contradiction and tension, behaving like a permanent scenario of power disputes and, inevitably, produces numerous conflicts, either real or ideological. Thus, the reserves creation represents the momentary needs of the capitalism and not of the Indians in the villages.

The permanent characteristic of the disputes, supported by the contradiction and need for renovation of the capitalist activities, makes the reserves ephemeral symbols of cultural maintenance as its limits and resources are permanently subject to questioning and, consequently, reason for conflicts. Thus, the capital will be presented in the form of a physical landscape, created at its own image, created as value for use, accentuating the capital progressive accumulation in an expandable scale. The geographic landscape encompassed by the capital and fixed assets is as much a crowned glory of the development of the past capital, as an inhibiting prison of the additional progress of accumulation [3].

## **6. New economic expansion fronts and the “pacification” of white men by the Xavante**

The West acts like a soulless, impersonal machine, henceforth lacking a master, that put mankind at its service. Free from any human interference that may want to refrain it, the insane machine goes on with its planetary uprooting work. Uprooting men from their soil, even in the furthest corners of the world, the machine throws them in the desert of the urbanized

zones without integrating them into the industrialization, bureaucratization, or the unlimited technicality it propels [7].

Many times, in distinct time and places, indigenous groups announced that they had “pacified the white men,” claiming for themselves the position of subjects, not victims. “To pacify the white men” has many meanings: pinpoint them before the white men and the objects in the world’s vision, empty them of their aggressiveness, their malevolence, their deadly force, tame them, in short, but also to establish new relationships with them and reproduce in society not against this time, but through them, in short, recruit them for their own continued existence.

The Xavante firmly state that upon establishing “definitive” contact with the *waradzu* (Xavante word meaning “white men” or non-Indians), they accomplished their pacification, not the other way around. For them, the acceptance of the contact does not derive from the simple inevitability of the Brazilian society expansion, but from inner geographical strategies of maintenance of their territory and culture. In other words, the Xavante bent and partially adapted to the western habits; in contrast the Western society also had to adapt to the Xavante.

The more pessimistic ethnographers consequently started to place the Xavante into the group of those Indians who, through flexibilization of “fundamental” aspects of their culture to preserve life, entered a kind of “social limbo,” where Indians “stop” being Indians and, at the same time paradoxically, they are not citizens in their own right in the core of the involving society either.

The idea of maintaining the “Indianness” through inflexible cultural distinctions and geographic and social isolation ends up underestimating the ability of the aboriginal people to preserve ethnical differences in spite of the social immersion in other sociocultural structures. Moreover, while viewing the inter-ethnic contact as a manicheist relationship between Indian people and dominant powers instead of a complex inter-cultural zone, the observers failed to evaluate how the differences are settled through economical and political practices [5].

Many Xavante, however, were able to understand that the selective cultural adaptation offered them the best guarantee to defend their land and communities and to adjust their relationship to the dominant societies [5]. Therefore, the idea of pacification of the *waradzu* by the Xavante is not only a matter of point of view or ideological orientation, but of a feasible strategy of survival that justifies itself, for instance, in the increase of birth and demography rates among the Xavante in the last years.

The adaptive mechanisms developed by the Xavante culture throughout the contacts with the Brazilian society — main objective of this article — were first perceived when, in several moments, the Indians actually took the reins of the “negotiations” and outlined their course, even without the due control over the results. That leading role, free of any romanticism, was necessarily permeated by concessions that almost always changed significant elements of those people’s culture.

In the Xavante case, the dominant forms imposed on the Indians merged, opposed, or superposed the indigenous practices. A clear example of that was the specificity lived by each Xavante group in contact with the Brazilian society, as, after the pacification, some groups remained under the direct “guardianship” of the state represented by the Indian Protection Service (IPS), whereas other groups kept contact with the involving society through the work of the Salesian Missionaries.



The role of both entities was initially one of guarding the physical integrity of the Xavante communities; however, that “protection” had its price of the cultural flexibilization. In order to protect themselves from armed conflicts with the expansion front landowners, those Xavante groups had to accept the confinement of the reserves, each one with its own set of rules and specific social constructions. On the one side, under the tutelage of the Salesian missionaries, the Indians were gradually deprived of their cosmology in favor of the Christian monotheism; on the other side, under the IPS guardianship, they were skilled under a nationalist manual to become “brazilindians.”

What the different processes of acculturation lived by the several Xavante groups had in common was the sign of work. The Indians were “stimulated” to definitely abandon the seminomadism in favor of getting skilled in any job that might contribute to building a nation or a divine work. In that way, hunting expeditions, pickups, and seasonal planting of food that served to initiate the young Xavante in the culture ceased, deeply changing not only their diet but also the symbolic landscape and oral tradition of knowledge transmission.

The Indians became permanent growers, carpenters, tractor drivers, artisans, seamstresses, rendering services either to the IPS or the Salesians in exchange of a few industrialized products that little by little became daily “needs.” On the other hand, they became low-skilled manpower. The end of that process would be, in a way, to convert the Xavante into low-income citizens devoid of possession and property of lands; however, it is in that dimension that the Indian protagonism begins to appear.

Even in the face of harsh and sudden cultural changes, the Xavante were able to maintain some practices that helped to perpetuate a feeling of belonging, creating a sensation of ethnic continuity. They maintained the communitarianism that molded and structured their lives and identities throughout generations, essentially keeping age structures, exogamous halves, performing rituals, and, mainly, dreaming of the ancestors so that the ancestral wisdom kept on nourishing their spirits.

On another plan, the Xavante sought to learn the Portuguese language as a means to understand not only what was being said but also to comprehend more deeply the sociocultural structures and the *waradzu's* way of thinking. Therefore, politically speaking their performance became more incisive and assertive when, through noncooperation, they were able to obtain concessions from the state as well as from the Church by playing one against the other on ideological conflicts.

Thus, the Indians began to realize that their Indianness happened even if they made some concessions like tossing aside some cultural aspects, and by doing it, they were able to better understand the outside social structure and, with a gentle touch and skill mark their ethnic differences and impose (covertly) their intransigence (here understood as something that decidedly should not be changed).

The *A'uwe*, however, quickly grasped the symbolic value of the indigenous identity after the pacification of the *waradzu*, even though culturally altered, the ownership of that identity would give them a concrete chance for political claims (territorial).



## 7. Final considerations

Under the steamroller effect of the westernization, all seems to have been destroyed, leveled, and smashed, however, at the same time, the reefs are often submerged, sometimes resisting and ready to emerge to the surface [7]. Latouche's words are "surgical" when he lively qualifies the planet's westernization power, accomplished through the capitalist system and its economic expansion fronts. However, he is equally brilliant on his alert about the resistance inevitability.

The magmatic activity inside the inner lays of the earth is uninterrupted and silent; however, it is always in touch with the lithosphere, be it by influencing or devastating it, through quakes or volcanism. Equally unstable is the Xavante resistance because its essence is far from being outdone. Those people, like the magma, will certainly look for an escape if submitted to "rises in temperature and pressure."

These days, the reserves are either surrounded by pastures for cattle or soy plantations. Some are cut by federal or state highways, which means their ways are not for strolling anymore but for road transportation. Most of the time the houses are not placed in semi-circles, facing one another (traditional distribution of the Xavante houses); they are not made of straw either, which is not found in the reserve limits anymore.

The seeds for the subsistence plantation are not *criolas* (native seeds), that is to say they are primarily distributed by the Indian National Foundation (FUNAI, government agency that replaced the IPS) and almost no swap is made among villages. The meat that is consumed does not come from hunting activities, it is cattle actually (the same that destroyed the ancestral *cerrados*) and it is bought in the supermarkets along with the sodas, which have risen significantly the diabetes cases, and often the money comes from the elderlies' pension.

The young people still listens to stories, but the movies and soap operas that are broadcast through the TV sets of each house offer "new" perspectives. *O wai'a* (race between the clans carrying Buriti logs) still happens, but nothing calls more attention than the soccer games, be it on TV or in the field at the *warã* (center of the semicircle formed by the traditional villages where meetings of men and the elders happened to deliberate about important matters like wars or hunting). All of that however is surpassed by the attention and time devoted to Facebook).

Lastly, those same young people who have access to the youth of more consolidated capitalist centers are encouraged to marry before they are 15 years old, as a last resource to keep them in the villages and thus avoid a demographic emptying, in spite of a rise in that density. Let alone old issues like alcoholism and the use of other substances (illicit or not).

The presentation of the field collected information, mainly in the São Marcos Indigenous Land and at FUNAI may, at first, generate questioning about the nature and the success of the Xavante resistance related to cultural spoliation and territorial expropriation. However, the objective of this research still remains that of identifying changes that symbolize strategic adaptive factors which help to promote the Xavante culture, instead of stressing the pains suffered throughout the process.

Despite all those illnesses, part of those Indians have been able to graduate at public universities and have come back to teach in the villages, in their mother tongue and in Portuguese, discussing different cosmological and theological theories. There are still those who throughout the years have been elected for city, state, or federal posts, contributing to the greater autonomy of the Xavante people vis-à-vis external institutions.

Several nongovernment organizations (NGO's) have been created inside the villages to demand improvements ranging from infrastructure to water supply, garbage collection to communication, and culture devices. Many documentaries have been produced and ethnic group exchanges have happened in the Xavante lands. Some rituals still happen, and the women have conquered more space and conditions for their social and intellectual development.

Here, one intends to present the final considerations, not as a presentation of conclusions. Even so, that should not prevent the reader from reaching his own conclusions. Even because such conclusions may symbolize important reflexive instruments that are fundamental to the academic-scientific development and progress. The truth is that the Xavante pride does not lie on his being a hunter or his exhibition of warlike ferocity, but on his Xavante feeling and understanding, without being minimized.

More than that, any conclusion may contain a partiality that the author does not even perceive. In other words, any conclusion or judgment about the current Xavante *modus vivendi*, besides lacking a structural partiality and not embrace the whole sociocultural complexity of that people, may be irrelevant or of little contribution from the indigenous themselves point of view.

The capital, on its own need for accumulation, reduced the Xavante to a rarefied mosaic of reserves, eliminating their structure and restructuring almost all aspects of their lives, but did not annihilate them. Thus, it is possible to affirm that the capital, at a given time, had to expand its activities to areas with unexplored resources and, at the same time, had to maintain some elements of those areas, like the workforce that is, virtually, also a consuming market. As the capitalist system is dynamic and inevitably expandable, it is equally possible to say that the same reserves that were "necessary" in the past may have their importance revised in the future.

Soon, new expansion fronts will surely besiege the remnant of the Xavante land, but what is not possible to predict is what kind of resistance the Xavante will have to offer. Important is to perceive that the past changes, according to some points of view, even though they seem so negative, can in the future symbolize very important elements of dialogue between Indians and the situations presented. That being said, the so-called acculturation may truly be an element of adaptation that enabled or is enabling the Indians to deal with more complex issues that might show up in the future.

However, the wisdom of the native Americans is not in a static body of costumes but on their ability to learn and react to situations in accordance with a rationality built up throughout thousands of years mixed with a spiritual irrationality that was also created throughout thousands of years of balanced contact with the Earth and its resources.

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