CHAPTER 15

# *Mario Juruna*

## Brazil's First Indigenous Congressman

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*It is fitting that this volume's final chapter returns to consider Brazil's aboriginal inhabitants and how they responded to the dizzying change of contemporary times. It would be hard to invent a more revealing example of the diversity of Brazil's population, land, environment, and culture than Mario Juruna, a Xavante (pronounced Sha-von'-teh) hunter-gatherer who went on to became a federal congressman in 1982. In Chapter 6 of this volume, the reader learned about Cândido Rondon, the army officer who championed the establishment of the Indian Protection Service at the turn of the twentieth century and who advocated contacting and peacefully assimilating Brazil's Indians into the national culture. What remains less clear in the preceding vignettes is how indigenous peoples themselves responded to these efforts by agents of the federal government and others. Frontier landowners and developers resented outside interference in local disputes with native peoples, and government agencies were often too weak or too corrupt to provide meaningful protection to Indians. For most of the 1900s, Mario's village of Xavante Indians preferred to pursue a strategy of isolating themselves from white Brazilians. They and other Xavante sometimes violently attacked whites who made forays into their territory or made peaceful attempts to contact them, and they earned a reputation for fierceness that for a time worked to ward off settlement near their territory. As Professor Seth Garfield shows, this strategy of resistance had become untenable for Mario and his fellow villagers by 1958, when they sought protection on a frontier Catholic mission in Mato Grosso from the attacks of settlers.*

*Mario had been raised to adulthood as a hunter and warrior according to the traditions of the Xavante, but then missionaries attempted to acculturate him to Brazilian society. The missionaries' attitudes about the cultural assimilation of Indians (except for the religious factor) shared many similarities with those advocated by General Rondon. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, homogenizing models of national cultural assimilation policies came under increasing attack in the West. What many have come to refer to as a "multicultural" model for national communities that favored greater tolerance of and respect for cultural differences and rights began to arise out of the ashes of the ethnic and racial intolerance*

*that fueled genocidal violence during World War II. Mario would take full advantage of these shifting attitudes.*

*As a young man, Mario perceived the need to ally the interests of his village and indigenous peoples more generally with powerful whites to maximize their chances for survival. He became a masterful strategist at playing Church and government officials against one another and at using the media and foreign organizations to pressure officials to better protect and provide for its indigenous citizens. He even used the nationalist myths developed by Brazilian intellectuals in the 1800s to chastise the government for its neglect and abuse of the "true" Brazilians or those peoples who had first inhabited the sacred national territory. Mario developed hybrid strategies that combined his Xavante traditions with what he knew of modern culture and technology to become a political activist. He then parlayed his celebrity into a successful political career representing not his home state of Mato Grosso but one of Brazil's most developed industrial coastal states, Rio de Janeiro. Mario and his political allies played on popular perceptions of Indians as noble savages incapable of the deceptions commonly practiced by white politicians, but, as Professor Garfield shows, he too was human, not a stereotype.*

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In 1958, when he was just about seventeen—an age when many middle-class Brazilians were first entering college—Mario Juruna, a Xavante Indian from central Brazil, was facing a far greater form of culture shock. After nearly a century of autonomous rule and unmitigated hostility toward outsiders, his community, battered by settlers' attacks, had been compelled to leave their ancestral land and seek assistance from Salesian missionaries. Like other young Xavante men, Mario had been well trained by village elders in the art of hunting and warfare. Indeed, it was the mastery of the former that had allowed Xavante communities to subsist on the abundant wild game that thrived in the *cerrado*, or tropical savanna, of central Brazil, while expertise in the latter kept covetous ranchers and homesteaders at bay and earned the Indians a fearsome reputation.

These defenses were no longer adequate. As white settlement increased on the western frontier in the 1950s, and land values along with land speculation increased, Mario's village, and perhaps a dozen other Xavante villages in the region between the Culuene and Couto Magalhães



rivers in the central-western state of Mato Grosso, came increasingly under siege. Indians were murdered by armed bands, houses were burned down, poisoned meat was offered to famished Xavante refugees, and, in an act of biological warfare, ranchers deposited contaminated clothing to infect Indian communities lacking immunity from diseases. A local rancher who took pity on the Indians shepherded Mario's village to safety hundreds of miles away to the south at a mission run by the Salesians in Merure, Mato Grosso.

The Catholic mission, along with its longtime residents, the Bororo Indians, had once been a target of raids by the semi-nomadic Xavante, who had roamed the countryside to hunt and gather food. But now, in a trail of tears, the Xavante had been forced to seek refuge among the Salesians, whose "kindness," to be sure, had been secured at the expense of subordination and suppression of indigenous lifestyles. And so a bewildered and besieged Mario had entered that day a different type of "school," one in which his "teachers" sought, through both persuasion and force, to eradicate "objectionable" cultural mores; to instill in the Indians "proper" notions of sexual morality; to teach the Indians the meaning of "work"; to instruct them in Portuguese and civics lessons; and, of course, to save their souls from the "devil." How strange or intriguing must have seemed these white lifestyles, and how frustrating their stringent rules and regulations to a people proud of their own cultural traditions and embittered by a history of persecution.

Slightly less than one-quarter of a century later, Mario Juruna, who had not been one of the Salesians' most diligent or cooperative students, was only semi-conversant in Portuguese and failed to fully acquire literacy in either Portuguese or the Xavante language. Yet he had attained through observation, determination, and ingenuity a savvy understanding of power dynamics in Brazilian society and the importance of political mobilization to secure the rights and entitlements of indigenous communities. In fact, he had achieved a national and international renown that few of his college-educated peers would ever know: in 1982, he was elected to Brazil's national congress, the first and only indigenous person in that country ever to achieve such an honor. Two years earlier, he had symbolically presided over an international tribunal in Rotterdam, Holland, in which the Brazilian government was put on trial for its violations of the rights of indigenous peoples. Mario Juruna, in more ways than one, had come a long way.

How did this Xavante man find the wherewithal to challenge the policies of the Brazilian government, then under the iron-fisted control of the armed forces? How did a member of a small ethnic minority—from an indigenous group numbering only several thousand in a nation of more than one hundred million—summon the courage to denounce

abuses perpetrated by the government's Indian agency? How did this onetime hunter-gatherer—who knew little of "Brazil" for much of the youth that he spent trekking in the thickets of the Mato Grosso savanna—find himself in the national and international spotlight? And why did his star fade less than a decade later?

To unravel this mystery, we must analyze the radical transformations triggered by the process of western frontier expansion in twentieth-century Brazil. This process was marked by much of the violence, inter-ethnic conflict, territorial usurpation, and consolidation of state power that occurred in the American West; but in Brazil, western frontier expansion took place nearly a century later, in an age of mass media, high-speed technology, international human rights movements, and worldwide decolonization. Therefore, we need to explore the ways in which indigenous peoples in Brazil, victimized by the shocking assault on their communities, lands, and ancestral traditions, have struggled to defend their rights in the national and international arenas and to clamor for cultural respect. To understand Juruna's career, we must explore the larger state policies that shaped the life of an indigenous leader and his people; the political dynamics within Xavante villages through which such dramatic changes were filtered and engaged; and the efforts of one individual—however constrained by overwhelming historical circumstances—to reshape the world around him, armed with both traditional tactics and the legal defenses and political opportunities provided by Brazilian society. The story of Mario Juruna's transformation from hunter-gatherer to political leader is rather unique: few Brazilians, irrespective of ethnic background, become national political figures. Yet the larger trends that fueled and that are reflected in Juruna's dramatic personal trajectory—the political mobilization of indigenous leaders to defend their communities against territorial loss and social marginalization—characterize the experience of many leaders of Brazil's nearly 180 different indigenous groups.

In 1940, around the time that Mario was born, Brazil was led by Getúlio Vargas, a nationalist dictator who sought to transform the predominantly rural, agro-exporting nation into a modern, independent, industrial power. Vargas had inherited a nation riven by sharp socioeconomic and regional disparities—a nation in which many residents of the backlands, such as Juruna and his people, had little or no contact with the market or ties to the state. Indeed, the lopsided nature of Brazil's socioeconomic development and demographic profile gravely concerned Vargas, his military supporters, and nationalist ideologues. Despite Brazil's immense national territory—larger than that of the continental United States—over 90 percent of its population cleaved to the coastal regions, with the other 10 percent dispersed over the remaining two-thirds of the country. The state of Mato Grosso (home to the Xavante) and the entire region of the central-west (home to numerous other indigenous peoples) was one such sparsely populated area whose purportedly untold economic potential beckoned to state planners. After all, government officials reasoned, why should Brazil fail to make use of the legendary mines, extensive land, and abundant natural resources in its heartland? Why not allocate "unoccupied" frontier land to small farmers who were denied such access under Brazil's grossly inequitable pattern of land distribution, thereby ensuring cheaper food for the rapidly growing urban populations? How could a modern nation, military officers clamored, allow its vast hinterland to remain a backwater and its international borders unfortified? Should not the Brazilian nation-state contact and assimilate indigenous populations and convert these "noble" but "primitive" peoples into full-blooded Brazilian citizens?



Thus, under Vargas's dictatorship (1937–1945), western expansion became a nationalist crusade planned, funded, and propagandized by the state and ceremoniously christened the "March to the West." The regime organized an expedition to penetrate the backlands of Mato Grosso through the Xingu region of the Amazon and entrusted the team members with constructing roads and airstrips for future transportation and settlement. Vargas endorsed the creation of agrarian colonies in the west, where the poor would be resettled on cooperatives. Indigenous populations would be converted into small farmers and regimented rural laborers working on their small reservations, whose demarcation was mandated by the federal constitution.

Vargas officials accorded both a protective mission to the state and a special role to indigenous peoples in the process of western frontier expansion that, incidentally, they often contrasted with the belligerent tactics of the U.S. government in its conquest of the West. Indigenous peoples were to be treated with benevolence, faithfully instructed in agricultural cultivation and animal husbandry, and, due to their legal status as minors and wards of the state, fully safeguarded by the Indian Protection Service. State officials proclaimed that this was a debt owed to the indigenous population, who had assisted the early Portuguese settlers in colonizing Brazil and whose biological and cultural contributions accounted for the nation's grandeur. As Cândido Rondon, director of the state's National Council for the Protection of Indians, stated in a speech in 1940, "Of all the precious things that befall us in this new march to the West, all relevant to the greatness of Brazil, none surpasses the Indian." For, as Rondon asserted, "they have given us the base of our national character: resistance, bravery, generosity, and modesty, contributed

by the Indian to the formation of our people, is what we consider precious, as much in the past as it still is in the present."[1]

The Vargas regime did not invent these stereotypes. The image of the "noble savage"—the inherently peaceful, benevolent, and persevering Native American—dates back to the earliest accounts produced by Europeans following their encounter with the New World. Of course, Europeans and their descendants in Brazil and other regions of the Americas also harbored a countervailing image of the bloodthirsty, sanguinary, barbaric Indian—an image that often served to justify genocidal warfare against Native Americans. Thus, it is significant (if not entirely original) that the ideologues of the Vargas regime embraced the former tradition, disseminating a "kinder"—if not necessarily wholly accurate—image of native peoples. Indeed, Vargas's touting of the indigenous contribution to the nation's biocultural makeup conformed to the larger ideological directives of his populist-nationalist regime, which celebrated the importance of racial mixture (*mestiçagem*) and racial democracy as a hallmark of Brazilian exceptionalism. In 1943 he decreed April 19 the "Day of the Indian," a national civic commemoration in which all Brazilians were to pay homage to the nation's aboriginal inhabitants (and, of course, to the benevolent state that protected them). Through the radio, newspapers, and other forms of mass media, Vargas sought to beam his nationalist message to far-flung corners of the country.

Mario Juruna was about three years old when expeditionaries from the March to the West resolved to tramp through as well as fly over his people's ancestral homeland in northern Mato Grosso. Juruna's family did not own a radio, or clothing, for that matter; they had never heard of Vargas or Rondon, nor did they probably care to; and their attitude toward their non-Xavante Brazilian brethren (whom they referred to as *waradzu*) was about as brotherly as Cain's toward Abel. The Xavante correctly understood that even if outsiders might be able to provide steadier access to industrial goods (some of which appealed to the Indians on utilitarian grounds), the tradeoff was far too great: drastic reduction in their access to the plant foods and wild game of the *cerrado* that assured their nutritional mainstay, the curtailment of their political and cultural autonomy, and the spread of devastating diseases. Brazilian officials—who never really moved beyond their romanticized or condescending notions to comprehend or value the complexity of indigenous peoples' social structures, political economies, and historical memories—tended to dismiss any resistance to assimilation as naiveté or childish stubbornness. Indeed, by law, indigenous peoples were defined as "relatively incapable" in civil matters (as were married women and minors), and were assigned to the guardianship of the Indian Protection Service to shield them from fraud, abuse, and exploitation.



Within Xavante society, which was structured by a strict division of labor based on gender and age, members of each hierarchically ordered age-set were considered supremely capable in their specific tasks and responsibilities. Villagers pooled labor and shared natural resources and knowledge to ensure successful mastery over the forbidding natural environment; goods were bartered and acquisitiveness repudiated. Moreover, unlike Brazil itself, Xavante society was not ruled by a dictator, but rather governed by a council comprised of all elder men, who met each night to discuss and plan community affairs. Yet Xavante villages were not the communitarian utopias celebrated by government ideologues and romantic intellectuals. Instead, they were settlements prone to constant rifts and reconfigurations and racked by factionalism and warfare. These feuds stemmed from accusations of sorcery (which usually arose in the aftermath of the death of an individual and were levelled by one male against a male of an opposing faction), competition over natural resources (and, increasingly, access to western goods), and historical grudges and vendettas. Xavante "chiefs" were more accurately leaders of factions, and since various factions existed within a single village, at any time several chiefs might vie for power. In short, Xavante society was sociopolitically complex and defied the simple stereotypes of Brazilian officials.

To be sure, the Xavante had not made it easy for the Vargas regime during the March to the West. In 1941, six members of the Indian Protection Service were bludgeoned to death by Xavante warriors in an abortive attempt to achieve peaceful contact with the Indians. Five years later, the government did succeed in "pacifying" one Xavante village, an episode celebrated with great hoopla and media coverage. Nevertheless, because Xavante society lacked political centralization, with villages vying with each other for resources and prizing their autonomy, other villages did not immediately follow suit. Juruna's community, living farther to the west of the territory traversed by government officials, resisted peaceful contact with *waradzu* for more than a decade. Yet although they withstood submission to state control longer than their fellow Xavante to the east, the ultimate fate of Juruna's community was far more traumatic. Although the Indian Protection Service was enjoined to secure the protection of indigenous communities within their ancestral territories, such assistance often failed to materialize because of inadequate state funding, overburdened bureaucracies, opposition from local elites, and resistance from uncontacted Indians. The booming real estate market in Mato Grosso, for example, offered tremendous personal and political advantages to local state officials, who were wont to violate federal laws protecting indigenous territory. Consequently, as settlers, ranchers, and land surveyors intensified their onslaught on indigenous villages, encroached upon their land, and depleted their supply of wild game, Juruna's

community could not count on the support of the Indian Protection Service. Their only recourse was to abandon their traditional territory and seek the assistance of the Salesian missionaries.

The Xavante stayed only briefly at the mission at Merure as constant friction with the resident Bororo Indians proved unbearable, and the Salesians resolved to create another mission for the Xavante nearby at São Marcos. Pedro Sbardelotto, an Italian Salesian who helped to establish the new mission, was met by a brutal attack by a local landowner, who sought to indicate, in no uncertain terms, that neither the missionaries nor their indigenous charges were welcome in the region. Sbardelotto survived, and the Xavante remained at São Marcos, but the conflict did not bode well for the Xavante's future relations with their neighbors.

While at São Marcos, Juruna would witness the dramatic changes that befell his people. A measles epidemic killed a great number of children as well as adults at the mission. Whooping cough and pneumonia also took the lives of many Xavante children, with an apparent overall rise in infant mortality after contact. Various visitors to the missions noted the Indians' dependence on the Salesians for medicine and health care; as one noted, "The Indians appreciate our medicines a lot, including the application of injections, even faking being sick just to take injections."[2] In fact, the geographic dispersal historically practiced by Xavante communities probably served as a better strategy to deal with infectious diseases, but now with settlement at the mission and limited mobility, such options were untenable.

Salesian accounts emphasize the great personal sacrifices that the missionaries endured in their efforts to redeem the Xavante, including a fatal attack by the Indians in 1934 that claimed the lives of two priests. Undoubtedly, missionaries (as well as Indian Protection Service officials) who toiled in rural Mato Grosso amid a contrary indigenous group did not live in the lap of luxury or comfort. Yet it is also undeniable that they exploited the Indians' enforced dependence to engineer drastic socioeconomic and cultural changes within the Xavante community. Missionaries insisted that such "improvements" were necessary to groom diligent workers, loyal citizens, and good Christians, although they, like government officials, rarely consulted the Indians.

The Salesians separated Xavante children from their families and placed them in a mission-run boarding school, or *internato*, where they were taught Portuguese, Latin for the liturgy, and civics. Xavante girls were trained in domestic service, sewing, and animal husbandry, while boys were apprenticed as carpenters, shoemakers, machine operators, and agriculturalists. Indian youths were discouraged from accompanying elders on hunting and gathering treks, a position that directly challenged the subsistence strategies and age-based hierarchies that had historically ordered Xavante society. To acclimate the Indians to their future lives as rural workers and market consumers, the Salesians instituted a remunerative system under which Xavante men and women received vouchers of various colors that corresponded to the value of the services they had performed. Thus, for, say, tending to the mission's orchard, an Indian received a piece of yellow scrip which he or she could redeem at the mission store for goods (fishing hooks, hunting supplies, sewing equipment) or cooking supplies (salt, sugar, oil) on which the Xavante had become increasingly reliant. In 1966 a government official who visited the Salesian mission marveled, "The work carried out by the Xavante with the assistance of the missionaries is really notable: large plots planted, a brickyard, diverse wooden buildings. All demonstrate work, order, and the spirit of organization."[3] While the missionaries took credit for transforming the Indians more fully into agriculturalists and regimented laborers, they also noted that such compliance stemmed from "insufficient [land] for hunting, fishing, and gathering of wild fruits."[4]



In the cultural and religious realm, the Xavante also faced constant surveillance and restrictions, which led to the suppression or alteration of traditional beliefs and practices. Indigenous sexual mores, such as polygyny, for example, which had been a prerogative of elder men, suffered clerical condemnation. Whereas prior to contact, Xavante women went about naked and adult men covered themselves only with a penis sheath, missionaries clothed the Indians and sought to inculcate Christian notions of shame and modesty. Clearly, religious indoctrination, educational training, and labor discipline all served to constrain communal ceremonies and endeavors that required broader participation.

External signs of religious observance or social compliance did not necessarily entail abject submission to missionary hegemony. As the Indians struggled to temper the sociocultural effects of enforced dependence, they engaged in various acts of defiance: malingering, dissembling, working sloppily or contrarily, and relocating. For example, one visitor noted that notwithstanding the Salesian efforts to convey proper notions of modesty, "When far from the priests, in the natural life of the village, men and women do not use, in general, even feathers as a covering. They go about entirely naked."[5] The Xavante, moreover, retained their age-set system, exogamous marriage patterns, communal institutions, and numerous rituals. Through these ceremonies, the Indians fostered a sense of cultural resilience in the midst of such wrenching historical change. Because certain communal ceremonies apparently bore little connection to theistic beliefs, they did not clash head-on with missionary doctrine.

Xavante testimonies and life stories display a great deal of ambivalence toward the Salesians. Among the converted, the Salesians represented divine messengers who redeemed the Indians from a life of darkness and sin and blessed them with the eternal grace of Jesus Christ. Even among the less zealous, many Xavante recognized the historic refuge that the Salesians provided, the ongoing medical care, the valuable apprenticeship that trained them in the ways of civilization, and the more modern amenities that the mission offered in comparison to the state-run Indian posts. Indeed, the Xavante undoubtedly saw that their physical and cultural survival no longer depended on martial prowess but rather on new skills—acquisition of Portuguese, apprehension of legal rights, understanding of Brazil's political and socioeconomic system, and alliances with sympathetic *waradzu*. They recognized that the Salesians could offer such remedies, however painful and disagreeable the dose.

Critics, however, recount with great bitterness the heavy-handed methods employed by the missionaries. Physical abuse of Xavante children, a practice unheard of among the Indians, was used to discipline supposedly uncooperative or wayward students. Other Xavante resented the missionaries' exploitation of their labor, the mission-run "company store" that drained their "wages," and the Salesians' efforts to restrict access to outsiders and straitjacket the Indians. Yet others found the intrusive tactics, strict regimentation, and relentless surveillance of the missionaries to be utterly insufferable.

Mario Juruna belonged unequivocally to the camp of malcontents. Perhaps because he was already seventeen when he arrived at the mission, he chafed under its rules and restrictions. Or perhaps, to the contrary, he was too ambitious and wished to engage the world around him at his own pace, rather than bow to the intermediation of the Salesians. As he stated in one interview, "We have to learn how to live, to think, how whites act. Staying inside the village at São Marcos, one is worse off."[6] In any event, in 1964, Juruna left the mission to work as a farmhand on various ranches in the vicinity, with meager pay and under exploitative conditions, but he broke free of the Salesians' control. Five years later, he returned to the mission to live among his people, although he remained unremitting in his hostility toward the missionaries. In 1975 he led 230 members of his community in seceding from the mission to create a new village named Namunkurá within the territorial confines of São Marcos. In Xavante society, such fissures had been historically common in response to cultural tensions or demographic pressures and probably were at play here as well; nevertheless, the Salesians rightfully interpreted the founding of this village miles away from the mission as a major rebuff. Indeed, Juruna became an outspoken critic of the Salesians, denouncing their educational system for deculturating Xavante youths and lambasting the mission's labor regimen and remunerative systems as forms of semi-servitude. Juruna also deployed his combative skills to confront and harry the Brazilian government—then under military rule—for its violation of indigenous land rights. Like other Xavante leaders, he faced formidable obstacles, for the northern region of Mato Grosso had become a favorite among government planners, corporate investors, and real estate speculators committed to the development of the region.

Since 1964, when the military seized power, the Brazilian government had shown a steadfast commitment to the settlement and economic growth of northern Mato Grosso and other parts of Legal Amazonia—the vast western and northern hinterland of the country that continued to remain sparsely populated and economically underdeveloped decades after the March to the West. The military constructed a network of roads through the region to link economic markets and facilitate transportation and communication with more economically dynamic regions. Through generous tax breaks, fiscal subsidies, and sweetheart deals, corporate investors were encouraged by the military government to establish cattle ranches in Mato Grosso, while large-scale immigration was also sponsored in an attempt to increase the population on the frontier and to protect national security. Most of these landowners failed to use their plots productively; instead, they found that razing the vegetation, clearing the land, and reselling their property proved easier and far more lucrative in a booming real estate market. For the Xavante, the developmental model endorsed by the military government triggered increased settlement by outsiders, social marginalization, and alarming deforestation of their territory. As a result of such conflict, violence mounted in the area.

The military government sought to resolve the "Indian problem" by reserving small plots of land for indigenous communities, thereby allowing for outlying areas to be sold off and developed while ensuring social peace and safeguarding its image in the international community. In 1967 it replaced the Indian Protection Service with the National Foundation of the Indian (FUNAI), entrusted with the demarcation of reserves and providing assistance to indigenous communities. Yet over the course of the 1970s, FUNAI found that its goals were stymied on two fronts: landowners objected when reserves encroached on what they considered "their" territory, while indigenous communities insisted that the state create larger reserves and evict all invaders. In Mato Grosso, such tension reached a boiling point in 1976, when landowners who objected to the demarcation of a reserve at Merure murdered Rodolfo Lunkenbein, the director of the Salesian mission at Merure as well as a Bororo Indian. Like most murders in Brazil committed by large landowners, the assassins were acquitted, in this case on the grounds of self-defense. At São

Marcos the Xavante did succeed in removing landowners and squatters from the reserve after they raided several local ranches, slaughtered cattle, interdicted road traffic, and threatened to blow up bridges; still, it took more than three years after official demarcation of the reserve by the government to secure their territory. Throughout the struggle, the Xavante were quite aware that because they were outnumbered and outgunned by their neighbors, they depended ultimately on FUNAI and the missionaries to defend their communities. Thus, Xavante leaders parlayed the aggressive tactics traditionally used in armed warfare into political mobilization, now the key to demarcating their territories and retaining access to industrial goods.

Xavante leaders regularly trekked now to the nation's capital, Brasília, to pressure government officials. Indignant and resolute—and often daubed with war paint—they would show up at FUNAI to demand the creation of larger reserves, the eviction of interlopers from their territories, the dismissal of corrupt government officials, and greater material resources and social services for their communities. Competition among Xavante chiefs and communities further served to fuel this aggressive lobbying, as the success of an actual or potential leader increasingly derived from his ability to attain the backing of influential *waradzu* for community (and factional) struggles and to net consumer goods. To publicize their struggles and spotlight bureaucratic stonewalling, the Xavante made highly effective use of the media, which during the later years of military dictatorship had seen a relaxation of state censorship. And perhaps none was more creative on this account than Mario Juruna, who had already mastered the art of playing off missionary against bureaucrat to gain leverage for his community. Juruna now sought to document the empty promises and double-talk of FUNAI leaders toward the Xavante with a hidden tape recorder and to replay them—to the officials' mortification—to the press. As he succinctly stated, "I bought the tape recorder because whites make many promises, and then forget them."[7]

Juruna's publicity stunt catapulted him to national fame. For Brazilians who held that Indians were inherently more moral than whites, Juruna's tape recorder, revealing the duplicity of government officials, only confirmed their beliefs. For opponents of the military regime, here was a brave soul who challenged authoritarianism and corruption in the government. Indeed, even for government officials, Juruna symbolized what they had long preached: Indians could benefit from technology like everyone else—and even use it for higher ends. And still for others, Juruna was an exotic or amusing diversion: a curious hybrid sporting the traditional long hair and pierced earlobes of adult Xavante men, but dressed in western clothes, toting a tape recorder, and speaking heavily accented and grammatically incorrect Portuguese. In fact, Juruna's crafty use of the tape recorder was only another example of the Xavante's appropriation of white symbols, slogans, and accoutrements for indigenous ends. From missionaries, government officials, and the media, he cobbled together elements of the dominant discourse that had defined Indians as protopatriots and noble savages but fired them back in protest. "We are truer Brazilians than the whites," he proclaimed; "FUNAI has the obligation to pay for our things . . . all Brazilians have an obligation because they took everything that was ours. Formerly, during the time of our grandfathers, all the land was ours."[8] Such appeals sought to pressure government officials to enforce the protective legal measures safeguarding indigenous lands and communities.



By 1980, many indigenous communities throughout Brazil had become politically mobilized. Assisted by the Catholic Church—which helped to organize pan-Indian meetings and to defend native rights—by sympathetic members of the press and civil society, and by international pressure, indigenous leaders took FUNAI and the Brazilian government to task for countless wrongs. The Indian bureau, staffed by military officials, systematically rode roughshod over indigenous concerns, abusing rather than honoring its legal guardianship of Indians; large-scale state projects, such as roads and hydroelectric dams, violently displaced and prejudiced indigenous communities; the government, favoring investors over Indians, authorized the exploration of minerals on native territory and overlooked the invasion and deforestation of Indian lands; corruption permeated FUNAI, while social services for indigenous communities lagged; and the government's assimilationist policies and condescending attitudes devalued indigenous cultures.

Thus, abundant evidence implicated Brazil when the Fourth International Russell Tribunal convened in Holland in 1980 to judge various governments and missionary groups in the Americas for their violation of indigenous rights, with indigenous leaders and anthropologists acting as the jury. In a symbolic example of the sociocultural and political shakeups that have marked the postcolonial world, Mario Juruna, whose youth had been spent in the thickets of the Mato Grosso *cerrado*, was invited to Europe by the Russell Tribunal to serve on the jury. Outraged, the Ministry of the Interior exploited the state's statutory guardianship of indigenous peoples to deny Juruna travel authorization, alleging that he was unqualified to deliberate on behalf of other Indian groups before a tribunal unrecognized by the Brazilian government. The military also sought to exploit the historic rivalries among the Xavante, mobilizing other leaders to discredit Juruna as illegitimate or unrepresentative.

The case generated substantial domestic controversy, and the Xavante's supporters vowed to make a legal appeal on behalf of Juruna, who had become a symbol of resistance to military rule. When the

Federal Court of Appeals struck down the travel ban, the FUNAI president admonished Juruna that he was not to defame Brazil abroad and that if he did not like Brazil, "[he should] go to Bolivia."[9] In November 1980, Juruna took his seat as the honorary president of the Russell Tribunal (having since been upgraded by its organizers to pressure the military government to grant travel authorization), which, to the chagrin of military officials, condemned the deleterious effects of the government's developmental policies on the Yanomami and Nambiquara Indians.

Shortly after Juruna returned from Europe, he began to speak publicly of his intention to enter Brazilian politics, which boasted a competitive party system in the final years of the military dictatorship. It was certainly difficult to return to São Marcos, given the opposition on his home turf from the Salesians, FUNAI, and other Xavante leaders, who accused him—either out of moral indignation, jealousy, or both—of abandoning his community and spending too much time among whites. Juruna was assiduously courted by Leonel Brizola, a populist politician who had returned to Brazil from exile to lead a left-of-center political party and to campaign for governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Affiliating with Brizola's party, Juruna moved to Rio to run for the federal congress, since he knew he stood little chance of being elected from his native state of Mato Grosso. In his campaign, Juruna defended the rights not only of the Indians but also of all of Brazil's poor and disadvantaged. Appearing together with Brizola at political rallies, Juruna was sure to draw a crowd of curious city dwellers either eager to hear his chastening discourse, show their irreverent disregard for the military and traditional Brazilian politics, or simply be entertained by an "exotic" candidate. It proved to be a winning ticket: Juruna was elected as congressman from Rio, and Brizola as governor.

As Brazil's first Indian elected to the national congress, Juruna faced constant surveillance, earning both praise and ridicule. Indeed, his checkered record during his term in office (1983–1987) would provide ammunition to both supporters and detractors. Juruna successfully presided over the creation of a congressional commission on indigenous affairs and met with native groups from throughout Brazil. He vowed to root out malfeasance in FUNAI and to restructure the agency to grant to Indians a greater role in its administration. Juruna denounced the leasing out of indigenous land by FUNAI for commercial purposes and the invasion of Yanomami land by gold miners, and he accused the government of fomenting or failing to prevent violence against indigenous leaders. His diatribes against economic austerity measures and corruption in the government—asserting that "every Minister is a thief"[10]—riled military officials, who demanded his removal from office for lack of decorum, but ultimately they were satisfied with a formal apology. In 1984 he spoke before the human rights commission of the United Nations in Geneva, denouncing the invasion of indigenous territory, while calling for "greater access to the channels of power in Brazil and the world for indigenous populations."[11]



Yet, Juruna was also constantly taunted for being an acculturated exotic or an inauthentic Indian by those who could or would only view "real" Indians as those still living uncontacted in the forest according to traditional ways. And notwithstanding Juruna's pan-Indian discourse and platform, Brazil's indigenous population was too small and too diverse—divided by language, culture, religion, geography, historical experiences, and traditional rivalries—to coalesce into a formidable power bloc. As a token ethnic leader, Juruna faced intense social pressure; as a national politician, he faced the temptation of illicit self-enrichment. In 1984, Juruna buckled. Reversing a position he had held since assuming office, he stunned his supporters by proclaiming that the land claims of the Pataxó Indians of Bahia—engaged in a bitter and long-standing struggle with large landowners to reclaim ancestral territory—were unfounded since the Pataxó were too acculturated to be "real" Indians. Juruna, accompanied to the area by three conservative Bahian congressmen and seduced by financial incentives offered by the landowners, had proposed that the Pataxó be relocated. Indigenous leaders and advocacy groups were outraged by Juruna's betrayal, couched in the racist stereotypes about indigenous authenticity historically used to discredit land claims (and, ironically, to impugn Juruna himself). Subsequently, Juruna was involved in another bribery scandal in the national congress.

Juruna was not reelected to office. While he would serve as an adviser on indigenous affairs and obtain a sinecure from FUNAI, he essentially faded into oblivion. Embittered by his foray into the Brazilian political system, Juruna declared: "I was used here by the whites, who are very evil, cheap, and envious. In 1982, when the PDT [the acronym of Brizola's party] was small, I was presented as an attraction at rallies, the way a street vendor uses a domesticated snake to attract a clientele to sell his knickknacks. Now that the party [PDT] is strong, a party I helped to found, they got rid of me."[12] Juruna was, in part, correct: his ethnicity had been exploited by more savvy and opportunistic politicians to attract curious onlookers and independent-minded voters. Because he was an Indian, he had been endlessly scrutinized while in office, lionized or lampooned as he deviated from or conformed to the socially constructed (and unrealistic) notions that Brazilians held regarding indigenous peoples. But whether through political miscalculation, unbearable pressure, or personal greed, he ultimately squandered a promising electoral mandate and an opportunity to strengthen a fledgling pan-Indian movement.

Mario Juruna's life, like those of other Indian leaders, was shaped by the larger socioeconomic forces that have rocked indigenous communities over the last half century with the expansion of the Brazilian frontier and the consolidation of state power: the loss of traditional lands and autonomy, the penetration of the market economy, increased socioeconomic marginalization, and painful apprenticeship and exploitation in the white world. The dismal health conditions, inadequate schools, endemic poverty, ongoing social discrimination, and pervasive invasion of indigenous lands are all grim reminders of the precarious status of Brazil's Indians. Yet Juruna's life also demonstrates the innovative ways in which indigenous peoples have sought to engage the Brazilian legal and political systems in a desperate attempt to safeguard their communities and ensure cultural respect. Manipulating societal images about noble savages, marshalling traditional warrior skills, and appealing to domestic and international allies, Juruna succeeded in becoming, against all odds, a political leader of national renown. He soon learned that such saintly images are impossible to fulfill, particularly for beleaguered communities and their leaders; that Brazilian politics offers a range of options calibrated to legislators' moral barometer; and that political allies and the media can be fickle. And perhaps Brazilians had learned that indigenous communities are complex, varied, and multifaceted; and that these communities face inordinate social pressure, racial discrimination, and internal conflict in adapting to that externally imposed reality to which they strive to belong: the Brazilian nation.

## NOTES

1. Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, *Rumo ao Oeste* (Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert, 1942), 21–22.
2. J. R. do Amaral Lapa, *Missão do Sangradouro* (Rio de Janeiro: Coleção Saraiva, 1963), 121.
3. Ismael da Silva Leitão, "Relatório da viagem de inspeção feita a Missão Salesiana São Marcos," *Goiâna*, 21 September 1966, Museu do Índio, Sector de Documentação [hereafter MI, SEDOC], Film 273, Fot837-39.
4. Pe. Bartolomeu Giaccaria to Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI), 10 July 1971, MI, SEDOC, Film 237, Fot1294-1308.
5. Lapa, *Missão do Sangradouro*, 102–3.
6. Juruna, quoted in Edilson Martins, *Nossos Índios, Nossos Mortos* (Rio de Janeiro: CODERCI, 1978), 205.
7. Ibid., 207.
8. Alvaro Pereira and Armando Rollemberg, "Entrevista: Dzururan (Mario), Cacique/Em Busca de Sobrevivência," *Veja*, 20 November 1974.



9. FUNAI President João Nobre da Veiga, quoted in "Juruna advertido para 'não atacar o Brasil,'" *Folha de São Paulo*, 1 November 1980.
10. "Ministros de Figueiredo pedem a punição de Juruna," *Jornal do Brasil*, 29 September 1983.
11. "Juruna denuncia na ONU que o maior inimigo Índio é o avanço da sociedade," *Estado de Minas*, 1 August 1984.
12. "Juruna, agora derrotado, volta à selva," *O Globo*, 21 November 1986.

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