

## Charles Wagley: his career, his work, his legacy Charles Wagley: sua carreira, seu trabalho, seu legado

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**Abstract:** Charles Wagley's work, firmly in the Boasian tradition, reflects his association with and training by Franz Boas, but especially by Ruth Benedict and Ruth Bunzel. Wagley's career as an ethnographer began in the Guatemalan highland town of Santiago Chimaltenango in 1937. Soon thereafter, he turned from Guatemala to Brazil, where he did his first field research (1939-1940) among the Tapirapé Indians. Wagley's Tapirapé revisits culminated in his last book, "Welcome of tears: the Tapirapé Indians of Central Brazil" (1977). Wagley's study of Gurupá began in 1948 and produced various editions of his popular book "Amazon town: a study of man in the Tropics". Wagley co-directed the Bahia State-Columbia University Community Study Project in 1951-1952, culminating in the edited book "Race and class in rural Brazil". Over time, Wagley focused increasingly on non-Indians, ranging from rural towns like Gurupá to Brazilian culture as a whole. Illustrating the latter, Wagley wrote two editions of "Introduction to Brazil", a culturally insightful text that examined unity and diversity in Brazilian culture and society. A man of careful scholarship and keen intellect, Chuck Wagley took great pride in the excellence of his teaching and writing; he also enjoyed sharing his knowledge and insights with a larger public.

**Keywords:** Charles Wagley. Biography. Ethnography. Rural anthropology. Tapirapé. Gurupá.

**Resumo:** A obra de Charles Wagley se situa na tradição estabelecida por Franz Boas, e mais ainda por Ruth Benedict e Ruth Bunzel. Sua carreira etnográfica começou na comunidade de Santiago Chimaltenango, nas montanhas da Guatemala, em 1937. Logo depois, mudou o foco para o Brasil, onde fez sua primeira viagem de campo (1939-1940), entre os Tapirapé. As diversas visitas que fez a esses índios resultaram no livro "Lágrimas de boas-vindas: os Índios Tapirapé do Brasil Central" (1977). O estudo de Wagley em Gurupá iniciou em 1948 e produziu várias edições de seu popular livro "Amazon town: a study of man in the Tropics". Wagley foi cogestor do Projeto de Estudos de Comunidade, desenvolvido pelas Universidades Estadual da Bahia e de Columbia entre 1951-1952, que culminou no livro "Race and class in rural Brazil". Ao longo do tempo, Wagley se concentrou em populações não indígenas, desde vilas rurais, como Gurupá, até a cultura brasileira como um todo. Por exemplo, publicou duas edições de "Introduction to Brazil", com observações precisas sobre a unidade e a diversidade na sociedade e cultura brasileira. 'Chuck' Wagley foi um homem erudito, com uma aguda capacidade intelectual. Tinha orgulho da excelência de seus escritos e de sua atuação docente, e também apreciava compartilhar seus conhecimentos com um público amplo.

**Palavras-chave:** Charles Wagley. Biografia. Etnografia. Antropologia rural. Tapirapé. Gurupá.

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Charles ('Chuck') Wagley (1913-1991), an eminent anthropologist and Latin Americanist, received his undergraduate (1936) and doctoral (1941) degrees from Columbia University. On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth we celebrate the contributions and legacy of his work, situated firmly in the Boasian tradition. Wagley studied at Columbia with Franz Boas, but he worked much more closely with two of Boas's former students, Ruth Benedict and Ruth Bunzel, and he was a good friend of Margaret Mead, also a Boas student. Ralph Linton was another of Wagley's mentors at Columbia. Wagley built upon a legacy of research on race, ethnicity, and social change pioneered by his professors at Columbia, especially Boas and Benedict. Linton helped spur his interest in acculturation, which Wagley developed (with Eduardo Galvão) in his study of the Tenetehara Indians of Brazil (1949).

## RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Wagley's career as an ethnographer began in the Guatemalan highland town of Santiago Chimaltenango in 1937. His field study of that Mayan Indian community was the basis of his doctoral dissertation, published in 1941 as "Economics of a Guatemalan Village", a "Memoir of the American Anthropological Association". He had successfully defended his dissertation prior to that year, but in those days a Columbia doctorate did not become official until the dissertation was published. Wagley wrote more about Santiago Chimaltenango in "The social and religious life of a Guatemalan Village" (1949). Bunzel, who had worked in Guatemala, was a helpful mentor for his research there, which examined not only economics and religion, but also social organization, including interethnic relations. Wagley's field experiences in highland Guatemala and, later, in lowland Brazilian peasant communities would eventually inform his insightful comparative essays on sociocultural, ethnic, and 'racial' differences in the Americas.

In 1939, with his dissertation written and awaiting publication, Wagley turned from Guatemala to Brazil, where, between 1939 and 1945 he conducted academic

research and later, applied anthropological studies on public health and sanitation for the Brazilian and American governments during World War II. Wagley is well-known for his research at three different sites in the Amazon region. His Brazilian research began in 1939-1940 among the forest-dwelling Tapirapé Indians. His 1940 article "The effects of depopulation upon social organization, as illustrated by Tapirapé Indians" is a classic in demographic anthropology. Wagley described a Tapirapé "population policy", according to which couples were permitted to raise only two children of one sex, three in all. Parents who tried to raise more than the allotted number were seen as depriving other families of basic resources. The Tapirapé considered it selfish and immoral to try to keep a surplus baby. The Tapirapé thought that the death of such an infant, who was not yet considered to be human, was morally necessary if other members of the group were to survive. The policy was eventually abandoned in the context of a declining Tapirapé population and after intervention by a group of French nuns (Little Sisters of Jesus) residing there. Wagley's multiple visits to the Tapirapé culminated in his final book, "Welcome of tears: the Tapirapé Indians of Central Brazil" (1977), which was translated into Portuguese in 1988. Wagley's research among the acculturated Tenetehara Indians in 1941-1942 (with his good friend and frequent collaborator Eduardo Galvão) led to their book "The Tenetehara Indians of Brazil" (1949).

During World War II, as part of the war effort to secure wild rubber supplies, the United States government and the Brazilian public health agency, Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública (SESP), conducted health education programs in the Amazon region. Wagley supervised the production of pamphlets and slide shows on public health funded by SESP. To test those materials, the Brazilian novelist Dalcídio Jurandir, a collaborator of Wagley's in the SESP program, suggested Gurupá, a small riverine community where he had served as municipal secretary. Wagley and his SESP colleagues visited Gurupá several times. After the war, from June to September 1948, Wagley and Galvão chose Gurupá for a field study of a 'typical'



Amazonian community. Joining them as fieldworkers there were their wives, Cecília Roxo Wagley and Clara Galvão. Two major works resulted: "Amazon town" by Charles Wagley and "The religion of an Amazon community" by Eduardo Galvão. After the war, Eduardo Galvão became Wagley's doctoral student at Columbia.

Gurupá, which Wagley referred to with the pseudonym 'Itá' in his earlier work, is a community of peasant farmers and rubber tappers on the banks of the Amazon. The studies that Wagley and his associates and students carried out there led to various editions of his popular book "Amazon town: a study of man in the tropics" (1953, 1976). An anniversary edition was published by Oxford University Press in 2013. Along with his 1974 edited volume, "Man in the Amazon", these books, along with many journal articles in English and Portuguese, established Charles Wagley's reputation as a pioneer in Amazonian studies.

Collaborating with two distinguished scholars from Bahia, the educator Anísio Teixeira and, especially, the anthropologist Thales de Azevedo, Wagley directed the Bahia State-Columbia University Community Study Project in 1951-1952. This influential comparative research effort resulted in Wagley's edited book "Race and class in rural Brazil" (1952, 1964). Published by The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), this work is the first modern anthropological look at race relations in Brazil. Other participants in that project included three of Wagley's Columbia graduate students: Marvin Harris, who did fieldwork at Rio de Contas ('Minas Velhas'); Harry W. ('Bill') Hutchinson who worked at São Francisco do Conde ('Vila Recôncavo'); and Ben Zimmerman who worked at Monte Santo ('Monte Serrat'). Along with these three towns in Bahia, Wagley's study of Gurupá ('Itá') provided the fourth case study for "Race and class in rural Brazil".

In "The Latin American tradition: essays on the unity and diversity of Latin American culture" (1968), Wagley brought together several of his papers on traditional and

modern Latin America, including an influential article on the social construction of race, which he called "The concept of social race in the Americas". In that paper, published originally in 1959, Wagley argued convincingly that races are culturally constructed categories that may have little to do with actual biological differences. What he termed 'social races' are groups assumed to have a biological basis but actually defined in a culturally arbitrary, rather than a scientific, manner.

In 1958, with co-author Marvin Harris, by now his faculty colleague at Columbia, Wagley published "Minorities in the New World: six case studies" (1958). Harris, who died in 2001, came to be known mostly for his theoretical work on "cultural materialism". However, students of Brazil are familiar with his ethnographic study of 'Minas Velhas' and his work on Brazilian racial classification. Harris's field research in 'Minas Velhas' is the basis of his "Town and country in Brazil" (1956) and of his chapter (1952) in "Race and class in rural Brazil". Wagley was Harris's dissertation chair and long-time collaborator and associate at Columbia and Florida, where Harris, like Wagley, became Graduate Research Professor. As had been the case with Eduardo Galvão, their lives were intertwined by multiple threads.

Wagley and the UNESCO project helped spur Harris's subsequent research on race, which received its fullest treatment in "Patterns of race in the Americas" (1964). Enlarging on case material he developed with Wagley in "Minorities in the New World", Harris offered a systematic comparison of the divergent racial patterns that emerged in Brazil, the United States, the Caribbean, and highland Latin America. In "Patterns of race", Harris took particular issue with "cultural heritage" and national character explanations of racial patterns, particularly those advanced by the historian Frank Tannenbaum for the Caribbean and by the Brazilian social theorist Gilberto Freyre for Brazil. However Wagley, with his Boas/Benedict background, was friendlier to such explanations, and this caused occasional friction with Harris. Freyre had stressed the role of Portuguese national character in

forming Brazilian race relations, and indeed in creating a “new world in the tropics”, based on a supposed penchant for racial tolerance and mixture: what Freyre called *mestiçagem*. In “Patterns of race”, Harris argued persuasively for the key role of material conditions (rather than national character) in forming the patterns of race in different parts of the Americas. He also took issue with Freyre’s contention that slaves received more humane treatment in Brazil than in the United States, supposedly because of differences in Portuguese *versus* English national character and attitudes toward non-Europeans. Both in “Town and country in Brazil” and in “Patterns of race in the Americas” Harris confronted the harsher dimensions of Brazilian race relations. While providing a vivid description of racial prejudice in ‘Minas Velhas’, Harris also showed that prejudice did not necessarily translate into systematic discrimination.

Harris also is well known for his work on Brazilian racial classification, especially his research on the multiple racial categories in use throughout Brazil and their relation to the categories used in the Brazilian census. Harris and Kottak (1963) coined the term ‘hypodescent’ to contrast American and Brazilian racial classification. With hypodescent, mixed children (e.g., those from a union between an African-American and a Euro-American) are always assigned to the minority category. Hypodescent did not operate in Brazil, where racial classification was based more on phenotype and social perceptions, and where full siblings could be classified as members of different social races. The inspiration for all this research on Brazilian race relations and classification can be traced back to the UNESCO Bahia project and Wagley’s work on the social construction of race.

Wagley was acutely aware that a Brazilian can change his or her ‘race’ – say from Indian to *mestiço* – by changing his or her manner of dress, language, location (e.g., rural to urban), and even attitude (e.g., by adopting urban behavior). Two widely used racial/ethnic labels in Brazil are *índio* i.e., indigenous, Native

American and *caboclo*, i.e., someone of mixed blood who might ‘look *índio*’ but wears cosmopolitan clothing and participates in Brazilian culture rather than living in an indigenous community. Late in his career at Florida, Wagley illustrated these points vividly, through his photographs, in a traveling exhibit, entitled “Índios e caboclos”, that traveled to several museums, including New York’s American Museum of Natural History in 1993. In “Minorities in the New World” and other works, Wagley showed that similar shifts in racial/ethnic classification occur in other parts of Latin America, for example, Guatemala. The perception of biological race is influenced not just by the physical phenotype but also by how one dresses and behaves.

From June 24 to September 16, 1960, Wagley traveled to Europe and Africa on a grant issued by the Institute of International Education with funds provided by the Ford Foundation. The stated purpose of the grant was “to study research possibilities in relation to the training of administrative officers” (Wagley report 1960). Accompanied by his wife, Cecilia, and his daughter, Isabel (‘Betty’), Wagley visited France, Portugal, and Portugal’s three African ‘overseas provinces’, Mozambique, Angola, and Portuguese Guinea, now Guinea Bissau. During their visit to Mozambique, traveling by jeep through South Africa and Southwest Africa (now Namibia) en route to Angola, they were accompanied by Professor Antonio Jorge Dias of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos in Lisbon and his wife, Margot Dias, her husband’s assistant and collaborator.

Wagley’s African sojourn ended with his visit to what is now Guinea Bissau, where he was particularly impressed with how rapidly Islam appeared to be spreading (Cecilia and Betty had returned to the U.S. before Chuck visited Guinea). Intrigued by Islam’s African advance, Wagley wrote an National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to study the phenomenon in Portuguese Guinea. The unrest that emerged in Portuguese Africa in the years after Wagley’s 1960 visit prevented him

from expanding his research to a new continent. In the report he wrote after the trip, Wagley urged international research in Portuguese Africa and commented on the old-fashioned nature of Portuguese anthropology, although he exempted Dias, an experienced ethnographer of the Makonde of northern Mozambique, from this criticism. He also commented on the suspicion and distrust held by Portuguese administrators in both Africa and Portugal itself of foreign researchers. Prior to Wagley's African visit, Marvin Harris had been forced out of Mozambique, where his questions about African labor practices had been deemed unwarranted and potentially undermining of Portuguese colonial authority. One reason Dias wanted Wagley to visit Mozambique was to smooth over feelings about foreign anthropologists engendered by Harris's activities and associations. Neither Harris nor Wagley found much evidence in Portuguese Africa for Gilberto Freyre's model of an integrated and racially harmonious tropical society.

While Wagley's African research never materialized, his work in Brazil continued. Over time, he came to focus increasingly on non-Indians, ranging from rural towns like Gurupá to Brazilian culture as a whole. Wagley wrote two editions of "Introduction to Brazil" (1963, 1971), which remains a culturally insightful, if now dated, text. In focusing on national culture, character, and values Wagley followed a path taken by his mentor Ruth Benedict in her influential book "The chrysanthemum and the sword" (Benedict, 1946), a study of post-war Japan. Writing almost two decades after Benedict, however, he was careful to describe diversity (e.g., based on region, race, and class) as well as unifying themes in Brazilian national culture.

## TEACHING AND OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

The courses that Wagley offered to undergraduates and graduate students at Columbia and Florida provide good evidence of his Boasian training. The concepts of culture area, diffusion, and survivals associated with such Boasians as Clark Wissler, Alfred Kroeber, and

Melville Herskovits guided Wagley to teach about what today might be called the African diaspora or 'the Black Atlantic'. His title for the course (using language that sounds dated today) was "The Negro in the New World". Wagley was equally interested in unity and diversity among Native Americans, especially those he knew well from his fieldwork in the highlands of Guatemala and the lowlands of Brazil. He regularly taught area courses focusing on Brazil – varying in scope between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies – and lowland South American Indians.

Wagley usually referred to himself as a 'social' rather than a 'cultural' anthropologist. One of his favorite and most influential courses was "Social Organization", which I attended. The term 'social anthropology' is more associated with British than American anthropology, and Wagley covered British as well as French findings on kinship, descent, and marriage in his course. One of his friends and admirers was Claude Lévi-Strauss, who shared Wagley's interest in the social organization of lowland South American Indians. In a letter supporting Wagley's selection in 1983 as the University of Florida Teacher/Scholar of the year, anthropologist Roy Rappaport credited Wagley's social organization course as having honed his interest in that topic as well as in the influence of environmental factors on human groups.

Wagley was a dedicated teacher and mentor, especially to graduate students. He chaired some 55 doctoral dissertations at Columbia and Florida, nurturing, guiding, and inspiring some of today's most prominent anthropologists, both American and Brazilian, including Marvin Harris, my own dissertation advisor. Several of his students, and their students (including myself), have benefited from the legacy of Wagley's interest in race, ethnicity, and social change as well as his pioneering coordination of simultaneous, systematic comparative fieldwork projects in multiple Brazilian communities.

A man of careful scholarship and keen intellect, Chuck Wagley took great pride in the excellence of his

teaching and writing. Chuck also enjoyed sharing his knowledge and insights, and promoting anthropology's value as a profession with a larger public. He also represented the field in several foundations, including the Guggenheim Foundation and the Social Science Research Council. The clarity and accessibility of his writing style helped him reach beyond books and academic journals to the popular press, in the United States and especially in Brazil, where his essay "If I were a Brazilian" (1963) attracted wide attention in a prominent newspaper. Affection, openness, honesty, respect for others, and a total lack of pretension were prominent features of Wagley's personality.

Wagley served as President of the American Anthropological Association (1969-1971) and of the American Ethnological Society. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Center for Inter-American Relations. He held honorary degrees from the University of Notre Dame and the University of Bahia (Brazil). His many awards include the Medal for Science in the Amazon from the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia (National Institute for Amazon Research) and the Kalman Silvert Award from the Latin American Studies Association. The Brazilian government expressed its appreciation of Wagley's work directing a major public health project during World War II by naming him to the National Order of the Southern Cross and awarding him the prestigious Medal of War.

Wagley's commitment to Brazil and his personal knowledge of Brazilian life reflects not only his research and applied work, but also his marriage to Brazilian-born Cecilia Roxo, a *carioca* who accompanied him in fieldwork in Gurupá and, later, among the Tapirapé. Wagley's daughter, Isabel (also known as 'Betty') Anne Wagley Kottak, now a retired social worker, has been my wife since 1963. Wagley's only son, Carlos William Wagley, died before his parents in a tragic accident in 1960, just before the Wagleys' African trip.

## THE LEGACY CONTINUES

Wagley influenced the work and careers of many contributors to this volume, myself included. Yet my relationship with Wagley was quite different than that with his other students and colleagues. I audited only one of his classes, and he was never a formal mentor during my Brazilian research, although we did talk on many occasions about how our various projects were going. For Wagley, whom I knew very personally as 'Chuck', was my father-in-law, and the grandfather of my children. Wagley's student Marvin Harris was my own dissertation adviser, and guided my initial research in Brazil, in Arembepe, Bahia. That is where I met Chuck's daughter Isabel Wagley in 1962 while both of us were doing undergraduate fieldwork. After our marriage in 1963, we returned to Arembepe several times: in 1964, 1965, 1973, 1980, annually between 1982 and 1987, again in 1991, 1992, 1994, 2003, 2006, 2010, and most recently, with our daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren in August 2012: the fiftieth anniversary of our first field work there.

That auspicious Columbia-Cornell-Harvard-Illinois Summer Field Studies Program in Anthropology was built by Wagley and Harris in collaboration with Alan Holmberg at Cornell University, Evon Vogt at Harvard University, and Joseph Casagrande at the University of Illinois. Initial support for this undergraduate training program came from the Carnegie Foundation, and it was eventually funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The program ran from 1961 through 1965 and included field stations were in Brazil (Bahia), Mexico (Chiapas), Peru (Vicos), and Ecuador.

My first field work stint in Arembepe from June to August of 1962 was as an undergraduate in that program. Isabel Wagley, at that time anthropology major at Barnard College, joined her parents that summer in Bahia, where her father held a Fulbright fellowship. She was seeking a field experience for a research paper and chose to live in Arembepe, where I was stationed along with David

Epstein, another Columbia College undergraduate. That is how we met. So obviously, Arembepe is a special place for us personally, but it has also proven to be a fruitful place to study over the past fifty years as we have worked there together and observed the fascinating process of change that has taken place. The story of Arembepe's radical social and economic transformation is told in my book "Assault on paradise: the globalization of a little community in Brazil" (Kottak, 2006).

Beginning with the work by Wagley, Azevedo, Harris, and myself in the 1960s, the Atlantic coastal town of Arembepe – something of a microcosm for Bahia state – is a site where multiple anthropologists have worked and continued to work as members of a what became an *de facto* longitudinal team. Later researchers have been able to build on prior contacts and findings to increase knowledge about how local people meet and manage new circumstances. Generations of researchers, including Isabel, myself, and others, have monitored various aspects of change and development in Arembepe. Brazilian and American researchers collaborated in team research projects on the impact of the introduction of television during the 1980s (Kottak, 1990) and on ecological awareness and environmental risk perception in the 1990s (Kottak and Costa, 1993; Kottak *et al.*, 1995, 1997).

Most recently, in 2012-2013, Richard Pace (a participant in the 1980s television project) and I received NSF funding for a return study of the impacts of television and other electronic media at five field sites, including four of those studied in the 1980s project: Arembepe, Cunha in the state of São Paulo, Ibirama in Santa Catarina, Gurupá in Pará (Wagley's "Amazon town") plus a Kayapó Indian village in southern Pará (Shepard and Pace, 2012). Pace received his doctorate under Wagley at the University of Florida carrying out ongoing research at Gurupá and following the social, political and economic changes since the days of Wagley's "Amazon town" (see Pace and Hinote, 2013).

Charles Wagley and Thales de Azevedo encouraged team research and international collaboration through the

UNESCO project. The need for such a collaborative model is even more apparent today. Contemporary forces of change are too pervasive and complex to be understood fully by a 'lone ethnographer' – a researcher who starts from scratch and works alone, for a limited period of time, and who views his or her field site as relatively discrete and isolated. No longer can any ethnographer imagine that his or her field site represents some sort of pristine or autonomous entity. Nor should the ethnographer assume that he or she has exclusive (owner's) rights to the site, or even to the data gathered there. That information, after all, has been produced in friendship, cooperation, and consultation with local people. More and more anthropological field sites have been restudied. Ideally, later ethnographers collaborate with and build on the work of their predecessors. Compared with the 'lone ethnographer model', team work across time – as in Arembepe – and space – as in the comparative studies encouraged by UNESCO and the media projects in various Brazilian towns – produces broader and more profound understandings of cultural change and transformation.

A 'fifth generation' – from Wagley to Harris to Kottak to Pace to Pace's current students – have continued Wagley's legacy of team work for the systematic comparison of Brazilian towns. As race and class in rural Brazil were scrutinized by the UNESCO researchers of the 1950s, television was the focus for comparative projects of the mid-1980s. Now the rapidly changing landscape of electronic media is the subject of the team study project in 2013: the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wagley's birth in Clarksville, Texas.

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