

Jacques Lizot

## **The Yanomami in the Face of Ethnocide**

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Jacques Lizot, anthropologist, began as an Orientalist and then studied classical Arabic. Encouraged by Claude Levi-Strauss, he was converted to Americanist studies in 1968, and went to the Yanomami Indians, with whom he has spent more than 6 years. He has published some 10 articles, a book on mythology and a Yanomami/Spanish dictionary. His last book: "Le cercle des feux. Faits et dits des Indiens yanomami" has just been published in Paris, and he is preparing a large work on economy and politics.

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Copenhagen, February 1976

For the International Secretariat of IWGIA

Inese Andersen Helge Kleivan

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IN THE FACE OF ETHNOCIDE**

**Copenhagen 1976**

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The opinion of those who take the Indians for people of no intelligence is false... The most curious and learned men who have penetrated to grasp their secrets, their ancient form of government, judge it in a very different way, marvelling that so much order and reason existed among them. ★

## INTRODUCTION

In Latin America - in Venezuela - of all the words bandied about, there is no more hollow and misused term than "integration", but there is none which is greeted with such a large consensus. Everyone agrees, it is necessary to integrate the ethnic minorities into national life, it is an absolute necessity, an ineluctable process, etc. However, if anyone dare ask what everyone understands by "integration", he will receive the most contradictory, consternating, and imprecise replies.

Of all the problems currently preoccupying human consciousness that of South American Indian civilisations, menaced with disappearance, is undoubtedly one of the most grievous.

The population and technological pressures of our civilisation have been so marked, and the need for new spaces and resources so imperious, during the last decades, that there is not a single corner - however remote - of Venezuelan territory which has not been affected.

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★ Cited by Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1969.

We don't have to judge whether this phenomenon is "good" or "bad" and I confine myself to recording it and raising questions about its effects. I am obliged to note the often brutal invasion of Indian communities by the modern world - communities which, until the present, remained untouched by its influence. Missionaries and officials have been endowed with more powerful material means to strengthen their infrastructure and activity; prospecting and research work have multiplied. The need to "integrate" the native people has appeared more pressing.

What is concealed by this notion of integration? To integrate is to modify - to provoke cultural change; to depart from a secure reality and arrive at a self-chosen goal: the insertion into the national life of minority groups which live at a distance.

The mechanic who intends to adapt a mechanism to do work for which it was not designed, has to know Mechanics - otherwise we would not entrust him the task. What of those people responsible for bringing the long, complex and delicate work of integration to fruition? We have to record that these specialists have neither the requisite qualities nor the suitable training. The missionary (since it is about him I am talking) wants to introduce change into the life of the Indians; this change affects the totality of the cultural complex: the economy, social life, family structure, environment, nutrition etc. As a prerequisite to action, the missionary ought to understand the reality he wants to modify and, therefore, study it; this understanding is in his own interest, since it will allow him to correctly direct his activity. With rare exceptions - of whom I am not writing here - the missionaries' knowledge of native institutions is extremely vague. Certain missionaries even let themselves regard the Indians as inferior beings, devalue their life-style, look on their beliefs as stupid superstitions and their language as consisting altogether of abstract concepts. They completely ignore the balance and internal logic of Indian societies which permit them to function.

Under these conditions, integration becomes a blind process quite unaware of the cultural context in which, nonetheless, it must work; far from leading to the insertion of aboriginals into modern life as is desired, it creates indefensible imbalances, dramatic contradictions, and brings about cultural decay. It is the most absurd of situations.

This report, devoted to the Yanomami of the Upper Orinoco, is concerned with this phenomenon, this situation - and the meaning and impact of the notion of "integration". Despite the severity of tone, and of its conclusions, I hope the reader will conclude that this study invites a re-ordering of ideas, that it allows us to pass from prejudice to understanding, that its criticism is not negative, but advocates a re-direction and co-ordination of present efforts in the interest of Venezuela and its indigenous people.

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My intention is neither to explain the word "ethnocide" nor outline its history. R. Jaulin has expanded its use, but we owe Pierre Clastres the merit of having spelled it out, by unambiguously dealing with the "political problem" in his reports on genocide. Ethnocide and genocide are two aspects of the same attitude: there is only a difference of degree between them, and the deplorable history of the Amerindian peoples shows how easily one passes into the other. If the Indians "aren't human beings" (to quote a phrase from the mouth of a missionary in 1969) then one can destroy them with impunity and - by ignoring them for what they are - some admirable civilisations. When it is necessary, and in order to deliver up to unscrupulous acquirers territory freed from its inhabitants, one can exterminate the Indians or condemn them to a lingering death, by attrition.

Need I recall the recent destruction of the Guayaki of Paraguay? This was the logic of our industrial society, stupid and cruel; the pitiless logic of continual growth and profit.

Missionary penetration among the Yanomami came late, since it dates from 1950, when an evangelist of the New Tribes Mission set up the first settlement on the banks of the Orinoco. Since then, the Salesians and Evangelists - each with its own spirit and using different methods - have engaged in a crude competition to establish their respective zones of influence. This rivalry has ended in the de facto partition of Yanomami territory.

This report is limited: in terms of time, since it only takes account of developments between 1968 and 1975, the period of my stay among the Yanomami; in terms of space, since I am only taking into consideration the situation of the groups of the Upper Orinoco and adjacent rivers. I will write of the effects of missionary action on the economy, the social system, and about the La Esmeralda Children's Boarding school. Then I take a look at the sanitary and demographic problems, and finally say why the present methods of integration are bad, what they inevitably lead to, and what it is possible to do in the future.

The Yanomami are spread between Brazil and Venezuela. They occupy a dense forest region on the borders of Guyana, the northern parts divided up by grassy savanna. The Parima plain which forms the frontier between Brazil and Venezuela constitutes both the geographic centre and the place of origin of today's communities.

Yanomami territory is more or less contained between 4 degrees north and the equator on the one hand, and 62 degrees east and 66 degrees west on the other: the source of the Orinoco. The dry season (verano) lasts from November until April, and the rainy season (invierno) from May until October.

The linguistic affiliation of these Indians has still to be determined; they might belong to the Carib stock.

The size of the local communities varies largely according to their location; in the centre of the territory they number at least 54 persons and no more than 150. In the south they

number at least 100, and can reach 250 residents.

### TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Neighbouring forest and gardens cultivated near their homes provide the Yanomami with the produce necessary for food and technological activities.

In former times, the Indians completely dispensed with metal tools, and probably used stone axes (wanabo) to clear their lands and for other secondary activities. Then, through a series of exchanges with neighbouring groups, several axes, machetes and knives arrived, passing from band to band in a complicated circuit. These first tools were used after they had served successive owners; it was often necessary to fix a simple strip of metal to a wooden handle, in order to use it like a hatchet (haowa). Family solidarity and the loan system enabled the Yanomami to overcome the scarcity of these tools. Tasks became less laborious; an important part of working-time was saved, the plantations could expand and the choice of sites, on which to put them, lost its importance.

During this period, the acquisition of tools fitted into the traditional model of economic and matrimonial exchanges: one traded a piece of metal or an old knife, as before one had traded a bow or basket-work. These exchanges occurred without constraint, the Indians did not have to alienate themselves politically or economically, nor to modify their cultural system in response to a pressure put upon them. Henceforth working less, they could devote more time to amusements and relaxation, thus gaining the benefits of a moderate use of manufactured goods, put to the service of a subsistence economy - that is, an economy which is not exclusively oriented towards the production and consumption of material goods. The Indians found a new equilibrium for themselves. And it was a happy one.

This stability came to an end, after the arrival of the first "whites" when it suddenly became necessary to "teach the Indians to work". Non-essential needs were diversified artificially and without discrimination. The white man introduced

western clothes - so ill-adapted to life in the forests - previously unknown foods, which were virtually useless to an indigenous diet; pocket lamps which required batteries; guns which needed powder and lead; outboard motors requiring petrol; cigarettes, and so forth. This food of new, whimsical, and often superfluous goods (including fair balloons, safety pins, plastic whistles and toys) only reached the riverine groups of the Orinoco and Padamo which were near the missionary establishments, or directly accessible by water.

Some of these objects were not harmful in themselves. Introducing them after careful study, without haste, might have been of indisputable benefit. But it was carried out too quickly. Badly fitting clothes were handed out, so that men dressed like women, and women like men. No effort was made to teach the Indians how to wash and sew them. Above all, clothes were made a matter of morality: it was necessary to hide one's genitals, the Indians were taught to be ashamed of their bodies. They were not told that, in certain circumstances - to go into the forest for example, or to bathe - they could do without them. Their bodies, so elegant, balanced and harmonious, were concealed under filthy rags which made them ridiculous. There was the unprecedented spectacle of Yanomami rushing to fetch their clothes, at the sound of an engine.

More seriously, technological aid was only given under certain conditions. It became a means of bringing pressure to bear, and was only given selectively. For example, it was necessary to go to Mass, or comply with this or that demand from a white provider. Instead of gaining inspiration from the Indian system of exchange, the whites exacted work and the Yanomami had to put themselves in another person's service. This had never happened in the past; traditional society had its interchange of goods and services, but an Indian never sold his labour to another for remuneration. Under this fundamental change, the usual cycles of reciprocity were disturbed, even destroyed. Thus there grew up two types of community - those holding manufactured goods acquired directly at source, and

those (isolated ones) which were deprived of them. The entire map of economic and matrimonial circuits, along with political alliances, was transformed (1) and flagrant imbalances appeared. Gradually, though scarcely within twenty years, the absolute isolation within which the Yanomami had safely lived, was broken. The economy was disrupted, the society menaced at its roots, and dysfunctional attitudes developed.

In contrast to the exemplary cleanliness of the old days, the large circular shelters inhabited by the Yanomami are now cluttered up with old vermin-infested clothes, rusty staved-in boxes, tarnished plastic, and a host of objects collecting dust.

The unexpected changes in the system of production and consumption of food have had particularly serious consequences.

Cultivated plants make up some 60% (by weight) of food diet. Banana plantains (platano) use up more than half the gardens; roasted while green on live embers, or cooked in water, they occupy the same place in the Yanomami diet as does manioc among other Indians. Manioc is not very important - taking up less than 5% of the area. Banana plantain has the advantage of simplicity: it doesn't require any preparation, is eaten directly, without any effort other than its transportation from the garden to the eating-place. Ocumo, maize, sugar cane, various tubers, and papaya are the other cultivated food-plants.

Picking and gathering wild fruits, collecting little animals (batrachians, crustaceans, caterpillars and other arthropods), fishing and hunting, take place in the neighbouring forest, in an area from five to ten kilometres around the settlements. These activities produce a large variety of edible products. Some fruits are very rich in vegetable protein and vitamins - for example, palm dates, and those from trees belonging to the Caryocaraceae family (kumato). The Yanomami know how to make certain poisonous fruits suitable for consumption - by boiling and maceration; from memory I can cite the fruit of the Clathrotropis macrocarpa (wabu) and that of a Euphorbiaceae (momo). Harvesting the fruits forms an almost

continous annual cycle. When a plentiful variety comes to maturity, it is not rare for the Yanomami to go and camp in the forest, to eat it. The exploitation area of resources around the settlement, circumscribes a space: that of the local group's territory, the zone which it actually occupies. This territory is informally defined by its use; it does not correspond to any conceptual category in Yanomami thought (which does not for one moment imagine that one can possess the land). Each community has its own colonies of wild trees where it customarily picks its fruit, and its own piece of hunting terrain. Although the zones used by neighbouring groups are always disjointed, there is never any conflict over their use. What I find astonishing is the absence of competition for the appropriation of natural products. Every one possesses the quarry which he has killed or the fruit he has picked: one is the owner of one's work, and of one's plantations, never of the earth. The forest is huge, and space for cultivation is never lacking; the plantations use up only a trifling part of unoccupied lands. The economic system has not undergone any internal pressures, it could perpetuate itself without alteration, and still support numbers even greater than those which existed before depopulation (2).

Since 1969, I have carried out long and detailed research into nutrition: an inventory of animal and vegetable resources, analysis of foodstuffs and the composition of meals, cooking times, and quantitative and qualitative values. Regularly, and for different communities of the Yanomami, I set out balance sheets relating to the contribution of proteins. The results have still not been put together and analysed, but what has become obvious is the great diversity in the Yanomami diet and the large sufficiency of proteins. In a phrase, it is completely false to suppose that there is any imbalance in the nutrition of the Indians. Such a statement, without any empirical foundation, can only be explained as racial prejudice. All the scrupulous doctors who have stayed for any period among the Yanomami, taking the time to observe them, have remarked on their vigorous

health. Conversely, they have all been surprised at the bad physical state of those Indians who live near the "white" settlements. Why such contrast?

The self-sufficiency which I have just described, with its varied nutrition, correct food balance, its political independence, has all been called into question in various ways.

Missionaries, in particular, have claimed, against the evidence, that the Yanomami diet is insufficient. As I have said, this attitude finds its origin in ideological prejudice. But the force of ideologies are such that they can shift reality, by modifying it, and still claim that they are grounded in it.

It is essential that the missionaries justify their intervention in Indian affairs in one way or another. What could be simpler than the pretext of material misery, laziness, or "hunger"? Not only do these claims tally with most peoples' ideas about primitive people, but it is from these very ideas that they draw their strength: they derive from common prejudice. No-one finds out if there is any contradiction between the broadcast judgment and things as they really are. They have simply seen the naked bodies and the absence of a machine technology, and that legitimises everything.

Thus it is understood - the Indians are "hungry", they require aid, they will receive advice and nutritional assistance. They are persuaded that there are "noble" foods, better than theirs which are more fortifying: these are the foods which we eat, and manioc. At the same time as non-Yanomami products are over-valued, so the habitual foods are depreciated. Moreover, an ignorant observer will show them, by his grimaces, that caterpillars are despicable to eat, while none eats toads. They are urged to cultivate more manioc, even though they would have to cut down the area devoted to bananas. In exchange for work, or for nothing, the missions offer manioc flour, husked rice, and white bread. Manioc flour and pancakes have a lower nutritional value than that of bananas or plantain. Their preparation, long and exhausting, is left to the women, who have to give up a good part of their energies and free time to a tiresome job.

tourist who will give out some shoddy goods and cigarettes, in order to be able to photograph and touch everything. And since the Indians go to camp less frequently in the forest, there is less for them to eat.

This confinement to a reduced space has its repercussions on hunting activities. Formerly, the migrations, the change of residence every five or six years, the alternation between life inside the communal round-houses and life in the forest camps, allowed the hunting grounds to be varied and the game to renew itself. Now, in the proximity of the fixed group, the game becomes increasingly rare: certain sedentary species have been decimated, others partially decimated, and the survivors put outside the range of the hunters. It is not simply movement which forces the animals into other zones, as is sometimes claimed. If that were true - if the game emigrated to gain shelter - then calmer spots would be enriched by their presence. Nothing of the kind: over a decade, the Upper Orinoco, the lower and middle Mavaca and the Ocamo have witnessed the irrevocable disappearance of animals which used to populate their banks. Species which move around only a little are exterminated; such has been the case with some large birds, hogs, agoutis, tapirs and pacas; these animals represent an important part of those habitually eaten by the Yanomami. Other animals, terrified, move further away.

The introduction of the hunting gun, far from having remedied the lack of animal protein, has only worsened the situation. It was justified by the claim that it is indispensable for hunting. This is indeed a specious argument. For centuries, the Yanomami killed their game solely with bows and arrows, and these were useful enough for them not to go without meat. Ecological balance was maintained so long as there were equal

White bread and husked rice also make for an impoverished diet. Through imitation, through conformity, and because it is easier, the Indians soon claim these foodstuffs, sure of meeting sympathetic ears since they agree with established bias. They cry out their "hunger" to whomsoever wishes to hear them. Bit by bit, those foods declared "noble", but which are really poor, come to supplant richer and more varied indigenous produce. The Yanomami spend less and less of their time on the plantations. We come to understand the fundamental illogic of the entire attitude we are denouncing: for either the Indians are underfed, and it is necessary to find them a complementary food - perhaps rice and whole meal bread - while encouraging them to develop their traditional culture; or else they are not underfed, and nothing justifies our intervention.

The imbalance which is being introduced is accentuated in two ways: by efforts to make the communities fixed, and by the introduction and increment of hunting guns.

A missionary opens a new station, he chooses a site occupied by Indians; if this is not possible, then he establishes himself first, and invites a community to come and stay by him. To retain the Indians, to persuade them of his benevolence, to lay down a basis for pressuring them, he creates and maintains a multitude of little dependancies. Commercial exchanges are favoured and developed. The Indians are not aware of the subjection into which they are falling, because it is insidious and they cannot imagine that anyone should wish to subjugate them. Our civiliser answers the needs which he himself has instigated, but under certain conditions: the Indians must attend Mass, the children go to school and boarding-school, and they must all absent themselves less frequently in the forest. For coveted objects, to please the missionaries, as a line of least resistance, and for shame at what they are, the Yanomami reduce their nomadic expeditions, and the children and adolescents participate in them less and less. One has the feeling that they are perpetually expecting - one doesn't quite know what: perhaps the noise of a motor, the impromptu visit of a

aims at a halted animal). With such a powerful and practical weapon, the extermination of the animals is ineluctable. Besides, the Indians are not alone; officials and mission personnel actively hunt along the big waterways. Destructive and illegal methods of shooting and fishing are employed: night hunts using pocket lamps, fishing with the boya (a cylinder of light wood, to which is attached a baited hook and which is allowed to drift with the current) and fishing with nets.

At first, thanks to these new methods, and because the Yanomami, like all Indians, are good hunters, know the forest perfectly, as well as the customs of the animals - game was eaten more often. People were happy. The euphoria lasted a year or two, perhaps three. Then, little by little, the game became scarcer, and it was necessary to hunt it further and further afield. The amount of meat consumed progressively diminished until it finally stabilised at a level considerably lower than before (before the relative sedentarisation of the Yanomami and the introduction of the guns). Hence this bizarre result: Indians provided with guns eat less meat than those who continue to hunt with the bow and arrow in protected zones. The forest surrounding the "white" settlements has been emptied of its animals, and the rivers of their fish.

Though in total contradiction with natural, economic and social laws, ideological prejudice is perfectly consonant with itself. By creating a politics of the worst; by destroying, by transforming indiscriminately, it finishes by achieving what it irrationally affirmed at the outset: the Indians do hunger, their food is deficient. Converted to manioc flour, white rice and bread, eating less game and fish, less wild fruits and insects, certain Yanomami do have an insufficient diet. Dental caries (formerly rare) multiply relative to the increase in ma-

## THE THREATENED SOCIETY

In any given society, it is the economy which is first hit by any change or transformations, the social system is always a little more resistant. This reprieve should not be misinterpreted, it is, generally speaking, only a respite, and there is not a single civilisation which has survived the destruction of the techno-economic complex at its foundations. Moreover, it is not only material life which is threatened; the entire society is disturbed in various ways: by the weakening of internal solidarity, through the manipulation of the political system, by the modifications inflicted on the habitat, and through the separation of children from their parents.

Everyone can verify that most missionaries are unaware of the entirety of the society which they frequent. Language, social and moral rules, rites and beliefs, are equally unknown to them. Indigenous man is an opaque mystery; what gives him joy and pain, invites his anger and his pleasures is totally misunderstood. Knowledge is unnecessary to carry out the coarse destructive work they set going, and everything is therefore so much more simple and clear: nothing to understand, nothing to analyse, nothing to adapt, nothing to protect; everything can be assessed and judged by our standards and criteria.

All the time, colonisers have required local intermediaries to establish and reinforce their authority. They set up little African kings - and replaced them if they were not sufficiently docile. In North Africa, the occupying French attached themselves to the religious elite when it had to be subdued; they imposed chiefs on villages which, up till that time, were governed by democratic assemblies.

The task is less easy in South America, where hierarchical political power is often missing in indigenous societies. The Yanomami communities are not directed by chiefs with extended powers, but are divided into a certain number of factions, stimulated by leaders. But their power is nil - or almost nil: they have neither the means of imposing their will, nor an exclusive resort to violence; in order to make themselves heard,

they discourse, exhort and provide examples; they have no rights, but numerous duties: deciding hunts of long duration and choosing the place where they will be carried out, indicating or setting-up the forest camps, taking the initiative in a retaliatory raid, receiving guests, taking on the expense of a fete or ritual. These factional leaders don't, in the true sense of the term, "give orders" - everyone already knows where to hunt and put up his shelter, - they have moral prestige and savoir-faire, and are courageous, as well as hard workers. To carry through a decision and make it convincing, they must always rely on evident necessity. Around them gravitates a clientele of people who seek to profit from them and who can always separate themselves off, in a case of disagreement. A chief without power - that, basically is the Yanomami leader. This is something which the missionaries cannot see; they are happy to graft onto the subtle indigenous reality, the model of our own societies: a highly hierarchical power, essentially coercive. They believe that, in the Indian leadership, they have discovered the source of a true command. It was decided that there would only be one chief per community; he was designated capitan and found himself vested with a power he had never previously possessed. The Whites address only him in their relationships with the native people, rewarding and favouring him as a result.

This manipulation of the political system has still not succeeded in raising up real chiefs, nor responsible persons on whom one can depend. But, already, a slide is occurring: the capitans in the missions now have more power than the most famous warriors of the past. Once again, the ideological prejudice fulfils itself: one sees authoritarian chiefs, one raises them up; the chiefs emerge to serve their masters. The great projected intention is to place at the head of these communities, young Indians who have been educated in the religious boarding-schools and trained in obeissance. These particular leaders, if accepted, will owe nothing to ancestral values, they will not have been sanctioned through their gallantry, their capacity to take on economic tasks, their ingenuity - but, rather, by their servility.

The habitat also undergoes modifications which weaken social cohesion. Customarily each local community lives as a group in a single large circular shelter, the shabono. It has been shown (5) that the shabono and cosmic order converge: each lineal group occupies a certain position under the roof, and each part of the shelter can be placed in relation to one of the main divisions of the cosmos. The shelter is a microcosm.

Without knowing why, certain outsiders are fascinated by the Yanomami shabono from which emanates, at one and the same time, beauty, elegance, power and order. Some would like to preserve it, while others put pressure on the Indians to adopt a rectangular house, with sloping roofs covered in zinc or palms.

Whether they want to preserve the shabono or not, as an original structure, it cannot survive the disappearance of what it symbolises: the order of the world. There are other reasons for this. When the whites establish themselves in the indigenous milieu, they turn up their noses at local techniques, instead of being inspired by them. Zealous builders transplant both our methods and materials. Huge constructions, often ugly and hardly functional, are set up; the walls are made of cement, the roofs of zinc. The Indians imitate in their turn - as they do with everything, and to their great unhappiness. Consequently everyone repeats without respite, that they are maladroit, don't know anything, that what they own is worth nothing. How many times a day this twaddle is lodged in their ears! No sabe, no sirve, you don't know, it's not worth anything.

Indigenous techniques, rounded by centuries of use, well-adapted household implements, forest lore transmitted from generation to generation and employed daily - all the Indian has made, everything he was accustomed to believing true - no sabe, no sirve (6).

Persuaded of his incorrigible ignorance, the Indian has only one resort: to imitate, to become inspired by the living source of universal knowledge, the "white" man.

When everything conspires to destroy indigenous values, how

can the houses be saved? Subjected to internal and external pressures, the social group disintegrates, fragments into small units which lodge themselves under different roofs. The new houses are completely closed up: there are no windows, the narrow, low, passages are shut off by spiteful zinc doors or hanging covers. The interior isn't always dirty, but there is little light, little air, and the firesmoke circulates badly (7). Since the families are isolated one from the other, ties of solidarity slacken. In such enclosed spaces, there is no longer a central spot for children's games, the performance of shamanism, festival rituals, and paying visits. For the Indian, the universe is suddenly reduced to the measure of the different life which has been held out to him. The society has lost its organic "cement". The exchanges have diminished and each person eats what he has at his side. The food distributions between one family and the next, made after the long morning walkabouts in the forest, are finished. Egocentricities assert themselves without constraint, indirectly supported by the missionaries who want to give the Indian family both the profile and the self-image of a Western Christian family. The result is often the very opposite of what was intended. Naively, the missionaries wanted to develop brotherhood and solidarity - without seeing that the Indians had always practised them, and that, in fact, it was their social life.

Money (8), guns, engines - these are goods too precious to offer, as one might a hammock or basket. An Indian has to work long and hard to acquire them - while everyone knows how to make a hammock or a basket.

The weakening of communal solidarity is increased through the practise of sending little children to the religious boarding schools.

#### A BOARDING SCHOOL FOR YOUNG INDIANS

Black earth savanna, dotted with termite nests, cut off at one side by the Orinoco, occluded on the other sides by the forest... Nearby, the enormous mass of the Duida, threatening clouds banked up against its craggy peak... A burning sun

cracks the soil. A horde of relentless mosquitos clings at the skin, sucking the blood, - a torment from sunrise to sunset. This is La Esmeralda (L'Émeraude). It was here in 1972, that the boarding school was opened for the education of the Yanomami and Yekuana Indians. The buildings descry a perfect rectangle, which closes off an inner space deprived of trees and vegetation. There is a solid metal door at the only entrance. The Church, imposing, overshadows the other roofs. half the space is reserved for girls and half for boys, with an iron railing forbidding crossings between the zones. (Doubtless, moral considerations have inspired this sexual segregation. But, when the lights are out, in the evenings, everyone gets together under the covers and "morality" makes itself scarce!) This building reminds the observer more of a military camp than a children's home. What young Indian - arriving freshly from his native forest - hasn't the feeling of being interned (he still doesn't know what a prison is) and losing his freedom? Looking from the inner courtyard, the horizon is masked by the walls. No window opens onto the outside. The trees - an inseparable part of the Indian's previous existence - will henceforth be invisible. What callous man conceived such a monstrous building? For whom - and for what purpose?

After the boarding school was constructed, it was necessary to fill it. So - Indians were enlisted, with scant regard for the methods. The missionaries busied themselves, clothing the children and adolescents, putting flaps into their outfits; they were then enticed into boats, with sweets and dry cakes sprinkled with pepsi cola, and promises of an easy future. That wasn't all: they went into neighbouring communities and came back with batches of naked children. The parents were not warned (what language would have been used?). They tied up at the bank, and without entering the houses, called the youngsters to come into the boats. The children, thrilled at travelling in a motor-boat, didn't need to be asked twice. Off they went to an unknown destination, without dreaming they wouldn't return quite soon.

Are the Indians inhuman, to be treated like this? Don't our own laws habitually punish such acts?

At the end of the long boat journey lay the boarding school. And here disillusion set in. Children cried for their parents, little brother or sister. Only busy adults, speaking an incomprehensible tongue, came to console them.

One of the children spoke about this deplorable episode:

"We couldn't do anything we wanted. If we stirred ourselves up, they put us down. We were forbidden to go out after classes, and had to be quiet. All the time, they were shouting after us. The master and the Father beat us. We didn't have enough to eat. We were always having to scratch because our wrists and ankles got covered in sores. We were sent to the kitchen to wash the dishes. One day, while I was there, the master entered, pretended not to notice me, approached the cook, and began touching her sex. I didn't know that Whites (nabe) were capable of playing with the sexes of women".

A child from Ocamo tells his friend: "The Father director beat me, I cried with rage, I was furious at him. Then I went to find my bow and arrow which I kept hidden. I withdrew the barb from the arrow and threw myself with all my might upon him. I touched his chest: I was avenged. I will never go back to La Esmeralda; it is too bad".

The young boarders are deprived of the natural activities to which they are accustomed. They are given foodstuffs which make them "swell" (maize flour, manioc, white bread, white rice and dough); although they have a false appearance of good health, in reality it is only a tangible manifestation of their disturbance. If, despite everything, the children still complain of being hungry, it's probably because the food has been given irregularly, and reserves were insufficient.

From the moment of their arrival, the children are subjected to an intensive effort at de-culturising. Everything "Indian" is devalued, scorned, set aside. The little Yanomami

learn for the first time the word indio; at the same time, everyone points out that it has depreciatory connotations. Their hair is cropped - that beautiful shoulder-length hair whose cut harmonises with the features of their faces. Even then, the sacrilege is not carried out by expert hands, but those of a clumsy, disdainful master. Their personal names are taken from them, and replaced by one they cannot correctly pronounce. Large stretches of their cultural universe are removed at a stroke: their name as a personal identity, their houses as a representation of the world, the kitchen as an expression of gustatory values, as well as a meeting-point between man and the environment, the family and the parents to which one's being is attached. A new and disturbing world surrounds the little Indian; a world marked by disturbing lacks and derisory signs. Surrounding the boarders are adults who are racist and hostile, or at best, paternalist.

There remain dreams, illusion, and an imaginary rupture with a traumatic reality. The accounts of the children bear witness to an intensive oneiric activity during their stay, which carries them towards the universe in which they previously existed, and which has been stolen from them. And these dreams are dramatically insistent.

We must also remark upon their facial looks, their yellow complexions, and saddened expressions. Their badly fitting clothes either float around the body or constrict it, sometimes so badly that the seams give way, and the buttons tear off: the children are so ashamed that they will clamour at a known visitor for needle and thread. Sometimes they will whisper into his ear, begging to be taken home with him.

At last the Xmas or Easter holidays arrive. The Indians are seen back home. It's a virtual deliverance. The youngsters swear that they will not be taken again and when, after the holidays, someone comes looking for them, some of them flee into the forest, others pretend they are ill (or simulate it). The most enterprising do not wait for the holidays, in order to bolt: the youths of Mavaca prepared to truant for a week,

stealing essentials which they hid until the day they might "borrow" a boat to return home.

The defections are so numerous that they embarrass the missionaries who see their effectiveness disappearing, and somehow have to explain it. Instead of making the best of it, instead of eliciting the reasons for it and rectifying them, they resort to lies - as always. For example, they have accused an ethnologist of inciting the Indians against La Esmeralda. A spokesman from Mavaca claims that, if the Makorima children are still missing, it's because, overwhelmed with work, he hasn't had the time to go and look for them; that fourteen children of the same Makorima have already come to the boarding-school, while only five were actually brought there, and that the schoolable population of this community doesn't reach this figure. These are false explanations. If there is no child from the Makorima currently at the boarding school, it is because none of them wishes to go there under any pretext; for the same reason, none of the Tayari, the Karohi, and the Witokaya is at La Esmeralda. As for the ethnologist in question, he doesn't need to speak against the school - it stands and falls on its own reputation.

What of the enormous power granted to the missions? A power quite out of proportion to the intellectual capacities of the priests, their respect for others, their courtesy, their moral qualities; a power which is totally uncontrolled. These men can virtually do anything, they are unaccountable to anyone, even the authorities of the country (whose confidence they generally betray), still less the parents. The boarding school is the ideal place for conditioning generations of little Indians, rendering them docile after they have been snatched from their parents, their culture and their natural surroundings. And to what end? To dispense artificial information which is in no way related to indigenous life, or which favours the integration that is ultimately desired. Spanish is taught as if it were a maternal tongue, using appropriated modern methods. Under such conditions, the progress is derisory, and not conducive to any real integration into national life, or modern-

ization of native life - but, on the contrary, to a deep cultural imbalance, and disarray in Indian consciousness.

Is it ever asked, what will become of these lads when they go back home? Probably not, because to pose such a question and answer it in all honesty, is to partly resolve the problem. It would be necessary to admit that the youngsters, on their return, become unadaptable, marginal persons, parasites and scroungers. New, totally artificial needs have been created which will never be satisfied - this invites scrounging. After several years at boarding school, grown-up stupefied boys pass their time, stuffing themselves with hallucinogenic drugs; they no longer join in economic activities, they hunt badly, are unaware of the vegetable plots, wound themselves in their hands and legs; for hours on end they wander from one fire to the next, trailing their idleness with them, a complete burden on the community to which they have become strangers (9). Their heart is missing, and one has the impression that they have no further taste for life.

Is this the kind of integration the missionaries want for the Indians? Is a boarding school necessary to teach reading and writing? Not at all - all that is needed is open schools near the communities, with masters living alongside the Indians who are respectful of their lifestyle. Programmes are needed which conform to the ecological environment, a scientific education based on close observation of nature, and which integrate cultural details, one with the other. What is required is part-time education, a timetable which takes account of subsistence activities and allows the children to participate in them. Holidays will be held, not on the occasion of religious festivals, but on Indian festivals, or visits, or when the community goes camping in the forest. Schooling must not be a pretext for religious indoctrination - the Indian, like everyone else, must be able to choose his religion (changing, or conserving his own). As for the choice of masters, they can be either clerics or laymen, but they must be prepared to take the initiative in adapting, be capable of promoting change.

### THE HEALTH AND POPULATION PROBLEMS

Since 1968, the health of the Yanomami has had an uneven evolution: relatively good in some years, and frankly bad in others. However, generally speaking, there has been a slow deterioration. We must hope that present efforts of the Ministry of Health will check this worsening situation. There are some particularly grave problems: malaria fever, infectious hepatitis, influenza, and the dangers of contamination from tuberculosis (10). However, we must be aware of one important fact: the fall in population revealed by the last census. This is a certain indication of the bad state of health of the people.

Since 1968, the methods used in the territory to fight against infectious centres, to check the spread of epidemics and develop prophylactic measures, have been considerably strengthened and diversified. The devotion and competence of the nursing sisters is beyond dispute, and the good will of the Venezuelan authorities, incontestable. So, what is happening? Above all this: placing better medical facilities at the disposal of the Indians has been accompanied by a definite growth of commerce into Yanomami territory and of tourism - especially at Platanal (11). One thing cancels out the other. Moreover, we must mention the almost total lack of coordination and collaboration between the different officials and scientific researchers among the tribespeople. Certain abuses go unchecked: people without medical training carry out all-purpose injections (often to no purpose) of penicillin, and administer medicines which customarily require the presence of a doctor. By and large, antibiotics are misused, so that resistant germs are created in time. The Sisters, whose great value we must recognise, are not sufficiently aware of their limitations and often make, all in good faith, an intervention with unforeseeable consequences. So far as can be gathered, there is no permanent doctor. But there is worse than this. How can we entrust responsibility for the indigenous areas to people who are unaware that the Indians are not immunised against our diseases, and that microbial shock can often be fatal to them? Amerindians, iso-

lated on their continent for thousands of years, are particularly susceptible to our germs. A very great proportion of the populations of the Inca and Aztec empires were wiped out by illnesses introduced at the point of conquest; 85% of the Indians in French Guyana succumbed for the same reasons (12). I could cite other South American countries where entire peoples have perished under the same scourges, following the same negligence, or thanks to the same disinterest. How - after Indians gathered together for conversion by the Jesuits were decimated by smallpox - can we still group Indians together, and not disperse them; not realise that their very nomadism might be a salvation in the case of grave epidemic?

Why, in 1968, was measles permitted into Platanal - which then unleashed an epidemic? (13) Why, in 1974, was there a proposal to regroup the Yanomami around Mavaca and along the navigable waterways? The further away that the Indians live from our permanent establishments, the better will be their state of health. Present situation, past experiences, here and elsewhere, bear irrefutable proof of this.

Several other things have been troubling over the last few years - and they continue to be. Influenza epidemics have increased in frequency relative with human traffic into Yanomami territory: the peak occurred in 1972-74, when Platanal became the tourist centre of the region. The illness particularly affected very young children, but sometimes entire communities were stricken by fever, coughing, sickness in the throat and breast. The great vulnerability of the Indians to these "breast" diseases means that influenza which is relatively benevolent at its inception can gradually become bronchitis, or develop into graver types. Both influenza and bouts of coughing have distinctly decreased since the Venezuelan authorities took steps to limit tourism. It is also true (and this is true of most contagious diseases) that Indians can even be contaminated by those living amongst them, and above all, by those Brazilian and other families which have been thoughtlessly settled at Platanal, and for whom health control has still not been introduced.

Thanks to the persistent action of the anti-malarial services, well supplied with people and materials, malaria had clearly regressed. But it made a brutal and unexpected re-appearance in 1971, in a form which might be fatal. This was a case of *Falciparum paludism*, resistant to the usual treatment, and which is now the major problem of the Indian communities; it is responsible for a proportion (uncounted) of deaths. The competent services of the Ministry of Health responded quickly, by putting into practice and adapting their methods: a more efficacious medicament was substituted for the old lozenges. After its introduction, however, this medicament, being too strong, stimulated secondary reactions and disturbances among the Indians. Despite the explanations offered them, they preferred to run away, and refused to take it. This unfortunate situation was remedied. But the cases of malaria fever are still too numerous, and the problem remains a serious one. The fight against malaria fever ought to unite everyone concerned, but the attitude of certain missionaries has been negative - they haven't hesitated to defame and criticise precisely those people whose cooperation was indispensable. The anti-malarial service could be bettered by various modifications which I would like to put forward here. For example, is it necessary to continue douching the Indian houses with DDT (banned in the USA) when its harmfulness is well known, and its usefulness is practically nil? Mosquitos and anopheles torment the Indians during the night: cockroaches and fleas multiply; the niqua, once eliminated by DDT, have been around for a year and are now resistant to it. The registered lists of officials who give out the lozenges are too rudimentary and badly made-up; they do not allow a strict enough control, and the system could be improved. Exact censuses of the communities exist, and they could be published; it wouldn't take long to learn to write a native name properly. I do not know what conclusions have been drawn from the recent action, nor the clinical picture, after the enforcement of prophylactic measures. An outbreak of malaria fever occurred at Mavaca in February 1975, just after a visit paid by the regional

medical officer, and despite the presence of a particularly competent sister. Why do infective centres persist, despite the measures concentrated at those points? This clearly oversimplified picture nonetheless gives an idea of the complexity of the problem of malaria fever in the region.

Viral hepatitis seems to develop into disturbing types against which one is less well armed and organised: frequently it appears that, among Indians, this disease produces cirrhosis. There have been several fatal cases in the past months and it is perhaps necessary to ascribe these to a new disease, characterised in its external manifestations by a swollen belly. The malady has been explained by a hypothetical deficiency of proteins: it has not been proven. If this really is the cause, it can be ascribed to the transformations of indigenous diet under the influence of the missions. (See this report pps. 10, 11, 12, and 14). Lack of protein in the Yanomami diet - if such it is (14) - is only a recent phenomenon, running quite contradictory to earlier studies on the diet of non-aculturated communities, and conclusions reached by responsible doctors after clinical observation of the Indians.

Tuberculosis has still not been definitely found among the Yanomami of the Upper Orinoco, although Dr. Chiappino has examined a patient whom he fears might have the illness. Because of the continuing growth of commerce and settlement at Platanal by certain families, contamination of the Indians is predictable, and consequently, vaccinations of BCG should be started as soon as possible, for as many people as possible. Results of the latest population census prove that the sanitary situation of the Yanomami is worrying. I have studied the central Yanomami since 1968. A 1972 census gave the figure of 1,333 persons in 25 residential communities; a new census, taken during the first months of 1975, gave the figure of only 1,318 for the same communities, taking into account transfers of population from one group to another. Certain communities, for whom we have figures since 1969, have experienced an even more marked decline. Thus, there is a constant and "natural" (in the sense

that no serious epidemic intervened between the two censuses) decline. Should it appear of little importance, it must be set against the fact that, until 1950-1960, the Yanomami population was in considerable demographic and territorial expansion; moreover, we must take account of the ravages caused by malaria fever in 1963 (we have no figures) and in 1968 by measles, which killed between 15% and 20% of the population, according to sources (15). Southern Yanomami have experienced similar tendencies: a community of the middle Mavaca lost 40% of its members, as soon as regular contact had been established with it (16). Working-out of the demographic material is still in progress; it concerns several thousands of people on whom detailed information has been collected (17). But it is quite obvious that the most affected groups are those who have steady relations with "white" settlements, while isolated groups have a much higher resistance.

The good fortune of the Yanomami might be to have "arrived late" - that is, to have remained isolated until quite recently. Modern medical techniques allow the prediction, control, and checking of an epidemic. The Indians ought to benefit from this progress. Not only to prevent the cultural shock being too brutal, but to prevent the health situation worsening, it is urgently necessary to strictly control access to Yanomami territory, and over a long period (10 to 20 years). Tourism must be completely eliminated in all its forms; traders must be restricted to an absolute minimum; journalists, photographers and film-makers should be eschewed; these latter professions, being too open, are burdened with mediocre and unscrupulous people. The Yanomami have been photographed and filmed too much. Even the activities of scientific missions must be regulated, to prevent the Indians becoming laboratory objects; for instance, it is necessary to avoid the duplication of studies, to consider seriously the value and interest of submitted projects, and authorise only a certain number of students. (Particularly in the Human sciences). Instead of holding scientific researchers aloof from the elaboration and practice of their projects and

disregarding their opinions (as at present) they should be treated as consultants, and their opinions taken into consideration.

If it is desirable to integrate the Yanomami into national life then not only should their cultural aspects be preserved, but also their physical integrity: there is a direct relationship between demographic and cultural change.

#### WHAT PROSPECTS?

What then, to do? What hope is there? What programme? It is necessary to be stoutly pessimistic. The Indian problem is, first and foremost, an economic and political one: who will be able to take the necessary measures, and how will the action of the different services involved, be coordinated? The Indian problem is a problem of our civilisation, doomed to economic and population growth.

One accusation is often made: "Anthropologists", it is said, "don't want the Indians to change, so they can continue studying them." Whoever draws that conclusion knows nothing of what it is to be an anthropologist, and cannot ever have read a work of ethnology. They are ignorant of the existence of "applied anthropology", which brings scientific caution to attempts at integration. One can do anthropology in Caracas, New York or London - it's not a question of method. Everything can be an object of study, including delinquency, secret societies or the gypsies. Ethnologists are far from being a homogeneous bloc, they are divided and become rivals. Let's put the question another way: do anthropologists oppose cultural change and integration in general? No - they oppose contemporary processes, knowing very well that these do not lead to integration, and sometimes to cultural disintegration and the transformation of Indians into destitutes (18). Let us turn the accusation back on those who make it. Anthropologists know well enough that integration is an inevitable evil, a last resort: what they want to do, is to make it softer on those who have to submit to it. Unfortunately the missionaries firmly refuse their cooperation. Why? To preserve their spheres of

personal power, out of misunderstanding of contemporary world problems, through inability to adapt, and for fear of a change in their routine. I pose this question in my turn: what would become of our critics if they had to return to a secular life, and take up a profession?

The outline of a programme has been traced in the preceding pages, to be read between the lines. When one is aware of the complexity of a situation, one is not so sure what has to be done. All change is irreversible, and one never knows exactly how it will occur: a society is a whole, and to touch one of its parts, is to move all of it - but how and with what result? Let us admit the truth - it has not been proclaimed enough: Prophecy in this area is not possible. In any event, what is lost is a cultural capital of incalculable value: irreplaceable riches, produced only once in history, which we destroy for ever. What a responsibility! Should we isolate the Indians - putting them into reserves? This is neither possible nor desirable. Things are as they are, changes will take place, one doesn't check something which has already taken place, otherwise you go backwards. Nonetheless it will be necessary to preserve the Yanomami's economy; not to deliberately change their diet; and to protect the fauna (where this is still possible). If schools have to be opened, they should be close to Indian communities. Bilingualism should be developed: not only with Yanomami Indians from the large rivers learning Spanish, but officials, masters and priests, learning Indian languages. It is almost unbelievable that Missionaries, who have lived long years by the Indians, are still incapable of speaking their tongue!

The Missions themselves could have a useful function - and must. The Sisters are irreplaceable, both as nurses and school mistresses. What is essential is to select Mission personnel primarily on their human and intellectual worth, their cooperative nature, their openness towards the contemporary world. Surely the Church possesses valuable men who can be placed in the missions? "Vocational crisis" doesn't explain everything.

There are some excellent missionaries, but they are rare, and sometimes they are eliminated. Men of quality exist in the bosom of the priesthood and it is these who should be employed before all others. What the Church needs most is the lightning voice of some new Las Casas, or the voice - intelligent and beautiful - of a modern Father José de Acosta, not the irresponsible men who discredit it.

La Esmeralda, instead of remaining a place of internment for little Indians, could become a research centre on indigenous regional civilisations, on fauna, flora and ecology. Linguistic and sociological training in environmental science could be given to those people destined to work with the Indians; this training would be longer and more complete for missionaries, nuns, and masters. In this way, anthropologists could integrate themselves, and play a positive role in the future of the peoples they study, and whom they deny wanting to turn into "museum pieces".

Certainly, cultural pluralism is a difficult road to take, but it is in no way opposed to national interests. Venezuela, if it is wanted, could have the best native peoples' policy in the world, and give an example to other countries. How rich it would become, if the indigenous minorities were placed in the national life, living in their thousand different ways!

Tayari, June 1975

## NOTES

- (1) Analysis of these processes is sketched out in several works. See J. Lizot 1971a.
- (2) This will all be shown in detail in a monograph currently under preparation.
- (3) The attitude of some people is completely inconsistent: on the one hand they maintain that the gun is indispensable to the Indian for hunting - on the other hand, that it doesn't confer any military advantage to groups which use it for war. But either it's advantageous or it isn't!
- (4) Sweets of low quality, with artificial colouring and flavour, are thrown into the middle of a central place, dirtied with dog-shit, so that the children will scramble for them.
- (5) J. Lizot 1971b and 1975.
- (6) Regarding no sirve, see Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1969.
- (7) That the Indians should live in such houses and wear such clothes is justified as protecting them from mosquitos and phlebotomes (jejen or plaga). But this should also be a reason not to attract the Indians to quite unhealthy places on the banks of the great rivers. Before their conquest, the Indians lived in good health, their numbers were increasing, despite the phlebotomes - against which, in any case, they could protect themselves. It is our germs which cause them to die. As well as being ugly, the clothes change the metabolism, encouraging influenza and colds.
- (8) We hear this: "It's necessary that the Indians learn Spanish and counting so that they won't be robbed by the traders". Aren't there other reasons? Two people who can't communicate find it difficult to dupe each other. As if language and writing do not serve lying

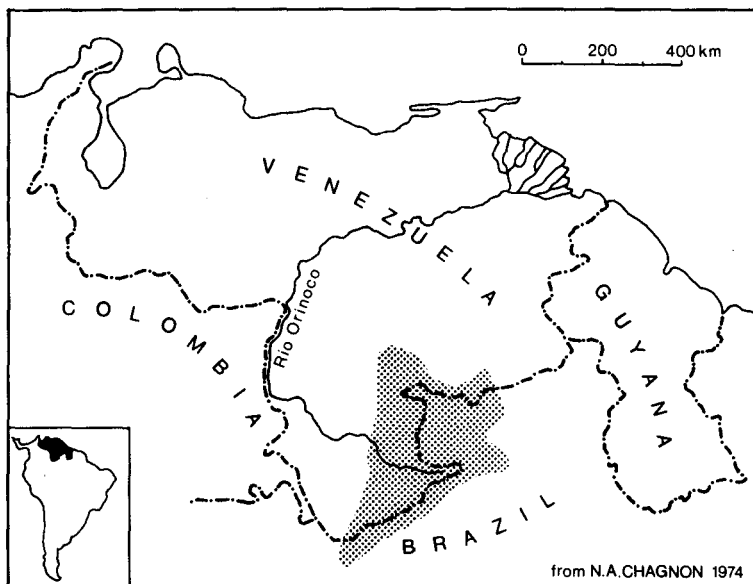
and deception! Using them, it is possible to make false promises, drag a person into debt, falsify price, weight, and value. Don't these falsifications exist among ourselves?

- (9) Before La Esmeralda was opened, the Yanomami went to the Salesian boarding school, on Raton island, near Puerto Ayacucho: the children never complained of their stay there.
- (10) For this part of my document, I have used several reports by Dr. J. Chiappino, made to different administrations.
- (11) An article which appeared in the Caracas magazine Resuman concludes that tourism has discernibly lessened at Platanal. But it hasn't stopped: from time to time small airplanes bring in tourists who arrive without being subjected to any health control for their entry into the indigenous areas.
- (12) J.M. Hurault 1974.
- (13) This, despite the energetic intervention of my colleague N.A. Chagnon.
- (14) The account sheets of the last weeks show no evidence of any notable change in the nutrition of those groups living away from the Missions. These sheets are at the disposal of anyone who wants to consult them.
- (15) On this subject, see J. Lizot 1971b.
- (16) Personal communication from N.A. Chagnon.
- (17) N.A. Chagnon's latest book affords research in this area (1974).
- (18) One only has to see the Yupa, prostrated in their "camps", and the Guajibo staggering in the streets of Puerto Ayacucho.

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