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From the misty rainforests on the slopes of the Equatorial Andes to the brown watery, eight-mile-wide mouth, the Amazon river churns its course. Where fifty years ago, monthly freighters travelled the great stream, ships now pass daily. Tiny vest-pocket airports are peeling back the protective cover. The Twentieth Century has made inroads along the banks of the river which explorers of the past century — and the native people — could not have foreseen.

The Ticuna still are there, a microcosm of the tropical river culture that stretches the width of the continent. But their culture has not only been changed, it has fallen. : the Ticuna now share their river with the drum-beating revivalism of the missionaries, the avariciousness of the traders hovering like flies over the few remaining Ticuna artifacts, the greed of the animal hunters who daily strip the jungle of its natural riches, and the sordid exoticism of the tourists, who pay to see "re-created" Indian villages.

Small wonder, then, that the harried Ticuna believe in a vast inundation that will wipe out all traces of the white man. They tell of Joaquim Nonato, called Nora'ne in Xeware, the language of the Ticuna, who thirty years ago led his people back into the jungle highlands to await the Great Flood.

The effects of the invasion are reflected in the Ticunas life now. They wear clothes and cook with tin pots, battered with age. For sixty years, they have hunted with shotguns, leaving their blowguns for ceremony. These people of brownish-black skin, rarely over five-foot tall, had a reputation for hospitality recorded by the great English naturalist Henry Bates during the 19th Century. With the coming of the traders a generation ago, however, rum and rifles became popular among the Ticuna, leaving them with a reknown for drunkenness and violence.

By modern standards, the Ticuna still lead a simple life. The men go off

With these, they attracted Ticuna from many outlying areas.

Gradually, they brought their order to the natives' lives. First, they built a church. Then a school. The Bible, translated into Xeware, was the text and the Old Testament tales were the primers. They sent away the brightest and most pious children to receive a special Christian education suited to the next leaders of their tribes.

TIME OF THE TICUNA

The Old Ways were prohibited, the Old Ways died. Ticuna were shown how to trim the unruly jungle grasses into near rectangular lawns. Christian marriage in proper church attire was introduced and older customs such as drinking, smoking, and polygamy were banned.

These carefully-groomed missionaries, blond-haired and pale, the hint of a midwestern twang in their voices, are ever vigilant. Handicrafts are discouraged as "pagan", except for a few settlements where they are sold in the missionaries' own trading posts. Once a year, they return to their North American parishioners with fund-raising slide shows.

Nora'ne and his six brothers live in such a settlement. Faced with this well-organized program to run their lives, his people have adopted it passively — they

found a young Mayaruna whom she named "Joe" wandering in the jungle. She took him back to the mission and educated him in the Christian fashion, making him teach her his language. After a number of years, Joe ran off to his people — the missionaries assert he is converting the tribe.

Ms. Field was not content to stop there. With the aid of the U.S. Army, which maintains a base nearby in Manaus,

[This essay is by David Dunaway, a journalist who has written for a wide variety of magazines over the past five years, including a recent volume of poems, Jungle Sea. This story was forwarded to us by the folksinger/activist Pete Seeger. We are grateful to each of them for this commentary.]

Brazil, for the missionaries, she arranged to be flown low over the jungle in a helicopter. Equipped with a bullhorn, Fields broadcasted to the Indians in the language she had learned from "Joe": "Go downstream. The servants of the Lord await you. Go downstream. The Word of God is to be found at the riverbank!"

If the missionaries hunger after the Ticuna's souls, the trader just wants trinkets. To the trader, the native settlers of the Amazon are simply a source of tourist goods and animals. For the monkeys they sell at \$45 each in the U.S., they pay the Ticuna \$2. For a trader, the notion that the native people have a rich culture is not so real as the notion that they have probably salted away some of the heritage he calls "curios".

roofed with thatched palm fronds. A fresh tortoise shell rested against the front, its former owner roasting nearby. "No masks?" the trader demanded with a barely-concealed contempt. "What do you people do here all day? You work one day a week and lie around the rest." His lecture went unheeded by the old woman bending away from the sun and slowly grinding her yucca to flour.

Furious, he stormed off. Back and forth he paced, past the rows of quiet houses with their overhanging roofs like mushrooms in a cow pasture. "Masks — I want masks! I have Marlboro cigarettes here. Sweets for the children, smokes for you. Today, I'm taking fishing spears..." he shouted in vain at the houses shuttered in the midday heat.

Mike Tsalikas, this man's boss, usually has better luck. He has some 400 traders looking for animals and organizing his tourist attractions. As recently as thirty years ago, monkeys and Caymans, a species of Amazon alligator, were common to most every lagoon and tributary. Now they are rarely seen. The traffic in live animals and skins is both lucrative and controversial. Tsalikas, the largest trader in the Leticia region, claims he ships animals only for medical research. Despite his claims, he has been called "the exterminating angel of the jungle" by a prominent Colombian paper.

Pressure from the Sierra Club and environmental groups within Colombia about the disappearing animal populations have forced Tsalikas to lease a special island for raising moneys. The effects of this depletion are clear: after a millennia of hunting, the Ticuna must learn to fish.

Today, the Ticuna have a new threat — tourists. Visitors not only want artifacts, they want to watch over the Indian's shoulders while they work. When the Ticuna refused to allow this, the resourceful Tsalikas joined his animal trade and tourist business. He arranged for a tribe of Yagua to move downriver to a specially-designed

fishing in their carved canoes, black spade-shaped paddles swishing in the dawn. The women and most of the children work the yucca fields, then roast and grind this cactus-like vegetable into flour as the staple of jungle cookery. Their handicrafts are practical, rather than ornamental — baskets of river rushes, intricately-carved fishing spears. At dusk, the men return, eat, sleep. Their ghostly mosquito nets — an absolute necessity in the tropics where animals are eaten alive by insects — glow in the moonlight through their open-walled houses.

Like many of the peoples along the upper Amazon basin, the Ticuna have today forgotten how to hunt. Much of their native game is gone, prey to the ruthless commercial trade in animal skins. The Ticuna, formerly noted for their use of the hunting poison, curare, have not used it for half-a-century. With the intrusions, their culture has been eroded, leaving them with age-old traditions and beliefs unfitted to the situation in which they find themselves.

In a clearing alongside one Ticuna village, the missionaries have built a church. Painted a robin's-egg blue, the one-room wooden structure stands out against the many shades of green surrounding it. A painstakingly-lettered sign, SANTA ROSA BAPTIST CHURCH, is obscured by a group of Ticuna crowding up the stairs in the heat of a clear, cloudless morning. Alongside the neatly-arranged unstained wooden pews stand stacks of hymnals. They look new, with covers of smiling Indian children "jungle happy with Our Lord." The women wear knee-length dresses, their hair freshly set in the fashion of the '50s, wearing necklaces made from monkey teeth.

The current wave of missionaries first appeared in great numbers along the Amazon in the 1940s. Nearby tribes date many changes from this period, which was the time of Nora'ne's prophecies. The Servants of the Lord brought inducements for the native people — free health care, technology for increased crops, and formal education.

have become Christians. It is a law of the jungle that most animals and plants live interdependently. Fish have parasites in their stomachs who take part of the fish's food, but aid the fish's digestion. Certain specialized plants need certain insects in order to reproduce themselves. Some travellers have suggested the missionaries exist in their colonies in like fashion, exchanging the trappings of civilization for their private fiefdoms.

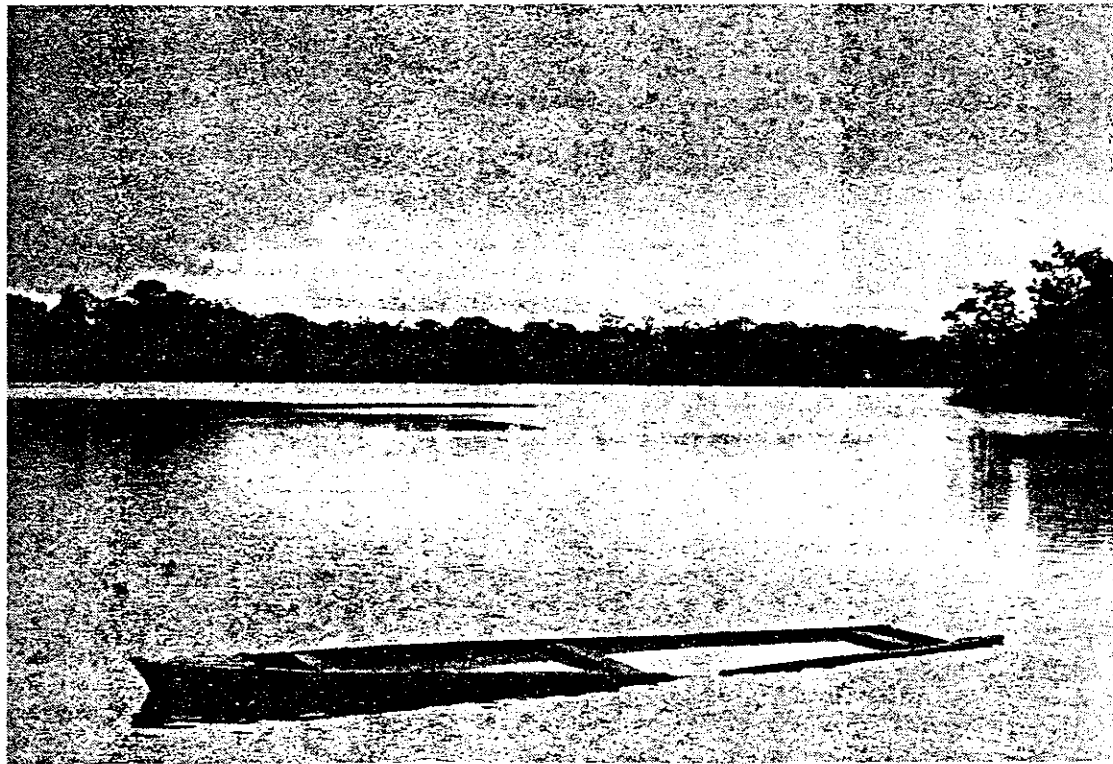
They travel along the river in motorized canoes, a race of traders pollinating native towns with tin cans and bonbons. For about two pounds of salt, they get three giant tortoise shells. Two packs of fifty-cents-a-carton cigarettes gets a carved fishing spear.

One small missionary village, Belem, is known for its masks of "bloodwood" and human hair. "I'm sorry if you came for the masks," said a young Ticuna in blue jeans to a docking trader. "We sold them all on Saturday to an Englishman

"authentic" village on his monkey island.

"We used to take the tourists out to see the Yagua in boats," Tsalikas began with a smile. "But it cost a lot of money — gas is expensive here. And sometimes they would have all gone hunting — boy those tourists would get MAD. Now that they're on my island, we can find 'em when we need 'em for a ceremony or something."

The Ticuna have always been more independent than this. According to the



The missionaries have not been so successful with other tribes. Along the Peruvian border, the neighbors of the Ticuna, the Mayaruna, have resisted all efforts by the army and the church to civilize them. They live in the interior of the jungle forests, appearing on the banks of the river to loot an occasional cargo ship, or to attack the nearby hydroelectric plant.

An American missionary, Harriet Fields,

on the steamer from Manaus. He paid us twice what you do," he said with a grin.

At these words, the slight Brazilian trader snapped off the ignition in obvious irritation. "I'll find some," he said, picking up his sack of cheap stale cigarettes and hard candies. He wandered through the village, alone on the streets in the hot equatorial sun. He stopped in front of a one-room adobe house, the walls washed with lime and

anthropologist Kurt Nimendaju, author of the sole volume on the Ticuna, this independence is inspired by their understanding of the Creator, known as Dyai, and called Tanati, "our father". Dyai is said to live in the uplands of the jungle, and to have given the day, sleep, fire, and cultivated plants to the Ticuna. He also protects them from the demons who come to suck the insides of men and animals, leaving only their skins behind. Throughout Ticuna history, he

has appeared to children approaching adulthood, offering them messages in puzzle form.

One such message came to Nora'ne. "I glided in my canoe to the mouth of the Black River, where the jumping fish live. But just as I raised my spear, the water exploded, sending a shower of water straight up, like a fountain. All the fish disappeared, leaving behind a group of animals — no, not animals, but with the skin of animals wrapped around them like masks. I thought they were demons. All kinds of fish and small animals danced in front of me, on the surface of the water, but not touching it. I wondered at this.



— Dave Dunaway photo
Tanah Nonato, Nora'ne's brother

"Later that day, I canoed back up river. There I saw a large orange fish. Looking closer, I saw it was a stream of tiny fish, different shades of red and yellow. They swam so close together, they changed first into a long fish, then a giant snake, and finally into an eel, the one that throws electricity. The eel was

River and down, even across to the other bank of the Amazon. Ticuna came from far to the west, past Leticia. There was no time for opposing sects to form, or for further deliberations. There were stores of flour to be roasted and fish to salt. Long thin canoes were built, big enough for ten men and their families. Black spade-tipped paddles were carved and the canoe bows oiled with roots.

The survivors say six hundred families started the trip. Some fled in the first days of rain, hastening to their boats without provisions or clothes. The more careful eyed the river as it began to rise, knowing that the great swells would come from far upstream in the rain forests. Two weeks would be plenty of time to prepare.

For the eight hundred who survived, it was not an easy voyage. Parts of the river were wide enough for only one boat at a time. Some found that their hastily-constructed canoes, floating level with the water with all their piled goods, could not pass the narrows.

Black spades, white water. While the Amazon rose upstream, the summer heat beat upon the shallow tributaries, twisting them like brown-black serpents through the green watery forests. The insects, the true rulers of the jungle, were everywhere. Flies and mosquitoes rose from quiet pools in great clouds at dusk, so thick the women ducked their heads to the keel. Two children died from their stings. After each day's rain, the insects increased.

It had been many years since the Ticuna had come up this river. Now the leaders weren't sure which overgrown stream, which faded path to follow.

There were few elders to guide them. They had been taken away in the big Brazilian Army boats to fight a border war with Paraguay, a thousand miles to the south, and they had not returned.

More trouble. Nora'ne, formerly everywhere, unloading boats to be carried overland, repairing broken spears, and supervising cooking, was nowhere to be

the ordeal, the Ticuna began to hunt again. Each family remembered some of the Old Ways, a snatch of a ceremonial song, a fragment of a legend. Proud to have survived, stimulated by the tales of their ancestors on whose ground they stood, the Ticuna forgot their recent past: the probing anthropologists, the trading freighters hungry for skins and relics, and the clack of the tourists' cameras. Proud, too, of their coming salvation, they looked to their distant past to provide for their future.

Old ceremonies were held. Masks used to frighten off the underworld spirits were hung outside the ragged palm shelters. Work had begun on the Moluca. Eight hundred Ticuna, arm in arm, formed a giant circle to outline the foundations of a single house where they were all to live while the waters receded.

At first, the rains stopped. Everybody felt better. Then a few men, the skeptics, began to watch the Amazon, trying to chart its swollen heights. The river continued to grow, and then subsided, glistening in the distance like a silver whip. People began to ask questions, impatient for their triumphant return. The few older men who had finally learned to fish on the river were uncomfortable trying to hunt again. Nora'ne was sick, with an illness he contracted on the trip. He rarely spoke.

In the middle of the second month, he announced he had an ill-omened dream: the time of the Ticuna had been postponed, for someone had married outside the nation and Dyai was angry.

Discontent was spreading. People were saying that if Nora'ne wasn't actually crazy, he had been taking Yagé, the powdered psychedelic kept by Ticuna leaders for ceremonial occasions.

On the day the Brazilian chief of the region, Quirino Maffra, managed to find his way to the Indian camp, all hell broke loose — at the sight of a white man on the tierra alta, the children cried

to Santa Rita, where he lives to this day. He is a curiosity there, receiving visitors every decade who have come for the memories of his youth.

Today, not much can be done for the Ticuna short of leaving them in peace, a protection the current Brazilian regime is not likely to provide. In fact, they have in store for them the completion of the trans-Brazilian highway, boldly being hacked out of the jungle.

At this point, the Ticuna has more of his past to forget than to remember. The last generation was lost in the war. The generation before that was unfortunate enough to have lived during the great Amazon rubber boom, when companies based in Brazil enslaved whole nations to cultivate their plantations. Not only were the native people forced to tap the rubber on pain of death, but their young children were taken to form a special internal police force. Pictures remain of the eight-year-olds in rows at target practice, staring straight ahead in their little white military uniforms.

The response of the Ticuna cannot be considered strange, given their options. An armed rebellion would have been unthinkable. The Ticuna's resistance was inarticulated, passive. In the visions of Nora'ne, the careful reader will have seen a turning away from fact, even from the physical laws of the universe. In place of secular struggle, Nora'ne fought in the plane of animal spirits, shamanism, the world that he knew best.

But the Ticuna's story is not over, and even now a prophet is among them. This new seer, a renegade Brazilian priest, embodies both the Christian and the old Indian ways. Jose San Francisco de Cruz, in flowing white robes and a long beard, today travels the little tributaries of the upper Amazon, holding curing ceremonies with shavings from the giant red wooden crosses he carries with him in his boat.

In the town where Nora'ne lives, they hold an annual celebration of his

so long he wrapped twice around the canoe, with a tail besides. I paddled as fast as I could back home and never returned."

Soon after this episode, other members of the Ticuna began to have visions. One boy dreamed that Nora'ne had turned into an old man who would lead the people. Another man, well respected and recently returned from a trip up river, said he had met other Ticuna there who believed that a vast flood — a periodic phenomenon on the upper Amazon — was coming. The people wondered out loud. Was this the Great Flood talked about in their grandfather's time?

At nightfall, only one fire burned in the village. By each house the wood was set, but no dinner cooked. The men were gathered at the ceremonial house, still wearing their leather fishing vests and carrying spears, tired from the day's work. They listened in silence to the words of a young boy, his ready adolescent voice sing-songy in the growing dusk.

"Yesterday Tanah told you and today I tell you — there is no mistake. In a fortnight, the river will rise. Before long our homes will be covered. Our animals will be killed. It is a time for sorrow. But this is the word of our father, Dyai, who appeared to me as a yellow tiger in the clearing by the forest. The white man's time is past. Those that have broken the old ways shall be punished. The time of the Ticuna is now.

"We must prepare a giant moluca, a house for all in the uplands. There we will be safe from the water. We will live in service to our ancestors. When the water comes, it will wash away the cities of the white man — we will survive.

"Listen then — the journey is long and we must prepare now. It is eight days by canoe and two by foot. All must go, up river and down, back to the land of our fathers."

Nora'ne stared in silence at his people, looking out over them into the black sky.

News travelled quickly up the Black

[Nora'ne is a living prophet of the Ticuna. This is one of the stories he relates.]

When I was a boy, I lived on the Black Mountain, at the foot of the mountain. That is where I grew up and where I hunted, high in the cliffs of the jungle. One night, when I was thirteen, I went hunting by myself, away from my family. As I climbed the mountain, the animals I met on the trail acted strangely. Cobras, birds, even jaguars came from all around and rubbed against me. I was scared, but decided to keep on walking. In a clearing in the forest, I met a giant wild pig, half the size of a house. He didn't attack just then — he stopped there in the moonlight, looking down at me, and lumbered off into the forest.

found. They were travelling day and night, through ever-increasing rain. Nora'ne's elder brother, 17, started directing the crowds of boats, steering back and forth in his own one-man canoe. Everywhere was the buzz of mosquitoes and the wail of babies stung beyond a mother's comfort.

Rowing upstream they made the voyage in a week, despite the rain and confusion. With the overland trip, they were not so fortunate: they followed one path for three days, the whole tribe panting under the weight of their provisions, only to discover a sheer forty-foot cliff blocking their way.

When they finally reached their goal, as many had been left behind as had arrived. At last, climbing out into the broad grassy savannah, high in the hidden mountains of the jungle, they were too tired to do anything but fall on the ground in a wet malarial stupor.

Slowly they recovered. Toughened by

The next day, I went hunting again, in a different spot. This time the wild pig appeared to me as soon as I set out. He had a breast of gold, brilliant and glowing with an internal light, beautiful in the still night air. I heard a noise above me. There, rustling through the bamboo, was a giant bat, five feet across. I was so scared. I fell on the ground. I thought it was an airplane. As soon as I thought it was safe, I went straight home, catching nothing that night.

After that, I didn't go hunting alone for a year, out of fear. I had told my people of these visions and my family couldn't decide whether I was bewitched or a prophet. When I finally went out hunting

again, it was just after midnight, a dark moonless night.

As soon as I reached the top of the mountain, I heard a great noise off to my right. It sounded like clouds of rain had poured down all around me, but no rain fell. I came a little ways further, and heard the noise again, all around me.

I looked up and in the trees were hundreds of parrots beating their wings. Each glistened and gleamed like gold in the sun, in beautiful colors: red and orange and purple.

One day, not too long after seeing the parrots, I went fishing. By the side of the canoe I saw a giant snake. He was long and fat, as if he had just eaten

a pig. The snake glowed faintly from the inside in bands, like a watch. I went home to tell my wife (for in those days it was not uncommon to have a wife at fourteen) but she didn't believe me. She said, 'Nora'ne, now you are telling lies.' So I said, 'Well, you come with me, and see for yourself.'

We went out on a small river. I was about to throw my spear into the water when it began to boil, but just near the canoe. Then the same giant snake appeared and swam toward us; we rowed home. After that, she believed me and told the village that I was a great man. People began to think of me as a wise man, and came to me for advice.

in fright, as if at a ghost. The men were called back from the forest. Nora'ne refused to come out of his tent. And the squirrel monkeys added to the general confusion by beginning to chatter.

Maffra, now a shy, grey-haired man of sixty-nine whose son is the present chief, remembers the scene:

"I came up onto that broad plateau, just dead tired, and there were all the Ticuna, living in little huts on the edge of a big cleared circle. A huge fire burned in the middle. When I finally heard what they were there for, from a boy I'd known all my life, I laughed fit to burst my sides. I told them there was no flood, to come back down to the river right away now, and stop all this foolishness."

And so the Ticuna returned to the river, to their little colony rich with the mysteries of transubstantiation and bottled pop.

Nora'ne moved 10 miles down the river

coming, which Nora'ne no doubt attends. Needless to say, San Francisco de Cruz is heartily unwelcome to the established missionaries. His success is no doubt due to the fact that, like Nora'ne, he offers the Ticuna a peaceful salvation from the daily humiliations they must live with.

Life taken from the Ticuna cannot be returned — the ceremonies of all the mystics will not bring back the tigers whose skins adorn split-level homes in suburban Miami.

"Looking back on it all, I must have been a little crazy," continued Nora'ne. No one could understand what the missionaries wanted. The old people were gone, and only a few of us remembered the past.

"And now — well, I guess there are even fewer."

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