

notes from the news:

"Only a Park Can Save the Yanomama"

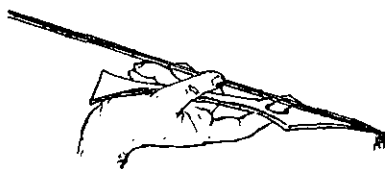
The 6,000 Yanomamö (or Yanoama) Indians located in the Brazilian Territory of Roraima face one of the most critical moments in their recent history. The Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* carried a story in July 1978 that revealed that the Brazilian National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) was planning to create a new reserve policy for the Yanomamö. This policy would split the Yanomamö area into sixteen minuscule reserves and pose a significant threat to the continuing territorial integrity of this large and still relatively unacculturated Indian tribe.

A full-page article by Memélia Moreira in the *Jornal de Brasília* of 1 October 1978 described how anthropologists, missionaries, and Indianists had pleaded with the Brazilian government for more than a decade to create a single Yanomamö land area in the northern part of the country. According to this article, the recent FUNAI decision was based on the advice of General Demócrito de Oliveira, the director of COAMA (the agency charged with coordinating Indian policy in the Amazon), and Sebastião Amancio, an Indian agent who gained notoriety several years ago by suggesting that machine guns and dynamite be used to break the intransigence of the Waimiri-Atroari tribe. General Demócrito was quoted as saying that he believed the Yanomamö Indians to be "physically and possibly intellectually decadent" as a result of sexual relations between members of the tribe. Sexual relations between "brothers and sisters, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, and even between grandparents and grandchildren," the general claimed, "constitute a true case of incest" among the Yanomamö.

Concerned Brazilians immediately

responded to the FUNAI initiative to dismember the Yanomamö territory. Claudio Villas Boas, one of the founders and former codirector of the Xingu National Park in Mato Grosso, noted that the Yanomamö were one of the "last great Indian nations of Brazil," but they were faced with "disintegration" by the speed of their encounter with Brazilian national society. The immediate creation of a Yanomamö Indian Park, he said, was needed in order to guarantee the survival of the Yanomamö and their culture.

Brazilian anthropologists point out that one of the major problems of the new FUNAI reserve policy is its failure



—from *Revista de Atualidade Indígena*

to recognize the vital role that mobility plays in Yanomamö culture. Yanomamö villages, of which there are dozens on the Brazilian side of the frontier, are constantly moving as a result of epidemics, deaths, ecological saturation, and defense against internal and external threats. The new reserve policy will substantially limit the possibilities of such mobility and upset the delicate social and ecological adaptations of the tribe.

The new reserve policy is also ominous in light of the extensive highway construction, mineral exploration, and colonization now taking place in the northern part of Brazil. The

Northern Perimeter Highway has already penetrated within 245 kilometers of Yanomamö territory, and the Brazilian government is reported to be planning to resume construction immediately. In 1977, a measles epidemic that resulted from highway construction wiped out sixty-seven Indians at a Catholic mission station along the Catrimani River. At an American evangelical mission station in Mucajai, Yanomamö are also reported to be dying from intestinal diseases and tuberculosis; six people are reported to have died and twenty-two people are estimated to have been treated for TB in this region over the past two years.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) is now distributing parcels of land to settlers along the southern and eastern fringe of Yanomamö territory. "INCRA," one observer writes, "has marked out land all the way up to Mucajai, cutting tractor-wide swaths through the forest up to between the *malocas* [villages] and putting cement marker blocks every five kms. . . . So whether the stupid little reserve for the Mucajai serves for something or not, INCRA has already marked out the land."

The Comissão Pró-Índio and the Prelate of Roraima have protested the FUNAI reserve policy and are calling for the creation of a well-protected and controlled Indian park. "Such a Park," reads a document released by the Comissão Pró-Índio in October, "would, in effect, be the only viable means to guarantee a unique and sufficiently vast territory for the physical and cultural survival of the Yanoama, who are still in intermittent or hostile contact with the encroaching national society."

ARC NEWSLETTER

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