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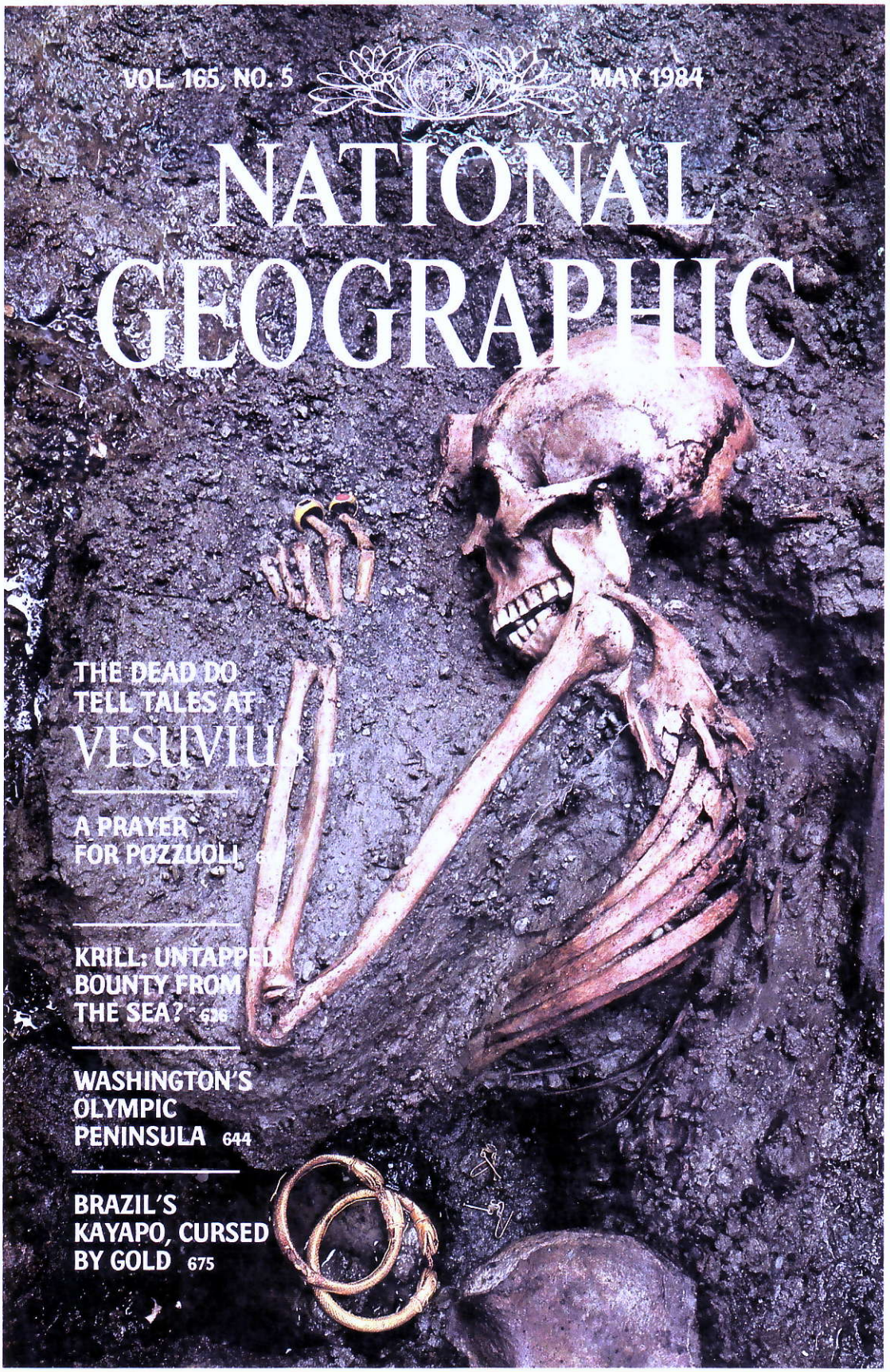

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAY 1984 HERCULANEUM POZZUOLI KRILL OLYMPIC PENINSULA KAYAPO INDIANS

BRAZIL'S KAYAPO INDIANS

Beset by a Golden Curse

By VANESSA LEA

Photographs by
MIGUEL RIO BRANCO
MAGNUM

***Tradition keeps company** with technology among Brazil's Kayapo Indians in their Amazonian village of Gorotire. This man values the radio-recorder for taping tribal songs. His red hat, left by a rubber tapper, is an heirloom. Its feathers signify initiation into manhood. A young relative wears the family's traditional wealth—ceremonial feathers, beads, and cotton bands.*

Since the first permanent contact with whites in 1937, followed by incursions of squatters, loggers, and miners, the Kayapo have gradually adopted new customs. But now gold strikes nearby bring more cash and increased contact, causing irrevocable changes in their way of life.

"WHY ARE *KUBEN* so hungry for gold?" Chief Kanhonk asked me with an air of sadness.

There really was no answer, since his culture and mine were worlds apart.

To Brazil's Kayapo, the term "kuben" includes all non-Indians. And, long before the *garimpeiros*—the gold miners—reached Kayapo lands, other outsiders had violated their domain. Rubber workers, Brazil-nut gatherers, hunters. Then squatters, ranchers, loggers, land speculators.

The Kayapo had fought all of them.

I knew that history well. While doing my research for a doctorate in anthropology from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, I had lived for 13 months among the Kayapo Indians on the banks of the Xingu River in the eastern part of Brazil's Amazon Basin (map, page 678). Now I'd come to stay with another group of Kayapo in the village of Gorotire, about 300 miles to the north. They had welcomed me, for I spoke their language and knew their ways.

As forest villages go, Gorotire is large, with close to 90 houses. Its layout is a curious mixture of tradition and modernity. Some villagers, including Kanhonk and his fellow chief, Toto'i, live on the "main street," a wide avenue between the Fresco River and the traditional men's house, in a plan devised by the Brazilian government agency that preceded the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI). Others live on paths branching off the street. One part of the village maintains the traditional plan: a large circle of houses at the foot of steep but low-lying hills.

The Indian Reserve of Gorotire encompasses much more than just the village of that name. On paper, it is the third largest in Brazil, after Tumucumaque and Xingu National Parks—a total of 2,738,850 hectares (10,575 square miles). But, as is so with most Indian areas in Brazil, it has yet to be demarcated on the ground. Of the 13 Kayapo villages, with a total of about 3,000 Indians, five are located within this reservation.

The Kayapo have long taken pride in their fighting ability. Before whites came, they raided enemy tribes and even skirmished among themselves. Their weapons were clubs and bows and arrows.

One old warrior reminisced about those

Ritual makes the world go round. *Behind leaders rattling gourd instruments, chanting men in body paint and shell-and-bead necklaces perform a circle dance during a festival in May. Smoke rises from the cooking fires of host families. Kayapo visualize a round universe; they traditionally have constructed circular villages and fields.*

simpler days. "We lived together in the men's house," he said a bit wistfully. "There we were on the alert for attacks on our village, and we planned raids against our enemies. Today the young men would rather stay home with their wives and children."

The traditional symbol of Kayapo manhood—and bellicosity—was a light wooden lip disk about six centimeters in diameter. It, together with a penis sheath, was a part of daily male attire. "But the sheaths are

uncomfortable," a young man commented. "We wear shorts now." He added that lip disks are also falling out of favor. "You can't speak Portuguese when you are wearing one."

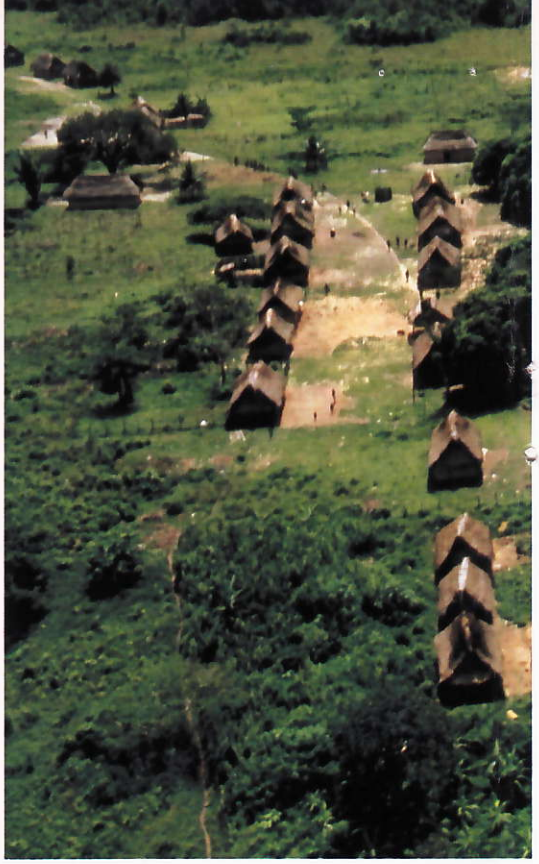
Since few Kayapo know more than a smattering of that language, it probably was self-consciousness, brought on by encounters with outsiders, that caused the lip-disk fashion to wane, though a few older men wear theirs.

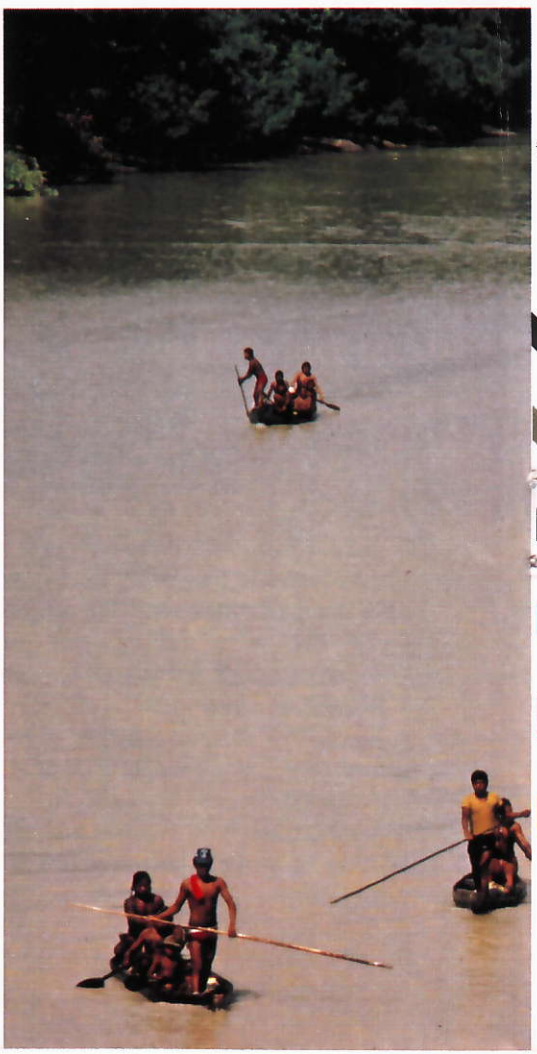
Perhaps the ultimate symbol of modern manhood is a firearm. Some have been obtained peaceably, through trade. Many others were booty, acquired in raids. The Kayapo use them for hunting, of course. And some have been used in battle.

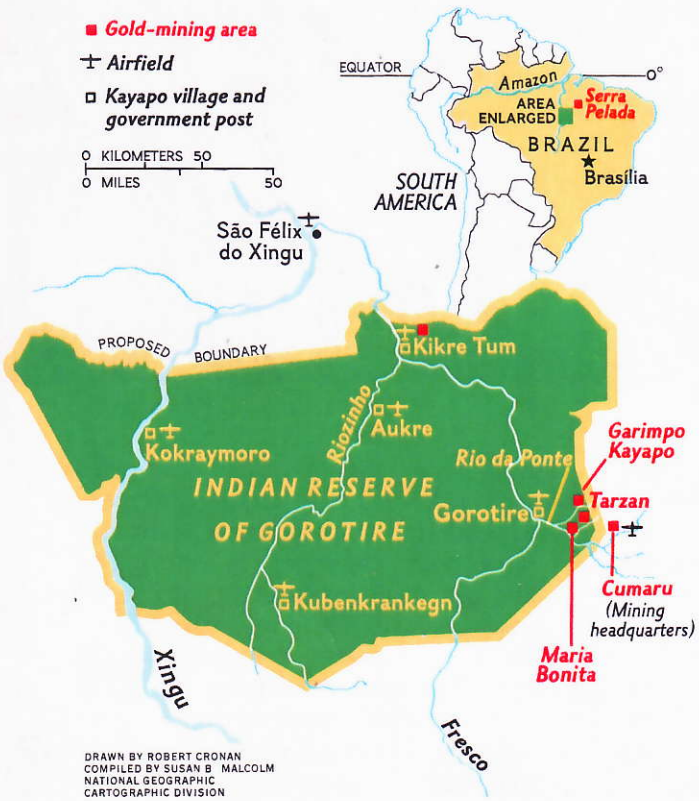
Now there are even newer symbols. Tape recorders, for example. During the many Kayapo ceremonies, more and more men, tape recorders in hand, accompany the singers to capture *(Continued on page 682)*

Design of Gorotire, *where the government settled many Kayapo in the 1940s, was inspired by Brazilian towns. But the plaza, supplied with electric lights and piped water, spreads out from the village men's house rather than an urban church. The office of the Indian protection agency, FUNAI, stands at right. Extended families live in the thatch-roofed homes, usually backing on a garden filled with edible and medicinal plants; some also have apiaries. Women plant and harvest the kitchen and distant gardens, while men hunt and fish. Here a hunting party* ***(lower right)*** *brings in fish and turtles for a festival. This stretch of the Fresco River ran clear until fouled by human wastes and tailings from the immense government-controlled gold mines of Cumaru.*

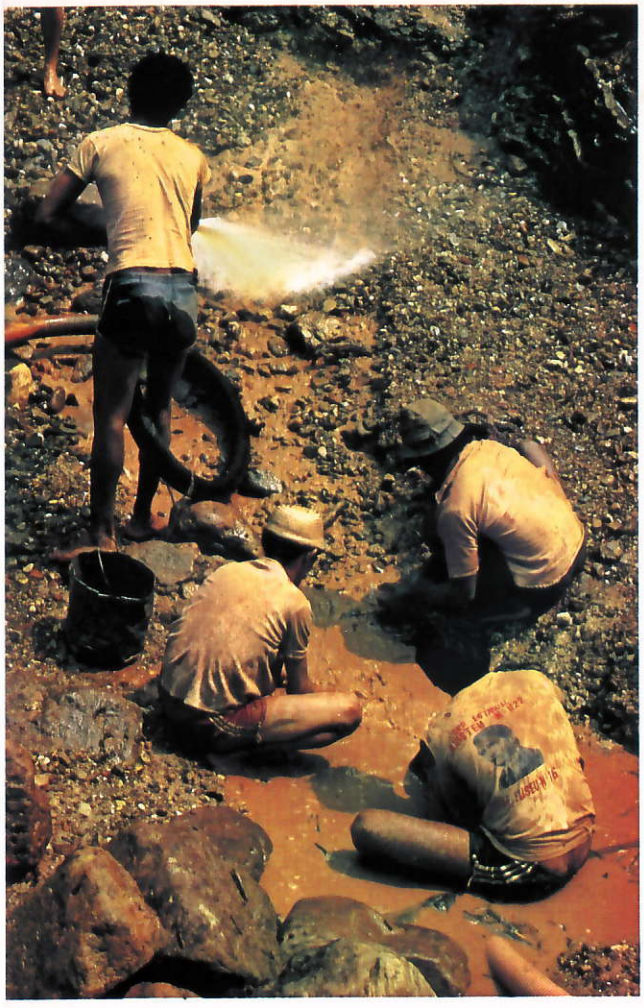
At the turn of the century several thousand Kayapo were living in one community, but they disbanded because of internal strife. Introduced diseases took a toll. Today 3,000 Kayapo live in 13 villages, of which Gorotire, with 600 residents, is the largest. It lies in a Maryland-size reserve set aside for Kayapo ***(below)****, but, as in North America, Indian rights are often reinterpreted. A road will soon link Gorotire to Cumaru. Rumors abound about moving the Kayapo farther away from the mines "for their own good."*







A chief wears many hats, *and sometimes a souvenir tie* ***(right)****. Toto'i* ***(facing page)****, shown with his wife and daughter, dons a headdress of matched parrot feathers that denotes his family links. Under the Kayapo system of multiple chiefs, Toto'i and his counterpart, Kanhonk, lead through consensus. Each directs a group of men in communal labor, such as harvesting Brazil nuts, clearing an airstrip, or constructing modern houses* ***(below)****. The chiefs approved the building project suggested by a FUNAI official, bought a kiln, and depleted their supply of cut firewood to bake bricks. This house, sure to be hot, took a year to complete; airfreight quadrupled building costs.*



Gold: the Indians' burden. *The Kayapo tried to work as miners, but the high-pressure hose was frightening and panning* ***(below)*** *was backbreaking, leaving them no time for hunting and festivals. So for a mine on their land they experiment by hiring non-Indians* ***(above)*** *and take a share of the revenues.*

the music. Speeches, too, are taped, to be studied over and over.

Like so many other tribes, the Kayapo are trying to fathom the mystery of the bedazzling wealth of the white man's world, source of wondrous products produced in uncountable numbers. And so they have entered the Brazilian gold rush on a modest scale. They ousted intruders from one mining site on the reservation, renamed it Garimpo Kayapo, and hired other whites to mine it for them for a 60 percent share of the profits. Though the Kayapo's 40 percent seems a handsome revenue, the money never seems to go far enough.

FUNAI, established in 1968 to protect Indian rights, is spread thin over the huge Brazilian interior. Often native tribes have been left to the care of missionaries, but some have been drawn to government-founded villages like Gorotire.

A scarred old veteran of many battles told me one day about the Kayapo's first encounter with a FUNAI pacification team. "We were going to kill them," he said. "But they had brought so many presents of knives, machetes, axes, beads, and other things that we decided to make peace with them."

Staffed liberally with military officers, FUNAI is intended as a buffer between Indians and whites. Its job on the Gorotire Reservation is to keep Kayapo and outsiders at peace. But that job is not an easy one.

A warrior told me of a battle of just a few years ago, when the Kayapo faced 21 outsiders illegally clearing farmland within the reservation's boundaries. "The government had failed to stop them, so we went there to drive them out. We grabbed one farm worker and began to crop his hair to teach him a lesson. A white girl came to help him, stabbing my brother-in-law. Then another white hit my uncle over the head with an ax handle. We ended up killing all of them."

Such violence must be viewed in the context of years of frustrated efforts by the Indians to obtain their legal rights. "We will fight to the death to hold on to our lands," the chiefs said. Only time will tell whether that threat will come true.

Gold prospectors in large numbers first reached the Fresco River, in the eastern part of the reservation, in the late 1960s.

Though FUNAI initially tried to forestall an invasion, the garimpeiros crossed the borders in 1980, expanding into the Indians' Brazil-nut groves. The police came in to put an end to the invasion, but that effort, too, dwindled away. In March of 1981 the mining complex of Cumaru, headquartered at the site of the same name, became a legal entity, controlled by Brazilian mineral bureaus and by federal and military police.

With a fluctuating population of as many as 20,000 men, the Cumaru complex can marshal a much larger "army" than can the Kayapo. Recently there has been talk of bringing in the miners' families and settling them near the working areas with farm fields to feed them. Exhaustion of the available sites is already predicted, and the search for new ones may well involve further incursions into Gorotire lands.

When I first flew in toward Gorotire, my mind was on my Kayapo friends in the village along the Xingu River. In memory I strolled again along the crystalline blue river. Millions of yellow butterflies carpeted the banks, and I walked along through a golden snowstorm.

Then, suddenly, I looked down from the plane at a river so fouled that not one Indian was bathing or fishing there. It was the Fresco, polluted by the gold camps.

In happier days, before soil runoff, sewage, and chemical pollution tainted the river, it was a center of daily life. Now FUNAI has to pipe water from a stream more than a mile away so the villagers can bathe themselves, wash their clothes, and draw their drinking water.

I found that the central village faucet had been ringed with barbed wire to keep out the local FUNAI staff's 30 head of imported African buffalo, which roam through the village at night. Those animals are an irony of imposed development. "We ourselves don't like the taste of beef," an Indian told me. "We hardly ever eat it."

"We cannot fish near the village now," an old man complained. "To fish with bow and arrow, the water must be clear. Besides, the fish have no taste. Many of them now die and wash up on the shore."

Pollution, sadly, seems to be the price of development. I asked Anazildo Silva, then head of the FUNAI post in the village, if the water runoff could not be filtered before it leaves the gold camps. He shook his head. "Far too expensive. And it does little good to pressure the officials at Cumaru. But at least they have agreed to mend the plastic piping system that we installed to bring clear water to the village. And they also promise to reinforce the small dam we built up there."

Mining methods at the camps are far from sophisticated. Diesel-powered pumps direct jets of water at the gold-bearing earth, washing it into ponds. Then the muddy result is pumped up into sluices where the gold ore settles out. Not surprisingly, torrents of the mud run off into the river along with sewage and diesel fuel. There is still another harmful effect of the mining: Abandoned craters fill with stagnant water, where malarial mosquitoes breed.

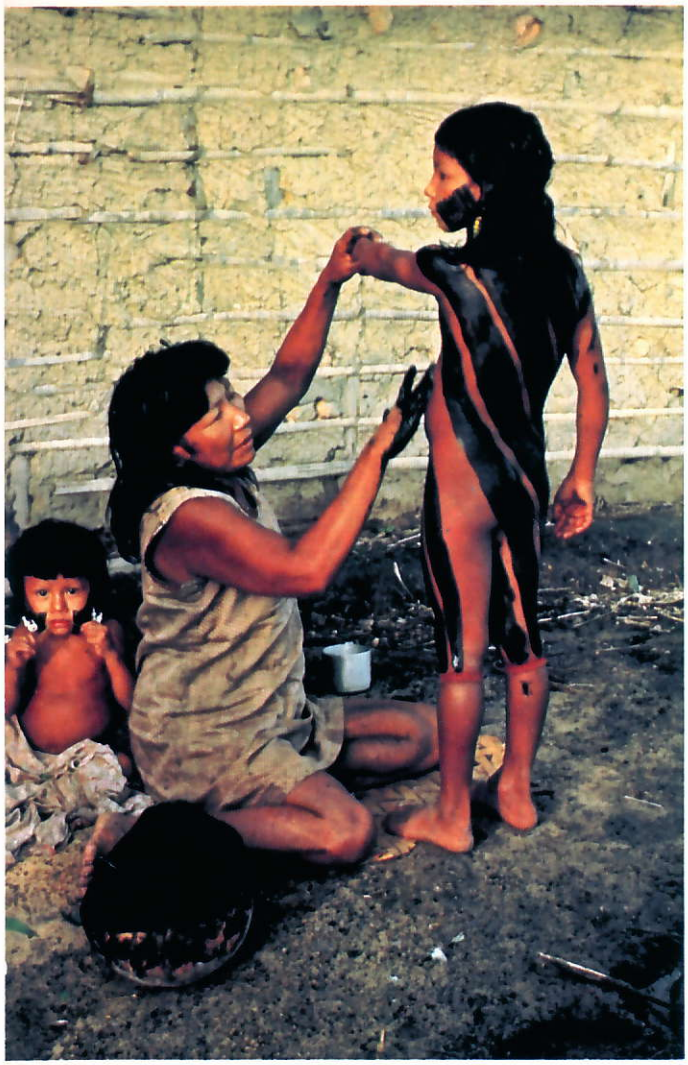
Fish still furnish a large part of the Indians' protein supply, but now the villagers must make a tedious journey upriver to do their fishing. Photographer Miguel Rio Branco and I set off by canoe one day under a scorching sun to see how far afield the source of the pollution lay. Frequently we lost the channel in the murky water and found ourselves aground on mud flats or stranded on barely submerged rocks. Often we had to leave the canoe to find deeper water or tow it up through the many small rapids along the way.

After three hours, we reached the mouth of the Rio da Ponte, which funnels the gold camps' runoff into the Fresco. Above that point the Fresco was clear and fish relatively abundant. It was hard to believe that all our efforts had carried us only a mile and a half upriver from Gorotire.

These days, hooks and lines are replacing bows and arrows, but at times the Indians fish with *timbo,* a vine that is wrapped into bundles and floated on the river. Singing as they work, the men beat the timbo with sticks. The beaten vines release a substance that causes the fish to float to the surface, where they are easily gathered.

TAPE RECORDERS and clubs, aluminum cookware and thatched roofs—the Kayapo of Gorotire find themselves torn between old ways and new. The village has an Evangelical church, where services are conducted by native pastors. I attended

Serious but satisfying, *the dry-season celebration called Bemp, after a local fish, encompasses initiation, marriage rites, and the presentation of ancestral names to small boys. This recipient* ***(left)*** *sits patiently as a female relative—a rare visitor to the men's house—wraps his knees with cotton strands. Using sticky latex, she glues yellow parrot down to his body and blue eggshells in a halo. In such finery the Kayapo of Gorotire are buried.*



An elaborate headdress is shaped from beeswax on Kangati ***(above)****, a son of Chief Toto'i, for an all-night song vigil with a ceremonial partner* ***(right)****. The headpiece with its radiating sun of feathers is believed to represent the universe. Its shaft symbolizes the cotton rope by which the first Kayapo descended from the sky. Later the wax in the ornament will be melted down and saved for the next Bemp, a tradition tying the Kayapo to their past and future.*

Little Ire-no ***(left)*** *receives an everyday paint job, without which no Kayapo feels properly attired. Her mother mixes juice from the genipap fruit with charcoal and applies a seasonal design. The paint will last nearly two weeks. Some patterns resemble animal markings, including those of bees and wasps. The Kayapo believe their ancestors learned from social insects to live communally.*

a service and heard the preacher warn that only those who listen to God go to the sky—the rest burn in hell. Traditionally, the Indians have a different view of an afterlife. At death one goes to the Village of the Dead, where men sleep during the day and hunt at night. There old men become younger and children become older.

As a non-Indian, I was allowed inside the traditional male assembly building, the men's house. Except on rare occasions Kayapo women are permitted only fleeting visits to deliver food to their male relatives.

And there I heard a sermon far different from the one in church. "We Kayapo are all brothers now," a village elder preached. "We must no longer fight among ourselves, but direct our battles against the whites who try to take our lands."

The Kayapo are usually in the midst of a ceremony or making preparations for the next one. In each dry and rainy season they hold one of five major rites to bestow ancestral names on the younger members of the tribe, a dance ritual adopted from another tribe, or a corn ceremony.

They have a rich repertoire of song, and it is stirring indeed to hear a large chorus of voices ringing out under the vast star-spangled sky in the forest night, punctuated by croaking frogs and the occasional cries of animals and birds.

My 18-day stay coincided with Bemp, a great initiation and naming ceremony held every few years. As part of it, the men came toward the village bearing a huge tree trunk that would be the centerpiece of the night dance. It must not enter Gorotire until sunset, so the men guarded it all afternoon, just outside the village. Incongruously, they

Curious stares *greet Toto'i on a shopping expedition to Cumaru* ***(above)****. The chief radioed for a FUNAI plane to take him to the place he thinks of as "Cobal," the name of the government store, where he shops from a list in his head. When his airlift returns to the Gorotire strip* ***(right)****, Toto'i's team ferries boxes of soap, rice, and other supplies to his house or warehouse for eventual distribution. The*

whiled away the time by munching imported cookies and drinking canned soft drinks.

So much of the village's gold revenue had been lavished on Bemp that the cost exceeded the previous year's income from the Brazil-nut crop.

"Next year the gold revenue will be invested in agricultural projects," declared Anazildo Silva. A practical idea, but it does not take into account the Kayapo enthusiasm for goods of the outside world.

During Bemp, a small contingent of builders and brickmakers were in Gorotire to construct new village houses. Already much of the cement flown in for the project had been damaged through carelessness, and little progress was visible. At the height of the ceremony, construction ground to a halt while bricklayers joined the dancers.

Gorotire is eager to rival the village of Kikre Tum, which split away in 1976 after a dispute over use of some ceremonial feathers escalated into a duel between the village co-chiefs. Kikre Tum, in the northern part of the reservation, has achieved affluence envied by Gorotire, after making a more lucrative deal for gold mining in its area. In fact, its chief, Pombo—inspired no doubt by FUNAI's large staff of military men—now answers only to the title of colonel.

THE GOROTIRE villagers conduct some trade with their fellow Kayapo on the upper Xingu River, who are rich in industrial goods but poor in traditional resources. Such goods are freighted in FUNAI aircraft, which fly between the villages.

Since I had lived on the upper Xingu for more than a year, I was asked why the latest shipment had not arrived. "We sent them

village chiefs also put revenues from gold into bank accounts in three cities and have so far purchased for themselves motorboats and gas stoves. They talk of buying an aircraft. Traditionally Kayapo leaders were expected to live poor, share all possessions, and rise early with their men. But now, some villagers complain, they live in the manner of Brazilian colonels.

Brazil nuts, macaw feathers, and babassu oil. But we are still waiting for the beads, ammunition, hooks, and fishing line that were promised."

Well, a mail-order service between two communities where hardly anyone reads or writes—much less knows how to label freight—is bound to become chaotic.

With an eye toward still more white men's goods, the Indians of Gorotire have agreed with FUNAI to have a road built from the village to the goldfields of Cumaru. An outside firm will build it, taking as payment the trees that must be cleared from the roadway.

Many Indian elders are afraid of that road and what it will bring, but the young are more sanguine. "Airplanes can't carry much," a young Kayapo said to me, "and they are expensive to use. But with a road we can have goods by the truckloads—tape recorders, clothes, cookies. . . ."

"Aren't you afraid the road will bring in more garimpeiros and settlers?"

His mind was on material things; he waved that possibility away. "Oh, there will be a FUNAI post along the road, with a gate. Only people bringing goods here will be allowed through."

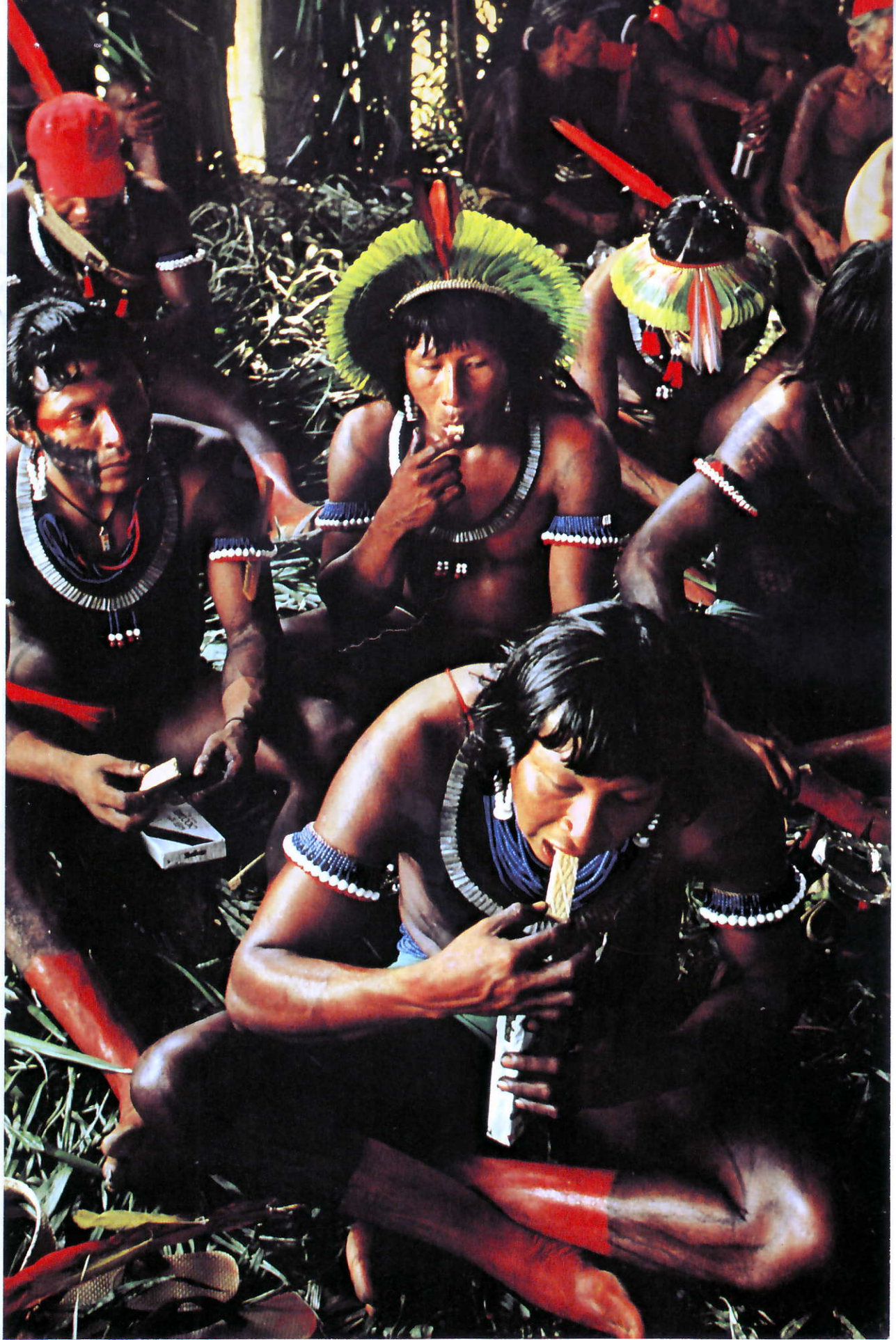
I had doubts. Roads into Brazil's Indian settlements usually have brought more problems than benefits to the villagers.

DURING MY VISIT Gorotire was a beehive of aerial activity; planes and helicopters landed frequently near the village, and we could hear planes serving Cumaru all day long. Frequently the village is visited by the military, by federal police, by Cumaru administrators, and by visiting FUNAI staff.

Both chiefs, Kanhonk and Toto'i, objected to the aggressive nature of those inspections. "I want to put a sign by the runway telling the police not to enter the village with guns," Kanhonk said. "This is our home."

The Kayapo's own gold mining enterprise

On a cookie break, *Bemp celebrators in the men's house enjoy store-bought treats provided by a host family. One soft drink, guarana, owes its origin to Brazilian Indians who domesticated the plant of the same name.*



at Garimpo Kayapo was just beginning during my visit. Accounts had been opened at Cumaru headquarters so the two chiefs could sell the gold, and FUNAI had bought some mining machinery. Four white miners were employed to operate the machines.

The Kayapo had already expelled a previous group of workers for trying to steal their gold, and it is fairly predictable that such conflicts will continue. Still, it is doubtful that they will ever want to do all the grueling work themselves, even if non-Indian workers teach them how. One plan is to limit the Gorotire operation to about 40 white workers—though the pressure of gold fever may make it hard to keep the mining on such a small scale.

There are two other large extraction sites within reservation boundaries—Maria Bonita and the adjoining Tarzan site. According to Silva, the Kayapo are receiving a percentage of the federal tax on gold taken from Maria Bonita.

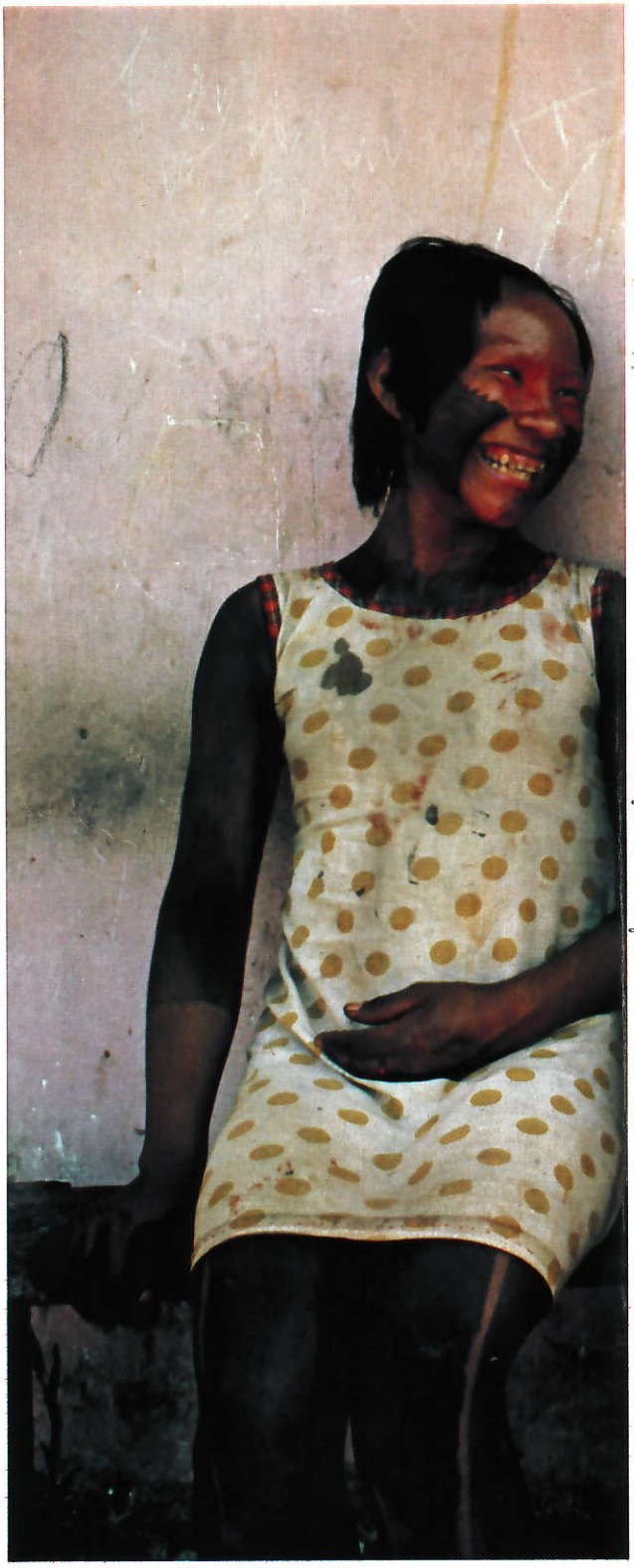
GRADUALLY, the Kayapo of Gorotire are moving closer to modern ways. A canteen was set up in the village to supply them with such staples as rice, beans, manioc flour, sugar, coffee, cookies, butter, and milk.

A church, a school, and missionary houses are part of the village now, and a pharmacy. FUNAI radio maintains daily contact with the outside world. Some villagers are being taught to read and write in their own language; others attend classes in Portuguese, though few retain it in later life.

Gorotire's two chiefs even dream now of extending electricity to the entire village; perhaps it will always stay a dream.

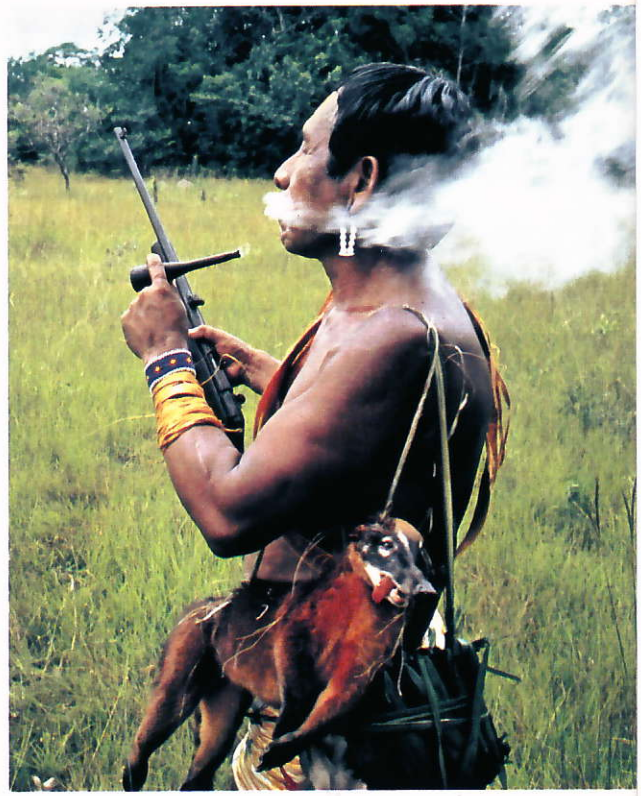
Still, despite this heterogeneity of modern contacts, Gorotire maintains much of its highly developed ceremonial life. Body painting—equally cosmetic and symbolic—is part of traditional daily attire. Adults paint each other in group sessions, and women spend long hours decorating their children. With palm strips as brushes, and using various fruit dyes, they paint striking black geometric designs on body and face. They add red "stockings" and paint faces red. Designs vary according to the occasion and subject's age and sex.

And Kayapo women bedeck their children



Prime candidates for marriage, *these teenagers will probably pick partners suggested by their families. Only after the*

birth of a child is the marriage formalized. For the past few years Kayapo chiefs have discouraged traditional birth control, hoping to increase the tribe's numbers and thus make possible the completion of a full cycle of the festivals essential to their culture.



Carrying live game *like totem poles, hunters return from a month-long jungle trek with the turtles* ***(left)*** *called for in every festival menu. After a ritual in the men's house the reptiles are delivered to the host families for roasting.*

Modern symbol of manhood, the rifle once fired at white intruders and enemy Kayapo. Now it and little else accompanies a former warrior ***(above)*** *on his hunts. He can feed himself because ancestors planted tubers and other edibles at regular campsites on jungle trails. Such sophisticated planning characterizes Kayapo slash-and-burn agriculture. Seemingly abandoned fields are managed in order to attract wildlife, such as the coati hanging from the hunter's shoulder.*

But as the Kayapo acquire more consumer goods and canned food, some neglect their fields, turning their backs on a rich agricultural tradition that has sustained their people for millennia. The question lingers: Can the Kayapo retain their self-sufficiency, their identity—and their land?

lavishly with beads. We brought 11 kilos of beads with us, but they soon ran out.

"Is it true," a woman asked me, "that our relatives on the Xingu have so many beads that they use them as blankets at night?"

That, indeed, would be a Kayapo dream come true.

OUTSIDE PRESSURES on the reservation continue to grow. To the north lies Brazil's largest gold mine, Serra Pelada. One of the largest gold nuggets ever found, weighing 137 pounds, was discovered there last year.

The Brazilian government has threatened to close Serra Pelada to manual workers, pointing out the danger of mining with hand tools at the site. Press reports suggest that major gold deposits are still to be reached and that the government and multinational companies intend to reap all the benefits by mechanizing operations. There is talk of plans to transfer many of Serra Pelada's 80,000 miners to the Cumaru camps, which would put even more pressure on Gorotire Reservation lands. Meanwhile, garimpeiros have arrived at two Kayapo villages outside the reservation.

Also looming in the future is a vast hydroelectric project that would flood two other Kayapo villages on the Xingu River. Development attracted by that project would have a marked effect on other villages too. But Brazil is in a deep economic crisis, and the costly hydro project exists only on paper for the present.

One of the wonders of the 20th century surely must be juxtaposition of such huge projects with small native communities that live from traditional slash-and-burn agriculture. The Kayapo have always inhabited mixed regions of forest and savanna, farming, hunting game, and gathering wild fruits. "We used to abandon the village," Chief Kanhonk told me, "to go off on long treks through the jungle." Now the Indians, depending on goods from the modern age, have become increasingly sedentary.

The Kayapo are but one piece in a complex mosaic made up of Brazil's many tribes. The Indian population is estimated to be as high as 150,000, comprising about 180 tribal groups speaking nearly as many languages and dialects. When Portuguese colonization began, the count may have been three million Indians.

Coastal Indian groups were virtually exterminated by diseases to which they had no immunity, and by subjugation and slavery in early colonial times. Many other tribes remained in relative isolation in the interior. Then the rubber boom starting in the mid-19th century began to change their lives.

As the hunt for rubber trees widened, the Indians skirmished with white invaders. The Kayapo attacked and killed the whites, both to avenge raids on their villages and to collect booty, such as arms and ammunition. Part of the tribe moved west to the Xingu and beyond to escape the intruders. But the hunger to exploit the interior grew, particularly after World War II. Brasilia became the nation's capital in 1960, and a vast network of roads laced into the jungle to link the interior with the developed coast.

IN 1980 the first Indian organization—UNI (Union of Indigenous Nations)—was established to allow Indians to speak for themselves. Two years later an Indian, Mario Juruna, was elected to the Brazilian Congress. His term of office has been stormy, but he has become a symbol of justice, looking out for the poor and oppressed of his country.

It is frequently said in Brazil that the Indians are doomed to die out. I believe this is overly fatalistic. True, the pressure is increasing, but the movement toward self-determination is making progress too, as exemplified by UNI and Mario Juruna. Some tribes—including the Kayapo—are growing; there were 23 births in Gorotire village during the first half of 1983.

But the future of all Brazil's Indians hinges on the continuing struggle for their rights and their stand against developmental pressures. It is of little use to mark reservation boundaries in the forest if those boundaries continue to be violated or constantly changed, or if groups are forcibly removed from their traditional lands, as is commonly the case.

This is a fact of modern life: Just as Brazil itself is beset by a staggering foreign debt, the nation's Indian tribes—the Kayapo among them—feel the unrelenting pressures of the world scramble for resources. □