

concluding chapter on the “Post-Colonial, “ the author has succeeded in convincing the reader of the need to conceive of the multiplicities of colonialism.

**Review of *Sanumá Memories: Yanomami Ethnography in a Time of Crisis*. Alcida Rita Ramos. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. xx, 346 pp. (paper).**

**Review by Raymond Hames, Anthropology Department, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.**

As I have done considerable research among the Yanomamö,<sup>1</sup> it was with anticipation that I received notice of Alcida Ramos' publication of *Sanumá Memories*. This work is a useful contribution to the large and still expanding research on the Yanomamö, an Amazonian people who have become a classic case study for anthropology and the social sciences. They are probably the most widely read about tribal people in the world, largely a consequence of Napoleon Chagnon's immensely popular ethnography *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (first published in 1968 and the most recent edition in 1992).

The Yanomamö have become a focal point for theoretical debates concerning the causes of warfare among tribal people, the promise of evolutionary biological theory in the behavioral sciences, and most recently, and lamentably, they are internationally known as victims of grave human rights violations. Ramos' *Sanumá Memories* was first published in Portuguese in 1990 as an update of her 1972 doctoral dissertation (The Social System of the Sanumá of Northern Brazil, University of Wisconsin) supplemented by several return visits to the Sanumá (as recently as 1992) yielding additional chapters. A number of the chapters have been published as journal articles in both Portuguese and English.

Based on the work of Ernesto Migliazza, the Yanomamö are divided into four ethnolinguistic groups: the Sanumá or Sanema with 3,200 speakers in about 100 villages, three-quarters of which are in Venezuela; the Yanomamö with 11,700 speakers in 171 villages, with about 80 percent in Venezuela; Yanomam with 5,300 speakers in 64 villages, nearly all of which are in Brazil; and the Ninam (or Yanam), with perhaps as many as 850 speakers equally divided in Brazil and Venezuela. The work under review here is the most systematic account of we have on Sanumá social organization. Other major works on the Sanumá by Kent Taylor and Marcus Colchester focus on ethnobiology, ecology, and economics.

Chapter One consists of a standard ethnographic overview focusing on the distribu-

---

1. Readers may be interested in the use of the terms Yanomamö and Yanomami. Following N. Chagnon's convention, I use the term Yanomamö to refer to the Yanomama in general while Ramos uses Yanomami. The difference has to do with how to represent the terminal vowel -- either by “ö” or “i” -- which is a high, central unrounded vowel that has no equivalent in English. For English speakers it is pronounced similarly to the “e” in “me” or the first vowel in “peter”. According to the International Phonetic Alphabet, this phoneme is represented by an “i” with a short bar through its center. It was first used in the rendering of Yanomami by Jacques Lizot who has worked for several decades among many of the same Yanomama groups as Chagnon. Unfortunately, typesetters do not have the proper symbol and instead they resort to “i”. Typesetters do have the symbol “ö” which is a much closer sound representation than “i”.

tion of Yanomamö groups in Venezuela and Brazil, their history, environment, economy, village life, and relations with outsiders. The location of Ramos' research ranged from *Auaris*, a multicultural village cluster consisting of a *Maiongong* (*Ye'kwana* in Venezuela) Indian village, Protestant Mission, mixed Maiongong-Sanumá village (the "Colony"), and a Sanumá village to six other Sanumá villages located one to several days walk from Auaris.

Chapters Two through Four deal largely with the dynamics of the Sanumá descent system and political leadership patterns. Like the better known Venezuelan Yanomamö, the Sanumá have patrilineal descent but it is more formal and complex. All Sanumá are members of sibs (clans) who trace their descent patrilineally. Sibs are not corporate (although sib-mates are expected to be hospitable to one another) and largely function as exogamous groups. The pattern of marriage between sibs is frequently reciprocal, leading to apparent long-term exchanges. Whether this pattern is a result of sister-exchange and ensuing double cross-cousin marriage or something else is not elaborated by the author. Beneath sibs are lineages, which Ramos defines as being "identified by a common founder, common name, and a strong intermarriage prohibition" (p. 67). The key difference between a lineage and a sib is that the lineage is preeminently a local descent group while a sib is a grouping with a common name, dispersed over several villages.

Interestingly, whereas all Sanumá have sib membership only about half all Sanumá belong to a lineage. Although ambitious men attempt to nurture the creation of local lineages, this process is thwarted by the presence of a uxori-local marriage rule, which works against the localization of agnatically related males. The process is also thwarted by disputes over leadership within lineages, which leads to village fissioning or splits, and the dispersion and destruction of lineages. Ramos clearly documents the chronic rise and fall of lineages using historical case study material with a special emphasis on the various tactics for ascending to the position of headman and quantitative data on sib and lineage membership in seven villages. In addition, in Chapter Four Ramos provides quantitative data on the frequency of various marriage forms, marriage alliances between villages, and the political significance of the in-law relationship.

Chapters Five through Eight are devoted to a detailed consideration of Sanumá conceptions of time, the social significance of personal names, and how names are acquired and related to spiritual entities. The influence of postmodern writers such as Derrida is plainly seen here. Ramos provides an interesting analysis of why personal names are important, why they cannot be used as a form of address, and yet how they are fundamental to the identification of lineages.

Chapter Nine represents yet another postmodern thrust: this time experimental play-writing (complete with a cast of characters in seven acts) on a rumor of an alleged murder that swept through adjacent Maiongong and Sanumá villages. The play is used to represent mutual fear, ethnocentrism, and distrust between Sanumá and Mainongong, which has its origins in a long history of warfare still fresh in the memory of the elders of both societies. As a method of presentation it is moderately effective, but it is an inadequate substitute for an empirically and theoretically informed analysis of interethnic relations and the political role of gossip in a traditional community.

Chapter 11, "The Age of Gold and Misery", describes the author's work with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and government authorities to stem the mortal consequences of the invasion of gold miners in the Sanumá area. It is a tragic and frustrating tale of humane anthropologists, medical personnel and missionaries ultimately failing to protect the Sanumá against miners supported by an alliance of military, political, and economic interests. The author leaves the Sanumá proper to broaden her scope to chronicle the gold rush that today still devastates many Yanomamö in Brazil. From 1972 through its incompleteness in 1976, the *Perimetral Norte* road opened the edge of Yanomamö land to settlers. Initially, villages near the road were devastated by the introduction of measles

and influenza. Malaria, which is endemic in most Yanomamö areas, flared to epidemic proportions probably as a result of the introduction of new strains of the parasite to which the Yanomamö were not adapted.

As the never-fully-completed road opened, RADAMBRASIL (a remote sensing and ground-truthing project of 1975) indicated that much of the area had poor agricultural soils but contained a potential bonanza of mineral wealth. Ultimately this brought the gold rush of the 1980s and an influx of thousands of miners backed by major commercial interests who cleared dirt landing strips allowing miners to penetrate deeply into the interior. In 1987 the military took control of the Surucucus and neighboring areas where most of the mining was occurring, expelled missionaries and anthropologists, and permitted mining to continue unabated. This action was part of the military's *Calha Norte* project to settle the border area in the name of national security. During this period an estimated 23 percent of the Yanomamö in the area perished from disease or murder by miners. This and other events made world headlines, and in 1990 newly elected President Collor acted to reduce the 45,000 miners in the Surucucus region to about 2,000 by blowing up illegal airstrips and prohibiting flights to supply miners. Further good news ensued in 1991 when Decree 22 was signed by President Collor, which permitted more than half of the indigenous reserves so far legally recognized to be demarcated. Despite these acts, miners soon flooded back into the region. The plight of the Yanomamö received international attention in August of 1993 when 16 Yanomamö men, women, and children were massacred by miners at the village of Hashimu. Unfortunately, government investigation and promises of increased vigilance have not significantly stemmed the spread of disease or miners into Yanomamö lands.

According to some observers, the status of Decree 22, which permits the demarcation of native lands towards the end of securing their land rights is now jeopardized by Decree 1775 signed by President Cardoso on 8 January 1996. An analysis by Terrence Turner (a member of the American Anthropological Association's Commission on Human Rights) forwarded to the World Bank by Yolanda Moses President of the American Anthropological Association, claims that this decree "retroactively invalidat[es] all reservations established under Decree 22 as unconstitutional, thus removing their legal protection and rendering them potentially vulnerable to revocations, partition, and legalized invasions ...". It is unclear whether this analysis of the consequences of Decree 1775 is correct. Interested readers should consult the next and subsequent issues of the *Anthropology Newsletter* for an exchange of views between academic and World Bank anthropologists.

My greatest disappointment with *Sanumá Memories* is the author's lack of comparative perspective to the mass of literature on the Yanomamö, especially the work of Napoleon Chagnon and Jacques Lizot. Both ethnographers, like Ramos, have extensively treated the topics of kinship, naming, lineage dynamics, leadership, and settlement fission, fusion, and growth. Although imperfect, comparison is the most powerful method we possess for understanding differences and similarities in sociocultural phenomena in groups who share a recent common history and origin.

### Reference Cited:

1996. American Anthropological Association Committee on Human Rights. *Brazil's Giant Step Backward on Indigenous Rights*. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.