

CS501.NA People as Social and Cultural Beings

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Book analysis on “The Rain Forest”

The 16000 Yanomamo people are depicted as the most primitive, most violent, and most famous tribal society in the Amazon. They are rural, brutal **and** cruel. Their lives filled with murder, raping and fighting. They were captives of evil spirits. Their life filled with violent.

Culture and meaning

Life with the Yanomamo:

They don't know how to plant crops. Their majority food comes from hunting. In order to survive, they need someone to go out hunt for them, if there's nothing brought back, they're facing starving even to death. Food is vital to them. Due to natural disaster, lack of food and nutrition, constant violence, most of their lifespans are short. They are very vulnerable to natural disasters and diseases, and despite of the death from violent, most of them couldn't live longer.

Language & communication:

They have their own native language which has very limited vocabulary, it's all about daily life. They don't have enough to express their feelings, they couldn't put into word about joy, happiness. When they're sad and angry, normally they use violence to express it. Outsider has to learn their language in order to communicate with the native.

Ritual:

Rituals mean a lot to them. They are people with many rituals. It is those rituals that give them meaning of life, and they use those rituals as a way to connect to spiritual world also. For

example, they dance a lot, they burn their dead, and make drinks out of their born. They put some stuff under their noses to sneeze. These all have special meanings to them. They love to connect to their dead in order to gain power.

Religion or belief:

The Yanomano express it in their origin myth, which tells how the original people were created from the blood of the moon, which had been shot with an arrow by beings who believed their children's souls were being devoured by the moon. The first Yanomamo born of the blood of the moon were exceptionally fierce and waged constant war on one another.

They believe that there is a spiritual world, they are very familiar with spirits. The relationship between them and their spirits is codependent. They use those spirits to gain power, to heal people. It looks like they are masters of those spirits and those spirits rely on them. When they found the great spirit, those spirits begged them not to throw them away. But on the other hand, those spirits will kill them when they are getting older and weaker.

Pattern of family relations

Their family structure is very loose. It's hard to say that they have a kinship system, if we have to define it, then it's a patrilineal kinship system in which people are tied to their father. People could get any woman they like as their wives. Marriages are arranged by parents on how much food, the husband-to-be could provide for the girl's family. Women have no voice and are very vulnerable in the marriages. Marriage are arranged, how the girl feels, doesn't count. If there's any resistant or rebellion, those girls are facing abusing and some time they have to give their lives for not obeying their parents.

They respect elders, no matter male or female. They respect dead people, and anything done to the dead they treat as disrespect, and might cause them angry to fight.

As it's said by Rynkeiwich "the truth is that there is no society in which everyone is absolutely equal. All societies have rank, though societies may be more or less egalitarian." For the Yanomamo people, their levels of class are very clear and simple, leaders or warriors of the tribe are the top level, in the middle are young males, at the bottom are elders and women and children. This is based on the ability to fight, work, hunt and protect the people in villages.

The culture construction of violent conflict

It is difficult to find societies that do not sanction violence for one reason or another. One way that societies create a bias toward collective violence is to reward it. For the Yanomamo people, to raiding another village, was a means by which a man gained status.

Another way society create bias in favor of collective violence is to make it necessary as a way of protecting valuable resources. Intervillage warfare is normal for the Yanomamo. Women and children are valuable resources for them. The men believe that to protect themselves and their resources, they must be fierce, and raiding another village is one way they demonstrate their ferocity. They may also make raids to capture women and children. the Yanomamo also teach male children to be aggressive and hostile.

Those people have conscience to know what is right or wrong, but they just couldn't get out of their old life pattern.

What do they think about those **Nabas**:

They considered nabas as very wise, they wanted to know about this strange spirit of nabas, this spirit of fire. They wanted to get out of so much of their misery. Here are some examples of nabas they encountered:

1. Granny Troxel

In Tigerlip's villiage, an old woman name Granny Troxel, everybody liked her. She had a bad leg made of wood. Even she didn't speak their language, she helped them whatever she could do. She loved all the children and always held a baby in her arms. She used medicine to heal sick people. When she got sick, the whole village were very sad.

2. Padre Coco

After granny left another naba called Padre Coco came to the village. He often spoke to the people and asked them to change their ways. He urged them to stop the warfare, to work to have more food for children, to clean up the village and cut off the jungle to protect people from disease. He taught the children in a school and showed them how to grow many new crops.

3. Pepe

Pepe was another naba, he became good friend with Tigerlip. He tried to teach them a different spirit, a creator of the spirits. He told them that the great spirit loves Yanomamo people. They called this great spirit Yai Wana Naba Laywa, or Yai Pada. They called the spirit the most powerful spirit who created things, even the spirits. He helped them learn better ways of doing things. And told them that many of the things they did were evil and they should stop doing them.

4. Other bad nabas

After Coco, many nabas began came to the village. Just like Coco had said they would, they traded things---fish line, hooks, and lots of beautiful things--- for sex with the women.

Those nabas that went to the village, they just wanted the village to stay in the same misery they had always lived in. Those nabas made so much money taking picture of naked women and writing stories about the people.

Some nabas even dressed like the village people and blew ebene as the native people.

They raised questions about their dead which were forbidden in the village. The people were very disappointed by them, because they were dreaming to get a naba to help them improve their lives. Those nabas taught them to drink, they had mess up with women, they didn't want the people change. But some other nabas, used money to exchange for sex, brought disease to these people. They're evil, they were liars.

They used weapon like guns to kill people. They worked with military or government to do corrupted things.

The spirits inside them and the great spirit:

Those spirits kept bothering the people in the village. They wanted to get rid of them, but they couldn't do it by themselves. They saw the nabas more and more and was wondering about their spirits, but they themselves were getting more spirits as time goes.

But the great spirit bothers spirits inside him. Those spirits didn't like the great spirit. When they lived with the spirits, they became like the spirits, did all kinds of bad things. But some nabas didn't do what their great spirit did, they were liars.

Those village people have their spirits just for certain purpose, but they couldn't get rid of them, because they have to lean on them to make a living. They relied on those spirits. They are looking for some mighty spirit who loves them, and is generous to them. They first got to know this great spirit is from the old lady with a wood leg. She was the one always helping, giving, caring them. And the other nabas who taught them new things to make a living, taking care of their kids as their own. It is through those nice nabas, they got to know the great spirit. When people had no use to those spirits, getting old or sick, they would come and take people away and kill them.

What happed after they accepted the great spirit?

1. People started responding to the Gospel

They stopped war and fighting. They felt peaceful. They made friends with their enemies. They were not afraid been invaded anymore; they were not afraid of power any more. They didn't please people anymore, they started to know right or wrong. They started to pray for the meal and thanked for the providence from the great spirit. They started changing their lives, they learn the spirit of forgiveness instead of revenge, the spirit of kindness instead of fierceness. Whole village of killers turned into active peace-lover that they forgive their enemies.

2. First time to church:

Tigerlip travel with Coco to his far land, met Coco's head man called "the Papa", the Papa should be the father in the church, he touched the head of Tigerlip, and prayed for him. As Coco said that touch had the power from the Greater Spirit.

3. God was working among them

Spear for the first time saw a vision, in it there were angels with white ropes who became warriors to protect the village from attackers.

The first time they started talking about Jesus, said the great spirit Himself became a Yanomamo, showed people a completely different way of life and died for them.

4. They had interactions with God

They have learnt to pray when they got into difficult situations. During their prayer they complained to God, but they wouldn't change their belief no matter how difficult it looked. They prayed for God's protection and faithfulness. They started to read the Bible, and Shoefoot gave the first sermon. Instead of Yai Pada, they started calling God.

They saw visions too, Jungle man had encounter with God when his spirits tried to kill him. There were a bright light and he felt warm and saw the God standing in front of him. God even fought for him and brought him back from the hands of those spirits.

God answered their prayer and healed sick people. More and more people had thrown their spirits, Gospel was spreading between villages.

What did the Yanomamo say to the western world?

They were upset about been lied, studied, and treated like animal by the western world. They thought white people are ignorant. White people didn't want them to change. They were upset academics who are content to do their research and draw their conclusion in the library,

they need to get out of the library and test every conclusion, otherwise they are living in Eden. Yanomamo are people just like white nabas who change their lives and cultures whenever they want, so do Yanomamo.

While they were suffering terribly the Supreme Being sent his people to them. They learned His love. Because of His love, they now love. They live in peace. They no longer are shooting each other. They are no longer stealing women. They are alive. They have many children who are alive. People outside they don't know anything about the Yanomamo because they have never been there. Although they are dying, people don't care. They have no idea how they lived. Because if they really see how people live in the jungle, they would not talk like that.

Self reflection:

Those talks shoeboot gave really teach me a lot. From an anthropological perspective we cannot take anything about even our own beliefs and behavior for granted, let alone the behavior and beliefs of those whose backgrounds and histories differ from our own.

It is also told me about how we should treat others like we'd like the others treat us, this is the teaching from our Lord. The author gave ten guidelines for us in mission, there are couple of them which I should work on.

Hospitality: I have to deal with my pride, to become non-judgmental and inclusive towards people, to understand and accept their difference among both non-believers and believers.

Community: Tolerate uncertainty, doubt, immaturity, and an exploratory spirit. This is the area I need to pay more attention and put more effort. Not only to nonbelievers, but to some Christians I couldn't stand their immaturity.

Dialogue: We are God's witness, not God's lawyers. This is very important for me especially when have conversation with educated non- believers, I feel powerless to talk to them. And most of the time, I couldn't stand in their position to appreciate their stories, because they thought they know more than me, and they have a better life than me. This is very hard for me to be humble to listen and learn from people like this. This is the most difficult task for me.

Integrity: This is the foundation to solve the above struggles for me. To live a Christlikeness life as my life, day in and day out, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and let Jesus shine through me, is my forever assignment in this life.