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Book Analysis

In Mark Andrew Richie's book, "Spirit of the Rainforest," he writes the story of a shaman by the name of Jungleman and the Yanomamo culture of the Amazon. This story tends to intertwine the spiritual world and the material world. Ritchie does a great job emphasizing the values and traditions of the Yanomamo people and how those values and traditions were changed one by one when the nabas, white people arrived on the scene. Jungleman was a shaman who was seen as the most powerful and most influential and most intelligent of all of the shamans. He, in fact, was well known in his tribe and in other tribes.

Jungleman gives a glimpse of how his journey began as a young boy, the influence of his people and mentors. As a boy, he begins the story of how he was seeing spirits and how they frightened him. It was his mother who he went to in order to get his protection and guidance from. She instructed him to the realm of the spirits of their culture. She encouraged him to spend time with them so he would not be so afraid of them. As a result, after following her advice, he began following the spirits and we get a glimpse of how they led him through the jungle and introduced him to various spirits, until he became very familiar with them and was not afraid of them anymore. We see him get mentored by the shaman of his village and later we see him get promoted to being the shaman of his village.

There are various themes in this book. One being that of the arena of the spiritual and material world. Another of vengeance. Another is that of the love of family and family values.

Another, is a theme of family retribution and commitment. Another of good and bad. Finally there is a theme of the new verses the old.

The book begins with Jungleman recounting conflicts between two tribes. The raid of the Potato Village demonstrates the tradition of the Yanomamo of retribution and commitment immediately. When the Potato Village was raided, it led to a brutal murder of many and children. As Jungleman put it, his people came into the village, “only to kill a person who had caused a death in their village” (p33). It is the spirits who inform them as to who is responsible for a specific person’s death.

In explicit details, Jungleman recounts how the attack begins with two rival fighters who are set on destroying each other’s land in which every man is slain, the women are attacked, raped and kidnapped and forced to become the wives of the invading community. The youth; however, in the attacked community are often slaughtered or captured in order to become slaves. The death of a relative initiated numerous tribal attacks are now the consequence of a vengeance murder. This keeps a continuous battle and war between the two lands and establishes an ongoing cycle of raids and warfare that only generates more vengeance. What is very interesting about this is that generations will be fighting for the honor of their village, for so long to where people can be fighting for people who were dead for many years because of the vengeance code.

Further into the reading of this book, we see two opposing villages that continuously clash, the Honey and the Mouth. The clash between these two rivals brings the reading into a more in-depth and ingrained conflict between them.

If a man is considered a good shaman, then he has the ability to contact the good spirits and avoid the bad ones. This man would also have the ability to lead his village to good hunting

and be able to tell them when and where to plant their food, where to harvest and with whom they are to fight with. These people in this culture cannot imagine not living without their spirits. In fact, we read constantly, if they lose their spirits, then the spirits will kill them and the person would die. Not only that, but the people rely on the spirits help to protect the people and punish their rivals for them. When the shamans seek the advice and counseling from their spirits, they fell them in their chests. In addition, they have the pleasure of being with the female spirits. As a result, this plays a crucial role in the lives of the people in the story.

The Yanomamo are driven by their own beliefs and values. They also have a way of honoring the death of a loved one, by burning their bodies, grounding their bones, mixing it with banana drink and drinking it. This is the belief that the spirit of that person is with them as they avenge their deaths.

Their world flips upside down when they become acquainted with the nabas, who are the foreigners. When Jungleman begins to experience a number of unfortunate events in his life, such as a food shortage and people dying due to the alienation of the tribe because they are living in constant fear that they would die at the hands of their rivals or even from famine. According to Jungleman, it was the nabas who had everything anyone could need. That's when he decides to visit the land of the nabas which was actually supported by the spirits that he and the Yanomamo people dreaded and feared. In fact, whenever he or anyone went to another community of the nabas, they would say that their spirits within them would always beg them not to leave them and would become fearful and sometime even angry with them.

His first impression of the nabas was of pure shock because they didn't understand their lifestyle. As Jungleman puts it, "all around were great big wooden things that the nabas has made. Things so big that people could walk inside of them" (43). Everything around them were

of progress and prosperity. Noweda was the leader of the nabas tribe and wielded much power over the nabas people. When the white man had ordered his mighty warrior to do something, he did it. They cooked his food, hunted meat for him and did anything that he told them to do.

As a result, the tribe of Jungleman was impacted by the visit to the land of the nabas so much so to where it caused their leader to think of reasons why they were so prosperous. He was confused about the tribe's behavior, their devotion to this white man and their beliefs. The people didn't show any signs of fear and lived comfortably and with convenience, while other tribes were dying from diseases and murders.

The first time the spirits showed they were angry was when Spear's father, who was a community warrior got sick and became too weak. Spear yelled at the spirits asking them "Where are you now that I really need you?" (56) Spear was furious with the spirits after this father's death and started to lose hope. He began to believe that the spirits were worthless and actually have no healing power.

As the story goes on, the nabas began to help and the tribe of Jungleman became somewhat dependent on the prosperous nabas. Although they were in awe of the prosperity of the nabas, they held onto their animal like tendencies and mindset. He thought that they were dumber than the Yanomamo. In fact, even after being helpless, the Yanomamo did not want to follow the path of the nabas.

The pivotal moment of the story and in the culture of the Yanomamo happened when Shoefoot, a disciple of Jungleman, disappeared. With the help of the nabas, Shoefoot's village became rich with axes, machetes, pots, and other things they received from the nabas. It was then that Shoefoot and his people realized that they needed the nabas to teach them everything.

As a result, the people realized how rich the spirit of nabas was and that the people had the knowledge that can lead to well-being.

As the story progresses, we see that more nabas are beginning to move into the jungle which meant that many more new things were beginning to happen. Now, we see that Shoefoot had abandoned and actually threw his old spirits away. This act encouraged both Shoefoot, Spear and their entire community at Honey Village to abandon their faith in the old spirits. This began their new life, with new traditions, new values, new beliefs and new way of doing things. This is illustrated when Shoefoot's Sister Sofia's husband goes hunting and shoots a tapir. Everyone in the village celebrates the moment as if it were a feast we would see happen in the Bible. However, before eating the food, the people begin to talk to their great spirit. In fact, Shoefoot makes a point of saying that when someone does something that makes people happy, they should have a word that they can say to that person.

This is not the only change that was made among the people in the village. The people in Shoefoot's village not only changed their beliefs, but their thought process and their hearts changed for the better. They stopped raiding other tribes for revenge. In fact, whenever the other tribes attempted to raid their tribes, their warriors would drive them off with clubs and no attempts were made for revenge by the Honey villagers. This seemed outrageous and confused the people outside of their village. They couldn't understand their mentality at all. In fact, whenever Cloudy or any of the other hunters from the other villages would come to raid, they would get run off by the warriors and then receive pleasant treatment.

In a discussion with Cloudy, Spear tells him that they were not cowards as some were beginning to believe they were because they wouldn't raid, murder, rape and kidnap their women and pillage their villages. He explained to them that they were still Yanomamo, but the only

different was that they chose a path that had wonderful spirits. Spear not only shed light on the new views of Honey, but also made the warrior question the power of his spirits.

While the people in Honey Village became more accepting and patient, the wild villages wanted to fight the new laws and notions that they didn't understand. According to the Honey Villagers, their new spirit was Yai Pada, who loves everyone. This causes the old spirits to get angry and plead for the Yanomamo to not throw them away. Not everyone in Honey Village believed in the new spirits, but they refused to be with the old spirits either. What is so awesome is that Spear is known as being the harshest, strongest and most powerful of the men, but he was sure he was not going to return to the old spirits, values, traditions, beliefs and ways of living.

Later on in the book, we see that Tigerlip and Mouth raid Honey Village and Honey Village refuses to seek revenge. They understand that their spells don't work anymore and that there is something new in the forest. Nevertheless, Shoefoot continues to spread his new belief during this visit to his relatives whom he had never seen. He actually convinced a man by the name Turkey that if his people stop killing other tribes, then other tribes would stop killing them.

After his conversation with Shoefoot, he wants a naba to live in his village and teach the people everything. As a result, as more people joy the nabas, the more their belief spreads even faster.

In the last chapter, Jungleman is experiencing an existential crisis. The man speaks of how the people at Honey are happy and rich and how they get richer every season. However, the most important thing which Jungleman believes is their biggest change is of their happiness. In fact Shoefoots's children are healthy and beautiful and so are his friends. The only problem Jungleman faces is his own failure to gain success and happiness. In his village, most of his children have died, the spirits are frightened of the new spirits. But, as a result, even the person

who was frightened of the new spirits and who loathed them came to the understanding of the new region's goodwill. In the end, the man felt warm and safe with the new spirit. No one was fighting, raping, murdering, stealing etc.

During this experience, Jungleman saw his own vulnerabilities when he has to take a look at his life and how he spent it. Every day he was seeking revenge and feeling unhappy. After this in-depth look into who he was and into his life, Jungleman went to Honey to learn more about this new spirit from Keleewa, a missionary of this new religion. Jungleman regrets not believing in Yai Wana Naba Laywa when he was a young man. According to the shaman, it could save him from so much "pain and misery" (238). Jungleman learned about the spirit of forgiveness, instead of the spirit of revenge. He learned about the spirit of kindness, instead of the spirit of fierceness. It is now at this juncture that Jungleman turns away from his old spirits and received the Great Spirit for the rest of his life.

Even though many of the villages still fight and kill, the people of Honey still share a different view, visions and lifestyle. Now the aim of the Honey Villagers is to demonstrate and show the beauty of the new spirit they have received, and which values civilized ways of life with the absence of conflict. After going through this hard path to their new belief, the Honey Villagers want to want to spread their new values. They assume and fully believe that this force will protect them from all destructive behaviors, wars and all manner of diseases.

After reading the Spirit of the Rainforest, I have a new found respect for the people and the various cultures of those who live in the rainforest in the Amazon. In times past, when I thought of the rainforest, especially in the Amazon, I thought of a hot humid muggy place of mostly evergreen trees and high amounts of rainfall. I imaged that the majority of the Amazon culture would practice some sort of Animism where every flower, plant and animal contained its

own spirit. I knew that rainforest were essential to life on earth, not only because they provide air, water, medicine, food and shelter to many human beings. The rainforest is the best defense against climate change because they don't have the toxins that are in populated countries and because their plants breathe in carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen. Not to mention, I would expect to see gorillas, jaguars and other wild and dangerous animals.

This book, *Spirit of the Rainforest*, by Mark Andrew Ritchie, was eye opening. As I read the story I saw so many correlations between the lives of the Yanomamo people and people in our culture. I saw the sweetest evangelistic story of love.

The first is that the people of the Yanomamo culture are similar in traditional culture as well as, I have seen many things that are similar in my past as well. First, they are a people steeped in traditional. Just like we in modern day culture have family traditions such as Thanksgiving, Christmas and the like. Another tradition they hold dear is the honoring of mourning and funerals. They burned their loved ones and drank their ground up bones. We don't go to that extreme, but we do hold funerals and memorials of our loved ones. The honor of traditional mourning is the same somewhat. We both morn in private and the Word of God tells us to mourn with those who mourn. We see that happening in the Yanomamo culture of people.

Second, they honor the spirits they have and consult them on a regular basis. Growing up, I remember we, as young people, would honor horoscopes and lean to what they said to see how our day is going to be. In a manner of speaking, we consult our friends, family, pastor, counselor, palm reader and the like. Although I did not do this last one, but for many of my friends and co-workers, they consulted a psychic and wanted to connect with previously deceased family members.

As the story went on, we see how when many people in the Yanomamo culture, like Spear and Shoefoot, we were evangelized by those who knew the Only True and Living God and received Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Once we did that, we had no need of consulting psychics, palm readers, horoscopes, etc. We learned that we could go to our Savior Lord for ourselves and consult Him directly for directions and guidance for our lives. Like Jungleman saw in Shoefoot, we experienced the peace that passed all understanding and learned how to put away vengeance and retribution and pick up love and compassion. For me, I received Christ as my Lord and Savior, not the traditional way at church, like many people, but for me, I received Him in my dorm room in room #302 at Delaware State College. There are many parallels and themes that link us in modern day and the Yanomamo people. These are the ones that come to mind.