

### **Involvement in Yanomami Political Affairs**

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We discuss here the allegation in *Darkness in El Dorado* that Napoleon Chagnon put Yanomamö lives at risk in a peace-making negotiation in one instance, and by aiding a raiding party in another. The Peacock Report distinguished this as an allegation that required inquiry.

On page 112 of *Darkness in El Dorado* Tierney's account of Chagnon's role in fostering an alliance between Mishimishimaböwei-teri and Bisaasi-teri begins "He had some initial misgivings". Quoting Chagnon, Tierney continues: "This was taking risk in spades ... I was also worried that I might be a contributor to an enormous disaster." This citation from Tierney is taken from Chagnon, 1997 [5<sup>th</sup> edition]: 217. What Tierney does not tell the reader is that the "this" refers to an antecedent subject, Kaobawä, in the previous paragraph and actually indicates that Kaobawä was taking the risk (and not Chagnon) in attempting to establish peaceful relations with the enemy village of Mishimishimaböwei-teri. In Tierney's text this extract is followed by an ellipsis, followed by a quote from Chagnon: "I was also worried that I might be contributor to an enormous disaster." (*Darkness*, 112). This quote is the start of a paragraph in Chagnon (1997:217) that is found two paragraphs below the "...risk taking in spades" paragraph. Here Chagnon debates whether he should assist Kaobawä in peace-making. He decides to assist because Kaobawä assures him that he will go ahead with or without Chagnon's help and convinces Chagnon that his presence will help him succeed, because Kaobawä believes that "...the Shamatari had accepted me and my role would be useful as a neutral intermediary and probably would contribute to the possibility of his success at making peace" (Chagnon, 1997 [5<sup>th</sup> edition] 217). It is clear from Chagnon's writing that the Yanomamö want to use Chagnon as an instrument of peace and that he obliged them at great personal risk to himself.

The second allegation made by Tierney about inappropriate political involvement on Chagnon's part that might have endangered Yanomamö lives concerns Chagnon's role in helping transport a raiding party. In the second edition of *The Fierce People* (1977), Chagnon describes how he assisted a raiding party from Monou-teri, a village where he was residing and doing his research. The account begins on page 135 where he describes how "emotionally close..." he had become to the Monou-teri after watching a mortuary ceremony of a slain warrior and listening to his male relatives weep during the night. He states:

I allowed them to talk me into taking the entire raiding party up the Mavaca River in my canoe. There, they could find high ground and reach the Patanowä-teri without having to cross the numerous swamps that lay between the two villages (Chagnon 1977: 135).

He later notes "Hukoshikuwä and his raiders did not locate the Patanowä-teri on this raid, although they searched for over a week." (p. 137)

Tierney remarks (2000: 87) that this assistance had given the raiders a significant advantage (citing Ferguson, 1995: 300). This is true. However, Ferguson (1995: 300) accurately notes, unlike Tierney, that the raiders did not locate the Patanowä-teri. Therefore, the raid was a failure and did not result in fighting.

In a direct reading of Chagnon's text we find the following (1977: 134-137): The raid was going to occur with or without Chagnon's assistance; he made it easier for the raiders by providing transportation; the raid failed.

Tierney, and to some extent Ferguson, seem to suggest that the failed raid would not have occurred without Chagnon's assistance. Chagnon's text clearly states that the Yanomamö had decided to make the raid and then asked him to help. There is no indication that the raid was contingent on Chagnon's assistance. In fact, the Monou-teri and the Bisaasi-teri had jointly or singly raided Patanowä-teri six times and Monou-teri had raided the Patanowä-teri alone on at least one of those occasions (Chagnon, 1977: 134). His description of his participation was on one of those occasions in which Monou-teri had raided alone. Nevertheless, it is clearly the case that Chagnon enhanced the probability of a successful raid by transporting the Monou-teri in his canoe.

Should ethnographers assist in the pursuit of feuds and alliances? In the case of the failed raid Chagnon felt emotionally and perhaps morally obligated to help. This obligation was probably a consequence of living with the Monou-teri where he internalized their animosity toward the Patanowä-teri as he listened to Yanomamö mourn their slain relatives. The Task Force believes that Chagnon should not have permitted the Monou-teri to "talk him into" taking them on a raid; indeed, Chagnon's language suggests that he himself regretted making that decision. We believe that ethnographers should not, with

premeditation, directly or indirectly involve themselves in hostile acts. But one could imagine other circumstances where involvement in hostilities is unavoidable. What if the Monou-teri were attacked while Chagnon resided with them and his own life or the lives of his co-villagers were under immediate mortal threat? And what if the attackers were Brazilian gold miners?

That Chagnon assisted the Bisaasi-teri in brokering a successful peace treaty with the Mishimishimaböwei-teri is clearly praiseworthy. However, we believe that the proper stance for anthropologists is to encourage those we study to make peace and not war, and to avoid direct or indirect facilitation of hostilities except in an emergency.