# WHO ARE THE YANOMAMIS: Anthropological studies of the environment and its biology

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# ABSTRACT

Yanomami, also spelled Yanomamo or Yanomama, is a group of approximately 35,000 indigenous people living in some 200-250 villages in the Amazon rainforest on the border between Venezuela and Brazil.

Keywords: indigenous, Yanomami, shamanism

# Etymology

The ethnonym Yanomami was produced by anthropologists on the basis of the word Yanomami, which in the expression *thëpë Yanomami*, means "man. ") but also enemies (enemies, strangers, non-Indians) [1]

According to ethnographer Jacques Lizot [fr; de; es]:

*The Yanomami* is a sect of Indians ... The term refers to the community that spread south of Orinoco [while] the *Yanomawi* form is used to refer to the community in the north of Orinoco. The word Sanuma corresponds to the language reserved for culturally influential subgroups. Much by the neighboring <u>Ye'kuana</u> people , other sects applied to Yanomami include *Waika* or *Waica, Guiaca, <u>Shiriana</u>, <u>Shirishana</u>, <i>Guaharibo* or *Guajaribo*, <u>Yanoama</u>, <u>Ninam</u>, and <u>Xamatari</u> or Shamatari.



### History

The first report of the Yanomami to the Northern world is from 1654, when the Salvadorian expedition under Apolinar Nez de la Fuente visited some Ye'kuana people who lived on the Padamo River. Diez wrote:

By talking to the Uramanavi Indians, I asked Chief Yoni if he had led the Orinoco upstream. He said yes and he went to war with the Guaharibo [Yanomami] Indians who were not very brave... and who wouldn't make friends with the Indians [4].

From about 1630 to 1720 other indigenous societies living in the same region were exterminated or reduced due to slave hunting expeditions by conquistadors and banderantes . [5] How this affected the Yanomami is unknown. know for sure Continued contact with the outside world began in the 1950s with the arrival of its members. new tribal missions [6] as well as Catholic missionaries from Society of Jesus and the Salesians of Don Bosco [7]

In <u>Ro</u>raima, the 1970s saw the implementation of development projects within the framework of the The "National Integration Plan" launched by the Brazilian military government of the time This meant the opening of peripheral roads (1973–76) and various colonial projects on land traditionally occupied by the Yanomami. Around the same time, the Amazonian Resource Exploration Project RADAM (1975) detected significant mineral deposits in the region. This gave rise to the progressive movement of gold prospecting which after 1987 took the form of a real gold rush. Hundreds of secret runways were opened by gold miners in the large tributary of the Branco River .Between 1987 and 1990, the number of gold miners in the Yanomami



area of Roraima was estimated at 30 to 40,000, about five times the indigenous population there. Currently, gold prospecting continues in the Yanomami lands, spreading violence and serious health and social problems [1].

Growing pressure from cattle farmers and gold miners, as well as those interested in securing the Brazilian border by building roads and military bases near the Yanomami community, has led to campaigns to protect Yanomami's right to live. In 1978, the Pro-Yanomami Committee (CCPY), formerly known as the Commission for the Creation of Yanomami Park , was established . citizens and politicsYanomami's CCPY is dedicated to a longstanding national and international campaign to inform and stir public opinion and to pressure the Brazilian government to demarcate areas appropriate to Yanomami's needs. After 13 years, the Yanomami native lands have been It was formally demarcated in 1991 and approved and registered in 1992, thus ensuring that indigenous people have a constitutional right to use the nearly 96,650 square kilometers (37,320 square miles) of land located in the states of Roraima and Amazonas. [8]

<u>Alto Orinoco-Casiquiare biosphere reserve</u> It was created in 1993 with the aim of preserving the traditional land and lifestyle of the Yanomami and Ye'kuana peoples <u>.</u> Venezuela's constitution Guaranteed the rights of indigenous peoples in ancestor domains. But few have been given official positions on their territories, and the government has announced that it will open up large parts of the Amazon rainforest to legal mining. [10]

# Organization





Location of the Yanomami people

Yanomami doesn't admit that they belong to the same group. Yanomami communities were grouped together because of their similar ages and kinship, and military coalitions cemented the communities together. Lived near the Orinoco River and moved to the highlands of Brazil and Venezuela, where the Yanomami currently occupy. [11]

Mature men hold the majority of political and religious power. A *tuxawa* (village headman) acts as the leader of each village. But there was no more than a single chief president than either of those classified as Yanomami. The headman gained political power by demonstrating skill in resolving disputes both in the village and with neighboring communities. Adult male consensus is usually required for community-related action. [12] Local ethnic groups also play an important role in regulating marriage and settling disputes within the village.

Home life



#### Yanomami shabono

Yanomami clans live in villages, often consisting of children and extended families. Villages vary in size. The number of people in the village is small, but usually between 50 and 400 *people*. An average 100 yd (91 m) *shabono* shelter constitutes the perimeter of a village if it is not fortified with crags.

Beneath the roof there is a marked division where only the supporting pillars divide each house and space . *Chabonos is* built from raw materials from the surrounding rainforest, such as leaves, vines and tree trunks. They are susceptible to heavy damage from rain, wind and insect infestation. For this reason, *Chabonos* are *replanted* every 4 to 6 years.

Yanomami can be classified as foraging horticulture, depending heavily on the resources of the rainforest. They use shear-and-burn horticulture. Plant bananas, collect fruit and hunt animals and fish. Crops comprise up to 75% of the calories in the Yanomami diet. Proteins are obtained from wild resources obtained through gathering, hunting and fishing. When the soil became depleted, Yanomami frequently moved to avoiding areas that had become overused, a practice known as shifting cultivation .[13]

#### Yanomami women in Venezuela

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Children stay close to their mothers when they are young. Child rearing was largely done by women. The Yanomami group is a famous example of about fifty documented societies that openly accept polygamy, [14], although the tradition of polygamy among Amazonian tribes has also been noted. Many unions are



monogamous. Polygamous families consist of large infertile family units based on a single man and smaller sub-families: each woman's family unit is made up of a woman and her children. Small family units belong to adult relatives while large family units are more politically important than villages.

Yanomami men are said to have had significant moments in the service of the bride by living with their in-laws, and may have practiced ill-mannered or disrespectful marriages in the event of the death of a spouse. [12] Kinship is often localized in villages and their genealogy is quite shallow. Kinship is of great importance in marriage arrangements and a strong bond develops between kinship groups that exchange women. Their kinship system can be described in the form of the Iroquois classification. To quote the anthropologist Napoleon Shaknon, "It is said that everyone in Yanomamo society is referred to by some kinship term that can be translated into what we would call a blood relative." [15]

Yanomami are known as hunters, fishermen and horticulturists. Women grow culinary crops and cassava in the garden as the main crop. The men worked hard clearing the forest for gardening. Another food source for the Yanomami are beetles .[16] Yanomami often cut down date palms to help the beetles grow. The traditional Yanomami diet is very low in edible salt. Their blood pressure was characterized among the lowest in the population [17] . For this reason, Yanomami has been the subject of a study to link high blood pressure to sodium intake.

Rituals are an important part of Yanomami culture. Yanomami celebrate a good harvest with a big feast invited by nearby villages. Yanomami village members



gather a large amount of food which helps maintain good relations with their neighbors. They also decorated their bodies with feathers and flowers. During feasts, Yanomami eat a lot and women dance and sing until late.

The hallucinations or entheogens known as *yakoana* or *Ebene* were used by Yanomami shamans as part of healing rituals for members of the community who were ill. *Yakoana* also refers to the tree from which it originated *Virola* elongata *Yopo*, which is derived from the plant. Another hallucinogenic species (*Anadenanthera peregrina*) is often planted in gardens by shamans. Xamatari also mixed the powdered *Virola* elongata bark with powdered *yopo* seeds to create the Ebene drug. The drug facilitates communication with *hekura*, spirits believed to control many aspects of the physical world. Women do not participate in this practice known as shapuri.

The Yanomami practice endocannibalism rituals in which they consume the bones of deceased relatives. [19] The corpses are wrapped in leaves and placed in a forest away from *shabono;* Then, after the soft tissue insects are consumed (usually about 30 to 45 days), the bones are collected and burned. The ashes were then mixed with a kind of soup made from bananas consumed by the entire community. The ashes may be preserved in gourds and the ritual is repeated annually until the ashes are gone. In everyday conversation there is no reference to the dead except in It is an annual "Day of Remembrance" where the ashes of the dead are burned and people remember the lives of their deceased relatives. This tradition is meant to strengthen the Yanomami people and keep that person's spirit alive.



Women are responsible for many chores and household chores, excluding game hunting and killing for food. Although women do not hunt. but they work in the garden and collect fruits, tubers, nuts and other wild foods. The garden plots are cut off from their families and growing bananas, mangoes, sweet potatoes, papayas, cassava, corn and other crops. [20] The Yanomami women cultivate until the garden is no longer fertile and then move the plots. The women are expected to carry 70–80 pounds (32–36 kg) of the crop on their backs during harvest using bark straps and weaving baskets .[21]

In the morning, while the men go hunting, the women and young children go in search of nests for termites and other beetles, which are later roasted on the family hearth. Women also chase frogs, land crabs or worms, or even look for grapes that can be woven into baskets. While some females gather these small food sources, other females fish for hours during the day .[22] The flour is roasted to make flat cakes (known in Spanish as kasabe), which they cook over a small pile of coals .

expecting women Yanomami will be responsible for the children, who are expected to help the mother with housework from an early age, and the mother depends heavily on the help of her daughter. Boys generally become the responsibility of the male members of the community after about age 8.

Using small bark and roots, Yanomami women weave and decorate baskets. They use these baskets to carry plants and food to bring back to the shabono . [21] They use red berries called *onoto* or *uruku* to dye the baskets as well as paint their bodies



and bodies. The loins are dyed [22]. After the baskets are painted they are further decorated with crushed charcoal [24].

### Puberty and menstruating women

beginning of *menstruation* It symbolizes the beginning of femininity. Girls typically begin menstruating between the ages of 12 and 13 [25] [26] . [25] The Yanomami word for menstruation (*roo*) literally translates into English as "squatting", since pads or pads are not used . blood Due to the belief that menstrual blood is toxic and harmful, girls are hidden in small tent-like structures made from leaf screens. A deep hole was made in the structure where the girl squatted. These structures are considered to be split screens [27].

The mother was promptly notified and she, along with the girl's elderly female companions, was responsible for disposing of her old cotton clothes and having to replace them with new ones that represented femininity and readiness for marriage. [27] During the first week of menstruation, the girl is fed wood because she is not allowed to touch food in any way. While imprisoned, she was required to whisper when speaking, and she may speak only to close relatives such as her sister or mother. but never a man [19]

Until the time of menstruation, girls are treated like children and are only obliged to help their mother with household chores. As they approach the age of menstruation, they are sought out by potential male wives. Puberty is not seen as the period when there are male Yanomami children, but it is considered very important for women. After the first menstruation, the girls are expected to leave infancy and enter



adulthood, and assume the responsibilities of a grown-up Yanomami woman. show her genitals and must have herself covered with a loincloth [19]

Yanomami women's menstrual cycles do not occur as often due to ongoing nursing or childbirth, and are considered to be a very significant occurrence only at this time [28].

# Language

The Yanomaman language consists of four main variants: Ninam, Sanuma, Waiká, and Yanomamo. There are also different styles and dialects, such that people from different villages do not always understand each other. Many linguists consider the Yanomaman family to be separate languages unrelated to other indigenous South American languages. The origins of the languages are obscure.

## Violence

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Traditional face painting

In early anthropological studies, the Yanomami culture was described as infiltrated with violence. not only to other tribes, but also to other tribes [29] [30]

An influential ethnography by anthropologist Napoleon Shaknon describes the Nomami spacecraft inhabiting [16] Chagnon's account and Yanomami's similar descriptions of them showing them as aggressive and warlike sparked controversy among anthropologists and generated great interest in the Yanomami. It addresses the degree of violence in Yanomami society and the question of whether violence and warfare are best described as an inherent part of Yanomami culture or as a



response to specific historical situations. Jacques Lizot [fr], who has lived in Yanomami for over twenty years, said:

I want my book to help correct the exaggerated presentation given by Yanomami's violence. Yanomami are warriors. They can be ferocious and brutal. but also sensitive and loving The violence was sporadic. It never dominated social life at any moment, and long peaceful moments could separate the two outbursts. When we are familiar with the societies of the North American plains or the societies of the Chacos in South America, one cannot say that the Yanomami culture was orchestrated to war as Chagnon did .[18]

Anthropologists working in the tradition of ecologists such as Marvin Harris argued that a culture of violence developed among the Yanomami through competition resulting from the lack of nutritional resources in their territories. [31] [32] However, a 1995 study, "Yanomami War" by R. Brian Ferguson, examined all documented instances of war among Yanomami and concluded:

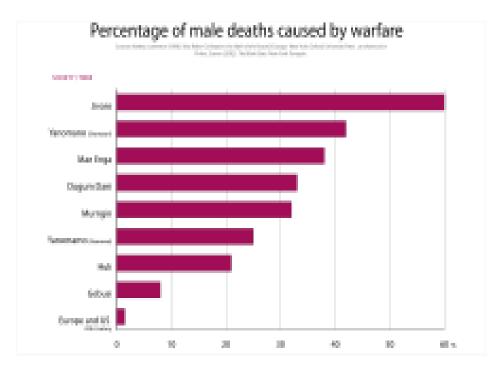
Although some Yanomami engage in intense wars and other types of bloody conflicts, this violence is not an expression of Yanomami culture itself. But because it is present and presented in some specific form, all of the Yanomami wars *as we know* them take place within what Neil Whitehead and I call "tribal districts," vast areas beyond the control of the state in which it resides. is by people who are out of state who have to respond to the far-reaching effects of the state's presence [33].

Ferguson emphasizes the concept contrary to Chagnon's description of the Yanomami, which were not affected by Western culture. The Yanomami were



affected by colonization long before their lands were accessible to Westerners. in the 1950s, and they received many influences and materials from western culture through Much earlier trade networks [29]

Lawrence Keely questioned Ferguson's analysis, writing that the nature and speed of change caused by exposure to civilization are not well understood, and that commodity disease, arms trafficking and Population movements were likely involved in pre-civilization warfare. [34]



The percentage of male deaths due to war among the two Yanomami subgroups compared to other indigenous ethnic groups in New Guinea and South America, and to some industrialized countries.

Violence is one of the leading causes of death for Yanomami. Up to half of Yanomami men die violently due to ongoing conflicts between neighboring communities over local resources. Often these encounters caused Yanomami to leave the village in search of someone new . [27] Women were often victims of physical abuse and anger. Wars between villages were common. But it doesn't affect



women too much. When Yanomami tribesmen fight and attack neighboring tribes, women are often raped, beaten, and taken back to *Chabono* to be admitted into the community of their captors. Wives may be beaten frequently in order to keep them tame and faithful to their husbands. [29] Sexual jealousy produces extreme violence. [28]Women were beaten with golf clubs, sticks, knives, machetes, and other sharp or sharp objects. Burning with stigmatized sticks occurred frequently and symbolized a man's strength or dominance over his wife. [19]

Yanomami men have been known to kill children while raiding enemy villages. [35] Helena Valero, a Brazilian woman who was abducted by Yanomami fighters in the 1930s, was seen attacking the Karawetari tribe:

They killed a lot. I cried out of fear and pity. But I can't do anything They snatch the children from their mothers to kill them while others hold their mothers tightly by their arms and wrists as they stand in line. All the women cried ... Men began to kill children. The smaller ones were bigger than them, killing many of them. [35]

#### Controversy

Gold was found in the Yanomami land in the early 1970s, and the influx of miners led to alcoholism and violence. The Yanomami culture was severely endangered.

In the mid-1970s, *Karimpeiros* (small independent gold miners) began to enter the Yanomami Country, when the Karimpeiros *settled* they killed members of the Yanomami tribe in a territorial dispute. In addition, the technique of mining by *garimpeiros*also lead to environmental degradation Despite FUNAI, a federal agency representing the rights and interests of the local population, Yanomami had little



protection from the government from these intrusive forces. In some cases, the government can be cited as supporting the infiltration of mining companies into Yanomami lands. In 1978, a strong government, under pressure from anthropologists and the international community, passed legislation demarcating Yanomami land, however. These reserves are small land "islands" that lack consideration of the Yanomami lifestyle, trade networks and routes, with boundaries determined solely by mineral concentrations. [36] In the 1990s, more than 40,000 *Garimpeiros* entered *the* Yanomami Land [37]In 1992, the Brazilian government, led by Fernando Collier de Mello, demarcated the Yanomami Indigenous Regions on the advice of Brazilian anthropologists and Survival. With International, a campaign that started in the early 1970s, non-Yanomami people continued to enter the territory; The governments of Brazil and Venezuela do not have adequate enforcement programs to prevent the entry of outsiders .[38]

Ethical controversy arose regarding the Yanomami blood used in the study by scientists such as Napoleon Chagnon and his associate James Neel. of that person But the donors were not warned that the blood samples would be kept for the experiment indefinitely. Several prominent Yanomami delegations sent letters to the scientists studying them demanding that their blood samples be returned. As of June 2010, these samples are in the process of being removed from storage for shipment to Amazon, pending deciding who to deliver them to and how to prevent potential health risks. Such actions [39]

Members of the American Anthropological Society debated the dispute that had divided them, voting 846 to 338 to overturn the year's report. In 2002, over



allegations of misconduct by scholars studying the Yanomami people, the controversy has been raging ever since. Tierney published *Darkness in El Dorado* in 2000. The book repeatedly accused anthropologists of causing harm – and in some cases, members of the Yanomami people they had studied in the 1960s – to death . [40] In 2010, Brazilian director José Padilha visited *The Darkness in the* controversial El Dorado in the documentary Secrets of the Clan.

#### **Population decline**

From 1987 to 1990, the Yanomami population was severely affected by malaria, mercury poisoning, malnutrition and the resulting violence. *Carimpeiros at* [41] Malaria, first introduced by Yanomami gold miners in the 1980s, is now prevalent in the Yanomami population . [43] In 1987, FUNAI president Romero Jucá denied that the rapid increase in Yanomami mortality had caused the Yanomami population to decline. It was a result of the Carimpeiros aggression , and Brazil's president, José Sarney, supported the economic affairs of *the Carimpeiros*.[44] Alcida Rita Ramos, an anthropologist who worked closely with Yanomami, said that during this three-year period, "leading to prosecuting Brazil for genocide" [45]

#### Massacre

The Haximu massacre, also known as the Yanomami massacre, was an armed conflict in 1993 outside the city of Haximu, Brazil, near the Venezuelan border, Gar Rimpeiros. *One* group killed about 16 Yanomami. Yanomami killed at least two *Garimpeiros and* wounded two others.



In July 2012, the Venezuelan government re-invested the alleged massacre. According to Yanomami, a village of eighty people was attacked by helicopter, and the only known survivors in the village were three men who went hunting. [46] However, in September 2012, Survival International, which had supported Yanomami in this allegation, withdrew their support after journalists found no evidence to support the claim. [47] ]

### COVID-19 pandemic

On April 3, 2020, during the outbreak of COVID-19A 15-year-old Yanomami boy from the river area Uraricoera has been confirmed to have COVID-19 and has previously been admitted to the intensive care unit at Roraima General Hospital in Boa Vista. He died on April 10. [48] According to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, this was the first death by Yanomami and the third death due to COVID-19 in an indigenous tribe, and raised fears over the effects of Viruses against indigenous peoples of Brazil [49]

### Group working for Yanomami

Yarima's son David Good and her anthropologist husband Kenneth Good created The Good Project to help support the future of the Yanomami people .[50] [51]

Survival International NGO in the United Kingdom, is conducting a global awareness campaign on the human rights situation of the Yanomami people [52].

In 1988, the US-based World Wildlife Fund (WWF) sponsored the musical *Yanomamo*, by Peter Rose and Anne. Conlon to convey what happens to the people and their natural environment in the Amazon jungle. [53] It is the story of the



Yanomami tribe/woman tribe that lives in the Amazon and is portrayed by a panel. Many plays around the world [54]

Yanomami-Hilfe eV, a German NGO, is building medical stations and schools for Yanomami in Venezuela and Brazil . Nehberg crossed the Atlantic in 1987 in the Pedalo and teamed with Christina. Haverkamp in 1992 on a custom-built bamboo raft to draw attention to the continued oppression of the Yanomami people.

Yanomami, based in Brazil, founded the indigenous organization Hutukara Associação Yanomami and the accompanying website [58].

# Comissão Pró-Yanomami (CCPY)

CCPY (formerly *Comissão pela Criação do Parque Yanomami*) is a Brazilian NGO focused on improving health care and education for Yanomami [59]. It was founded in 1978 by photographer Claudia. Contributed to the protection of Yanomami territorial rights and the preservation of Yanomami culture, the CCPY launched an international campaign to spread its impact. On the destructive side of the invasion , *Garimpero* promoted political movements to designate the area along the Brazilian-Venezuelan border as Yanomami indigenous areas. [60] The campaign was ultimately successful. [61]

Following the demarcation of Yanomami indigenous areas in 1992, CCPY's health program, in collaboration with the now-defunct NGO URIHI (Yanomami for "forest"), has succeeded in reducing the incidence of malaria in Brazil's Yanomami. By educating Yanomami community health representatives on methods to diagnose and



treat malaria, between 1998 and 2001, the incidence of malaria among Yanomami Indians and Brazilians decreased by 45% [62] [63].

In 2000, the CCPY sponsored a project to promote the market for Yanomami-grown fruit trees. The project aimed to help Yanomami as they transitioned to more everyday lives due to environmental and political pressures [64] in a separate entity. Together, the CCPY, at the request of the Yanomami leaders, established the Yanomami School teaching Portuguese with the goal of assisting Yanomami in the political leadership of Brazil and the international arena in the struggle to defend land rights. In addition, these village schools teach Yanomami about Brazilian society, including the use of money, good production, and record-keeping .[44]

## In popular culture

- Yanomami's reputation for violence was predominant in Ruggero Deodato's controversial film *Cannibal Holocaust*, in which locals apparently practiced endocannibalism .[65] [66]
- Peter Rose and Anne Conlon, Yanomamo, [67] Musical entertainment published by Josef Weinberger, London (1983) [68].
- The 2008 Christian film Yai Wanonabälewä: The Enemy God is one Yanomami in telling the history and culture of his people.
- In the 2006 World War Z novel by Max Brooks, a Brazilian doctor named Fernando Oliveira, in the aftermath of the titular zombie war, lives with the Yanomami.
- In the NCIS television series (Season 1, Episode 11), the character Dr.
  Mallard states that 23% of Yanomami are believed to be left-handed, far more

than the 9% incidence in the general population. There is no evidence for this assumption [71].

- in the movie series *Metalocalypse* (Season 2, Episode 9) as the Yanomami tribe is shown and they share with the main character their drug made from yopo.
- Yanomami is mentioned as a relative to the Jaguar werecats known as "Balam" in the tabletop role-playing game, Werewolf: The Apocalypse.
- In the comics, Sergio Bonelli's story *Mister No*, the legendary protagonist was previously married to a Yanomami woman and often interacted with Yanomami (they are called "Yanoama" in the manga).
- In 1979, a video was released by Chilean artist Juan Downey. Laughing Crocodile, [73] his 27-minute documentary, two months live on Amazon featuring Yanomami.
- Yanomami made a prominent appearance in the 2017 Bengali film Amazon.
  Obhijaan assists the protagonists in their search for the mythical city of El Dorado.
- Musician and producer Steve Albini tells an anecdote about the Yanomami on the Big Black Live in Sound Effects album [74].

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