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**"There is no right to life and culture without our lands": The power of landscape and the landscaping of power in the Venezuelan Amazon.**

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This paper is based on fieldwork among the Piaroa of the Venezuelan Guiana Highlands conducted by J. Overing throughout 1968 and for 6 months in 1977, and by Paul Oldham in 1991-93. The period between 1968 and 1993 covers those years in which the Piaroa have moved from a protected, but isolated relation with the Venezuelan state to one of increasing involvement with both it and the market economy. By anyone's measure, the Piaroa experience of change in these years has been rapid and extreme. It has been marked by such factors as the nucleation of settlements, the introduction of the Spanish language and the Venezuelan educational system, the reality of tourism and hydroelectric dams - and the Venezuelan legal system and notions of territoriality.

It is the last imposition that will be our focus, for it is the controversy over land and territoriality that most starkly reveals the opposing values of the Piaroa people and the state. The stance that the Piaroa are today taking in their dialogues with the state is one that is becoming a familiar plea throughout Amazonia with leaders of indigenous rights: it is as citizens of the state, in this case Venezuela, that the Piaroa are framing their arguments with the state over ethnic integrity. They want both the rights of citizenship and those which will maintain their own ethnic identity, of which land is one pertinent aspect. In the Piaroa case, as we are sure is true for other similar disputes elsewhere in Amazonia, the argument

is profound and thus has no simple solution. It has depth that goes far deeper than a mere problem of a modern national state coping with its internal ethnic diversity; for it is first and foremost a conflict that speaks of the meeting of the state with peoples whose ethical (social) values are largely "non-state". The conflict goes even deeper, for it is also between peoples who hold views that are respectively alien to each other with respect to cosmology and cosmography. Combined, these two elements - the issue of ethics and that of cosmology/cosmography - make dialogue between the two parties over land and territorial issues particularly tricky.

Thus, it is through the confrontation between the Piaroa and the state over land and sovereignty that the clash is most potent, for it is here that we can see unfolded radically different understandings of the proper relation between people, power, and the land. Even where concerns might be congruent, as with environmentalist issues, such understandings are both embedded and expressed through histories that are distinct, and thus estranged: the historicity of the Piaroa speaks of land, in itself, as a particular and meaningful embodiment of power and life for themselves as culturally specific human beings; whereas land from the perspective of the state is an empty sign until converted through power to political (thus meaningfully sovereign) territory. It is with this misunderstanding between the state and the Piaroa, over what for the Piaroa is embodied space, that we shall be concerned. As deliberate and intellectual strategy, the Piaroa are willing to create structures and thereby transform their own internal political policy in order to meet the state on its own terms, but in this tactic they will only concede so far. The Piaroa are not willing to allow such policies to corrupt either their ethics or their cosmographical understandings.

What might the embodiment of space underlying Piaroa cosmography entail? Why, might we ask, is it intractable to intellectual transformation? One way of beginning to reveal such embodiment is through the words of Jesus Caballero, who as a young man worked with J. Overing and as a mature one with P. Oldham. In one particular battle over their rights to land, the mature Caballero proclaimed that "you cannot defend the right to land without defending the right to culture and life, for without our lands there is no right to either - life or culture!" To explain his meaning requires a brief unfolding of the Piaroa understanding of two related issues: 1) the historical relation that exists between themselves as human agents and the land that they understand as belonging to them as a people, and indeed is **enabling** of them as a people, and 2) the proper relation between people (Piaroa as both individuals and as members of groups) in their relationship with the land. The first issue which relates to themselves as an empowered people in their relationship with the land is what we can call a cultural matter. It pertains to Piaroa cosmogony and cosmography, to the origins of their universe and themselves within it. The second is one that we can very loosely categorise as a social matter, relating as such to their high valuation of informality in inter-personal and inter-group relationships.<sup>1</sup> While space forbids the unfolding of this second issue, it should be noted that both concerns are alien to the concerns of the Venezuelan state and relevant to the discussion below.

## The Power of Landscape.

To continue their indigenous economic pursuits, which the Piaroa have every intention of doing alongside of newly acquired commercial endeavours, they need the land necessary for hunting, gathering, and gardening. It is, however, not any expanse of land, whatever its fertility, that would fulfil their needs for material well-being, that is, retain the possibilities for achieving life as Piaroa human agents. For this they need a **specific** landscape, i.e. the forested and mountainous valleys of the Cuaio, the Sipapo, the Autana, and the Guayapo rivers. These rivers, with their valleys and mountains are sacred to the Piaroa, for they are the centre stage for the playing out of the creation of their world and all the beings that inhabit it. For the Piaroa, this land is the actual centre of the world. It is where their creator gods emerged and lived and where they began their creations: their creations of the land, the rapids, the waterfalls, the rivers. It is from there that the gods placed the sun in the sky, and the moon; it is from lakes along Caño Rojo, a tributary of the Autana, that the creator god, Wahari, created people. It is there that he caught fish from which he made the bones of the first Piaroa people, where he made their flesh and their odour. It is there at Nyuwaema'a that he made land for people, gave them air and breeze from the waterfall of the Mountain Maeriweka, and created his tree of life, which grew all the edible foods of the world. This tree of life still lives, and now forms the mountain range which lies between the headwaters of the Cuaio and the Autano.

The list could on, but in short it is on this geographical centre stage that the gods of Piaroa cosmogony lived, married, fought, and through their adventures and misadventures created both the conditions enabling of Piaroa life, and those dangerous for it.<sup>2</sup> These gods of cosmogonic history are immortal, as too are their creations, and as such remain attached to the everyday life of the Piaroa. In the words of one **ruwang** (Piaroa leader and religious specialist), "the creation time gods will forever be powerful beings". They and their acts and their creations are today embodied (albeit in transformed but living image) within the landscape upon which they played during creation time history. Beyond the fact that the Piaroa receive "a sense of identity" from their attachment to the landscape that is truly their own, they also are daily affected by this "embodied" landscape in terms both practical and material. For one thing, the Piaroa capabilities for human existence are dependent upon their attachment to it - both as it exists in creation time history and in the form it takes in present day time. The two landscapes (of creation time and of today), although intertwined are distinct.

The Piaroa receive in "today time" (as opposed to the situation in creation time) all their capabilities for life, both their "life of the senses" and their "life of thoughts" for living a human existence, as a gift given to them by present day gods (who are transformations of their creation time miscreant and godly selves). These present day gods live beneath the purity of the waterfalls within the mountains of Nyuema and Maeriweka; there they own the crystal boxes which contain for today time all the capabilities for life created formerly by the creation time gods. From their crystal boxes of power, the today time gods give to the Piaroa their potency for living a productive life, their capability to hunt, to garden, to cook. Because

of the gifts of these gods the Piaroa are able today to transform animals and plants into edible food. The Piaroa also receive from the gods the potency to make curare and the blowgun, to weave cotton, to make cassava graters, and to build houses. They also receive the social powers to have affines and therefore to marry, and to have children, and to care for them within a community of relationships. The gods give the Piaroa the capabilities for ritual, so that they can protect themselves from disease and other dangers, and to cure the sick.

That the Piaroa receive these gifts is an accident of creation time history through which they emerged from this turbulent period as "winners", as the only beings of creation time to be able to receive the agency in "today time" for 1) achieving the culinary arts (both the ability for transforming animals, fish and plants into food, and **benefiting** from it), and 2) leading a fertile existence allowing for marriage, the having of children and living a cooperative existence within a community of relationships. The world that followed creation time became spatially discontinuous, and human agency in the process became unique; for no other beings are today able to gain access to the **particular** combination of powers and capabilities available to the Piaroa. In present day time, the Piaroa, although dependent upon both became distinct from both the world of animal and plant life and the world of the gods, neither of whose beings can today receive such a full gift for life. Although animals are also human and live in community in an immortal but subterranean existence, in the present day time of earthly existence they are killed and cooked and eaten by the Piaroa. In return they can but give the Piaroa their diseases. Indeed, because of the powers they receive from the crystal boxes of the gods, the Piaroa give the animals the earthly existence that is specific to the animals when they transform them through ritual from their human subterranean form to their animal earthly and hutable one. The present day gods might **own** the powers enabling of a productive life, but as beings who in earthly today time have no "life of the senses", they are unable to use their powers for a civilized fertility, and as such they lead an asocial life, as too do the animals.

Thus humans alone have the privilege of productive labour, and the privilege of sociality. Nevertheless, as will be seen in the next section, the Piaroa posit no natural order of subordination between themselves and other agency in the universe. We shall see that in the Piaroa understanding of their own relation to the land, and to the agency pertaining to it, they could not through domination appropriate for themselves the power of others, and therefore they could not "dominate" the land; nor did they see themselves as dominated by any other agency in the universe.

### **Territories follow people, not boundaries.**

Because of the direct meeting of the Piaroa nowadays with the state, they are in the process of formalising their territorial and inter-territorial relations to accommodate with the state's notion of the boundedness of land. Thus what was once an **informal** structure relating land to people is being transformed into a more **formalised** one. This section is concerned with a description of the "traditional" situation when

the Piaroa had little concern for the boundedness of land. In the past, communities and political allegiances determined territory, and not the other way around. Territoriality was more a matter of relations between people than of people and a particular land. Land was not **objectified** (was not a commodity) as it is in a modern legal sense. Also, there existed no principle of birth-right to the land, no idea of inheritance of land rights through descent or law. This does not mean that the Piaroa placed no value upon the land nor upon the relations of people to the land. Both were and still are critical values for them. What is crucial to note is that "the land" for indigenous peoples is not the same thing as "the land" within the context of the reasoning of a nation state.

In "traditional" terms, all adult Piaroa as **human beings**, who as such were endowed with "a full life of thoughts" which they received as gifts from the Tianawa gods, had both the means and the right to use the land and to transform its products in order to sustain their distinctive material way of life. In contrast, rights to membership within a Territory (**Itso'fha**, as it was called in the region of Paria Chiquita, while on the Sipapo it was called **Tawiyae**) was more a political than an ontological matter. All Piaroa had the right to use the land, while not all Piaroa belonged to a Territory.

The land of each Territory was said to be "owned" by its **Ruwang Itso'fha**. It was his responsibility to protect the people of his Territory, and to make its land fertile for them. One could belong to such a Territory only through close kinship or political ties to its "owner" (**ruwang**): the people of Paria Chiquita told me that a person (male or female) had the right to membership within a Territory only if 1) he or she were an immediate kinsmen to the **Ruwang**, or if 2) he or she had acquired formal permission from the Territorial **Ruwang** to live within it. Both husband and wife required such permission.

Each political territory was bounded, but its territorial land was never objectified as having an existence separate from the relationships of the people who politically formed the Territory. They went together, the relationships of people and their relationships with the land. Territorial land, rather than being circumscribed as a **particular** land, was **fluid** in its boundaries as it followed the movements of people, and their relationships. Thus boundaries fluctuated as people re-positioned themselves on the land, both spatially and politically.<sup>3</sup>

Accompanying the right to membership within the Territory was the right to use the land, protected and made fertile by its **Ruwang**. Membership automatically allowed one to hunt, collect, and garden anywhere in the Territory that one pleased. Territorial ecological diversity could be taken advantage of equally by all the members of the Territory. Likewise, kinsmen from other Territories, and all those who were visitors of the Territory, could freely use the land and the water of the Territory for hunting, fishing, and gathering; they also had access to any garden in which they themselves provided labour. This point is important, for Territories vary in their environmental privileges: headwaters people could visit relatives on the larger rivers in order to catch large fish; those situated on the larger rivers could visit the deeper jungles for game. In general, it can be said that the relations **between** Territories were **informal**.

We have spoken above about "ownership", about the **Ruwang** who is the "owner" of a Territory. We must use this word with caution because the Piaroa understood "ownership" very differently from what we today understand by proprietorship. For the Piaroa, "ownership" denotes more than anything else the duty of caring and being responsible: the **Ruwang** is responsible for the safety and the fertility of his people, and therefore has responsibilities for the land they use. It would not be correct, however, to suggest that it could ever be said of a piece of land that there is one, and only one, "owner". All who use the land are in a more than trivial sense its "owners" (the Piaroa classified themselves as a people as **Dea ruwa** (as "masters" of the jungle, along with the tapir, the monkey, the peccaries, all of whom have equal rights to its space). There also exists a mightier "owner" of the land than the **Ruwang**, and this is the powerful "Master/Owner" Spirit of the Jungle, **Re'yo**, whose job it is to guard the safety of all jungle beings and the land on which they live. This great spirit punishes the Piaroa if they use the jungle and its beings too freely. He also helps them: it is his responsibility to work with the Spirit Master of the Rivers to harmonise the earth and the water (autochthonously incompatible elements) so as to allow garden plants, which are of the water, to grow safely on the land. The plants the Piaroa grow in their gardens, and then eat, are at one and the same time the products of their own thoughts (those they received from the Tianawa gods) and at the same time the progeny of the Creator God of cultivated plants, who was during creation time the Master of the Rivers. Garden plants were once people, and exist for immortality as such in creation time. This complicated case of plants, their relation to the land, to water, and to people, is merely one more example of the way in which land is not land as we or more pertinently the modern state might view it. Our specific contrast between the boundaries of nature and culture would be alien to the Piaroa. Our own notion of ownership is integrally associated with our understanding of such boundaries - we can "own" alienable rights in natural space, for instance, while the Piaroa could not.

In Piaroa theory, humans could not have proprietorship in a Western sense over land and water; it was impossible for humans to have absolute control over resources. The Piaroa could view themselves as **dea ruwa**, as Masters of the Jungle, but they shared that status with a good many other beings. Piaroa mastery (and therefore ownership) was one that was always relative to, and even dependent upon, that of others: there were the animals with their own human history, who were also **dea ruwa**; there were the powerful present day Masters of the Jungle and of the Water who wilfully intervened in human productive activities and who therefore prevented the Piaroa from doing what they wished with the resources of land and water; there were the Tianawa gods who limited the amount of capabilities they gave to the Piaroa for using the resources of jungle and water. Humans could not gain sole appropriation of power over a piece of nature. What we would call nature was for the Piaroa an intentional universe filled with non-human beings with an agency of their own, who for instance would not allow themselves to become objectified and conquered. Human beings had to share such resources with other types of agency.

## Indigenous Peoples and Venezuelan Development Policies:

In the preceding sections we have examined traditional Piaroa conceptions of land and territory and their perceived relationship with their land. In the following sections we examine the impact of government development policy and increased contact with the national society on the Piaroa, the threats that this has posed to their territory and their responses to these threats.

We have noted above that the historical records suggest that the Piaroa attempted to avoid contact with whites except, as far as possible, for purposes of trade. This situation begins to change from the 1960's onwards when the Venezuelan state became increasingly concerned with the potential exploitation of forest and mineral resources within the Amazon and with protecting sovereignty over these resources from the perceived threats posed by neighbouring states, notably Colombia and Brazil (Medina 1980, Ewell 1984). Further interest in the Amazon and its resources was inspired by the desire to diversify the economy away from dependency on oil exports which from the 1920's onwards has been the dominant foreign currency earner and driving force of the Venezuelan economy (Baptista 1991).

This desire to protect and exploit the resources of the Venezuelan Amazon territory found its main expression in the 'Conquest of the South' development program during the Christian Democrat administration of Rafael Caldera from 1969 to 1974. This program sought to protect Venezuelan sovereignty through the construction of a road infrastructure throughout the Amazon territory. As in Brazil this road network would also provide the infrastructure required for the economic development and colonization of the territory through mining, timber exploitation, the modernisation of agriculture and cattle ranching (CODESUR 1970).

With respect to the indigenous peoples within the Amazon, the main expression of Venezuelan indigenous policy is enshrined in article 77 of the 1961 national constitution which states that,

"The State proposes to improve the conditions of life of the peasant population.

The Law will establish a regime of exception, that requires the protection of the indigenous communities and their progressive incorporation with the life of the Nation".(Venezuelan Constitution 1961:22-23 our translation)

The establishment of a National Border Council in 1970 modifies the integrationist tone of State policy by introducing the notion of 'selective integration' of the indigenous peoples (Heinen and Coppens 1986). Venezuelan indigenous policy, like those of surrounding states can be defined as integrationist with a poorly defined emphasis placed on 'selectivity' and the preservation of indigenous cultural values (Batalla 1981).

While the main emphasis within the 'Conquest of the South' development program can be said to have been concerned with infrastructural development the indigenous peoples were not excluded from the program. The program aimed to achieve the integration of the indigenous peoples with the political, social and economic life of the State (CODESUR 1970). An important aspect of the integration of the indigenous

peoples during the 'Conquest of the South' was to awaken 'consciousness of citizenship' amongst the indigenous peoples who at that time did not speak Spanish, hold identity cards, or vote (CODESUR 1970). Arousing 'consciousness of citizenship' among the indigenous peoples can be seen as an important component in the achievement of the protection of national sovereignty.

The state also aimed through the 'Conquest of the South' development program to elevate the standard of living of the peasant and indigenous population with whom the indigenous peoples have in effect been classified since the 1960's (CODESUR 1970). In practice this involved persuading the indigenous peoples such as the Piaroa that they should accept Government housing, sanitation, education and economic development projects particularly, in the case of the Piaroa, on the border with Colombia marked by the Orinoco river.

Thus with respect to the indigenous peoples the basic objectives of the State during this period can be described as achieving sedentarisation of the indigenous peoples for the purpose of political control and protection of the frontiers combined with inculcating identification as Venezuelan citizens for the purposes of protection of national sovereignty.

In the case of the Piaroa, this was achieved through visits to indigenous communities by missionaries, government officials, and politicians in the company of young bi-lingual Piaroa who worked with the government or were being educated by the missionaries. In this way the Piaroa were persuaded to accept government development projects at existing sites or to move to sites closer to the frontier (see for example Boglar and Caballero 1982). The result of this is that the majority of the modern Piaroa live in government built housing close to the international frontier with Colombia and along the tributaries of the Orinoco river (see map).

From 1974 onwards with a change in the national administration the 'Conquest of the South' development program was abandoned. This was a consequence of three main factors. First, a reduction in concern over national sovereignty issues on the part of the Action Democratic (AD) administration (Ewell 1984). Second, a growing concern over the environmental implications of traditional modernisation development strategies in the Amazon. Third, the fact that Venezuela, reaping the economic benefits of a newly privatised oil industry during the oil crises, could afford not to pursue full scale development of the Amazon during this period.

Increased world-wide awareness of the environmental implications of modernization strategies in the Amazon from the 1970's onwards led Venezuela to prohibit road-building, mining, commercial timber and flora and fauna exploitation throughout the Amazon territory (Venezuela 1970, 1978, 1989b). This was combined with converting large sections of the Amazon into protected areas during the late 1970's and the 1980's.

The 'Conquest of the South' modernisation development program and the subsequent policy change towards protection of the environment and the introduction of sustainable development programs have both



had important implications for the Piaroa and their territory. It is to the analysis of the effects of these policies to which we now turn.

#### The impacts of modernisation policy:

We have noted above that the introduction of the 'Conquest of the South' development program resulted in rapid change for the Piaroa as they moved into nucleated government constructed settlement sites. Our concern here however is not with the results of this nucleation which has resulted in local resource base depletion (see also Zent 1992) but with the effect of modernisation on Piaroa territory.

One of the main consequences of the application of the modernisation model of development for the Piaroa was the invasion of their lands. These invasions can be classified into five main types; invasion by cattle ranchers particularly around Puerto Ayacucho and San Juan de Manapiare; invasion by criollos from Puerto Ayacucho along the roads leading to the town and in the Cataniapo river valley; invasion by other indigenous groups along the roads leading to the town; invasion by gold-miners on the Southern margin of Piaroa territory in the 1990's; 'invasion' by tourists from the late 1980's onwards.

For our purposes the invasion of Piaroa territory by cattle-ranchers from the 1970's onwards is the most significant because of the response of the Piaroa. Specifically the establishment of a cattle-ranch in the Valley de Guanay area of Piaroa territory near to San Juan de Manapiare is significant because it reveals the ambiguities in Venezuelan Law with respect to land rights and because of the response the case elicited from the Piaroa.

The circumstances of this invasion are as follows. As mentioned above, one of the objectives of the 'Conquest of the South' Program was to encourage settlement of the Amazon and its economic development. As part of this economic development program cattle ranchers were encouraged to establish ranches in the Amazon in the extensive savanna areas around San Juan de Manapiare which it was hoped would be connected to the rest of the country via a new road.

In 1972 a man belonging to a wealthy Caracas family of German origin established the San Pablo ranch in the Valley de Guanay in Piaroa territory where thirty Piaroa families were resident. Problems began to arise from 1977 onwards when ranch-hands, who managed the ranch on behalf of the absentee rancher, began to abuse the Piaroa while drunk and on more than one occasion raped Piaroa women. The ranch-hands were replaced on various occasions by new ranch-hands in an attempt to resolve the problem but the abuses continued. The conflict came to a head in 1984 when a small group of Piaroa were walking across the ranch in order to bury a kinsman who had died of snake bite. Two of the Piaroa were captured by ranch-hands and dragged back to the ranch tied behind horses. They were then tied to a table leg for the rest of the day until the arrival of the rancher from Caracas with members of the political police (DISIP) who tied the Piaroa to a tree with twine around their necks and then placed guns next to their mouths and

ears. Further abuse was prevented by the arrival of officers from another police force (Caballero personal communication and Caballero 1984).

Jesus Caballero, the eldest son of the territorial leader of the Paria Chiquito territory where Overing conducted her fieldwork was at that time working as a teacher in San Juan de Manapiare and led the Piaroa campaign against the land invasion and human rights abuses perpetrated by the ranch-hands. He and other young Piaroa enlisted the support of sympathisers with the indigenous peoples including the Catholic Church the result of which was that following intense publicity the rights of the Piaroa were upheld and title was to be given to the Piaroa for the area.

For our purposes these events are significant for two main reasons, firstly, because it reveals the ambiguities in Venezuelan law with respect to indigenous land rights and secondly because of the impact it had upon the Piaroa's attitude towards the national society, state development policies and their land.

#### Land legislation:

Under the Spanish crown and later following independence under Simon Bolivar indigenous reserves (resguardos) were established (Bolivar: 1820, 1825, Coppens: 1971, Armellada 1977, Aranga- Achoa:1993). Following Venezuelan independence from Gran Colombia repeated attempts were made to weaken indigenous rights towards their ancestral lands. This has taken the form of stating that land title for reserves would only be given to household heads rather than to communities (Armellada 1977). A further device in concert with the above was to declare indigenous lands, even where colonial 'reserve' status had been granted, to be 'no mans lands' (tierras baldias) and thus property of the State. In this way the majority of indigenous lands in Venezuela became 'no man's lands' and property of the State (Venezuela:1936, Arvelo-Jimenez:1980,1993)

The 1960 Agrarian Reform Law sought to diminish the power of large landowners (latifundistas) and introduce a just and equitable system of land distribution (Venezuela, Ley de Reforma Agraria 1960 article one). This reform program specifically includes the indigenous population and,

"guarantees and recognizes that the indigenous populations which de facto retain their communal or extended family status, without diminishing the rights that correspond to them as Venezuelans, the right of use of the lands woods and waterways which they occupy or which belong to them in those sites where they customarily dwell". (Art 2, Ley de Reforma Agraria 1960 our translation)

While the Agrarian Reform law recognizes the rights of the indigenous populations to use of the land and the right as Venezuelan citizens to obtain title to the land on family or community basis, in practice the Agrarian Reform Law has proved to be a deficient instrument. Indigenous communities where they have successfully negotiated the complex application procedure have received only provisional title to their lands, as opposed to definitive title, and these have been for parcels of land around their communities without

taking into account actual land usage patterns and future community requirements. Of the 128 Piaroa communities within the Venezuelan Amazon listed in the 1985 indigenous census, only 27 had received provisional title to their lands (OCEI:1985). The average title for Piaroa communities has been 2.500 hectares (see Arvelo-Jimenez 1993).

This trend towards the granting of land title on the basis of community and individual household head has the consequence that large areas of Piaroa territory are classified as 'no-man's lands' and as such property of the State. The administration of the 'no-man's lands' is, with the notable exception of lands declared to be protected zones, the responsibility of the National Agrarian Institute which was set up to implement the Agrarian Reform Law. However, the procedure for obtaining even provisional land title is complex and the National Agrarian Institute inefficient and under-resourced (see also Arvelo-Jimenez 1993). My own visit to the National Agrarian Institute offices in the Amazon revealed that land title documents were stored in no coherent order, had been damaged by rain from the leaking roof in the office and had been attacked by mould. In 1968 Aldaria estimated that given the progress of the Agrarian Reform program this would take a further 437 years to complete. While the granting of land title to indigenous communities increased during the 1970's there is little reason to believe that Aldaria's prediction is incorrect(1).

In the case of Valley de Guanay detailed above the rancher, encouraged by the Conquest of the South program, applied to the National Agrarian Institute for title in the Valley de Guanay area and provisional title was granted in what from a Piaroa perspective formed part of their ancestral territory. The inadequacy of the National Agrarian Institute and the Agrarian Reform Law was revealed by the absence of protection of the Piaroa's land and the fact that the promised title deeds for the Piaroa of the Valley de Guanay had not been provided by 1993. Perhaps above all, as various authors have suggested, this demonstrates the lack of political will with respect to indigenous land rights and the confused nature of Venezuelan indigenous policy (see Arvelo-Jimenez 1980, Henley 1982 and Heinen and Coppens 1986).

The Valley de Guanay case however, is significant not only because it constitutes a case in which the Piaroa achieved a victory over a powerful Caracas family who in the words of the rancher could afford 'to buy the land Piaroa and all' (Caballero 1984 and personal communication) but also because it reveals the inadequacy of land rights legislation and the absence of political will on the part of the government. This conflict is also particularly important from the Piaroa perspective because it sent shock waves through Piaroa society and provided the impetus for the creation of a pan-Piaroa organisation. It is to this organisation and its demands with respect to land rights to which we now turn.

#### The Piaroa response:

From the 1970' onwards education opportunities became increasingly available to young Piaroa as part of the government's attempts to integrate the indigenous peoples with the national society. This increased availability of knowledge of the national society was combined with the growth of indigenous

federations which were sponsored by political parties to represent the indigenous peoples. The Piaroa in Venezuela also maintain strong links with Piaroa communities in Colombia where independent Piaroa organisations, formed to combat the negative influences of increased contact with the national society, proved influential in motivating the young Venezuelan Piaroa. This increased awareness of the national society and increased involvement in indigenous organisations led the young Piaroa to attempt for the first time to create an independent pan-Piaroa organisation.

Young Piaroa involved in the attempt to create this organisation stated that initially the headmen of the communities and of the Piaroa territories did not recognise the need to create such an organisation and were unwilling to co-operate with other communities who they regarded as their enemies. The Valley de Guanay case however provided the young Piaroa with additional strength in the internal Piaroa argument for the creation of a pan-Piaroa organisation that would enable the Piaroa to more effectively address the problems presented by the national society.

With the approval of the community and territorial leaders (ruwa itso'de and ruwa itso'fha), the first Congress of what became the 'Council of Piaroa Sectors' (CONSEU) was held in Cano Grulla on the Orinoco river in 1985. During the Congress it was decided that Piaroa-land (Wotihathiraehae) would be divided into seven sectors. This was significant because the Piaroa term de'E'u, which is normally applied to a river valley or area of forest, was expanded in its usage to signify a sector. As a result traditional political territories itso'fha, which had already been modified by migration patterns, became political elements within a wider conception of a Piaroa sector. Thus the Piaroa sector Sipapo which takes as its limits the 1 million 215 thousand hectare area of the Sipapo forestal reserve became the de'E'u of the Sipapo incorporating the Sipapo, Cuao, Autana and Guayapo rivers of the Piaroa heartland. The Piaroa sector Sipapo contains approximately five traditional territories (itso'fha).

The responsibility for co-ordination of each of the seven sectors was given to two Piaroa from each sector elected for the task. Beyond the sector co-ordinators a general co-ordinator, a vice president and a president were elected the latter with the duty of representing the Council in the Amazon Federal Territory Capital of Puerto Ayacucho.

Following the first two Piaroa Congresses however the organisation began to experience difficulties with mobilising sufficient resources to finance the organisation and with factional disputes between Piaroa leaders within and between the different sectors. These difficulties can be seen as a reflection of the wider difficulties an indigenous society with a traditionally informal political organisation encounters in seeking to respond to the threats posed by a society organised on radically different principles during a period of rapid change. However the Piaroa Council remained as a powerful image in the minds of the Piaroa during Oldham's fieldwork and efforts were being made in the different sectors to strengthen the organisational base of the Piaroa Council. While a full Piaroa congress has not been held since the late 1980's, meetings between Piaroa communities are often convened in the name of the Piaroa Council.

The right to land constitutes the principal demand of the Piaroa Council and the Piaroa sectors and reveals the intimate relationship that the Piaroa perceive between their land, culture and life. The Conclusions of the First Piaroa Congress provide an good example of Piaroa conceptions of their land and their aspirations for the future of their territory,

"The Uhuottoja we are a single people, we have the same origin, Anamai is our creator. Anamai created all of the Piaroa in a site named Yuhuamea. This is by the Autana, in the centre of our land, in the heart of our world. There our creator gave us life. From there we went to the Middle and lower Ventuari, to Manapiare, Parguaza, Cataniapo, Paria, Samariapo, Sipapo, Cuaó, Guayapo, Parhuena, Tauaja and the Orinoco from the mouth of the Sipapo to the mouth of the Ventuari. These are our sectors. Here we live. Here we have lived since Anamai gave us life with his supernatural power....

The Uhuottoja we do not understand how we have denounced the landowner of Guanay for seven years, yet the government has not taken steps to control him. The Uhuottoja we are 'diyarua'; this means that we are peaceful people: but we are not stupid. We take notice when we are abused and stolen from. The community of Guanay was violated in its legitimate rights. Some Uhuottoja kinsmen went to prison. The DISIP from Caracas went to Guanay and captured some Uhuottoja. Then they treated us a guerrillas.... Some Congressmen who arrived told us that they would not give land to the Uhuottoja because we are lazy. That is a lie. (Conclusions of the First Congress of the Piaroa Council, (CONSEU) Cano Grulla 1984).

The Council also complained of the entry of strangers into their communities and the apparent clandestine construction of airstrips in their territory before going on to make the following request,

"For these [reasons] we ask our Venezuelan Government to legalize tenancy of our land. We would like that:

The National Agrarian Institute proceeds to legalize the tenancy of the land of the following sectors: Upper Orinoco, Cataniapo, Manapiare, Middle Orinoco, Parguaza, Sipapo, Ventuari. We are sure that this is the best way to legalize the tenancy of our land. In this way our neighbouring communities are not divided and so our people and our communities can move freely in the lands that have always been of the Uhuottoja"

The Council then goes on to request that the titles be definitive and free before concluding as follows,

"Without land there is no culture. The land for us is something sacred. There are the sites where Buo'ca, Huajari, Puruna, Cheheru and all of our sacred beings passed. This is why we need our Venezuelan government to legalize the tenancy of our land. We are more than 7,000 Uhuottoja and each day we are more. With our lands the Piaroa culture can grow and strengthen. This is what we would like" ( Conclusions of the First Congress of the Piaroa Council, (CONSEU) Cano Grulla 1984 our translation)

A number of important points can be drawn from the Conclusions of the Piaroa Council. Firstly, we observe that the claim to the land is framed in terms of Piaroa conceptions of their origins. Secondly we observe an intimate conception of land and Piaroa culture. As a representative of the Piaroa at the time put it in an international meeting, "you cannot defend the right to land without defending the right to culture and life", while conversely "there is no right to life and culture without lands"(Caballero 1984:68). From

a Piaroa perspective, as we have explored in detail above, the issues of land rights, culture and life itself are inextricably linked. Piaroa culture and identity is embedded in the waterfalls, mountains, hills, rivers, streams, caves and forests of Piaroa-land.

Second, we observe that the Piaroa request land title to the seven sectors making up their territory on the basis that this will provide protection from invasion by outsiders while allowing free movement within Piaroa territory as a whole. In this sense Piaroa identity as 'one people' and in a technical sense as 'one family' (chawaruwa) has come to supercede internal Piaroa political distinctions in dealings with the national society.

Third, the designation of specific sectors and the request for title on this basis can be seen as specifically rejecting the emphasis placed upon granting title to individual communities in government policy. The rejection of title on the basis of individual community constitutes affirmation of common identity and also awareness of the potential dangers of land invasion posed by dividing Piaroa territory into individual parcels.

Another point worthy of note is the use of the term 'our Venezuelan government'. This affirmation of citizenship and of Venezuelan sovereignty serves a specific purpose. During the Valley de Guanay conflict accusations were made in the sections of the national press sympathetic with the politically powerful rancher that the Piaroa were 'communists', 'guerrillas' and 'subversives'. While the Piaroa clearly regard themselves as Venezuelan citizens, following the accusations during the Valley de Guanay conflict the Piaroa came to recognise that the economic interest groups concerned with exploiting the resources within the Piaroa's territory would probably adopt the position that the Piaroa were seeking independence from Venezuela as a means to block their land claim. It is for this reason that the Piaroa specifically place an emphasis on 'our Venezuelan government'.

Thus we observe in a general sense a politically and intellectually sophisticated Piaroa response to the threats posed to Piaroa-land by the encroachment of agents of the national society. This response has consisted of modifying traditional concepts to create macro-structures such as the modern 'sector' and of a conscious emphasis being placed on common Piaroa identity.

### **Summary:**

In summary so far we have seen that the pursuit of modernisation of the Venezuelan Amazon resulted in invasion of Piaroa lands in five specific areas, firstly, invasion by a cattle rancher in the Valley de Guanay area. Second, invasion by residents of the town of Puerto Ayacucho along the roads and into the Cataniapo river basin. Third, the migration of other indigenous groups into Piaroa territory around Puerto Ayacucho. Four, invasion by gold miners on the southern margin of Piaroa territory. Five, invasion by yourists. We then observed that while indigenous land rights are technically recognised in the Agrarian reform law, the inadequate implementation of this law, the corresponding treatment of indigenous areas within the Amazon

as 'no man's lands' and the tendency to grant title only on the basis of individual community or household head has the consequence of inadequately protecting indigenous territories from land invasion.

We then turned to the analysis of Piaroa responses towards the land invasion perpetrated by the cattle rancher. Here we saw that the human rights abuses perpetrated during this land invasion provided additional impetus for the young Piaroa seeking to more effectively organise in order to address the problems presented by the national society. This resulted in the creation of the Piaroa Council. The creation of this council had important implications for the traditional Piaroa political system. The concept of De'E'u was expanded to signify 'sector' within which traditional territories were incorporated but within which the traditional leaders maintained authority. The creation of this first pan-Piaroa organisation can be seen as a direct response to the problems presented by increased contact with the national society as exemplified by the Valley de Guanay case.

When we turned to the examination of the conclusions of the Piaroa council with respect to land rights we observed that demands for the recognition of land rights are framed within an argument concerning the sacred nature of Piaroa-land and of the perceived inextricable connection between Piaroa-land, culture and life. Land for the Piaroa can therefore be justifiably regarded as an essential component of identity.

We also observed that the Piaroa rejected the donation of land title on the basis of individual communities, requesting instead title for all sectors of Piaroa-land. This reveals a conscious affirmation of Piaroa identity vis a vis the national society which supercedes internal political distinctions. The Piaroas' political aptitude is also revealed in their affirmation of Venezuelan citizenship which further illustrates that Piaroa identity and identity as Venezuelan citizens are not incompatible from a Piaroa perspective.

Having examined the effects of land invasion during the period when 'modernisation' of the Amazon was official government policy and Piaroa responses to the problems produced by this policy we now turn to the implications of the more recent shift in government policy towards the preservation of the Amazon for the Piaroa and their notions of territoriality.

#### The emergence of environmentalism:

Venezuela has a long environmentalist tradition as is perhaps illustrated by the fact that its first national park was established in 1937 (Galbaldon 1992). By 1992 Venezuela had created 39 national parks totalling 16.4% of Venezuelan Territory. This figure excludes areas protected by weaker environmental protection regimes which cover considerably larger areas of Venezuela. It can be legitimately stated that Venezuela is at the forefront of the environmental protection movement in South America and perhaps in the wider world.

Venezuelan concerns with environmental protection and with the rational development of natural resources accelerated from 1974 onwards with the election of the Democratic Action (Accion Democracia)

party under the leadership of Carlos Andres Perez. Venezuela could at this point readily afford to adopt a strong environmentalist stance and an emphasis on balancing economic development with environmental protection because during this period Venezuela was a prime beneficiary of the petro-dollar bonanza precipitated by the OPEC oil crisis.

The adoption of strong environmental policies during Perez's administration resulted in 1976 in the creation of the Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources, the first such Ministry in South America. As a consequence of the creation of this ministry responsibilities for development in the Amazon and control over development policy formulation and research with respect to the Amazon was transferred from the Ministry of Public Works (MOP), the Ministry of Agriculture and Breeding (MAC), and the 'Commission for the Development of the South'(CODESUR) to the Ministry of the Environment (MARNR). In this process the 'Conquest of the South' programme and its corresponding modernisation model of development was abandoned.

In 1980, under President Luis Herrera Campins, the Amazon Federal Territory was incorporated with Bolivar State and The Amacuro Delta Federal Territory to form the Guayana region under the development responsibility of the Venezuelan Guayana Corporation (CVG), a Government owned development company which has been responsible for the pursuit of modernisation policies in the Estado Bolivar and the Delata Amacuro since its creation in the 1960. The incorporation of the Amazon with Guayana and the presence of the Venezuelan Guayana Corporation can be seen as an attempt by economic interest groups to reassert a modernisation policy for the Amazon during the 1980's. As we will observe below repeated attempts have been made to re-assert the modernisation model of Amazonian development. However the overall trend in development policy in the Amazon from the mid-1970's onwards has been towards environmental protection and the introduction of sustainable development programmes (TCA 1988).

With the return to power of Carlos Andres Perez and the Democratic Action party in 1988 environmental legislation was once again strengthened and in the Amazon all logging, mining, road building and other traditional development activities were prohibited. In 1989 the government established the Autonomous Service for the Environmental Development of the Amazon (SADA-AMAZONAS) an organisation dependent on the Ministry of the Environment which is responsible for co-ordinating, planning and implementing environmental protection and sustainable development policies within the Amazon.

This has coincided with declaring large areas of the Venezuelan Amazon and thus the indigenous territories within the Amazon to be Areas under Special Administrative Regime (ABRAE). 49% of the Venezuelan Amazon is now classified in various ways as an Area under Special Regime (Galbadon 1992). In fact, in practice given that permission from the Ministry of the Environment must be sought before almost any development can take place in the Amazon it is realistic to describe the whole of the Amazon Territory as a protected area (see for example Venezuela:1983).



As a consequence of the environmental importance attributed to the Amazon territory the Ministry of the Environment has become the key Ministry determining development policy within the Venezuelan Amazon. The introduction of the Environmental Penal Law in 1992 which has the power to impose fines or imprisonment on those individuals and companies who transgress the environmental legislation has further strengthened this position.

Our concern here however is with the analysis of the practical effects that the pursuit of environmental protection and sustainable development under the guidance of the Ministry of the Environment has had on the Piaroa and their territory.

On one level the environmentalist stance adopted by the Venezuelan State with respect to the Amazon Territory can be viewed as possessing important positive implications for the indigenous peoples such as the Piaroa in so far that environmental legislation has prevented a return to the modernisation model of development of the Amazon. The Ministry of the Environment, as the most important of the federal public bodies in the Amazon, has repeatedly frustrated attempts by economic interest groups, the Venezuelan Guayana Corporation, and successive governors of the territory to re-introduce modernisation policies in the Amazon more ambitious than those of the 1970's. This has occurred despite the limited resources and personnel available to the Ministry for monitoring and controlling development in the Amazon particularly in more remote areas.

The principal instrument of environmental protection in Venezuela is to designate a specific area as an Area under Special Administrative Regime (ABRAE). These fall into three broad categories, Environmental, Economic and Military (Frontiers). The indigenous peoples in the Venezuelan Amazon are affected by four types of environmental Areas under Special Regime and one type of economic regime. These are, Biosphere Reserves, National Parks, Natural Monuments, Hydrographic Reserves, and a Forestal Reserve (economic) (Venezuela:1983).

The Piaroa are affected by four types of Area under Special Regime. On the southern margin of Piaroa territory the Yapacana National Park was established in 1978. This park has been subjected to a major gold rush from early 1992 onwards involving some Piaroa, other indigenous peoples, Venezuelan and Colombian criollos and Colombian guerrilla groups.

Throughout their territory the Piaroa are affected by the classification of the following mountains as natural monuments, Autana, Serrania del Cuao, the Cuao mountain, the Piedra de Tortuga, Camani, Morrocoy, Yutaje-Corocoro, Guanay and Yavi (1978-1993) which have previously been subjected to uncontrolled tourist excursions. In many cases these natural monuments are scared sites for the Piaroa and other indigenous peoples.

The Cataniapo river valley, with a predominantly Piaroa indigenous population, has been turned into a Hydrographic reserve in order to protect the main water supply of the state capital of Amazonas, Puerto Ayacucho.

The Piaroa are also affected by the Sipapo forestal reserve which covers 1 million 215 thousand hectares and constitutes the heart of Piaroa territory and 6% of the Venezuelan Amazon. The Sipapo forestal reserve is an economic reserve and was established in 1963 because the timber resources within this area are regarded as indispensable for the national timber industry and because of hydro-electric power potential of the rivers in this area. The forestal reserve covers the core of the Piaroa territory including the main Piaroa sacred sites and represents a considerable threat to the future of the Piaroa territory. In 1993 the Ministry of the Environment aimed to convert this forestal reserve into a Hydrographic reserve and a sustainable reserve respectively and to expand the reserve to include the Cataniapo river valley reserve. Such a reserve would cover the majority of Piaroa territory.

What though are the implications of these environmental reserves and the forestal reserve for the Piaroa and their attempts to obtain land rights?

Areas under Special Regime are created in areas which have been designated as 'no-mans land' (tierras baldias) and therefore as property of the State (Venezuela:1936,1983) . Residents within these protected areas can be forcibly re-located if their presence results in environmental damage and limitations are imposed on the economic and other activities permissible in the area. In the case of environmental reserves, which in practice includes the Sipapo forestal reserve (2), these areas are the responsibility of the Ministry of the Environment and not of the National Agrarian Institute as would be the case with other 'no-mans lands'. However, within these areas the indigenous peoples are treated as a special case and in all cases the indigenous peoples are required to be allowed to continue to live in

"the sites where they have their ancestral home and have realized following their traditional model of subsistence, occupation of the area and co-existence with the ecosystem..."

however,

"In necessary cases, the judge can take adequate preventative measures to guarantee the protection of the environment and the harmonious relation of the indigenous communities with the same" (Ley Penal del Ambiente Article 67. 1992)

Further, the law requires that the indigenous peoples be consulted with respect to the formulation of management plans which are required for each protected area. Active indigenous participation in environmental protection within the protected areas is also desirable (see for example Venezuela 1989). In the case of national parks and in particular Biosphere reserves these have come to be regarded as a means of protecting indigenous peoples (Venezuela 1983, 1991). Natural monuments on the other hand are increasingly being recognised not only on the basis of their scientific value but also for their importance to the indigenous peoples (Venezuela:1990).

Thus it can be argued that environmental law, as required under the Regime of Exception established by Article 77 of the National Constitution, seeks to actively protect the rights of the indigenous peoples and

to ensure participation in establishing the regulations for the protected area and in a wider sense in protecting the environment of their ancestral territories.

However the issue of indigenous participation and indigenous land rights within protected areas has proved to be a complex problem not only in a legal sense but also with respect to the attitudes of environmentalists towards the indigenous peoples and the changes which have taken place in their relations with the environment in response to the pursuit of economic integration of the indigenous peoples by the State.

Two main trends can be identified in environmental legislation and environmentalist attitudes towards the indigenous peoples. The first of these is the tendency to treat the indigenous peoples as if they form part of the flora and fauna of a protected area. Environmental legislation assumes that indigenous peoples maintain a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with their environment an assumption which coincides with the treatment of indigenous peoples as part of the fauna of a protected area. The following article from Decree 276 of 1989 which provides partial regulations for the administration of national parks provides a good illustration of this tendency,

"When within an area that merits being declared as a national park populations are encountered with more than 50 years of age characterised by a mode of social, economic and cultural life which in itself is a factor of betterment of the natural medium, the area with its natural zone of expansion will be demarcated and zonified for the "use of autochthonous population or touristic village" (Venezuela:1989 our emphasis)

The emphasis within this article is placed squarely on the aesthetic desirability of indigenous peoples within national parks particularly with respect to the enhancement of the potential for tourism within these areas. Tourism, specifically 'eco-tourism' is regarded by environmentalists as the key economic alternative to modernisation policy in protected areas.

This tendency to classify indigenous peoples within protected areas as part of the 'fauna' of the area is a reflection of the fact that the majority of the people who design and implement environmental policy in Venezuela are natural scientists with little or no knowledge and experience of dealing with indigenous peoples. The tendency also reflects a more deeply rooted Venezuelan attitude towards indigenous peoples, that is that the indigenous peoples are 'pristine innocents' who require protection but who are at the same time inferior and irrational. This treatment of the indigenous peoples as part of the fauna and their corresponding classification as the 'innocent but inferior other' denies the human agency of the indigenous peoples and thus their right to participation in the determination of their futures in the areas designated as protected by the State (3).

The second trend in environmentalist attitudes towards indigenous peoples is the perspective that the indigenous peoples have been 'corrupted' by the national society. This is related to the fact that the pursuit of modernisation policy in the Venezuelan Amazon and attempts to integrate indigenous peoples such as the

Piaroa with the market economy has resulted in changes in their relationships with their environment. Piaroa economic activity now consists of a variable balance between production to meet subsistence needs and production for the market. In fact the town of Puerto Ayacucho with a population of approximately 48,000 people is almost entirely dependent on indigenous agricultural production for its supply of fresh produce (MARNR:1983). The result combined with population nucleation has been more intensive local resource exploitation and environmental depletion around the Piaroa communities within these protected areas.

In response to this the Ministry of the Environment has attempted to introduce regulations to control environmental damage in the protected areas and require that the Piaroa and members of other indigenous groups, for example in the Cataniapo Hydrographic Reserve, apply for permits to cut their fields. Fines can be imposed on the members of the communities if they do not possess permits. This has resulted in protests from the indigenous organisations and communities an example of which will help to illustrate the importance of this second component of environmentalist attitudes towards the indigenous peoples.

In 1992 at the Second Congress of the National Council of Venezuelan Indians, in which Oldham participated, the Ministry of the Environment and Areas Under Special Administrative Regime were denounced by the indigenous delegates and calls made for the removal of the Special Regimes and provision of definitive collective land title. This was partially a consequence of complaints made by Piaroa delegates from the Cataniapo river valley who argued that that they had been fined for cutting fields without permits when they were not aware that permits were necessary and they had not been consulted with respect to the introduction of the regulations.

When Oldham submitted a report on this issue the response of some of the environmentalists at the Ministry of the Environment and the Autonomous Service for Environmental Development was revealing. The Piaroa who had complained were, Oldham was told, 'liars, who only want money to keep quiet'.

Thus we observe that those indigenous people who complain with regard to the introduction of regulations about their activities in their territories without consultation are treated as 'corrupt' whose complaints are motivated either by a desire for money or through support for political opponents of environmentalism.

Both perspectives on indigenous peoples such as the Piaroa, where they are regarded either as part of the fauna and as existing in a pristine and innocent state requiring protection, or as non-traditional and corrupted by the national society can be seen as marginalising or delegitimising indigenous participation in the determination of policy for the future of their territories.

This treatment of the indigenous peoples as part of the 'fauna' or as 'corrupted' has important consequences for the treatment of indigenous demands for their land-rights in protected areas. The typical environmentalist response to discussions regarding indigenous land-rights was that land-rights were unnecessary because the protected areas were equivalent or superior to land rights, or, that if the indigenous peoples received land-rights they would then sell the land.

Thus it can be argued that the combination of the treatment of the indigenous peoples as part of the fauna of a protected area, and therefore to be protected from the predatory elements in the national society, with the treatment of peoples such as the Piaroa, who are actively campaigning for their rights, as 'corrupt' and 'non-traditional' in both cases marginalises and devalues indigenous human agency and provides the opportunity for the affirmation of the superiority of the environmentalist and environmental policy.

However, the classification of the indigenous peoples as either 'innocents' or 'corrupt' and the corresponding paternalistic assertion of the superiority of environmental protected areas when compared with indigenous land title disguises the fragility of environmental protection legislation and policy implementation. The majority of the environmental protection legislation which establishes protected areas in the Venezuelan Amazon has been established by presidential decree which does not require congressional approval. President Carlos Andres Perez, currently awaiting trial on corruption charges, was noted for his enthusiasm in governing through Presidential decrees. These decrees can in fact be readily overturned by the Congress or by the incumbent President's successors. Thus environmental legislation, particularly with respect to protected areas established by presidential decree exhibits considerable fragility.

In December of 1993, the Democratic Action administration was replaced by a co-alition of minor parties under the leadership of President Rafael Caldera. As noted above it was during Caldera's Christian Democrat administration from 1969-1974 that the 'Conquest of the South' modernisation program was introduced. While the new administration's policy on the environment remains as yet unclear it seems likely that those economic interest groups at both national and regional level who favour the re-adoption of modernisation policy in the Amazon will regard Caldera's presidency as an important opportunity to reverse environmentalist policy in the Amazon (4).

The re-adoption of a policy of modernisation such as that proposed in 1993 by the Venezuelan Guayana Corporation with the title "Guayana of Today and Tomorrow" (CVG:1993), which constitutes an ambitious plan for road construction, mining, agricultural development, logging, industrialised fishing, rubber plantations and tourism throughout the Amazon, would represent a disaster for the environmentalists but critically for the indigenous peoples such as the Piaroa whose lives and cultural values are, as we have seen above, inextricably bound up with their land. The Piaroa and other indigenous peoples are already well aware of the negative consequences of the implementation of modernisation policy for indigenous peoples such as the Pemon, Karinya and Arawako of Estado Bolivar where the Venezuelan Guayana Corporation is politically powerful.

The Piaroa and indigenous organisations such as the National Council of Venezuelan Indians, which is led by a Piaroa, are increasingly arguing that land title for the indigenous peoples, environmental protection and sustainable development are not incompatible. Further, indigenous demands with respect to land rights reveal the inadequacy of the environmentalist attitude that if land title were granted the indigenous peoples would sell the land. Since 1992 the National Council of Venezuelan Indians has been

attempting to introduce a 'Ley Organica de Proteccion a las Etnias, Comunidades y Ciudadanos Indigenas' which would formalise the Regime of Exception for the indigenous peoples called for by the National Constitution. Article 15 of this proposed law states that areas where collective title is given to the indigenous peoples or communities the peoples and communities should not have the right to sell the land.

Thus, indigenous demands for land rights exclude the possibility of sales of land. The adoption of this position is based in the indigenous view, as we have seen in the case of the Piaroa, that land, life, and culture are not mutually exclusive. The granting of land title on the collective basis desired by the Piaroa and other indigenous peoples without the possibility of sales of lands is entirely compatible with their traditional conceptions of their land and interactions with the elements in their environment. Further, the provision of collective land title on the basis desired by the Piaroa would provide them with the collective security, which has been achieved among the Piaroa in Colombia, which would enable them to address the other serious economic, health and educational problems with which they are presently struggling.

For the environmentalists the granting of land title to the indigenous peoples in protected areas on a collective no-sale basis, while problematical would provide a more secure legal basis for the pursuit of environmental protection and sustainable development in these ecologically fragile areas.

This would however require that those environmentalists who currently advocate what is in effect environmental paternalism with respect to the indigenous peoples engage in dialogue with indigenous organisations and communities and take their arguments seriously. This process is already taking place in the Venezuelan Amazon through consultation efforts with the Piaroa in protected areas, the Ye'kwana to the south of Piaroa territory and with the Yanomami organisation SUYAO (United Yanomami Shabonos). During 1993 the Ministry of the Environment and SADA-AMAZONAS provided generous logistical support for the realisation of the First Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the Venezuelan Amazon and with whom Oldham and Masterman worked as advisors. The organisation resulting from the Congress, the Regional Organisation of Amazon Indigenous Peoples which represents the 19 indigenous peoples within the Amazon (5) is actively engaging in discussions with the Ministry of Environment and seeking to re-orient Ministry policies through consultation.

It remains to be seen whether increased communication will result in the modification of environmentalist attitudes and constructive collaboration which might result in recognition and support for the principal demand of the Piaroa and other indigenous peoples. That is, the right to their land and thus to their life and culture.

## Conclusion:

We began this paper with an analysis of traditional Piaroa conceptions of their land and territory. We then turned to an analysis of Venezuelan policy with respect to the indigenous peoples and specifically towards land rights. Here we argued that the Agrarian Reform law has in practice proved to be a deficient legal instrument. This was followed by an analysis of the consequences of the implementation of modernisation policy for the development of the Amazon during the 1970's 'Conquest of the South' program focusing specifically on the subsequent rancher-Piaroa dispute. We then turned to an analysis of the Piaroa's response to this conflict and observed that this provided the young Piaroa who had engaged in increased contact with the national society and emergent indigenous organisations with the justification for the creation of an autonomous pan-Piaroa organisation. The conclusions of the First Piaroa Congress with respect to land rights revealed the importance of Piaroa conceptions of their connectivity with the land and their demands with respect to the form that land title should take. This was seen to constitute a sophisticated argument demonstrating the increased intellectualisation of relations with the national society on the part of the Piaroa.

We then turned to the analysis of the emergence of environmental protection and sustainable development as the dominant development ideology in the Venezuelan Amazon particularly from the late 1980's onwards. Environmental protection legislation was seen to represent an important element for the protection of Piaroa territory. However, the attitudes of environmentalists towards indigenous peoples were problematical in the sense that the indigenous peoples tended to be classified by environmentalists as either part of the flora and fauna or, in the case where they complained with respect to what they viewed as draconian regulations, were characterised as corrupted by the national society. The effect of both characterisations was to

marginalise indigenous participation in influencing the regulations applied in their traditional territories. This phenomena of what was termed 'environmental paternalism' by some indigenous leaders extended to the negative treatment of indigenous demands for land rights and the argument that environmental protection legislation in protected areas was equivalent or superior to definitive land title for the indigenous peoples.

This argument was seen to be based on false premises when the nature of land title desired by the indigenous peoples and the legal fragility of environmental legislation were taken into account. Specifically environmental legislation based on presidential decree was seen to be particularly vulnerable to modification by subsequent administrations under pressure from economic interest groups seeking the re-introduction of modernisation policy. We then argued that indigenous land rights aspirations are not incompatible with the pursuit of environmental protection and sustainable development strategies, rather the granting of land title in protected areas could strengthen the legal foundations of environmental protection policies in the fragile environments inhabited by the indigenous peoples and a secure basis for the indigenous peoples to actively

participate in the protection of their territories and environment. Whether environmentalists would be willing to abandon present paternalistic attitudes as a consequence of increased communication and collaboration with the Piaroa and other indigenous peoples was seen to be an open question. While progress is being made in this area it remains the case that more rapid action is necessary given that pressure exists from economic interest groups who wish to revitalise modernisation policy within the Amazon which would have severe negative consequences for the Piaroa and other indigenous peoples.

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### Notes

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1. It had originally been anticipated that the Agrarian Reform program would take between 5-15 years in total to implement (Aldaria:1968). In effect the indigenous peoples were only incorporated with the Agrarian Reform program in practice following the 1974 agreement between the Ministry of the Justice responsible for indigenous affairs at that time and the National Agrarian Institute, (see Venezuela:1974).

2. Forestal Reserves were originally the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture however responsibility for the Sipapo Forestal Reserve appears to have been transferred to the Ministry of the Environment probably as a consequence of the creation of the Ministry of the Environment in 1976 to whom responsibilities for renewable natural resources were transferred, (see Venezuela: 1983).

3. The treatment of the Yanomami of the Upper Orinoco whose territory has been declared a Biosphere Reserve (Venezuela:1991) provide a particularly good example of this treatment in practice.

4. An article in the Caracas newspaper, El Globo, of the 10th of May 1993:4, provides details of a meeting between the pro-modernisation policy Governor of Amazonas and Rafael Caldera during his Presidential election campaign during which the Governor of Amazonas pressed for the re-introduction of the 'Conquest of the South' program.



5. The classification of 19 indigenous peoples within the Amazon was made by indigenous leaders and includes members of the Yeral (geral) of the Rio Negro who are not normally classified as indigenous for the purposes of anthropological analysis on the basis that geral is a lingua franca based on Portuguese and indigenous languages in the area.

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