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Social Sci Department/
Goodbye, Kranhacacore

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Since early 1972, (anthropologist)
Claudio Villas Boas had been camped
in the jungle of Brazil's interior.
Finally, on February 4, 1973, after
382 days of patient waiting, several
members of the Kranhacacore tribe
emerged from the surrounding foliage
to exchange gifts with him: beads
and machetés in return for bows and
arrows. His constant presence and
the gifts he had left hanging across
their trail had induced the elusive
Kranhacacore to overcome their fears
and approach him. (The beginning of
his efforts to contact this tribe was
documented in "The Tribe that Hides
from Man," shown nation-wide by
National Educational Television on
January 8, 1973.)

Claudio Villas Boas and his brother,
Orlando, have spent over 30 years in Brazil's Interior and
are considered by many to
be the world's leading authorities on
Native Americans. They have dedicated
their lives to the protection of
Brazil's Indians, their work earning

them nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971. As members of Brazil's National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), they have repeatedly made first contact with Indian groups living within the unexplored regions of Amazonia.

On February 5th, however, they announced their intention to quit FUNAI and leave the Xingu Indian Park. According to Dr. Shelton Davis, an anthropologist at Harvard University who is an authority on Brazilian Indian affairs, "the announced departure of Orlando and Claudio Villas Boas from the Xingu Indian Park and their retirement from FUNAI ^{are} were entirely predictable." "They are outraged by the malicious way in which the Brazilian Ministry of the Interior and FUNAI have refused to protect Indian land and territorial rights," he said.

"In late 1970, the life-long struggle of the Villas Boas brothers was literally undermined when the Brazilian Minister of the Interior announced that 8,213 square kilometers of the Xingu Park would be alienated and one section of the Xavantina-Cachimbo highway would cut across the northern section of the park.

"This land encroachment, flagrantly illegal under Brazil's own Federal Constitution," Davis continued, "uprooted several Indian groups and, through contact with the highway crews, generated a major 'flu' epidemic. Now FUNAI refuses to protect the Kranhacacores in their legitimate rights to property."

Davis then remarked with considerable bitterness that Brazil's present administration has completely abrogated the legal rights of Indians. He concludes that Orlando and Claudio Villas Boas intend to left their posts "so as not to be implicated in what can only be described as the systematic extermination -- yes, I mean genocide -- of Indian people in Brazil."

For most people, the word "genocide" conjures images of bloody massacres like the battle of Wounded Knee. For Indian peoples, however, loss of native lands invariably means loss of livelihood, the disappearance of a way of life and, ultimately, obliteration. If, therefore, any government permits encroachment on Indian land, it is, in fact, committing genocide.

As the Villas Boas brothers stated in a recent interview in the Brazilian paper Journal do Brazil: "If a reserve for the Kranhacacore is not immediately demarcated, and if a rigorous protection policy is not also developed... the destiny of the Kranhacacore, as of so many other Indian nations, will be their ultimate destruction and disappearance."

The situation in Brazil must be bad indeed if people as patient as the Villas Boas brothers are finally giving up.

Sally Bates

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