Chapter 10
Indigenous Networks and Evangelical Frontiers: Problems with Governance and Ethics in Cases of 'Voluntary Isolation' in Contemporary Amazonia

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Abstract The periodic emergence of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation in Amazonia have given rise to sensational media reports and heated academic debate. In this chapter we describe briefly the historical and contemporary relations between indigenous peoples in and out of isolation in the Guiana Shield region of North-eastern South America and discuss the role of indigenous missionaries in histories of contact. After considering these facts in relation to some of the general debates about isolated peoples and policy, we assess the ethical dimensions of the question of emergence from isolation.

10.1 Introduction: Hunter-Gatherers, Governance and History

In many countries it is far from taken for granted that the rights and responsibilities of citizenship apply also to hunter-gatherers, who tend at best to be wards of the state. The ways in which states (together with various para-state actors such as non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations) define and carry out their responsibilities towards their citizens are important aspects of governance. Yet although states often deny indigenous peoples in general, and hunter-gatherers in particular, full recognition as citizens, this has not exempted such peoples from

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being the object of governmental interventions in the name of their protection or improvement (Li 2007). James Scott (2009) has argued that such peoples actively choose to live beyond the reach of the state and that the remote geographical areas in which they dwell lend themselves to the practice of this 'art of not being governed'. Scott's thesis ranges widely across Southeast Asia and deeply through historical time. We shall take a similar albeit more modest approach to the peoples of Amazonia, who were described by Clastres (2011) as 'societies against the state' in the classic essay that inspired Scott's study. Confining our argument to a part of this region, we shall also focus on a single set of phenomena: the dynamics of voluntary isolation and emergence and the associated interventions of state and civil society actors. We refer to the discourses surrounding these interventions as discourses of governance, that is, as discourses expressing modes of governing, for, although they employ humanitarian language, they are grounded in assumptions of paternalistic responsibility and knowledge-power relations.

Indigenous peoples' marginal relationship with citizenship can be understood in light of their widespread treatment as 'outside history', since historical narratives have tended to be dominated by the perspective of states. The 'historical turn' that took place in anthropology from the early 1980s onwards, marked with the publication of seminal texts such as Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People without History* (1982) and Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* (1983)*,* ensured that indigenous peoples could no longer be understood as 'lacking' history or as existing outside it. Much of the most interesting subsequent work in lowland South American ethnology focused on debates about indigenous historicity and the question of what historical change looked like from an Amerindian perspective (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007; Hill 1988; Santos-Granero and Hill 2002; Whitehead 2003). Hunter-gatherers are, nonetheless, still often discussed as 'survivals' of humans' evolutionary past, if not necessarily wholly representative of prehistoric societies then at least giving clues to some aspects of them. However, already in his contribution to the *Man the Hunter* volume of 1968, Donald Lathrap noted that one could hardly take such a view when considering the remaining Amazonian hunter-gatherers, who live in the relatively marginal environments in the zones between the *várzea* floodplains. There was already strong evidence that the ancestors of most if not all such populations had, in the near or more distant past, left the rich alluvial soils of the *várzea*, fleeing the disease and violence brought by other Amerindian groups or by the European conquerors (Lathrap 1968). Lathrap's view has since been supported by further archaeological research (*e.g.,* Heckenberger 2009; Roosevelt 1994). Nevertheless, recognition of Amerindian peoples as subjects with historical agency, fully involved participants in historical processes remains restricted to narrow academic circles. Lowland South American native peoples, particularly those who live a nomadic lifestyle, are still widely considered as living outside of time and modernity.

In this chapter we discuss the question of Amerindian communities who are presented as 'isolated', or as living in 'voluntary isolation' in Lowland South America. Such peoples are often hunter-gatherers, in the narrower sense of foraging peoples who have no domesticated plants or animals except for dogs (Lee and Daly 1999: 3). But the majority are swidden horticulturalists for whom hunting, fishing and gathering are nevertheless also culturally and economically central activities to

an equal if not greater extent than horticulture (*cf.* Lathrap 1968: 25; Rival 1999: 78–9). Native Amazonian populations who now live in 'voluntary isolation' are generally understood as communities which, at a certain time in their history, have made the conscious decision to break existing bonds with neighbouring groups and to retreat to deeper recesses of the rainforest, away from large rivers, to live in temporary villages which can be abandoned every few days. High mobility and autonomy can come to support one another, as peoples in voluntary isolation move through a living environment using paths which carry seasonal and ritual significance, and are suffused with anthropogenic biodiversity (Jara 1996; Politis 1996; Rival 2002). It is extremely difficult to attach numbers to a population which is by definition invisible and indeed surveys of nomadic peoples tend to be inappropriately designed and inaccurate (Randall 2015). Estimates of the number of isolated groups range from around 50 for the whole of Amazonia (Walker and Hill 2015) to 97 registered entries of such groups with the General Coordination of Isolated and Recently Contacted Indians (CGIIRC) in Brazil alone (FUNAI 2015; see also Corry 2015).[1]

The existence of people living in 'voluntary isolation' represents one of the last exotic frontiers of the Western imagination, and sightings of such peoples trigger worldwide media attention (AP 2013; BBC 2012; The Guardian 2015; The Telegraph 2015). It also poses a challenge to normative ethical guidelines and human rights principles. Humanitarian discourses, both secular and faith-based, stress empathy and suffering, but the hopes and desires of isolated peoples remain a matter of guesswork. A number of different sets of actors with differing opinions vie for the privilege of speaking on their behalf, but who, if anyone, is the most legitimate representative to voice their perspectives? This question is especially challenging given that, as the remainder of this chapter will illustrate, their situations vary greatly from case to case.

10.2   Voluntary Isolation: Sensation and Debate

It is clear from the periodic mainstream reports of encounters between peoples described as 'isolated' and other neighbouring indigenous groups, extractive industry workers or state agencies, that their isolation is far from absolute or permanent, and that they are affected by various forms of global change in profound ways. For example, The Mashco-Piro's periodic appearances in recent years in Peru have been the subject of particularly fervent international media attention, (*e.g.,* AP 2013; BBC 2012; The Guardian 2015; The Telegraph 2015). One reason for the high level of media coverage was the high quality of the images that were circulated, as the BBC coverage points out. Much recent debate on isolated peoples has centred upon the question of whether or not it is desirable for authorities to orchestrate controlled

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[1] For an overview of the issues surrounding isolated peoples in lowland South America from a human rights perspective, see http://www.iwgia.org/culture-and-identity/isolated-indigenous-peoples.

contact, ostensibly for the benefit of the peoples concerned (Walker and Hill 2015), or whether it is preferable to leave them alone and to protect their territory from outside influences (Bodley 2015; Corry 2015; Feather 2015; Plotkin 2015; Torres 2015). In these debates, morality in general and humanitarian reason in particular are invoked to justify either precipitating contact or preserving isolation. The peoples in question are often portrayed as physically and mentally fragile. Discussions tend to focus on specific cases and their sensational nature often eclipses broader political contexts, longer term historical change, or the dynamics of regional economic systems. This tendency is more marked in the case of arguments in favour of precipitating contact. Blame for the tragic outcomes to which contact situations have tended to lead (including illness, physical violence and death) tends to be quickly dealt out, without always giving due consideration to the underlying causes of such occurrences. It is indeed difficult to separate proximate from ultimate causes. Multiple factors are involved, including the continued expansion of extractive industries (both informal and formal) and infrastructure developments with an impact that reaches into all parts of Amazonia, as well as clandestine activities, particularly gold prospecting and drug smuggling (Pringle 2015). An exhaustive and detailed comparison of cases in their full variety would require an entire book, but to illustrate the complexity of the issues at stake, let us take one example. Laura Rival discusses the controversy surrounding the massacre of indigenous people who were in voluntary isolation and under state protection by a group of Huaorani men, which took place on March 30th, 2013. She writes,

> Seven of these Huaorani men…are in custody awaiting trial for genocide, which is a concept they neither knew nor even now understand. Those who campaign for the arrest and incarceration of these men are still debating against those who argue that indigenous people cannot be thrown in jail, especially the Huaorani, who are [themselves] indigenous citizens of 'recent contact', hence with limited knowledge of national norms and laws… Some actors…stress that the recent killings were not caused by logging or other extractive economic activities, but, instead, by timeless cultural framings of blood revenge, which will not be put to rest without religious or legal intervention and further integration…[others emphasise] how Huaorani communities have adapted to the specifics of economic development in the Ecuadorian Amazon and, most especially, to the apparently unlimited material wealth of oil companies…the intent of these actors has been to point to the genuine, yet incomplete, transformation that 'being of recent contact' represents…[they argue that] far from having remained authentic hunters and warriors, they have instead become lawless terrorists who must be brought under control and held accountable for their actions (Rival 2015: 276–7).

This case illustrates how the interplay of isolated and non-isolated indigenous peoples, or those more or less 'recently contacted', with the materiality of 'development' is enlisted in the discourses of different actors with specific agendas for control and 'improvement'.

Another important factor influencing the dynamics of emergence and isolation is the complexity and contradictory pressures of governance. For example, those familiar with indigenous and environmental politics in the Brazilian Amazon are well aware that the national foundation for indigenous peoples (FUNAI) suffers from chronic underfunding and is under sustained political attack from the

agricultural lobby, the '*ruralistas*'. This constitutes part of a long history of confrontation between those who would support the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain their livelihoods and those who support the development of Brazil's interior through large scale agriculture. FUNAI has become weakened to the extent that it now struggles to cope with the range of threats to native Amazonians, whether isolated or not (Globo 2015; Pringle 2015); neighbouring countries like Peru suffer from a similar lack of resources (Lawler 2015: 1075).

Stories of first encounters and contacts are often tragic and highly emotive, but the contacted peoples in question are frequently portrayed as silent victims with little agency. This reinforces the feeling that they represent something larger than their historical fate, a humanitarian trope in which they represent a dying fragment of humankind. It is notable that Walker and Hill, who have received considerable criticism for their position expressed in a recent article in *Science* (Walker and Hill 2015; cf. discussion in Bodley 2015; Corry 2015; Feather 2015; Hill 2015) take a relatively unsentimental approach to their argument. They present themselves as practical and well informed about the realities of contact:

> The most important lesson learned from these experiences is that mortality can be reduced to near zero if the contact team is prepared to provide sustained, around-the-clock medical treatment, as well as food. A well-designed contact can be quite safe, compared to the disastrous outcomes from accidental contacts. But safe contact requires a qualified team of cultural translators and health care professionals that is committed to staying on site for more than a year (Walker and Hill 2015: 1061).

The authors correctly understand that a very high level of commitment and responsibility on the part of exceptionally well trained, funded and equipped professionals would be necessary to make orchestrated contacts as harmless and viable as possible, rather than causing epidemics and rapid cultural loss. They also attempt to show respect for the intellectual capacities and agency of the isolated peoples, questioning the assumption behind current policies to maintain such peoples' voluntary isolation, 'that they would choose isolation if they had full information (i.e., if they were aware that contact would not lead to massacre and enslavement)' (Walker and Hill 2015: 1061). However, one must question the implicit assertion that the authors, or other scientists, are in possession of 'full information', whatever that may be. Their strategy of argumentation, vaunting the capacities of modern technology and forms of organisation and planning to save populations living in childlike innocence and ignorance (though carrying the potential for improvement) is identical to that of missionaries, who have been perhaps the principle agent of deliberately orchestrated contact or 'pacification' of isolated peoples in South America since the sixteenth century, and have continued to fulfil this role since states relinquished it in the 1980s. Furthermore, Walker and Hill's orientation is in direct continuity with nineteenth century colonialism and with the discourses of improvement, characteristic of international development policy (Li 2007; Rist 2014).

Even if one takes an interventionist stance on the ethical debate about respecting autonomy (Scoccia 1990), one must also be careful about the assumptions made: the idea of 'full information' is a very difficult one to sustain on the Amazonian frontier (and we leave aside here the problem of how information or knowledge is

culturally mediated and dependent on context and position). The uncertainties of contact are as great, if not greater, than the uncertainties of isolation. If there is a worsening lack of resources for the protection of both isolated and non-isolated indigenous people in the face of growing pressure from multiple quarters, the same problems apply to the perilous endeavour of precipitated contact. So, whether or not one subscribes to the modernist agenda of salvation and improvement, it is only in an ideal world that national agencies such as Brazil's FUNAI would be able to choose between keeping the territories of isolated peoples thoroughly intact and free from the incursions of outsiders or carrying out perfectly orchestrated 'controlled' contacts, and maintaining the emerging peoples in legally sanctioned 'controlled' isolation for a sustained period, as FUNAI itself has been attempting to do for the Zo'é of northern Pará for some time (Gallois 1997). Unfortunately we do not live in such a world and, for better or worse, institutional control is necessarily limited by economic and political pressures.

Another fundamental ethical question that must apply to the issue of intervention is that of prior and informed consent. It is of course normally impossible to document the perspectives of isolated peoples, when their occasional emergences tend to be sporadic and fleeting. However, the avoidance of contact, together with signs such as spears or arrows placed on paths (Hill 2015), not to mention acts of hostility, can be taken as an expression of a rejection of contact with neighbouring peoples. On the other hand, it is possible ethnographically and historically to document cases of emergence from isolation. The 'post-contact' period can be very protracted, as is the case of the Akuriyo, with whom we have worked, whose present situation, decades after their emergence from isolation, remains almost wholly defined by this event. The Akuriyo case underlines that, as Torres (2015) has pointed out, great attention should be paid to the neighbours of isolated peoples. His reason for underlining this fact is principally that it is the neighbours of isolated peoples, whom the latter first encounter or approach when they choose to come out of isolation. This seems to apply to a wide range of cases, including the Akuriyo, who used to appear in Trio and Wayana gardens and villages in search of metal goods and other tools and items before they were contacted by missionaries. The example of the Huaorani introduced above is a case in point.

Torres is mainly concerned with the increasing number of cases in Western Amazonia of isolated peoples periodically emerging from the forest in a context of increasing pressure on their territories which, though to a certain extent protected by law as officially demarcated indigenous areas, are in fact subject to incursions and encroachments of a variety of sorts, including extractive industries on both large and small scales, both legally sanctioned and clandestine, and illegal activities such as drug smuggling. Indeed most of the debate on the subject of isolated peoples has seemed to share two common, tacit assumptions: that isolated peoples emerge from, but do not return to, isolation, and that their emergence is inevitably driven by the global momentum of material 'progress', the expansion of the world system. As we shall now see, from our case studies from the Guiana region, there are other factors at play, and these do not always lead to emergence from isolation. Indeed, the

response of some peoples to changing relations with the outside world can be quite the opposite.

10.3   Isolation and Contact in Guiana

In the eastern part of Amazonia and the Guianas, the extractive industrial activities, especially mineral extraction (notably gold and diamonds) that often put pressure on the territories of isolated peoples are certainly taking place. But here, unlike some other areas, small scale mining is the most significant and is having the greatest direct impact. The impact of small-scale mining is often hard to measure on a regional scale, but initiatives such as Amazon Conservation Team's mapping programme show the scale and distribution of goldmining, which has expanded rapidly over the last 10–15 years (ACT 2015). Even so, in the borderlands of eastern Guiana, extractive industry's expansion seems to play a smaller role in the emergence of isolated peoples than do certain initiatives taken by neighbouring indigenous groups. These initiatives take the form of evangelical contact expeditions, which received their initial impetus from outsiders – North American missionaries – but which have taken on a momentum of their own, and are expressions of native Christianity – a widespread religious phenomenon with its own distinctive features, many of which have been the subject of ground-breaking ethnographic studies in recent years (Vilaça and Wright 2009). Here it is common for indigenous missionaries actively to seek out neighbouring isolated peoples in order to 'civilise' them and to 'save' them.

In this section we shall outline how certain external interventions that have taken place over the last half century or more in Guiana brought about profound changes in interethnic relations. We will then examine more closely some of the specific events that occurred in relation to contemporary debates about isolated peoples. We will draw attention to two movements: a deliberately orchestrated concentration of previously dispersed populations into large permanent villages located on large rivers, and a later dispersal of the populations of these villages onto small creeks or interfluvial regions.

The Guiana Shield region of Northeastern South America, overlapping with Amazonia, includes one of the largest uninterrupted areas of intact rainforest in the world. It is home to various indigenous groups, most of whom speak Carib languages, while a small number speak Arawakan or Tupi languages. We choose to focus on the border regions between Suriname, Guyana, French Guiana and Brazil, leaving aside the western part of Guiana which extends across the savannah area shared by Brazil and Venezuela, and as far as the Rio Negro.

It is worth noting that a great many of the isolated peoples of Amazonia -or 'greater Amazonia', if we are to include the whole of Guiana – inhabit such border regions. National borders in South America are often situated in geographically remote areas, following watersheds or river systems far from urban centres. Many indigenous groups were indeed first documented and contacted during expeditions

by boundary commissions, such as those of Euclides da Cunha and General Rondôn for Brazil (Hecht 2013) and Robert Schomburgk for what was at the time British Guiana (Rivière 2006). Yet at the same time they are subject to particular kinds of political claims, not only on an international level, but perhaps more importantly on a national level. For example, the Brazilian military sought to argue for the necessity of establishing a presence in these remote areas in order to protect the borders from foreign incursions (Hemming 2003).

States have, throughout their history, aimed to regularise the situation of all of the peoples living within their territories, and the history of the bureaucratic state is also a history of homogenisation, of cultural and linguistic assimilation as the state extends its reach throughout territories by means of the creation of infrastructure and services, and by counting and monitoring its citizens (Dean 2010). As James Ferguson's (1990) well known study shows, all kinds of development projects can serve as catalysts for the extension of the reach of the state, and are often more successful in this than in achieving their declared aims. Citizenship itself, indeed, can be understood as a set of privileges granted in return for participation in this system of bureaucratic control. At the time of their constitution as independent states in the early nineteenth century, Latin American countries gave their citizens a far greater freedom of movement between the various states of the continent (compared to Europe), due to the diplomatic influence of the merchant class in relation to the newly established regimes; however citizenship did not extend to the native Amerindian populations until much later (Acosta Arcarazo 2015). Later attempts to transform native peoples into citizens were directly connected to the adoption of a paternalistic, humanitarian attitude towards them, beginning in Brazil with the creation of the Indian Protection Society (SPI) in 1910 (ISA n.d.), and entering a new phase of development with the creation of the Xingú National Park in 1961 as a result of the activism of the Villas Boas brothers (Hemming 2003). However, the subsequent proliferation of protected areas for indigenous people came to be seen as an affront by certain factions of the establishment; the continued calls for the 'civilisation' or 'assimilation' of native peoples echo those made in response to frontier conflicts in the early twentieth century (ISA n.d.). In Brazil, the project of assimilation gave rise to the status of wardship, whereby native peoples were classified as 'relatively incapable' and thus placed under the tutelage of the National Indian Foundation, FUNAI (French 2014). In French Guiana, where full citizenship is extended to native peoples without special provision for their indigenous status, another complex set of problems is generated (Mathieu et al. 2014).

From the 1950s, the native peoples of the region were systematically contacted, mostly by privately funded missionary organisations, to persuade them to move to large villages or mission stations. This effort took place either at the instigation of the state or with its encouragement and logistical aid. The former was the case in Brazil, where a series of mission stations called *trinômios* were set up, combining the presence of the air force, the missionaries and the Amerindians themselves to establish a 'civilised' and 'civilising' presence in what were viewed as strategic border areas (Hemming 2003). Meanwhile in Suriname, a Protestant missionary organisation called 'Door to Life' obtained the approval of the government to create

mission stations in the interior in 1959; the government, seeing this as an opportunity to initiate the development of the remote southern region of the country, gave logistical support for the cutting of airstrips (Conley 2000).

At the same time, a separate missionary organisation, the 'Unevangelized Fields Mission' (UFM), carried out an operation which was to have wide reaching consequences across the region. When they arrived among the Waiwai, the latter were a small group whose first ethnographer, Nils Fock, considered them the product of a continual 'ever-repeated process of tribal admixture and division' (Fock 1963: 9), whose very name appears to derive from the neighbouring Wapishana's term for tapioca, in reference to their light skin (Fock 1963: 5). However, Fock does not discuss the role of evangelical Christianity in the process of 'tribal admixture' which was in the ascendant from the 1950s onwards. The Waiwai, following their conversion, enthusiastically embraced the missionaries' project of bringing God's word to other groups. But for them, this was also a project of social expansion through the domestication of other Amerindians, leading to their transformation into Waiwai through intermarriage and linguistic and cultural assimilation (Howard 2001).

Some Waiwai also became involved in the missionisation of the Trio, and as our Trio informants told us, the missionary Claude Leavitt, of UFM, brought Waiwai men with him when he came to work among the Trio in the early 1960s. To help establish the villages which were to act as centres of attraction and permanent settlement for large numbers of Amerindians 'becoming' Trio, Waiwai men built the first collective houses, modelled after their own traditional roundhouses, the *müimó* (Yde 1965: 152), since Trio did not traditionally have collective houses. The roundhouses themselves are in fact associated with collective feasts in which people from outside the village play a vital role, and during the building of the *müimó* young men from outside the village dance with the new central pole before putting it in place (Fock 1963: 169; Rivière 1984: 85). Their construction in Trio villages can be seen as a symbolic and ritual marker of the Trio's conversion, but also as a reminder that this was less of a conversion to Christianity in the Western evangelical sense and more of a conversion to a new spatial and ontological orientation towards alterity.

In turn, converted Trio people carried out similar activities of attraction and assimilation, so that the Trio identity of today is in fact composed of a number of different historical groups (*jana*). However, while most of these groups seem to have been in sustained mutual contact before the arrival of missionaries, certain groups remained isolated in the forest, and indeed to this day some peoples still live in a state of voluntary isolation in the region. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Trio people worked with missionaries to contact and sedentarise one such isolated group, whom they referred to as the Wajarikure. These hunter-gatherers later came to be known as the Akuriyo, after their own name for one of their sub-groups. Based on the missionaries' own reports from the field and on the narratives of Trio and Akuriyo people who were involved, we have described in detail elsewhere how this healthy group of people who had chosen to live in isolation succumbed to disease, anxiety and shock following contact, and how the few survivors came to remain among the Trio, mostly in the village of Tëpu on the upper Tapanahony river (Grotti

and Brightman 2010, 2016). The remaining Akuriyo, though they have been 'domesticated' by the Trio, have not been fully assimilated by them. They continue to aspire to become Trio themselves, but they maintain a distinctive social and bodily identity which is explicitly linked to their status as 'proper' hunter-gatherers; that is to say, who do not practice, or know how to practise, agriculture. The Trio speak disparagingly, and the Akuriyo with self-deprecation, about how the latter used to rely on *napy* potatoes as a staple instead of manioc.

In 2011 we learned from a nurse that some Trio missionaries from Tëpu in Suriname had visited a newly contacted group across the border in Brazil. The nurse showed us a video that had been taken by the Trio missionaries using mobile telephones, and which showed a boy whom they had brought to their village. Descriptions of the people, together with the video footage, led us to understand that this was another group of Zo'é, and this was confirmed subsequently as we investigated further. The Trio missionaries wanted to bring 'the good news' of Jesus Christ to the people who they said were living in darkness, ignorance and misery in the forest. Their desire to help echoed the humanitarian rhetoric of advocates of 'controlled contact'. However the Zo'é continue to be protected by FUNAI and have had only limited encounters with missionaries.

Still, intermittent stories of attempts by Trio and Waiwai missionaries to contact isolated peoples circulate in the Guiana region. This is in the context of an evangelical resurgence across Guiana: 'bible conferences' are held regularly every couple of years, during which hundreds of people from different ethnic groups travel to remote villages accessible only by days of trekking and river travel in shallow waters using dugout canoes, or by light aircraft. At these 'conferences', indigenous pastors preach for extended periods and the pilgrims sing repetitive hymns for hours on end. There is a powerful Durkheimian 'collective effervescence' as these different peoples, from groups who were enemies not long ago, enter a collective trance-like state. This 'brotherhood in Christ' is the ecstatic fellow feeling, called *sasame wehto* by the Trio, that native missionaries want isolated groups to feel, and they pity them for not yet having known it. It is clear from our Trio friends' accounts of them that these 'bible conferences' have become nodes in space and time for invigorating a regional network and fomenting will to go out and seek more 'brothers'.

Here, some indigenous groups have come to believe that they have a moral duty to continue the work of evangelisation begun by foreign missionaries. Moreover they have 'amerindianised' this process of evangelisation, so that it becomes assimilated to native ideas of predation and domestication, and the expansion of consanguineal ties.

10.4 Minimalist Societies vs. Networks of Relations

As Ribeiro and de Queiroz point out (2015), a reappraisal of the history of the eastern Guiana region over the last six decades shows that there have been two symmetrical movements: an earlier movement of concentration of peoples into mission

villages, and a later movement of dispersal into smaller settlements. In relation to the previous ethnography of the region, it is worth considering the relationship between these two broad movements and modes of representation of the region's characteristic forms of social organisation and patterns of interethnic relations. Some of the first systematic professional ethnographic studies of the region, most notably those of Rivière (1969) and Overing (1975), have been interpreted as emphasising the 'atomistic' nature of Guianan societies. Rivière in particular attached importance to a regional preference for 'settlement endogamy'. Contributors to *Redes de Relações nas Guianas (*Gallois 2005), on the other hand, emphasise the networks of trade and interethnic (or inter-settlement) feasting that are evident not only in later ethnographic studies (Barbosa 2002; Grotti 2010, 2013) but also in ethnohistorical material (Butt Colson 1973; Dreyfus 1992). It is our view that the reading of the regional literature became unnecessarily polarised, perhaps due in part to the influence of Viveiros de Castro's characterisation of Guianan societies, based on his portrayal of the regional social model, described in Rivière's *Individual and Society* (1984), as 'minimalist' (Viveiros de Castro 1996). Taken out of the comparativist context for which it was originally intended, and considered against the ethnographic record, this label appears rather reductive.

Nonetheless, in the debate that followed the publication of *Redes* (Gallois 2005), it was suggested that the different representations of Guianan societies reflected not only theoretical predispositions, but also historical changes (Rivière et al. 2007). Certainly Trio people themselves told us, indeed with great emphasis, that they had experienced an important rupture in their own history when they decided to leave the interfluvial areas in which they used to dwell in relative isolation, although frequently engaging in warfare against other groups, choosing instead to live in mission stations cheek by jowl with affine and former enemies. Akuriyo hunter-gatherers, to an even greater extent, experienced a radical and traumatic rupture when they themselves took the same path, albeit perhaps less willingly.

The association between isolation and warfare on one hand, and peacefulness and contact on the other, should not be taken uncritically. The Trio and Akuriyo are not the only ones to make this dual opposition explicit. There is a long history of Western or European representations of Amerindians as either 'peaceful' or 'wild', and indeed early descriptions of Arawakan and Carib speaking peoples are classic examples (Whitehead 2002). Groups that had chosen to eschew peaceful collaboration with the colonial invaders were described as 'wild' or '*bravos*', and the '*bravos*' versus '*mansos*' ('tame') dichotomy served as a shorthand for categorising vast swathes of the indigenous population. The early ethnographers of the Guiana region such as Coudreau (1887) and Schomburgk (1845) resorted to such categories, and as Niels Fock points out (somewhat admiringly), Protasio Frikel, the Franciscan missionary and ethnographer who founded the Trio village of Missão in a strategic location close to the Surinamese border, had developed theories about the differences between these 'peaceful' and 'wild' indians (Fock 1963).

This crude typology goes back to the earliest colonial period and is repeated today in the discourses of parties wholly unsympathetic to indigenous rights, such as *ruralistas*, the powerful Brazilian agricultural lobby that campaigns – with

growing success – for the revision of the existing mechanisms, such as indigenous reserves, for protecting native peoples' rights and livelihoods (see above). In a certain sense, it is also repeated by some of the humanitarian narratives that treat isolated peoples as needy, lacking, and inevitably destined to be 'pacified' one day, for good or ill, when they are at last caught up in the unstoppable march of history and progress.

In a direct empirical challenge to this linear and teleological view of change, it is well known that native Amazonians periodically choose to go into isolation. The recent cases of dispersal in the Guianas are examples of history repeating itself. Indeed many peoples came to the Guiana Highlands in order to isolate themselves from the impact of colonialism, as is well documented for the Wayãpi (Gallois 1986). As Lévi-Strauss foresaw in his work on the Nambikwara, Amazonian archaeology has gathered evidence that many of the region's present population were remnants of less dispersed and often more differentiated social formations (Heckenberger 2009).

The phrase 'voluntary isolation', now routinely employed by Amazonian ethnologists, expresses the fact that isolated peoples are pursuing a relational strategy, based on a deliberate choice which was often a reaction to experiences of trauma or exploitation – epidemics or enslavement, for example during the rubber boom (Virtanen 2010). Trio people speak about the historical moment of their emergence from isolation as a deliberate choice on their part: they chose to come out of the forest and live on the large rivers or on the savannah, in sustained contact with affines and former enemies. But they were, on the whole, not truly isolated before the arrival of missionaries; many of the various sub-groups were already in the habit of engaging with each other periodically (in more or less peaceful ways), and used to trade with Maroons downriver (Rivière 1969).

The Akuriyo on the other hand do not present their emergence from isolation as having been a choice of their own – as indeed it was not. The Akuriyo represent two patterns of inter-group relation which one could choose to describe without reference to global change. From the perspective of a relatively short timescale of two or three generations, they represent a pattern typical of hunter-gatherers who have been enslaved or otherwise placed in a subordinate and dependent position in relation to neighbouring peoples. Similar cases following this pattern can be found elsewhere in Amazonia, such as the Maku (Silverwood-Cope 1972), and in other regions, for instance in Africa (Turnbull 1966). Meanwhile, from the perspective of a much longer timescale, the Akuriyo show evidence of being a people who at a certain point in their history became solely hunter-gatherers, in the sense that they gave up agriculture to adopt a more mobile way of life. Their language is close to Kali'na, the 'true Caribs', a once powerful group whose territories lie along the coast from Venezuela to Brazil, and they continued to have a cultural memory of manioc production when they were contacted (Jara 1996).

However, both processes are better understood with reference to global change. The Akuriyo are an example of part of the fragmentation and reduction in scale of societies that took place after the European conquest. Their isolation and loss of agriculture should be seen as the result (whether direct or indirect) of the first great

wave of globalisation that took place following Colombus' arrival in the Americas in 1492. And on a shorter timescale, the contact and emergence of the Akuriyo and their subjection to the Trio took place as a result of the activities of American evangelical missionaries in the region, from the 1940s onwards.

10.5   Conclusion

We suggest that the Guianas case presents a more complex ethical problem than other areas in which the pressures for peoples to emerge from isolation are more clearly related to resource extraction. When native peoples have incorporated evangelical ideologies of contact into their own systems of thought and reconciled them with their own traditions, a conundrum is presented for the anthropologists whose profession is grounded in the respect for other cultural practices and who understands that traditions are not static but are historical phenomena, responding and changing with cultural interactions through time. Anthropologists have often condemned Western missionaries for interfering with native practices and cosmologies, but here is a new indigenous Amazonian tradition of interfering in ways which are also recognised, and, it seems, sometimes even welcomed by the objects of their interventions. Should one advocate non-intervention in indigenous affairs, allowing Trio and Waiwai missionaries to domesticate and convert isolated communities such as the Zo'é and the Akuriyo as they wish? Or should anthropologists urge states to intervene to prevent such activities (as indeed many South American anthropologists already do)?

These questions arguably test the limits of the cultural relativism which is the mainstay of social and cultural anthropological method. But given the unique insights that anthropologists can bring to these questions, we suggest that it is important to take a position. We have already given reasons for our disagreement with the arguments in favour of controlled 'scientific' initiatives to bring peoples out of isolation, and the same arguments apply to indigenous missionaries. States have a moral responsibility to protect their citizens, and there is much to say in favour of special rights for indigenous peoples, which should include the right to self-determination. Expansive evangelical movements impinge on the right to autonomy that isolated peoples have shown that they wish to exercise, and it is the responsibility of states to protect isolated peoples from missionaries as well as from extractive industry and overzealous scientists. There are many practical challenges to an agenda of protection, just as there are practical challenges to enacting policies of 'controlled contact': rather than states, it is missionaries and camera crews that mobilise the most resources to reach isolated peoples (Shepard 2014), and different state agencies often have agendas that are in conflict with one another. Nonetheless, if the voices or actions of anthropologists can influence matters even in a small way, we advocate promoting a principle of respect and tolerance for the alternative lifeways that specific peoples may choose.

Asking states to protect and respect the autonomy of peoples who have chosen to disengage with the frontier of material progress and, by extension, with the state itself, may raise a paradox. If these are 'societies against the state', why should states respect them? In practice, states get around this paradox by characterising them as 'relatively incapable'. For anthropologists this is troubling, perhaps even more so than the notion that the enlightenment values of humanitarian reason should sometimes be allowed to trump our own tradition of cultural relativism. The solution may lie in some other enlightenment values such as freedom and tolerance, from which our own cultural relativism also in fact derives. Voluntary isolation (which as we have seen is rarely if ever absolute or permanent) should be seen as belonging to a wider category of alternative livelihoods, livelihoods which are chosen by actors who are fully aware of the dominant discourses and agendas of developmentalism and progress. A growing number of anthropologists has been studying and actively engaging with social movements that seek to create and build spaces for such alternative lifeways, in the name of cultural autonomy, holistic wellbeing and social and environmental sustainability (Escobar 2008). These movements rarely pose genuine existential challenges to the state, but they do raise challenges for existing models of governance, and they demand new understandings of the nature of citizenship.

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