

LES YANOMAMĪ, SONT-ILS LIBRES ?
LES UTOPIES AMAZONIENNES, UNE CRITIQUE.

A LOOK AT FRENCH ANARCHIST ANTHROPOLOGY

The issue of human freedom has not got an obvious place in anthropology.¹ Although it can be suggested that a concern to discover the constraints on free will underlies much of anthropological study (e.g. Sperber 1975 p.x.), the discussion of liberty itself has rarely been explicit. The purpose of this paper is not to review the concept of freedom as it relates to ethnology but rather to demonstrate how a polemic concerning human liberty based on the political convictions of various anthropologists both underlies and determines the way they present ethnographic facts.

The 'anarchist' anthropology that I attempt to reveal here consists of the substantial contributions to the ethnological literature on lowland South American societies made by two Frenchmen, Jacques Lizot and the late Pierre Clastres. It will be suggested that the ideological inclinations of these two authors have led them to conclusions that cannot be substantiated given our present knowledge of the societies they have studied. In arguing this case the close parallels between Lizot and Clastres' ethnology and anarchist philosophy will be exposed, and it will be made clear why, even though these 'anarchists' are ultimately interested in the issue of human political freedom, the current polarization in anthropology between mentalist and materialist approaches (between structuralists, symbolists,

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culturalists and their opposition the cultural materialists, ecologists and Marxists) has led them to focus their attentions on the problem of freedom from economic constraint.

Clastres (1978) and after him Lizot (1978a) have asked: 'What ethnology is there in Marxism?', and again 'What Marxism is there in ethnology?'; and it will be to the conclusions that Lizot draws in this and other publications concerning the Yanomami that I shall come in the end. But before I discuss these Amerindians I must pose two equally important questions, namely: 'What ethnology is there in Anarchism?', and secondly 'What Anarchism is there in ethnology?'

The anarchists' primary concern has, of course, not been with the interpretation of the past or of distant societies but rather with rebellion in the immediate present and the creation of a just and free society of the future. Nevertheless there is a timeless almost mythical quality to their visions of the future that allows us to see in them a strong reflection of their belief in human nature and their conception of human history, not only as it relates to the past but also to the primitive societies of the present. We cannot obviously talk of a single, coherent vision of the just society shared by all who have called themselves anarchists and those others whom anarchists have seen as sharing their political convictions, such as Godwin, Tolstoy, Winstanley, Lao Tzu, Gandhi and others (see especially Woodcock 1962 Chapter 2); indeed some have argued that it is this very lack of dogma in anarchist theory that has given it its vigour and continuity. Nevertheless it is possible to point out various characteristics that most anarchists hold to be integral to the creation of the society of tomorrow.

In an anarchist society of the future no human has the authority to command another; each individual is considered sovereign to do with his life as he will so long as he injure no other. There shall be no political hierarchy, no government, no state, no laws, no poverty, no money, no private property, no inequality. Instead there shall be individual control, free associations and free federations; the authority of custom shall prevail over disputes; frugality and simplicity of living shall assure affluence; exchange shall occur through barter; property shall be held in common (Morris 1890; Woodcock 1962, 1977; Joll 1964). The satisfaction of physical needs will be assured by the principle of collaborative production and consumption, from each according to his deeds, to each according to his needs: 'The perfect society has no government, but only an administration, no laws only obligations, no punishment only means of correction' (Joll 1964, p. 39). The society shall be the negation of property and government (*ibid.*, p. 54).

There shall be 'Production without possession

Action without self-assertion

Development without domination' (Morris 1981).

It is argued that a dominating characteristic of anarchism has been its yearning for a Rousseauesque past, for that 'happy,

primitive world, a state of nature in which, so far from being engaged in a struggle of all against all, men lived in a state of mutual cooperation' (Joll 1964, p. 15; see also pp. 45 and 259). Thus did Morris look with horror at the rise of shoddy industrialism and dream of a Pre-Raphaelite world of egalitarian mediaevalism (Morris 1890 ; Thompson 1955; Thompson 1977). Tolstoy extolled the virtues of the Russian peasantry (Woodcock 1962) and likewise Lao Tzu preach the reversion 'to the way of life that had been followed in a self-contained neolithic age community' (Morris 1981); but it is only in the works of Peter Kropotkin that we find an attempt to apply in any detail the principles of anarchist philosophy to primitive society.

Kropotkin's ethnological researches, essentially literary though his several years in Siberia provided him with considerable personal experience of 'barbarians' (Kropotkin 1971), are summarized in his work *Mutual Aid* (1902). This book, which attempts to refute Huxley's depiction of life as a struggle of all against all, incorporates a vast body of ethnography and natural history. Kropotkin's underlying motive is to show that humanity has a *natural* tendency to observe a high moral level. He thus denied Hobbes' image (in *Leviathan*) of a brutal primitive life and objected even to Locke's propositions concerning the 'State of Nature' (see also Nozick 1974). Quite contrary to Huxley, whom he sees as an apologist for capitalist exploitation (Kropotkin 1902, p. 77) Kropotkin asserts that humankind is inconceivable apart from society and that it is 'man's essence . . . to cooperate with his fellows to secure his basic needs' (Miller 1976, p. 182). As Kropotkin saw it, primitive *society* was the original and natural state of humankind. The primitive man he conceived as 'a member of a tribe which has certain mores, customs and habits, and attitudes to which he must conform. This is the natural condition of man in which he is freest and happiest' (*ibid.*, p. 183).

His ethnology was, of course, couched in terms of the then dominant evolutionist perspective and owes its formal structure largely to Morgan, Bachofen and Maine (e.g. Kropotkin 1902, p. 85), but the treatise incorporates a wealth of information from a huge range of ethnographic sources. Primitive society he extolled for its lack of chiefs, for its communal property, for its friendliness, and for its lack of legal machinery. These were societies that knew 'no kind of authority except the authority of public opinion' (*ibid.*, p. 87). 'Unbridled individualism', Kropotkin argued, 'is a modern growth, but it is not a characteristic of primitive mankind' (*ibid.*, p. 88). Only with the enslavement of mankind by the state have human instincts to mutual aid and communality been submerged by the capitalist ethos of private advance. Kropotkin argued that the 'purpose of rebellion is to destroy hierarchical authority, to extinguish the laws and legal systems artificially created by ruling classes and to re-establish the tribal ethic' (Miller 1976, p. 183). Latter-day anarchists have not done much to modernize their picture of primitive society; even today they continue to present

them as utopian communes (e.g. Hanna 1981).

The ethnology of the anarchists is quite as polemical as that of the Marxists criticised by Lizot (1978a, pp. 71-72).

Turning to the second question, 'What anarchism is there in ethnology?', my goal is only to reveal that the interpretations that Lizot and Clastres have made of Amazonian societies have not been elucidated exclusively from the ethnographic reality but rather reveal an underlying ideological commitment to the ideals of anarchism. If this demonstration is accepted then Lizot's exhortation, that we should let the facts speak for themselves (*ibid.*, p. 70), begins to sound rather hollow.

Some idea of the political inclinations of these authors is given by the very journals to which they send their publications. The Sartrean journal *Les Temps Modernes* published a number of their earlier articles (Clastres 1971a, 1971b; Lizot 1974), but with the appearance of the libertarian journal *Libre* a more congenial forum has been discovered. (Lizot 1977b, 1978a; Clastres and Lizot 1978; Clastres 1977b, 1977c, 1978; see also Vol.4).

In his book *Society against the State* (1977a) Clastres' concern is with what he calls the 'problematic of power', the basis of the problem being whether power has its birthplace in Nature or in Culture. He sees himself as engaged in a battle against an ethnocentric anthropology that can see primitive societies only in terms of western society. This anthropology either implicitly or explicitly is founded on an evolutionist perspective that sees the outcome of all social development as the development of authoritarian, hierarchical States.

Turning his attention to the societies of lowland South America he discovers 'societies without conflict ... in which "primitive communism" obtains'. To quote the blurb on the fly-leaf of his book he shows us that 'we need not take refuge in imaginary utopias to find societies in which people are not divided into oppressors and oppressed and which can flourish without the coercive institutions of the state and privileged hierarchies'. Thus under his analysis the apparent hierarchy implicit in the role of the Amerindian chief turns out to be no proof of the existence of authority in Amazonia. Such leaders, he argues, exchange the prestige of leadership and the advantage of polygyny that goes with it for a diligent dedication to the good of the entire social group, providing it with a focal identity, a generous supply of meat and other goods, and a fount of oratory. In this transaction the 'group reveals its radical rejection of authority, an utter negation of power'.

To quote Clastres again: 'far from giving us the lacklustre image of an inability to resolve the question of political power, these societies astonish us by the subtlety with which they have posed and settled the question. They had a very early premonition that power's transcendence conceals a mortal risk for the group, that the principle of an authority which is external and the creator of its own legality is a challenge to culture itself'.

In the final chapter he turns to the question that forms the connecting theme to his book, that is, the causes for the origin of the State. From his discussion of chieftainship he claims that all societies can be divided by a dual typology. 'On the one hand there are primitive societies or societies without a State; on the other hand, there are societies with a State.'

After the briefest consideration of the economic significance of the neolithic revolution he claims to have proved that political superstructures are independent of Marxist infrastructures. (We shall come back to these elements of Clastres' argument later on.) He thus argues that it was not an infrastructural revolution that effected the radical transition - the *coupure* between primitive society and State, 'but a political revolution, that mysterious emergence - irreversible, fatal to primitive societies - of the thing we know by the name of the State'. The State - with a capital S, it should be noted - he equates quite simply with 'the development of hierarchical authority, the power relation, the subjugation of men'.

Rejecting that man could *voluntarily* submit to subjugation and allow the State to take control of him, Clastres is effectively arguing for an aboriginal morality whereby humanity voluntarily also rejects power. 'No one in such a society feels the quaint desire to do more, own more or appear to be more than his neighbour'.

Finally we are presented with the preposterous suggestion that the migrations of the Tupi-Guarani in search of the Land without Evil (H. Clastres 1975) were in fact undertaken to prevent the evolution of the State. Faced with a demographic increase that was leading to the development of centralized control vested in the growing hierarchy of chiefs, the Tupi-Guarani wilfully engaged in migrations that prevented the transformation of their society into a State 'at the price of collective near suicide'.

Amerindian societies, then, present us with evidence of mankind's ability to reject power, through their 'continual effort to prevent chiefs from being chiefs, the refusal of unification, the endeavour to exorcize the One, the State'.

Lizot's anarchism is witnessed in a number of his publications (for another comment on it see Fabietti 1979, p. 221). It is Lizot's article 'Economy or Society?' of 1972 that makes his position most obvious. Ironically, as a footnote on the first page of this article Lizot claims that the unusual aspect of his presentation is its very lack of interpretation: instead he claims here to 'present facts, leaving the reader the opportunity to exercise his own mind with the material'. In fact the article commences with a statement on the contrast between non-industrial societies of leisure and the industrial societies. The reason for the difference, Lizot tells us baldly,

...is simple. Industrial societies are animated by the ideology of development (technological, economic, demographic); people work there for a salary used to satisfy

a number of ceaselessly growing needs which are artificially created and maintained; the economy and work have such an importance that they dominate all other activities, so that people's existence is completely subordinate to them: the population, constantly increasing, submits the natural environment to an ever more intense exploitation. Non-industrial societies, so-called primitive ones, have on the contrary only moderately developed their technology and economy: family and social life is developed there with a minimum of limitations. In these societies population increase is checked by infanticide and warfare, and human activities are in harmony with the possibilities of their natural environment.

'Nous voici en plein délire idéologique', Lizot writes (1978a, p. 73), in a comment on one Marxist anthropologist.

After a descriptive account of the Yanomam̄ economy he concludes that 'primitive societies are characterized by a rejection of technological progress' and that their 'disdain for work and their disinterest in autonomous technological progress are certain.... Barely interested in mechanization, the Indians have exercised their intelligence and their will in other inventions, in the development of the game of social life, in the creation of a rich and complex magico-religious universe, even in their observation and experiment with the natural environment' (Lizot 1972, pp. 172-3). Lizot sees the Indians' refusal to allow their economy to constrain them as evidence of the same freedom by which they have refused political power (*ibid.*). He is suggesting that radically different processes underlie primitive and industrial societies, the first being dominated by free choice and the second by economic law. Primitive societies offer us a glimpse of human possibilities, but

...if industrial society comes to cause the disappearance of the last primitives, we will only be left with a uniform image of ourselves: humankind living under the tutelage of co-ercive power, subjected to servitude in the industrial society. The contemporary mind already has difficulty imagining a society without specialised political institutions, without authoritarian powers, dedicating themselves whole-heartedly to an un-mechanized economy. When it can imagine it, it is only to persuade itself that such a society has been passed by on the margin of history, and so hurries on to cause its disappearance (*ibid.*, pp. 173-174).

The central concern for all anarchists and libertarians is, of course, liberty in the sense of individual sovereignty as described by J.S. Mill (*On Liberty*, 1859). It has been the issue of freedom from political constraint that has consistently divided the anarchists from their comrade socialists, the

communists. Just as Bakunin was prepared to destroy the first International in his battle against Marx (Joll 1964; Woodcock 1962), proclaiming that 'liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice: socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality' (quoted in Dolgoff 1973, frontispiece), stating further '... I detest communism because it is the negation of liberty. I am not a communist because I can conceive of nothing human without liberty. I am not a communist because communism concentrates and absorbs all the powers of society in the state: because it necessarily ends in the centralization of property in the hands of the state, while I want the abolition of the state' (quoted in Joll 1964, p. 89),² so Morris was alienated from the mainstream of British Socialism as it came to be dominated by Hyndman (Thompson 1955).

The fears of the anarchists have been all too well borne out by the events in communist Russia. With the Bolsheviks ascendant Lenin was safely in the seat of power and could comfortably proclaim, 'liberty is a luxury not to be permitted at the present stage of development' (quoted in Joll 1964, p. 168). It was however this very attitude that prevented Spanish Anarchism from being absorbed into the communist cause (Thomas 1951, p. 22). It is told that when de Los Rios visited revolutionary Russia in 1921 he turned to Lenin:

'But where is liberty?', asked that bearded individualist from Andalusia. 'Liberty?', replied Lenin. 'What for?' (*ibid.*, p. 40).

Correspondingly a major concern for anarchists in their descriptions of the past has been their emphasis on the aboriginal liberty of the noble savage (though not so Proudhon, who feared the tyranny of custom as much as that of the State; see Joll 1964, p. 59). The attempt was to show that Proudhon's 'immanent sense of justice' (Woodcock 1962, p. 89) that all humanity carries within itself can function fairly only in the absence of the paraphernalia of the state (cf. Hanna 1981). This essentialist conception of natural truth contrasts anarchists with the Marxists and existentialists, as witnessed by the attacks made by Marxists on Jensen and the sociobiologists: 'Look into the depths of your own beings. Seek out the truth and realize it yourselves. You will find it nowhere else' (Arshinov, quoted in Woodcock 1962).

Just as Bakunin fought his most vociferous ideological battles with Marx, so it is that Lizot and Clastres see the major challenge to their interpretation of lowland South American Indian societies not as coming from the anthropologies that align themselves more closely with the right but from the cultural

² For a communist opinion of the anarchists see Marx, Engels, Lenin 1972.

materialists, whose eloquent spokesman and founder Marvin Harris has the opinion that

...free will and moral choice have had virtually no significant effect upon the direction taken thus far by evolving systems of social life (Harris 1977, p. 11).

In Harris' cultural materialism (1979b) the dichotomy between mind and body, underlying virtually all modern anthropology, is displayed in its crudest, most 'vulgar' form (Friedman 1974).³ Harris' challenge to the 'obscurantists', students of 'mystification' and 'eclecticists', denies even the least admission of a dialectical relationship between the 'emic' and the 'etic' (Harris 1966) and recommends instead that we focus our attention on the 'techno-demo-eco-econo-determinism' (Harris 1975) by which all social forms have evolved. Harris' anthropology argues for the rule of Nature over Culture, for the domination of the 'Emic' by the 'Etic', the rule of the 'mind' by the 'body'; the subordination of reason to material circumstance and the dominance of necessity over freedom.

Those 'anarchists' who would see operating in Amazonian societies the same dominant principles as should underlie the free society of the future are thus faced with a serious challenge by the materialist schools of North America. If, as the North American materialists contend, the external environment in Amazonia simply cannot support the dense populations necessary for the development of hierarchy and State systems (eg. Meggers 1971; Gross 1975; Lathrap 1970), owing to a scarcity of essential resources such as usable agricultural land or huntable game, then the simplicity of Amazonian societies is better explained materially than by reference to ideology. Warfare is thus explained in terms of competition over resources (Harris 1974, 1977), cannibalism as a protection against protein shortage (Harner 1977), the weakness of political authority in terms of the lack of surplus (Leeds 1969; Fabietti 1979), sexual antagonism in terms of hunting proficiency (Siskind 1973), shamanism in terms of ecological modelling (Dolmatoff 1976), and food taboos in terms of optimisation strategies and conservationism (Ross 1978; McDonald 1977).

The suggestion made by the substantivist Marshall Sahlins (cf. his critique of 1976a), that palaeolithic societies are in fact examples of an original era of affluence (Sahlins 1968, 1972), has thus been seen as crucial by both Lizot and Clastres, who have devoted much attention to showing that the era of affluence included the Amazonian neolithic cultivators no less than the palaeolithic foragers of the Old World.

Clastres, who wrote the preface to the French edition of Sahlins' book (Sahlins 1976b), sees the attempt to paint a

³ See Harris' reply to his critics: 'as for my being a "vulgar" materialist, ought there be any other kind?' (Harris 1975, p. 454).

a Hobbesian picture of primitive man as yet another example of anthropology's ethnocentrism. Rejecting the interpretation of Amazonian society as being 'one that barely manages to feed its members and thus finds itself at the mercy of the slightest natural accident' (1977a, pp. 6-7), Clastres asks: 'if it has become possible to speak of groups of hunters and gatherers as the "first affluent societies" how will neolithic agriculturalists be described?', and he thus sets Lizot his fieldwork topic. Even in the absence of any data he concludes however that 'it is not because they have a subsistence economy that archaic societies have survived in a state of extreme underdevelopment up to the present time' (*ibid.*). Quoting no sources he adds, 'Let it be remarked merely that a good many of those archaic societies 'with a subsistence economy', in South America for example, produced a quantity of *surplus* food *equivalent* to the amount required for the annual consumption of the community.' Only 22 pages later he contradicts himself: 'we know', he writes, 'that the Indian societies of South America as a rule possess only a rudimentary technology, and that consequently, no individual, including the chief, is capable of amassing very much material wealth' (*ibid.*, p. 29). Rather than confuse us and himself Clastres might have done better to await the conclusions of field research.

Content however with the merest scraps of data (cf. *ibid.*, p. 78) Clastres goes on to describe the demography of the Tupi-Guarani using population estimates of the coastal Tupi to estimate the density of the inland Paraguayan Guarani (*ibid.*, pp. 71-75). The grounds for doing so are his lack of discrimination of ecological variations and differences in economy over the entire area of Lowland South America where he finds 'a uniformity at the level of "infrastructure"' (*ibid.*, p. 40). Deducing that the Tupi-Guarani were very much more populous than previous estimates have allowed, Clastres then gives his data blanket applicability to the rest of Amazonia.

'If we are right,' he concludes, 'then it is necessary to radically transform our notions about the economic life of forest peoples ... throw out the foolish beliefs about the purported inability of that type of agriculture to sustain a substantial population, and totally rethink the question of political power' (*ibid.*, p. 77).

He thus considers that, having shown that the Indians live in an era of abundance and technological simplicity characterized by a refusal to work, they are outside the scope of economic anthropology (*ibid.*, p. 166). Having also shown, as he believes, that political superstructures are independent of economic infrastructures (*ibid.*, p. 170), he considers it impossible that political relations of coercion should have an economic explanation or origin (*ibid.*, p. 166). Thus just as economic anthropology '...thinks it has grasped "hold of society" ... it loses its object ... the economy becomes a political economy' (*ibid.*, p. 166).

That some traditional anarchists have similarly considered free society to function only in the absence of material constraint

is amply testified. Thus Kropotkin and Godwin saw in mechanization the means for man's liberation from economic laws: even now, nearly a century later, some anarchists still visualize the path to anarchism as lying through over-production (see for example Bookchin's *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*). Only once man is freed from the slavery of production can his natural liberty be expressed. To quote Kropotkin (quoted in Woodcock 1962),

Man is not a being whose exclusive purpose in life is eating, drinking and providing a shelter for himself. As soon as his material wants are satisfied, other needs, which generally speaking may be described as of an artistic nature, will thrust themselves forward. These needs are of the greatest variety.

Most anarchists see their liberation from economic shackles by different means. Their anger is not merely directed at the wealthy but at wealth itself. Like Morris (1890) they reject industrialism as an unnecessary evil that makes man a slave to machinery. Their ideal is that 'in the new society man will live in extreme simplicity and frugality and will be quite happy to do without the technical achievements of the industrial age' (Joll 1964, p. 259). Woodcock (1962, p. 344), referring to the Spanish Anarchists of the civil war, notes of their beliefs that they '... exposed certain elements of anarchism which more sophisticated advocates have tended to gloss over: the moralistic element in particular and that mental shift into a timeless world, out of progress and freed from material temptations, which seems the necessary leap of faith for the true, black anarchist'.

Sahlins' postulations of aboriginal affluence have thus appealed to anarchists too, providing them with a happy argument to justify their extolling the virtues of 'pre-industrial' societies. Speaking of the pygmies, Hanna notes: 'it would be easy for them to acquire a surplus from the forest, but instead they make do with the minimum and enrich themselves in another direction, namely that of socialization' (1981, p. 18). Quoting Turnbull he continues, 'if there is no time for socialization, if it is all taken up in the effort to amass a larger and larger surplus, then man lives in ignorance of his neighbour and society becomes a mere conglomeration of individuals each seeking their own good.'

The Anarchist vision then elides with that of the Taoists who argue that 'to be content with what one has is to be rich' (Morris 1981, p. 14).

The Yanomam̄ are well enough known, I hope, that I can dispense with an ethnographic introduction. An upland people renowned for their bellicosity the Yanomam̄ have been expanding territorially and demographically since before the turn of the century.

Considering Lizot's and Chagnon's data, Marvin Harris (1974, 1977) has advanced the hypothesis that the Yanomam̄'s 'ancestors

were nomadic hunters and gatherers living away from the larger rivers in small scattered bands that relied on wild forest products for their chief source of subsistence' (Harris 1974, p. 76). With the acquisition of bananas (*ibid.*, p. 76) and steel tools (Harris 1977, p. 60), the Yanomam̃ population increased dramatically but with unfortunate consequences for the environment. According to Harris it is a 'fact that there are already too many Yanomam̃ in relation to their ability to exploit their habitat' (Harris 1974, p. 79), and that 'they have already degraded the carrying capacity of their habitat' (*ibid.*). According to Harris the population explosion and consequent depletion of hunting resources forced the Yanomam̃ to escalate their levels of warfare as they competed over resources. Escalating warfare increased the need for warriors to defend home communities so that male children were favoured at birth and female infanticide was practised. Consequently competition over women intensified the warfare. The escalating warfare in turn caused the villages to relocate and so their territory began to expand.

In sum, 'the Yanomam̃ have "eaten the forest" - not its trees but its animals - and they are suffering the consequences in terms of increased warfare, treachery, and infanticide and a brutal sex-life' (*ibid.*, p. 77).

The advantage of Harris' suggestions are that they are open to empirical testing. If he is right, and warfare is a response to environmental impoverishment, the following propositions should hold:

- i) Intensity of warfare is proportional to population density.
- ii) Intensity of warfare is proportional to the sex ratio.
- iii) The intensity of warfare is proportional to the protein intake of the diet.

It is very doubtful whether any of these propositions is in fact true.

Lizot's position is directly contrary to Harris' but not as coherent. He has not attempted to explain Yanomam̃ warfare (Fabietti 1979) and he has consistently failed to explain *why* the Yanomam̃ engaged in a population explosion or *why* they have expanded territorially. He has however collected a considerable body of data on the Yanomam̃ economy, the best of which is published in *Man* (Lizot 1977a) and *Libre* (Lizot 1978a).

According to Lizot the Yanomam̃ have always had agriculture (Lizot 1972, 1977a, 1978b). They live considerably under the carrying capacity of their habitat (1978a) and suffer no dietary deficiencies at all (1977a, 1978a). Infanticide only affects 1-2% of births and cannot explain the distorted sex ratio (1978a). Warfare intensities are not proportional to population density (1977a). Lizot thus considers that he has refuted Harris, and the fact that Harris has consequently altered his argument (Harris 1979a) - so that it no longer allows a null hypothesis! - need not concern us here.

Lizot argues that the Yanomam̄i originated east of the Parima and came into the highlands already practising agriculture. 'In the healthy mountain region they found a new demographic balance, protected as they were from epidemics which decimated the Indians elsewhere: this balance was followed by a strong population increase and concomitant territorial expansion' (Lizot 1977a, p. 500). Between 1900 and 1950 they underwent a six-fold population increase (*ibid.*, p. 503) at a rate of 1.5-2% per annum (*ibid.*, p. 505). Subsequently they have been suffering from epidemics. On the one hand Lizot argues that 'the economic system has not undergone any internal pressures, it could perpetuate itself without alteration, and still support numbers even greater than those which existed before depopulation' (Lizot 1976, p. 10). He even argues that mobility is not a critical aspect of the economy. He notes that 'some Yanomam̄i have been living in the same place since 1950 without any adverse effect on economic activities' (1977a, p. 505). On the other hand he also argues quite contrarily that

this confinement to a reduced space has its repercussions on hunting activities. Formerly, the migrations, the change of residence every five or six years, ... allowed the hunting grounds to be varied and the game to renew itself. Now in the proximity of the fixed group, the game becomes increasingly rare: certain sedentary species have been decimated, others partially decimated, and the survivors put outside the range of the hunters ... over a decade, the Upper Orinoco, the lower and middle Mavaca and the Ocamu have witnessed the irrevocable disappearance of animals which used to populate their banks. Species which move around only a little are exterminated; such has been the case with some large birds, hogs, agoutis, tapirs and pacas: these animals represent an important part of those habitually eaten by the Yanomam̄i (Lizot 1976, p. 13).

And further,

No, the Indians have not "eaten the forest" nor destroyed the environment. On the contrary their economy is in harmony with the possibilities of the natural environment and is perfectly integrated with it. The reasonable limits of population growth have never been reached and territorial expansion could still be carried out into uninhabited areas (Lizot 1977a, p. 513).

It is difficult to know what to believe,⁴ especially since

⁴ Elsewhere Lizot has argued that warfare and infanticide 'brake' the population increase (Lizot 1972, p. 138). Later he argues that warfare and infanticide do not check the population (Lizot 1977a, p. 503).

few of these statements are given empirical substantiation.

Elsewhere I have given the Yanoama economy detailed treatment but the vast body of ethnographic data cannot be reproduced here. Instead I will treat one single issue that I consider of paramount importance in this debate, namely the issue of technology.

Before I present my own case on the influence of metal technology on the Yanomam̄i economy it is worthwhile noting Lizot's and Clastres' positions on this issue. Both argue that technologies have been imposed on the Indians by the whites (Lizot 1976, p. 7; Clastres 1977a, p. 166) and that these imposed needs have consequently led to the Indians' subjugation. Even though Clastres (*ibid.*) suggests that metal tools might increase productivity by ten times compared to the era of stone tool use he seems reluctant to accept the implications. Lizot has almost ignored the issue in his treatment of the Yanomam̄i economy (but see Lizot 1971); admitting that the stone axe may have eased plot clearance and reduced the significance of site selection he argues that metal tools had a minimal effect on the Yanomam̄i economy. With the new tools 'the Indians found a new equilibrium for themselves. And it was a happy one.' (Lizot 1976, p. 7). In his most recent treatment of the Yanomam̄i economy Lizot even suggests that the technical aspects of their subsistence are negligible (Lizot 1978a, p. 101).

My own fieldwork among the Sanema, the northern Yanoama, suggests that their population expansion coincided with the introduction of metal tools. I have found that their territorial expansion was correlated not only with intensive warfare but also with a search for trade opportunities. This migration continues today, encouraging the Sanema to subject themselves to the exploitations imposed by YeKuana Indians and Criollo peoples. The Sanema's lack of modern tools has made them very aware of the 'superiority' of white peoples and they consequently have become readily manipulable by the missionaries. Recalling their past (the Sanema used their last stone axes in the 1930s) the Sanema relate periods of hunger and hardship. They recount the small size of their garden plots and the problems of felling trees.

Like Lizot's Yanomam̄i the Sanema devote very little time to the food quest. Subsistence is indeed easy for them. It would be a crucial mistake however to therefore consider them examples of a *neolithic* era of affluence for they use *metal* tools. My data suggest that like the Siane of New Guinea the *stone-using* Yanoama may have to work about 80% of the day on subsistence tasks (Salisbury 1962).⁵

Perhaps we should not blame Lizot for making this mistake. His inspiration came after all from Sahlins' work *Stone-Age Economics* (Sahlins 1972). When we look at Sahlins' information

⁵ The data will be made available shortly in my D. Phil dissertation (Oxford 1982).

we find that the Dobe !Kung San studied by Lee, the Aborigines studied by McCarthy and McArthur in Arnhem Land, and the Hadza studied by Woodburn in Tanzania were all using metal tools when they were studied. The Hadza and Aborigines were living in demographically transformed situations too, compared to their stone-age past. The San have had access to steel tools since 1880-1890 (Sahlins 1972, pp. 20-21). The Aborigines of Arnhem Land also had metal tools, which Sahlins notes may have raised productivity. As for the Hadza they were memorably metal-using, employing their metal arrowheads (Woodburn 1968, p. 53) in gambling so that for many men 'games of chance' had replaced 'chances of game' (Sahlins 1972, p. 27).

Has the idea of an era of stone-age affluence any real grounding in accurate ethnography, or is it the polemic of substantivist economists carried to an absurd extreme? At least, the substantive argument seems to be in need of substantiation.

Conclusion

The object of this paper has not been to discredit anarchist political ideals but rather to show how the political persuasions of certain anthropologists, both of anarchist and Marxist inspiration, have led to polemical misrepresentations of ethnographic reality. Where these anthropologists have made quite explicit the political content and context of their discourse such polemic is relatively harmless; if, on the other hand, they disguise their political persuasions behind a pretence of objectivity the results may be more pernicious. In such circumstances it falls on others to rip away their masks, but, ultimately, a healthy anthropology will come about only when anthropologists are more honest with themselves concerning their pretended disinterest and relativism.

That anarchists and anthropologists have been misled into confusing the issue of freedom from economic constraint with that of political freedom and individual sovereignty can best be explained in terms of the dichotomy dominating Western thought, which attempts to set mind apart from body (Ryle 1949). By presupposing that mental and physical phenomena are separate anthropologists have been obliged to explain in some way their evident co-existence, occasionally championing nomothetic attempts to explain one realm in terms of the other. As this paper should have made clear, anthropologists may situate themselves on either side of the ensuing debate for reasons of their own political convictions. It may be that the phenomenological and existentialist perspectives have the potential to heal this rift in anthropology. At the least we should be prepared to admit that in attempting to understand the logic(s) by which cultures have evolved, they must be understood as having done so as parts of societies that operate *within*, rather than *without*, the economic constraints imposed by the external environment. We must take '... as the distinctive quality of man not that he must live in a material world, circumstances he shares with all organisms,

but that he does so according to a meaningful scheme of his own devising. In which capacity mankind is unique...' and therefore take '... as the decisive quality of culture - as giving each mode of life the properties that characterize it - not that this culture must conform to material constraints but that it does so according to a definite symbolic scheme which is never the only one possible' (Sahlins 1976a, p. viii).

Bakunin himself made the same point a hundred years earlier:

What is authority? (he asks.) Is it the inevitable powers of the natural laws which manifest themselves in the necessary concatenation and succession of phenomena in the physical and social worlds? Indeed, against these laws revolt is not only forbidden - it is even impossible. We may misunderstand them or not know them at all, but we cannot disobey them; because they constitute the basis and fundamental conditions of our existence; they envelop us, penetrate us, regulate all our movements, thoughts and acts: even when we believe that we disobey them, we only show their omnipotence.

Yes, we are absolutely the slaves of these laws. But in such slavery there is no humiliation, or, rather, it is not slavery at all. For slavery supposes an external master, a legislator outside of him whom he commands, while these laws are not outside of us: they are inherent in us; they constitute our being, our whole being, physically, intellectually and morally: we live, we breathe, we act, we think, we wish only through these laws. Without them we are nothing, *we are not*. Whence, then, could we derive the power and the wish to rebel against them? The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has *himself* recognised them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever

(From *God and the State* (1882), quoted in Woodcock 1977, p. 310).

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