

In 1969 the writer Norman Lewis revealed in this magazine how the Amazon's tribes were being wiped out. The photographer **Sebastião Salgado** has returned to see how they are faring. **Peter Crookston** reports

The headline on Norman Lewis's report from the Amazon rainforest in this magazine on February 23, 1969, was one word: GENOCIDE. It was set in just 48 point, which is small by today's standards for such a loaded word. But the 12,000 words that followed — the longest article ever published in the history of the Magazine — had a huge impact on world opinion. Lewis, best known for his travel writing and novels, detailed the massacre of Indians in their tribal lands, where they had lived for thousands of years by hunting and fishing and gathering the fruits and vegetables of the forest.

Tribes had been machine-gunned, bombed with dynamite from the air, poisoned by gifts of sugar laced with arsenic or injected with smallpox. The report led directly to the founding of Survival International by the explorers Nicholas Guppy and Robin Hanbury-Tenison, and the anthropologist Francis Huxley, which now has supporters in 100 countries dedicated to preventing the annihilation of tribal peoples.

Lewis's description of how Indians were oppressed (see page 27) has a sombre resonance as we look at these photographs by Sebastião Salgado of the Awá, who Survival International describes as the most threatened tribe on earth. Their traditional way of life was shattered in 1985 when a railway to an iron ore mine was built through their land, opening it up to logging companies and ranchers. Many of the tribe were shot; others died from diseases brought in by the outsiders.

The people pictured on these pages are among just 450 of the Awá who have survived — and 100 of that total have not yet been contacted. They have vanished into the forest to evade the chainsaws and the guns.

Similar invasions of their land had been suffered by the remnants of tribes Norman Lewis visited when we sent him to Brazil in the ➤➤➤

SONG OF THE WILD



PARADISE LOST

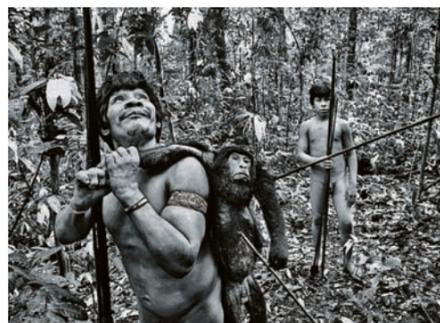
EDEN'S SCARS Above: the tracks of illegal loggers go deep into Awá territory, and cattle farmers follow. Right: an Awá man shows the marks made

by loggers on a sacred ipé tree. Below left: hunting monkeys with bows and arrows. Previous pages: an Awá family with their pet monkey

1960s. He travelled deep into the Brazilian Amazon — an area half the size of the European continent — following up on what he had found in an extraordinary report by Brazil's then attorney general, Jader Figueiredo, about the operations of the government's Indian Protection Service (IPS).

It revealed crimes against the Indians “with brutal frankness and with little attempt at self-defence”, wrote Lewis. Officials of the IPS had been selling, for their own gain, thousands of hectares of tribal lands to mineral speculators, cattle ranchers and logging companies. “Tribes had been virtually exterminated not despite all the efforts of the Indian Protection Service, but with its connivance — often its ardent support.”

Lewis was reporting on the most recent of the many atrocities committed against the indigenous population since the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil in 1500. Tribes were



particularly oppressed and driven from their land during the 19th century when they were enslaved to tap rubber trees, or were slaughtered to clear their villages as civilisation — financed by tremendous profits from rubber — advanced along the Amazon, creating the city of Manaus, with its Belle Epoque architecture and its opera house almost as grand as La Scala.

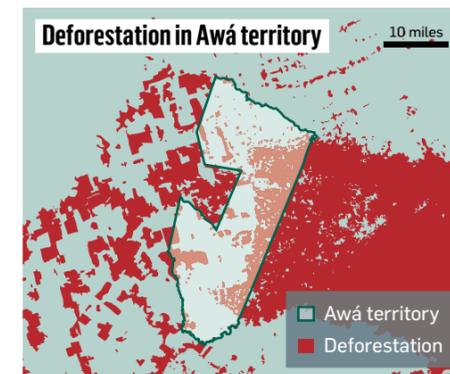
But in the bust that followed the rubber boom, the government was remorseful about the 30,000 Indians who had been murdered. Legislators decided that such crimes should never be perpetrated again. They founded the Indian Protection Service in 1910, which was, as Lewis wrote, “unique and extraordinary in its altruism”.

Robin Hanbury-Tenison, the president of Survival International, says that the IPS once had “a long and honourable tradition and was a model to the world”. But in 1968, on an expedition along the Orinoco River, he heard

rumours of appalling atrocities perpetrated by the IPS against the people they were supposed to be protecting. “They were trying to eliminate them so as to open the place up to cattle ranchers, loggers and others. We came back determined to do something to save the tribes.”

Lewis had also heard the rumours and his investigative report was published soon after Hanbury-Tenison returned to England. He remembers the furore it caused. “It was such a powerful article — a well-researched and brilliant piece of writing that electrified not just those of us who were involved but a lot of other people. It was the spark for Survival International.”

Their mission statement declares that they work to defend the lives of tribal peoples, to protect their lands and to help them determine their own futures. Nowhere has this been more necessary than in the case of the Awá, a tribe of nomadic hunter-gatherers in the



eastern Amazon basin. Since 1982, Survival International has been campaigning ceaselessly for the Brazilian government to designate an area of rainforest specifically for the Awá so that loggers and ranchers are kept out, enabling the tribe to survive.

In 1988, when a new Brazilian constitution was established, it recognised that indigenous people had exclusive and “original” rights to their land. The government's foundation for indigenous people, FUNAI — a replacement for the former “protectors” of the Indians — announced that 147,500 hectares had been set aside as a reserve for the Awá. It has since been reduced to 118,000 hectares, an area three times the size of the Isle of Wight, which may seem large to us, but is much less than this nomadic tribe's entitlement in the huge landmass of the Amazon rainforest.

Sawmills are now only 3km from their land. Brazil's minister of justice has served



CHILD'S PLAY Above: a monkey sits on the head of Yahara, an Awá boy. Below: Amerytxia, the eldest of this Awá community. Right: children empty

the water out of a submerged canoe. The Awá drown their boats when they are not using them so they don't dry out and become damaged

eviction orders on the loggers and has promised that all illegal settlers will be out of Awá land by the end of 2013. But the director of Survival International, Stephen Corry, is not confident that it will happen. "There's a lot of money at stake for people who are taking timber out of the rain forest and I think it's very difficult to predict whether the government will be resolute in keeping its promise."

Fiona Watson, research director of Survival International, who has made several visits to the tribe, says: "The Awá will only survive if the Brazilian government upholds and protects their land rights." A proposed constitutional amendment would give the Brazilian Congress — dominated by the logging, mining and agricultural lobbies — the power to participate in tribal land demarcation and she worries that if this causes further encroachment on their



reserves the Awá and other indigenous groups will cease to exist.

After living among and studying an Amazon tribe, the great French anthropologist Claud Lévi-Strauss wrote: "A primitive people is not a backward or retarded people, indeed it may possess a genius for invention or action that leaves civilised people far behind."

It's a theory espoused by Survival International, which has recently put a lot of effort into getting the message across that people like the Awá simply have a different way of life.

"Tribal peoples today are as contemporary as anybody else," says Stephen Corry, "and they should be allowed to live differently. Even more fundamentally they should be allowed to survive. But they will be destroyed irrevocably if they don't have their land." ■

Peter Crookston was deputy editor of the Magazine in 1969. For further information about the Awá, and to donate to Survival International, visit survivalinternational.org/awa

Genocide by Norman Lewis

Extracted from the original Sunday Times Magazine article, February 23, 1969

The first Europeans to set eyes on the Indians of Brazil came ashore from the fleet of Pedro Alvares Cabral in the year 1500 to a reception that enchanted them. Pero Vaz de Caminha, official clerk to the expedition, sent off a letter to the king that crackled with enthusiasm. Nude ladies had paraded on the beach splendidly indifferent to the stares of the Portuguese sailors. The Europeans were overwhelmed, too, by the magnificence of the Indians' manners.

It was Caminha's letter that encouraged Voltaire to formulate his theory of the Noble Savage. Here was innocence — here was apparent freedom,

even, from the curse of original sin.

They were to be sacrificed to a process that was beyond the control of those admiring visitors. The atrocities of the Conquistadores described by Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas, who was an eye-witness to what must have been the greatest of all wars of extermination, resist the imagination. Twelve million were killed, Las Casas says, most of them in frightful ways.

The process of murder and enslavement slowed down during the next three centuries, but did so because there were fewer Indians to murder and enslave. For a half-century rubber had been the great destroyer of the Indian, and then suddenly it changed to speculation in land. Rumour spread of huge mineral resources awaiting exploitation in the million square miles that were inaccessible until recently — and the great speculative rush was on.

A great deal of this apparently empty land was only empty to the extent that it contained no white settlements, and the map-makers had not yet put in the rivers and the mountains. There might well be Indians there, but this possibility introduced only a slight inconvenience.

The state of affairs that had come to pass in 1968 is depicted in the testimony of a Bororo Indian girl. "There were two fazendas [farms], one called Teresa, where the Indians worked as slaves. They took me from my mother when I was a child. I heard they hung my mother up all night... She was very ill and I wanted to see her before she died... When I got back they thrashed me with a raw-hide whip... They prostituted the Indian girls... The Indians were used as target practice."

Thus were the Indians disarmed, betrayed and hustled down the path towards final extinction ■