

GOETHE MEDAL 2018

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY CLAUDIA ANDUJAR

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I am deeply moved by the fact that the Goethe Institute, in Germany, has invited me to receive an award for my involvement and work with the Yanomami, indigenous people of the Amazon. I became involved with the Yanomami, who became an important part of my life over the years, after I left Europe and came to live in Brazil. My first contact with the Yanomami was in 1971, at the time in which I established myself in São Paulo, Brazil, and decided to find opportunities to get to know the country and its people. It belongs to the times in which I developed a close relationship with the Yanomami people.

In the 1940th, belonging to a Jewish family in Hungary, my father died in a concentration camp. It happened when the Germans deported all my father's family from Hungary, during the second world war. The Jews from Hungary were taken to a concentration camp. My mother and I escaped, as my mother had separated from my father some years earlier, and got divorced. In the beginning of 1940, she started to live alone. The Russians, on the other hand, were advancing and occupied Nagyvárad, my hometown in Hungary. My mother, being Swiss, fled from Nagyvárad with me, during the Second World War. She wished to return to Switzerland. We left Nagyvárad, the city where I spent my childhood. We left everything behind us and traveled on a refugee train to cross Hungary and Austria, to get to Switzerland. My mother got sick during the trip and we had to stop in Vienna. She had to be hospitalized because of an epidemic she caught. A month later, when she recuperated, we continued our trip in Austria, and finally arrived in Switzerland. I never saw my father again nor anybody else who were taken to the concentration camps, being part of my father's family. They all died. I cannot forget these terrible years of the Second World War!

Some years later I left Switzerland, I went to live in New York, with relatives of my father that fled Hungary at the beginning of the Second World War. I lived a couple of years in New York, and later on came to live in Brazil. I settled down in São Paulo where I go on living, I liked Brazil and its people, and adopted it as my home. Most probably I will go on living here until the end. I became interested to get to know Brazil and started to travel. Until one day I decided that I wanted to get to know the Amazon, and received a suggestion from a friend, to get to know the Yanomami indigenous people, after having spent some time with the Karajas and Bororos. That was the time when I decided to get to know Roraima and the Yanomami people, in 1971. I went with George Love, my husband at the time, to the Yanomami people. We went to the Catrimani mission where Yanomami lived. We spent two weeks there, in a part of the Yanomami territory, in the Amazon, in northern Brazil.

After that trip I decided to return, wanting to understand better the Yanomami as people. I started to photograph them and felt that to do an in depth job, I would have to spend much more time to understand who the Yanomami were and how they lived.

I felt that I needed to understand them culturally. I decided to plan to spend more time with them to learn to get to know them as people, and to develop an in depth feeling of them in photography and perspective. Those were the times when I started to stay several months in the region, traveling with them, getting to know their culture. From then on, I returned every year until the end of the 19th century. During this time, I was there when the “Perimetral Norte” high way was built by the government and crossed the Yanomami territory.

I got politically engaged to defend their human and land rights and worked for several years on this question of getting to know their territory. I emotionally incorporated them as part of my being. CCPY, “The Commission for the Creation of the Yanomami Park” invested much energy and time to create an organization called “Comissão pela Criação do Parque Yanomami” to defend the land area over the years and the legal recognition of the territory. CCPY succeeded to impose the demarcation of the Yanomami lands, as a continuous land area in the Amazon, which is legally recognized as their territory to live on and develop according to their needs. But unfortunately this territory has been invaded by outsiders over the years because of its minerals richness. It has become an endless fight to protect the legally demarcated Yanomami land area.

Today this fight continues by an organization called ISA, “Instituto Socioambiental”, that continues to work with the Yanomami and defends their lives and land rights. It is very important to continue to prepare the Yanomami to defend their lands and their culture. Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, an important leader of the Yanomami people, came with me to Germany to present the situation of the Yanomami people.

I wish to thank the Goethe-Institute, the Regional Institute in São Paulo and the Goethe Medal commission who have chosen me to receive the Medal as a recognition of my efforts.