

# Film Guide *for Ajishama*

José María Korta's Revival of the Jesuit Mission Legacy

## FILM SUMMARY

The Basque Jose Maria Korta, born in 1929 in San Sebastian, graduated in Electrical Engineering just after the Second World War and joined the Jesuit Order. Sent to Venezuela in 1960, he helped found the first vocational high school, the Jesuits Obrero in Caracas, where he taught his subject for ten years in the working-class neighbourhood of Catia. He was inspired by the historical Jesuit Missions to pay attention to the plight of the Amazonian indigenous groups, and accepted a government assignment to set up technical facilities at border refugee camps after an aborted uprising in neighboring British Guiana. This led to first contact with the Pemones, resident in the magnificent Gran Sabana area, and with the Capucine Missions assigned to work with this group. Korta soon felt that better service could be provided the indigenous groups, and he obtained permission from the Salesians nominally in charge of the remote upper Ventuari area of Amazon territory, to help the Makifitare tribe resident there to initiate economic self-development projects. Korta felt this would help them withstand the pressure of a kinds coming from the surrounding white creole society, make them equals. The project soon found enthusiastic support from the Indians, and much pioneering work and many adventures later saw the Indians generating large amounts of produce (honey, meat), managing their own transport systems (roads, barges), and participating in a wider

and wider marketing cooperative created by Korta, called CEPAI. This huge success sparked the seeds of undoing, as the Salesians reacted against the decrease in their relevance, and the Indians often mismanaged their new resources and found themselves unprepared for the sudden increased contact with the outside world. Much pressure was brought on Korta, until he was ordered by his superiors to leave so order could be restored.

A second phase of activity after a long sabbatical trip through the Americas taking stock of the work being done by the Jesuits with the indigenous populations, began in 1990 as Korta realized that although CEPAI had gone along way to solve some of the problems faced by these peoples, particularly in the Amazon basin, it had not sufficiently addressed the general cultural problem involved. A change of awareness was needed, which involved education, reflection, new institutions, a grasp of the general situation faced and not only its economic dimension. Two activities were envisaged: a School to prepare the volunteers who would help Korta in this task (at Yarikajé), and a Centre where the representatives of the different ethnic groups could meet in a context they would find friendly, so they could analyze their situation, their culture, and decide what concrete steps to take to protect themselves, their lands, their civilization, from encroachment and eventual annihilation by the surrounding white creole society (at Tauca). The idea of sponsoring month-long seminars to over the whole of the group's culture and its 90, situation with its designated representatives, led quickly after two such sessions, to the decision to set up a Parliament (the Ptaros) and a General Council (the Pemones), to solve internal problems (education, health, culture- particularly language), and outside the group to represent it in a more forceful manner to the creole society (especially in terms of protecting its traditional territory, besieged mining, logging, cattle fanning). The inherent economic dimension was to be integrated into all of this, whether by association with CEPAI, which still existed under separate management, or through new initiatives to be run out of Tauca itself.

This brings us up to the present in Korta's vision, in his effort to assist the Amazonian Indian, which as we have seen has undergone change since his first 'mission', eminently technical and economic in nature. To recapitulate in a paragraph: Korta's spectacular initial Upper Ventuari activities, specifically encompassing tens of thousands of square miles, were phenomenally successful and their effects were felt throughout the Amazon basin and even beyond- while stirring up much envy and animosity, affecting as it did entrenched interests

Context material for an 85 -minute documentary shot in Venezuela, (Ajishama, the White Ibis') about Jose & Maria Korta's lifetime vocation in aid of the Amazonian indigenous peoples, in continuation of the work of the Jesuit Missions.

**Produced/Directed By**

**John Dickinson, Caracas, Venezuela, October**

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as one ethnic group after another flexed its economic potential and started to compete with creole pretension. However, as we shall see all was not well with this vision and it led to contradictions, especially among the indians themselves. It also led to cultural damage- the opposite of the effect intended. Korta himself was separated from CEPAL, the overriding Upper Ventuari economic cooperative he founded, a victim of the forces he had unleashed. After taking stock, viewing at first hand for example the work the Jesuits were doing throughout the Americas with the indians, he came back to Venezuela to attempt a broader approach exemplified by the school at Yarikajd and the meeting centre at Tauca. His new idea, the present 'mission', is proving even more powerful than the first in its effects, galvanizing indigenous awareness, consciousness, so that dim indigenous groups survive and prevail over the forces that are extinguishing their cultures- even learning to manage their economic activities, these now carried out from within the culture, not as something isolated from it.

The latest work at Tauca involves perhaps the most interesting aspect so far: Korta decided to use the centre as the basis for an Indigenous University, with Spanish-speaking indigenous students coming in from different ethnic groups; so far from the Yaruro, Yekuana (Makiritare), Sanema and Ffiepí (Panare) groups. This is so recent and such a dynamic development that it is better to see in/from the documentary itself where it is going; the syllabus includes 'demonstrative' areas' dealing with fish, duck and subsistence farming, cacao and fruit tree nursery technique and growth, compost management ... the whole to make the nomadic nature of the groups an elective process, that is the group moves if it wants to, not because it has to (which then in that case probably will create conflict with the invasive white culture): other aspects of the syllabus are considerable linguistic/text work (textbooks into the different languages, preparation of educational materials in general so the students can go back into their communities and act as multipliers supplying authentic bicultural education but viewed from their own perspective, a first in Venezuela although the law empowering this is on the books), and then a relearning/updating of recently lost techniques/activities such as pottery; the use of computers; general studies, work back at the communities, writing of subsequent reports, all of this making full use of the Tauca site which as seen is appropriate to the way of life of the source communities.

This Tauca Indigenous University, much contested by traditional educational sites in Venezuela (even by the Jesuits and of course the Salesians, but also by the national educational establishment), is taking on enormous importance to indigenous communities especially south of the Orinoco, and the councils of Elders are taking on more and more of a role in helping to define the syllabus and help in the practical elements- helping build the campus, sustaining students' families when they are at Tauca (for a period of two-three years), and contributing to their work when they come into the communities for several months a year, this taken as part and parcel of the higher education being offered. For Venezuela at least, the Indigenous University concept is almost revolutionary, but as the film will

show it is something that has grown out of all of Korta's previous work at Kakuri and then at Yarikajé, and the initial phase at Tauca with the Seminars. As a whole, the film will present Korta's thought process as it develops through specific experiences or projects with the indigenous communities, working first in the field alongside the indian, and then preparing a site so that the indian can come to an environment conducive to reflection about his condition, or conducive to an education conceived with his participation and taken from his own point of view, and necessarily relevant therefore to his concerns.

Follows a more detailed discussion of Korta's activity since he began to work with indigenous groups in the Upper Ventuari, leaving aside this latest venture of the Indigenous University at Tauca since this is in constant evolution and should best be viewed in the film itself to get an up-to-date view of its development.

## Setting the Stage

Korta conceives, then implements a vision of indigenous resurgence through self-development.

In the eighteenth century the colonial power-structure, the traders, felt threatened by the empowerment of the indians. This led to the disbanding of the Missions. Here, in Venezuela, the dominant society doesn't allow the small ethnic 'indigenous groups to organize, to reaffirm their millenary culture, because this represents a brake on the attempt by the dominant society to manipulate them, and occupy their remaining land. We saw this on the Upper Ventuari; along with all the faults that we allowed into that project, we ourselves were learning, we were finding out what the real problems and forces in play were."

*Jose' Maria Corta, Interview, 1998.*

### Early Days, Travel to Venezuela, Initial Work.

Whether this becomes a part of the film or not, it is helpful to trace Jose MaLia Korta's origins as a Basque, born in 1929 and raised in San Sebastian. He says being a Basque helps to understand cultural diversity. He lives in the city centre, in the heart of the old town, and studied in the San Sebastian Industrial School, taking a degree in Electrical Engineering in 1949, with further work in Barcelona. He then decides to join the Company of Jesus with the intention of teaching technology in the Missions' vocational schools for working-class children, perhaps in India. He is impressed already with the history of the Missions in South America in particular, the *reducciones*. Loyola's thinking permitted some of the Jesuits there to enter a sort of symbiosis with the indigenous cultures, finding a balance between their values and the Scriptures, recognizing that commonalities existed- They were late arrivals compared to other Orders, and immediately noted that the native cultures

were under siege and were already disappearing. What started in Titicaca as a laboratory experience with the Aymaras and Quechuas spread eastward to the Guarani lowland areas, respecting to a large extent the indigenous culture, including community values, social structure, and even political organization. The new Missions soon migrated to the most inaccessible areas to have time to develop, and be able eventually to fend off the aggressive tactics, for example, of the *bandeirantes*. The indians were viewed as the protagonists of a process which incorporated the Evangelical message without in any way threatening indigenous identity. The Missions eventually were allowed to develop military capability, forcing respect from outside forces. They went on to incorporate the best European technology and expertise of the day and became the primordial economic force of the Americas. But this experience was in many ways revolutionary in terms of what was happening around it, and the predatory colonial cultures of South America eventually found ways to eliminate it.

When Korta came to Venezuela to the Jesus Obrero vocational school in 1960 to teach technology to working-class children, he already admired the legendary Jesuit Missions. The idea of the new school was to improve the chances of the children to go onto university level. This was achieved through a technical syllabus which was accepted by the Education Ministry. Korta found Caracas to be a modern city, but with gigantic slums and social problems. The Jesuit house in Catia was more like a hut, and there were frequent shootouts close by. The school was slowly built up, with laboratories and equipment brought in to sustain the work. Yet one thing Korta found disenchanting was that the need for technology in Venezuela meant that the Jesus Obrero's graduates immediately went on to University and left the area for good. Catia became more marginal as a result, not less. During the ten years spent in Catia, in Caracas, he gradually became aware of situation of the Venezuelan indians. A couple of chance experiences brought turn into contact with them. In 1969 he went to Caicara on the Orinoco and saw the Panare indians in and around the town. He was impressed by their poverty, by their marginalization from the white society, working as labourers, miners. His group of teachers were offered a small indian boy in adoption by an indian they met in a tourist camp; for some time, Korta felt guilt at not taking on the responsibility. As a technologist imbued with the postwar reverence for the power of applied science, he saw the indians as orphaned in this sense. The Dominican Louis Lebret's phrase 'development, a new name for peace' was fashionable at the time and played its part in his thinking. He felt the indians needed tools to improve their lot. He began to feel he could find ways to continue the work of the missions, in the modern context. What could be done for these people, in practical terms?

Pascasio Arriortia was the well-loved director of the Jesus Obrero school, surrounded by a group of highly motivated Jesuits wanting to develop a socially-oriented educational model. Pascasio would tell Korta that 'his indians, were here in Catia', he would get cross with his younger colleague when their conversations at the

end of the '60's turned to the plight of the indians. Caldera won the 1968 elections and was to replace Raul Leoni in power, during the transition period there was an indigenous military uprising in neighboring British Guiana in its Esequibo area (the Grupuruni uprising by the Taulepartes, -Mapuchis and Acabayos), a protest against the black-centred politics of Georgetown. Venezuela may have encouraged the movement, and provided refugee camps along the border for the losers in this obscure conflict. Korta was asked in 1969 to use his technical skills to improve conditions there, and was flown in by an Air Force C-123 with another Jesuit, Martinez lunare, to San Ignacio de Yuruani. The two months spent there were an opportunity to walk out of the camps into the stunning parklike plateau of the Gran Sabana, along the Yuruani river, looking for places to develop hydroelectricity, to implant cattle breeding and agriculture; following pathways that led to nearby Pemone indian villages overshadowed by the towering flat-top mountains known as tepuis. It was also an chance to visit the local Capucine missions where the reception was frosty, Monsefor Mariano Gutierrez being the bishop. Korta noted they played no active role in the day-to-day existence of the indians, concentrating instead on evangelical work and keeping their Spanish culture entirely separate. The Pemone was somehow viewed as a second-class citizen, the Missions themselves were like distant cathedrals on the savannah, made of stone and tile.

Korta keeps many photographs taken during this working, trip, and a copy of the project drawn up for the Interior Ministry under Aristides Calvani. It was well-received by his lieutenant Rojas Cabot at the Frontiers Directorate, but nothing happened other than that they wanted Korta to go back and continue his work- But he noted there was no master plan to assist the indians of the Gran Sabana, so the offer made to the Jesuits by the government to continue was considered devoid of interest. Korta had understood that the mission itself (Capucine in this case) was the centre of interest to the missionaries, that the indian was simply supposed to accept the way of life brought in by the missionary. He also noted that there was no fostering of the traditional indian concept of communal living, rather individualism, the notion of property, was favoured, Soon after (1971) Korta would have the chance to visit the Salesian Mission at the Island of El Raton in the Orinoco river south of Puerto Ayacucho (on the Colombian border, with the Sipapo river coming in, the Piaroa's mountains set in -the distance), which similar to other establishments at Manapiare and San Fernando de Atabapo was a sort of enormous boarding school (*internado*). It is an area of Piaroa and Guajibo indians., and what Korta most noted was the extent of the establishment founded and run by Father Federman; the cinderblock and zincroof construction, the vast kitchens and dormitories, the dining rooms- with girls overseen by nuns, the boys by the priests. The island is about fifteen kilometres long and three wide, the Mission possessing tractors with which technological agriculture was possible. The idea being -that the boarders would learn to read and write following the Venezuelan school syllabus and simultaneously team modern agricultural methods, being brought up as Spanish speaking Catholics- so as to go back to their commu-

nities as schoolteachers, to spread this way of integrating with white culture. Since several ethnic groups are represented, the common language which was to solve their communication problems, is Spanish. Korta was not convinced by the methods, or the objective.

Shortly thereafter at the invitation of the government (who sees in him a capable technologist), at the end of 1971 Korta travels to Kakuri in the Upper Ventuari a remote hamlet set on a riverbank, in a wide valley peopled by Makiritare and the Samana indians. It is far up the Orinoco from Puerto Ayacucho, in fact it is four hydrological levels upriver. He goes in by Air Force airplane, and returns by river 'in an outboard motor-driven bongo. He is struck by the unspoiled nature of the area he reaches. But beyond this lie thinks of dominating nature, subject to the same motivations as those experienced by the Jesuit missionaries reaching the Guarani areas of Paraguay, centuries before. He brings a baggage of European preconceptions, a belief in the transforming power of technology. The area and its peoples are backward, nature must be tamed to serve man's development. Korta begins to measure the relative levels of the rivers, to obtain power by hydroelectric means. He looks at the Salto Oso (*Gwrincharisodi*) for this purpose, takes soil and wood samples. He begins to measure the possibilities of economic development, carried forward by the resident Makiritares. He feels it is a beautiful area, but that it must be developed by the indian in his own self-interest. When Korta returns to Caracas, he feels he has at last identified a way in which he can contribute to the well-being of the Amazonian Indians. He begins to plan a definitive move to Kakuri on the Upper Ventuari river.

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### Indigenous Resurgence Through Self-development

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In 1943 strategic considerations 'linked to rubber production in the Amazon had led to the building of a three-runway airport at Kakuri. An Air Force colonel on assignment there adopted a Makintare boy of about eleven, whom named Isaia Rodriguez. The boy grows up in Caracas, marries a schoolteacher from Tachira state, and works as a taxidermist for the Central University. The novelty is that he hunts for the animals, that he then stuffs. He is content with his life in Caracas, living with his wife and seven children in a small but neat house near El Junquito. Around 1971 Korta 'is advised to meet Isaia if he wants information about the Makinitare and life at Kakuri. They rendezvous one afternoon at the foot of the big three-faced clock which is the University symbol. Korta needs help; he is preparing an 'indian' project for his Jesuit superiors, and the -Alto Ventuari area which he has just visited seems appropriate and available for new missionary work- basically untended by the Salesians, being so distant from Puerto Ayacucho. Isaia (who today lives near Kakuri) has a number of unexpected and important things to say to Korta. His main contention is that he is fired not only of the Protestant Evangelists working in the Upper Ventuari area (the New Tribes, among others), but of the Catholic missionaries as well' He explains that the prototypical missionary arrives as the indians'equal (*'Los dos como pata de rolo*), but within a year already obtains his

little church and boat or *curiara*- with its outboard motor-, by the second year has a school and a larger meeting-hall, and by the third year, an airplane. But the indian's condition while all this is going on, remains unchanged! Isaia wants the indian to prosper, not the missionary. Korta is impressed by the force of this logic, then makes his commitment: he is not looking for possessions or position, he simply wants to help the indian progress. Although Isaia takes a wait-and-see attitude., as is natural, this turns out to be the beginning of a friendship, a partnership, which will last for years, and is at the heart of the famous Upper Ventuari project.

In view of the lack of communication with Kakuri, Korta and Isaia decide it is necessary to go there to consult with the indians about the convenience of initiating a project in their aid. This type of consultation will become a constant in Korta's work, If there is disagreement, the work is promptly called off. A well-known radio ham called Teodoro Rodes, a shipper, communicates daily from Caracas with the far-off Salesians in Puerto Ayacucho, and his messages are sometimes intercepted on the radios along the Alto Ventuari. So a 'blind' message was sent out, announcing the impending trip, which could be lengthy and complex, because Kakuri on the Upper Ventuari. was at the fourth hydrological level- that is, there are three sets of large falls going up the Orinoco and then toward the headwaters: the first at Puerto Ayacucho, the second at Tencua, the third at the Salto Oso. But this time, the journey was by air- at the time there was no road to Ayacucho, the capital of the Territorio Amazonas, and so they arrived there via the commercial flight, the Aeropostal DC-3 (the road to Ayacucho was only opened in 1982.) There, two nuns, a priest, Isaia Rodriguez and Korta, embarked on a light airplane to do the trip out from Puerto Ayacucho, in abominable weather. The flight took them over the thick jungle with the granite mountains rising out of it, and the massive falls and rapids in the larger rivers. Finally, the broad eighty-kilometre Ventuari valley opened out, surrounded by the belt of the Paru and Marahuaca ranges, and the Caura mountains to the east. The valley is savannah and jungled rivers and headwaters.

At the time Kakuri was a small mixed Makiritare/Sanema hamlet close to a curve in the banks of the majestic Ventuari (a hundred metres across at this point), the rapids there framed the imperial if disused airfield. About two kilometres away was another little Village, Senifia. Several more 'blind' radio messages had been sent by Isaia announcing his arrival with Korta to present a project to the Makiritare, They were expected. A series of meetings ensued at Senifia with the combined communities, in the single existing house. The Makiritare in particular knew of Isaia's life among the whites, and turned out to be quite avid for whatever could stimulate their exchange with the outside world, so they could obtain tools, machetes, technology of all kinds. So they were open to a discussion of an indigenous development project as designed by Korta. In the meantime, context and gossip at the meeting was provided by a conflict between the indians and a French adventurer named Jean-Jacques Bichier who had begun mining in the area, at Paru (seven kilometers away), where a landing-strip had been cleared for

his party by the Makiritare, He was a member of the elite Caracas Aeroclub, whose members liked to land in the exotic south, Rafael Poleo from the University was a part of the group, certain drug experiences were involved, and was accompanied by a former Minister of the Laval government, Jean Tenaille, and engineer- they had turned up around 1972. Gold and diamonds were to be found there alone, the open savannah between the rivers Paru and Ventuari, ten kilometres apart at this point but which open out away from each other to the south. The Makirilares fell deceived by the miners, who had done nothing for them despite all promises. They had lodged complaints with the authorities, and wanted them out of the area. One day a twin-engine plane came over Kakuri and Korta and a group of Indians went to see, it was a police aircraft. Poleo was there, the pilot's name was Estevez, a high Police commissioner, a girl, and the Frenchmen. They pulled out machineguns, Korta was kept on the ground for hours under arrest, in the cold of the night, and was told he was going to die. Shots were fired into the air, and some of the indians escaped and reported that the Jesuit had been killed. Finally they were set free. Complaints were lodged in Caracas about the incident, it was only in 1976 that the Frenchmen stopped coming back to the Paru mining arm.

Isaia and Korta's fortnight's journey back from Kakuri was by river, portaging around the waterfalls, and again passing the Salesian mission at Isla El Raton sixty kilometres up the Orinoco from Puerto Ayacucho- where Korta reflected once more about the limitations of its boarding school concept- which seemed aimed at inducting the indians into the creole culture, giving up their birthright, while providing them with some of the elements necessary for survival in a new context. Korta's vision was quite different, and was about to blossom.

Korta was back at the end of the year, again travelling by river. By this time the concept of Jesuit work in the Alto Ventuari had been accepted by the Salesians, and it had been possible to build a *churoata* or conical meeting-hall at Kakuri by the Makiritare, who had begun to understand what Corta was up to. A new town was necessary as focal point for future activity, and had to be built by them, The Jesuits would provide direction, and would look for outside assistance in the way of loans and contacts. As time went on Korta realized that what drove the Makiritare was the desire to have the same economic resources that the white man had. Stated simply, they felt that the white man's worth came from his tools, and so they wanted the tools, to acquire the worth. For example, Francisco Martinez, their 'Captain' at Kakuri, was desperate for tools. A strong man, dressed in his loincloth, his other obsession was that his children team Spanish. Ultimately, the Makiritare wanted to learn Spanish and function in the country on an equal footing with the creole, but this Korta only understood toward the end of the Upper Ventuari adventure. The Evangelists present at Kakuri who ran a small school there, were asked to leave because the indians wanted to focus exclusively on what they saw as Isaia's project, to achieve modern status Isaia Rodriguez, the Makiritare, was considered by

them to be assisted by the Jesuits, that is, by Korta. Roberto Martinez, Francisco Martinez, Lucas, Federico, the Lopez and Magdalena families, all these Makiritares who joined the project in its early days are still living in the Kakuri area, and can describe events as they unfolded.

Thus many people come to the December 1971 meetings, and Isaia takes on a preponderant role, His idea is to bring all the Makiritare together, even those from- the immense Caura valley to the north-east. These are led by a famous leader called Jose Antonio, and are suspicious of Isaia's intentions. Nevertheless, Isaia is the essential go-between, and for a year works intensely to get the Makiritare to accept 'his' project for indigenous economic development (as he defines it) supported by the Jesuits. An Indian Enterprise is legally constituted, the Union Makiritare del Alto Ventuari ('UMAV, in September of 1972, the first registered Indian enterprise in the Territorio Amazonas), which takes legal title to all Upper Ventuari land and is able legally to receive grants and take on debt. Isaia is thus in constant conversation with both sides, with Korta and the indians, as economic goals were defined- cattle for meat, the need for electricity, transport to take produce to market, and so forth. The -equation is simple: to pay for whatever transport system was devised, the goods produced had to have high market value- this initially meant meat handicrafts and cocoa, perhaps vegetable oils, and not yuca and maize, which the indians had been producing in small quantities. A production strategy was in the making The transportation solution was not clear: small outboard-driven boats, the bongos, were manifestly inadequate for bulk work, the motors were unreliable and not durable, and the gasoline logistics didn't add up, and in any case they had to be taken around three sets of waterfalls to get to Puerto Ayacucho. Even after the falls at Tencua, the last downriver leg would take such a boat about six days, Air transport was of course prohibitive, so what was the solution?

Korta considered that a barge was necessary, driven by a tug powered by a centrally-mounted inboard diesel engine, to carry a forty or fifty ton load. This could ply the Orinoco on its second level, between Sarnariapo at Puerto Ayacucho, and the Tencua falls. From there, a sixty-kilometre road would have to be opened up crosscountry over the mountains and down into the Ventuari valley to Kakuri. For this, a small Caterpillar earthmover and a tractor were needed. So the search for funds by the Jesuits began. 150,000 Bolívares come from the Agriculture Ministry to begin to buy the cattle, and the Southern Development Agency (Prodesur) provided a loan to buy the barge. Just such a disused barge happened to be on sale at the mouth of the Orinoco, moored on the Cano Manamo arm which had been dammed by the CVG (Guayana Development Board)- with disastrous ecological consequences, but that is another story! The barge needed repair and so a group of Makinture indians, qualified to work with the soldering and riveting, travels down the Orinoco with Korta and Isaia, and begin to repair its hull outside Tucupita, while a 100 HP diesel engine is installed in the shell of a tug which is also purchased, Pedro Diaz, the Captain of the Makin-

tare hamlet of La Sita on the Ventuan', was heading the work party, Everything was ready by March 1973, and since the new Mimarno darn impeded direct access upriver to the Orinoco, it was necessary to sail in the other direction, out to sea when conditions were right, and then duck back into the main river via the main channels- before the weather changed or the tides became adverse! Navigation was entrusted to Diaz, Korta and Isaia (photographs and first-hand accounts exist of all this, as does the tug and barge, hauling cattle and goods for the Makiritare to this day).

The three managed to haul the barge up the Orinoco, past Puerto Ordaz (where the CVG loaded them with 40 tons of cargo donated to the development project- cattle, plants and fertilizer), and on to Puerto Ayacucho, where they were faced by the first set of waterfalls and rapids (*los raudales*). Getting this far had taken a month, since the start motor for the Perkins diesel burnt out and a sidetrip had to be made to Caracas (overland) by Korta to get it fixed and get the barge underway again. In Ayacucho the authorities didn't help despite all promises, the problem was the one road to nearby Sarnariapo (first port on the Orinoco, above the falls), crossed the Cataniapo river on an iron bridge that proved too narrow for the barge I So it was raised onto an extrawide flatbed truck, and taken to the bridge where the barge (and tug) were lowered down to the river, pushed across, and hauled up the opposite bank onto the flatbed again, and on to Samariapo where it was definitively launched back into the Orinoco (with the tug!). All this pulling and heaving the barge and tug took another month, for a distance travelled of about twenty kilometres. An initial fifty head of cattle had been purchased locally and were waiting for loading, and -the journey upriver to Tencua was effected 'in record time by the fully loaded barge, arriving on December 7th 1973- the day Carlos Andres Perez won the national elections.

The cattle were herded to Kakuri along a brand-new trail which had been hacked out with axes and machetes by the Makiritares. This *pica* winds over twenty kilometres of completely virgin mountains, then on thirty kilometres more across the Oso and Paru savannahs, ending at the Ventuari's left bank, facing Kakuri. This last river crossing was made using a smaller, locally constructed, barge or *chalana*. Conditions were still hazardous, half of this initial herd died along the way. AM of this was perfected over the next four or five years, tractors helping enormously in the work as more and more important loans or credits were obtained, buffaloes brought in, grasses sown on -the savannahs... The Makiritares could see their situation was changing, they were soon working, ever increasing herds of cattle on their vast traditional land (but which they now had title to), shipping meat out on their own transport system to market, and bringing in whatever they needed from the white man's world. They became good cattlemen. (All this structure is still in place; the cattle, the barges, the road-available for filming. Most of the pioneers that put it in place are still alive, in and around Kakuri.)

Throughout the seventies the Upper Ventuari economic activity accelerated, always guided by Korta through the intermediary of Isaia; the Makiritare enterprise became a force. Bees were brought in, but they were initially a problem, from 1976-78. Lack of expertise led to permitting ants to attack the hives, the bees escaped to the surrounding mountains. However, once the ants were controlled the empty hive boxes were progressively recolonized, this apparently constituting a basis for apiculture. However, the bees had grown wild, the hives were too close to the village, and they started to attack everything in sight, killing cattle, pursuing the inhabitants. The Makiritare declared they wanted nothing further to do with bees!

This incident provides a chance to glimpse the social reality of the indians sharing the Upper Ventuari valley. Korta had imagined his project to equally benefit all the inhabitants, but the Makiritare coexisted in the valley with the Sanema (part of the Yanoania/Yanor-nami group), and what he noted happened more and more was that the Makiritare used the Sanema for the heavier menial tasks, but didn't let them in as equals to the results of their work. This didn't seem right. The Sanema wanted to be like the Makiritare, but were dominated by them in cultural terms. For example, the Sanema chief, Ma'mai was very dependent on Isaia Rodriguez. So Korta decided that the bees would be worked by the Sanema separately in their villages, with the proviso that the hives were to be placed further away from the dwellings! The Sanema were delighted. This was about the time when Korta was given the name Ajishama (white ibis) by the Makiritare, and refers to one of their capital myths which tells that: *when the stars had to leave earth because of their great difficulties there, the white ibis led them on their road, up along a very high branch that arched to the heavens (the stars were living beings like you and me), until they managed to reach heaven.* Thanks to Ajishama.

It is important to note that right from the first exploratory trip to Kakuri the Salesians were agreeable to Korta's Jesuit 'mission' (as it was defined) in the Upper Ventuari, permission was obtained in Ayacucho from their Monsefor Segundo Garcia, and after discussion the Jesuits in Caracas (led by Padre Jesus Frances", made it official. The Salesians were indeed far away, their effective work only reaching as far as Manapiare, and the initiative was viewed by them and by the Jesuits as a useful way of keeping the Venuari's Protestant Evangelists in check. The whole initiative was given formal blessing, though an Agreement between Salesians and Jesuits, and Korta moved permanently to Kakuri along with the Jesuit Alejandro Castellot, as did Isaia- who starts to live with a Makiritari woman, leaving his wife in Caracas, albeit supported by his pension from the University. His sons come and go from Caracas. Economically, the Upper Ventuan' project goes from strength to strength. Enormous efforts are deployed to bring in a hydroelectric power station, its turbine capable of generating 500 KW. Lengths of tubing adding up to 800 metres are soldered together for the matcourse, at a site carefully chosen by Korta, quite close by in Momi, on a river bypass running at 100 litres/second. (Although all this is in place and the station fully designed, it was never put into operation, partly be-

cause Korta left before final assembly- which is complex- could take place.) A new mile-long runway was built -next to the old Kakun airport by the YekLiana for the Air Force, so that their Hercules aircraft could land even in the rainy season.

The Sanemas set up the honey production cooperative. SA-NEEMAP, in 1980. (This still exists although is not functioning at capacity). By 1982 a Hercules C-130 arrived at Puerto Ayacucho loaded with seven tons of Sanema honey. This success helped the Sanema's self-esteem enormously, especially vis a vis the Makiritare, who for their part deal in projects with slower growth, expanding their cattle production to include buffalo meat production with a 'rotating credit' from the CVG; they get the cattle and breed it, and eventually after ten years pass the same number of cattle on to another indigenous group. They also produce cocoa.

In Kakuri there are now about thirty houses, none of them belonging to the 'mission', as such, with thatched roof, earthbeaten floor, whattle or *bahareque* walls in the indian manner. There are volunteers coming in from all over Venezuela, helping in the educational effort that parallels the production work (one of these is Hernan Gonzalez, formerly from the Jesus Obrero), and four Jesuits working alongside Korta. Korta is therefore freer to travel around the region, he moves to Momi among the Sanema. in 1982-83. The Makiritari are not happy about this or about the increased autonomy of the Sanema, who now have 500 beehives, around ten kilometres from Kakuri on the Paru river. One day, Korta sees four Piaraos youths arrive unexpectedly at Paru in a light airplane, saying that they have been sent, to work for free alongside the Sanema if they can learn how to tend bees. Eight months later they leave, returning to the Guanai valley to the west. However, they soon sent back by their village elders, since they have no bees! When they, next travel home they are given everything necessary to initiate apiculture called Mario Chacon is sent by Korta with them, and so the Empresa Piarao de Miel, APIAMIEL, is founded.

The infamous invasion of Piarao lands by Herman Zingg and his fleet of DC-3's, constantly and illegally expanding what had been a small cattle farm owned by him there since 1975, takes place in the Guanai valley area at this time. Zingg is the scion of a great Caracas family and has the direct support of the Minister of the Interior and the ruling party. However, the Piarao organize around their nascent economic enterprises and appeal to their Catholic authority, who now is the Salesian Monsenor Enzo Ceccarelli in Puerto Ayacucho, who sides with them. Korta is active in this famous face-off, even testifying with Ceccarelli before congress in Caracas defending the indians' rights. The MEP, the Universities, the left, all support the indians. The government, President Lusinchi and his mistress/secretary Blanca Ibanez (who owned a villa on Zingg's farm'), the Ministry of the Interior Octavio Lepage, the Armed Forces...all of these support Zingg's pretensions to much of the Guanai valley. Korta is harassed and publicly called everything from Communist to ETA terrorist, making many enemies in high places. Yet in the end Her-

man Zingg's farm, his herd, is relocated by the Air Force to another valley (where to this day he continues to trample on indigenous rights). The whole Herman Zingg affair is important in terms of national politics, is well-documented (television, film, articles, photographs), and marks a turning-point in terms of national policy toward the indian. As to the Guanai Valley Piarao, they are free as a result to develop their cattle and honey-farming in relative peace, and soon even buy their own barge to take produce from Manapiare downriver to Samariapo at Puerto Ayacucho

By this time the burgeoning indigenous economic activity is getting far too complex to handle from the perspective of the initial Makhtare cooperative organization, there are now three distinct indigenous cooperatives at work, and more are on the way!, So Korta convenes the indian representatives and forms a new umbrella organization, which is to respond to all the Amazonic indigenous groups and in fact initially covers an area of activity of 70,000 Km.1 (the Paru, the Guanai, the Alto Ventuari.) This is called the Centro de Promocion de la Autogestion Indigena (center for the Promotion of Indigenous Self-management): CEPAI. The Piaraos promptly join with a cocoa-producing entity, AVIPROCA. Cooperative fever sweeps the area, reaching down to Manapiare; also, the Guahibos want to produce honey, the Arahucos from the Rio Negro also want to join the movement, which would already mean goods moving from the Amazon basin proper up the Casiquiare inter-basin connection down the Orinoco to Puerto Ayacuch! Suddenly, the Salesians were witnessing a revolution in their assigned Amazonian parish. They found Korta's hand everywhere, with the indigenous groups increasingly participating in an economic revolution, which was now even funded by the Interamerican Development Bank. The Salesians started to object. The comparison with their own endeavours was not favorable. The tide, so favourable up to this point, started to turn against Korta in particular. This is what we must describe in what follows, the factors that now since 1972 Korta's right-hand man in Caracas, manning the radio, following events step by step. He can provide us with the perspective of the Volunteers. He is a witness that can tell us about all of this, and has considerable materials to document events. Even as back in 1965 he was Corta's student at the Jesus Obrero, when CEPAI ceases to be a Jesuit organization he becomes its President).

The Salesians now ask that Korta leave and that the Jesuits turn CEPAI over to them. The Makiritares refuse, and the Salesian Monsenor in Caracas, Ignacio Velasco, writes a most offensive article in the national press saying that the Salesians can do what they like with the Makiritare, since they live within an assigned Salesian parish.(All this exchange of correspondence is available.) Korta finds that at the point of his leaving and in the subsequent years, several things are happening in the Upper Ventuari that are definitely not to his liking. The Makiritare are becoming spoiled by success. They are indeed becoming more like the white man, Their goods go to Puerto Ayacucho for sale, and often the money does not return but is spent there on liquor and diversion by the younger indians who

are entrusted with this aspect of the work. The cattle are frequently not tended property, the bees are abandoned, the teachers trained at Kakuri demand individual wages which were never asked for in the first years, when everything, was distributed ... The road is rutted, the power station languishes, the barge breaks down more often than not- so airplanes are used to transport meat on a regular basis and this takes much of the profit..., stereotypes abound, parties are held... As to the Sanemas, drinking also becomes rife. Their main teacher in the Paru, Isaias Guanapanai, who speaks Sanema, Makiritare, and Spanish, having been specially trained by Isaias Rodriguez to play a pivotal role in his community, turns to drink, mistreats women in his charge, and converts the school into a sort of discotheque. All these things are happening or start to become evident around 1990, when Korta is pushed by events to 'leave the Upper Ventuari..

There was a revolt within CEPAI when its volunteers realized that a deal had been struck between Salesians and Jesuits, passing the organization over to Salesian control (without Korta's knowledge, Korta was already away on -his trip), so they decide that they will use their legal voting rights and with the aid of the Makiritare and the other ethnic -groups they themselves take over the management of this organization. Korta's hand is suspected in all of this, both by the Salesians and the Jesuits. In time, the Salesians founded their own cooperative, on the lines of CEPAI Neither organization has been functioning with the effectiveness of the original CEPAI What became clear was that the Jesuits could no longer remain within the Territorio Amazonas, it was Salesian jurisdiction and increasing off-limits. (In this sense, CEPAI had been corseted from the start) The Salesians demanded that the Jesuits make Korta leave the country for good, and were convinced that this had been agreed to. But the arrival of new Jesuit authorities meant that, after Korta's necessary trip abroad while things cooled down, he was to be allowed to comeback to Venezuela- so long as no more Salesian feathers were ruffled. In fact the Jesuit Provincial, Anaqui, had invited Korta to take a year's sabbatical, at a Jesuit retreat in Brazil. Korta said he would rather have a chance to review indigenous organizations in the Americas.

Korta covered over sixty thousand kilometers, leaving Venezuela in July 1990, returning in February of 1991. It fostered changes in his thinking about the work with the indigenous populations of Venezuela. He goes to Mexico first to attend a Jesuit seminar, then on to Pittsburgh to see John Friccioni, the Anthropology department head at the University (who had spent two years with him on the Alto Ventuari, and who had written his doctoral thesis about the work at Kakuri- published in the Cuadernos de Montalban, Andres Bello University).

Going on to Chicago, Korta found himself semi-paralyzed due to a spinal problem, the local Jesuit residence refused to take him in taking hi for a hobo- finally he was recognized as a Jesuit and was picked up off the street and taken to the University Hospital...in a limo! From here it was on to South Dakota, California, and back

through Mexico, Central America, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil and back to Venezuela. The sum of all these experiences with the pastoral work being done with the indian of the Americas, was to reinforce his sense that something important had been achieved with CEPAI, because everywhere there seemed to be a repetition of the Salesian boarding school philosophy- the integration of the indian into the different creole white cultures, whether in the United States or Bolivia, and no real emphasis, an having the indians being at the centre of their world- managing their own affairs and strengthening their culture. However, Korta could not fail to recognize also that there had been grave deficiencies in the philosophy that led to CEPAI's creation and its work, which he could visualize better now that he was away- derived especially from the emphasis on the economic aspect of indigenous development. Korta began to realize that he wasn't going back to CEPAI. He now felt sure that the indigenous affirmation it had permitted was correct, the material success was real, but that it had to be more broadly based in cultural terms or many vices would creep in through the back door. This was to be the backdrop to the new work he was about to undertake in Venezuela.

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### **Korta now feels indigenous resurgence must be based on increased self-awareness, through an educational process.**

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Upon return to Venezuela Korta attended a crucial CEPAI meeting outside Caracas. There, he found the volunteers in full cry, rejecting the deal made by the Jesuit administration to give their organization over to Salesian control. There were strong personality clashes, and he knew his time with the cooperative was at an end. Even before leaving Korta had been up to date on the misuse of much of the resources being handled by CEPAI, and he also knew that some of the Makiritare and Sanerna leaders were not unhappy to see him ousted, it allowed them increased freedom to do as they wished with their goods, Korta knew that despite all its achievements, CEPAI had had certain negative side-effects, favouring only a few ethnic groups (provoking envy and rivalry), accelerating trends such as alcohol dependence, consumerism... and a tendency after the peak in the middle 80's toward a generalized deterioration of the whole indigenous productive apparatus that had been set up though so much hard work- declining herds, shrinking cocoa plantations, lackluster apiculture, handicrafts in lesser quantity and quality, transportation breakdowns, and the preemption of most of whatever profits were obtained by those closest to the money, that is, those that took the goods to Puerto Ayacucho. All of this was having a negative- impact on credit or loan donors, and a vicious circle was forming which was enhanced by the deep crisis within the cooperative's decision centre- which was now politicized and was becoming subject to some of the vagaries of national politics. This was not the kind of indigenous self-development Korta had envisaged, and he soon met with the outgoing Jesuit Provincial, Inaqui Huarte, who told him that any further work by Korta in Venezuela had to be cleared by his successor- Alejandro Goni.

Korta met Goni in 1991 in Merida in the Venezuelan Andes, bringing a project for work with the indians separate from CEPAI- Korta argued that the economic aspect must be set within the cultural dimension, that is, must be subject to enhanced indigenous awareness. He proposed that economic issues as they arose could be worked out with CEPAI on an agreement basis. Goni refuses, saying that Korta must leave indigenous work altogether- one explanation for this answer is the feeling among the Jesuits that Korta has secretly influenced the CEPAI volunteers to wrest that organization from Jesuit control, and certainly from the control of the Salesians. Another reason for criticism that Korta had been getting- and that was conditioning Goni's response-, was that CEPAI by 1991 had received considerable amounts of money from Misereor, the German religious foundation, and the IDB in Washington- well over a million dollars. The ferment at CEPAI stirred fears among the Jesuit leaders that the devastating bankruptcy suffered by the Venezuelan Company of Jesus at the end of the 50's- due to gross mishandling of the infamous 'Cooperativa Javier'- was about to be repeated! The current buzz: not only had CEPAI spun out of control due to Korta's machinations, but their troublesome Brother could be about to sink the entire Venezuelan Jesuit organization! Korta of course felt that this was nonsense, but he faced formidable opposition from his superiors to any further work with the Venezuelan indians. As far as CEM the Jesuits- and the Salesians- were concerned, Korta was finished.

At a second meeting, Goni says that Korta should concentrate on education, working with youngsters volunteers. A fortnight later the broad outlines of the "Ecomunidad" project are established by Korta for Goni's examination; an alternative to conventional education, a window for young volunteers, from all over Venezuela to learn to think for themselves, to review their society, so as to go on with values that can permit enhanced responsibility (values that included above all 'social' concerns, in Korta's mind). To this end, Korta feels that a small educational centre can be established in the jungle. He has seen how prolonged contact with nature stimulates reflection, focuses the mind. He presents the outline of a curriculum, the course to last for a year. Goni is interested and he soon transfers Korta's Jesuit home base from the Jesus Obrero in Caracas (which had remained invariable the whole time he was at Kakuri and working with CEPAI), to San Ignacio School at Puerto Ordaz Mi Bolivar State, on the lower Orinoco. Korta promptly travels upriver, to talk the new scheme over with -his old friends the Piaroa indians, asking them for a site for the new venture. This cannot be in the Piaroa heartland in the Territorio Amazonas, because of course he is anathema there to Monsenor Velasco and the Salesians. The remote Yarikajé valley is chosen- it has a fast stream joining the river running through it, some jungled savannah surrounded by low mountains, and is quite strategically situated about a hundred kilometres southwest of Caicara. The first 'school' year is 1992-93, and Yarikajé has functioned regularly since then up to its demise in the year 2000. Yet even before this, and despite Gofiti, Korta could not stop thinking about the situation of the indians as he now understood it

CEPAI itself had had an educational dimension ('we learn by doing'), but Korta now felt that the indian had gone too far there in teaming the creole ways, in the emphasis on production, and lost sight of his own culture. So along with work at Yarikajé, Korta is still trying to do something to change this state of affairs, to rectify past mistakes. He is driven by a certainty that indian cultures generally are under siege, that they are disappearing, and that none of the missionaries are trying to stem this loss of Amazonic indigenous culture. Even before Yarikajé is set up, Korta is looking for another space, a place where he can communicate to the indian this very serious situation. Korta feels that something new is needed to revalue the indigenous culture, because if this disappears the indian will be the next to go. The indian needs a quiet place in which to think about all this. Michel Heno is a French volunteer who has come in 86-87 to work in agriculture in the Upper Ventuari, and stays on. His work is recognized as being of interest by the French Cooperation authority, and the money he is paid he gives over to CEPAI. Michel identifies totally with the work with the indians. Yet, when Korta leaves the Upper Ventuari Michel goes to the Sanema at Momi, to help them with the apiculture.

He is practically thrown out, since there is a groundswell against CEPAI and Korta, fostered from various hostile quarters. He meets up with Korta in Puerto Ordaz in early 1992, listens to the new ideas, and the pair promptly goes off travelling, looking for a strategically-situated place for a new indigenous centre. They note the Caura valley area as being suitable, one might they string their hammocks under the arches of the long bridge over the mighty river (quite close to where it comes out to the Orinoco). They are told about a place called Tauca which is close to the highway, with a river, jungle, savannah and good hunting- which could be suitable for an indigenous meeting-centre. There is about two thousand hectares of land, which nobody is claiming. Korta soon obtains title to the land in Caracas from the Indigenous Affairs Authority.

So in Korta's mind in this new phase of his work, there -are to be one-year courses offered to volunteers (at Yarikajé), and courses and shorter meetings for the different indigenous groups (at Tauca). Different European governmental organizations had been financing the sending of volunteers from Europe during the Upper Ventuari phase, and quite aside from the enormous expense this inevitably caused, they had to be trained on arrival from scratch as to local conditions, and linguistic problems overcome, becoming useful only quite a while later. Their first in Venezuela was usually, devoted to their training- an enormous and impractical task. So Korta now proposed that volunteers be obtained locally in Venezuela and trained at Yarikajé, which would be funded directly by European organizations, as a way of lowering all these costs and making the process more efficient. The German Misereor organization agreed to underwrite Yarikajé infrastructure costs, principally: a thatched conical churoata as library and meeting place for the students, the books and educational materials, tools, and other practical elements,

and a few small zinc-roofed houses of whittle walls with earth-beaten floor. A small truck was also provided to take the food and other supplies in the summer, when the water levels in this Alto Guanai area permitted passage.

The Yarikajé idea as explained by Korta, is to shape men (Korta as Jesuit usually works with men in instinctive preference to women in his more 'personal' projects- except when women naturally take their place at larger indigenous assemblies/activities- and at the present time in the next stage of the Indigenous University) who can take decisions in a free manner, not being influenced by 'distortions'- all this based on Ignatius' search for a balanced existence. Man must know his historical reality, his social situation, the country and its merits and problems, and what can be done remedy distortions. The student follows man's evolution, soon proceeding to an in-depth review of the Americas before and after the conquest, all this is discussed by the students in the afternoon sessions at the churoata, from three in the afternoon to ten in the evening, every day. The mornings are devoted to maintaining the community-construction, repair, preparing elements for the agricultural pursuits- the student organizing his work as a form of discipline, this activity not being simply to produce food, it is obviously used as an educational tool. There are the community work the volunteer has to participate in-cooking, to order their life together. Democracy, solidarity, respect for the other are hallmarks of the work. The result is to search for a meaning, a usefulness for your life. Money, consumerism, status-these are no longer objectives, the goal becomes what Korta terms making a work of art of your life.

Within this, the agricultural pursuits are an expansion/refinement of traditional indigenous methods, so that the Yarikajé valley can provide food in a self-sustaining manner, without soil erosion or depletion. The land is of course very fragile in the Guayana Shield area, and so ecological considerations are paramount. A diverse form of subsistence agriculture is the result- yucca, grains, rice, name, ocumo, all this is produced while being combined with elements that sustain the tropic chain- the buffaloes eat leftovers from the crops, their excreta are gathered and used for worm production, these go back into the land as compost, special fertilizers are used for fruit tree nurseries, algae grown in pools combined with slugs add strength to the soil-chickens are grown, ducks, guinea pigs- to ensure sustainable and renewable agriculture, while in the surrounding jungle coffee and cocoa is tended.

At Tauca, on the other hand, another German organization, Adveniat, becomes interested in helping with the practical needs of the projected meeting-place, and provides enough support so that an access road is made, two churoatas built, along with a number of small houses of the model which is now traditional in Korta's work. Also, an open cook-house is made close to the river with covered eating-areas among the trees, pumps and generators are brought in along with tools, a computer, in short, Tauca is prepared for business as of 1992 (Sanemas are contracted to help in the building, directed by a volunteer). The idea is that the Indian will be able to meet

with others in comfortable, familiar surroundings. The site is huge, there are kilometers of jungle and savannah, a very good small river which permits fishing. This is a virgin habitat, basically untouched by man, yet is only two kilometers from the Puerto Ordaz- Puerto Ayacucho trunk blacktop highway which runs along the course of the whole lower Orinoco, and is also close to the outlet of the Caura river- the Caura valley runs right back in the deep hinterland, so Tauca is very central in terms of the different ethnic group- Maki-ritares, Sanemas, Pemones, Piaroas, the Yaruros of the plains, the Waraos from the delta... The Indians at Tauca can bathe after work, hunt, rest, and can take his or her family to the meetings, the Indian can be there maintaining his natural rhythms. All constructions are of indigenous type, and are placed far from one another so there is no interference.

Korta at this moment is thinking, learning about what to do at Tauca. He knows the objective; the Indian must review his reality, and this should be a stimulus so that he think about his situation in active terms, about his values, his destiny. The structure of the courses Korta intends to offer at Tauca to the ethnic groups is as follows: four weeks duration, the first devoted to indigenous cultural roots, the cosmo-vision; the second, the group's socioeconomic reality, culture, education, health, and so forth; the third, the context in which this reality is to be placed- the surrounding Creole society, the country, the country's place within the world; and in cultural terms. Korta thought Tauca could offer two or three of these courses a year. He thought it would be easy. But he found that the work was much more complex than this, that each meeting took an enormous amount of work, and that it was nonsensical to go through this kind of exercise, and then not provide an intense follow up. So Korta needed more and more volunteers, which is what Yarikajé can produce. Yarikajé in conceptual and practical terms, immediately became the perfect complement to Tauca.

This can be verified in practical terms in the fact graduates from Yarikajé in its 1992-93 class, yielded several volunteers who wanted to work with the indigenous groups- Ender Rodriguez from San Cristobal, who had studied agriculture there; Julio Chavarri from Caracas, who had studied agronomy at the University of Tachira; Edmundo Fajardo who directed the construction work at Tauca. With these three, in 1994, Korta designs the initial Tauca course which they decide they will attempt first with the Piaroas. Ender Rodriguez is designated to go and inform the Indians about the course and its purpose. The first Piaroa group approached chooses a young emissary- Luis Rodriguez- who speaks Piaroa and can accompany Ender around the whole territory, to help him deliver his message so the communities can select their participants.

For the next two months Ender and Luis go around the vast Piaroa hinterland, walking, by boat, by light plane- the Suapure, Sipapo, the Ventuari, to Manapiare and Ayacucho...and finally thirty-five Indians turn up at Tauca for the initial Indigenous Self-awareness course/meeting (and not sixty as were expected, but the travel expenses and difficulties are often great, an area of roughly

35,000 Km<sup>2</sup> is involved). The course takes place in August 1995, it is considered that many things could be improved, but it was a big success. Korta realizes he is on the right track. Everything is done in the Piaroa language, they are developing Piaroa thinking within their own cultural parameters. In formal terms, participants have to be over 18, and range up through all the age groups including the shamans. There must be translators present, and everything is written down in Piaroa, translated to Spanish, and recorded in the computer.

The Salesians have been informed that the meeting is to take place, in particular Father Ponce at the Isla del Raton in the Sipapo (on the Orinoco); he is quite agreeable. But after the course is over, enormous friction ensues. This is because the main conclusion to come out of the course is that the Piaroas are going to found a Parliament to represent them, to be made up on the one hand by Elders drawn from the six Piaroa river basins or cuencas. These would be the Parliament's 'Senators'; whereas on the other hand the 'Deputies' would be the Captains or active leaders of all these communities. The nascent Parliament is to meet near the Sipapo, in what is known as La Grulla, where none other than the Salesian Father Federmann, the founder of the El Raton mission, is now posted! He is very angry when Korta arrives for the meeting, refusing to meet with the Jesuit. However, the La Grulla meeting was inconclusive because the Piaroa continued to have travel problems and quorum was not achieved. The Parliament could not come into session because of this.

Six months later, another attempt to constitute the Parliament is made in the Guanai. The arrangement is that the Piaroa inform the Jesuit Provincial that they want Korta to attend their meeting, and also inform the Salesian Bishop. Since the invitation comes from the Indians, the religious authorities cannot stop Korta from attending, since this is no longer part of official Church missionary work, it is simply a 'civilian' visit. Yet, Father Federmann immediately raised the alarm, saying that Korta was stirring up the Indians against the Salesians and that the Tauca courses were full of anti-Salesian propaganda. The Bishop therefore asked the Jesuit Provincial to get Korta out of the country or at least prohibit him from visiting areas under Salesian supervision. On his next scheduled trip to Rome (to inform the Pope of the work of the resentment already burning among the Salesians concerning CEPAI's work, but despite all this Korta went to the Guanai meeting where the Parliament came into session.

This has functioned more or less well, with great opposition from the Salesians. But it must be said that the Tauca organization, which is constituted with the name 'Causa Amerindia-Kiuxi', a formal Jesuit Secretariat for indigenous affairs, has not provided as much followup or support to the Parliament as Korta would wish- the Piaroa have repeatedly asked Korta to go to Guanai to assist them, and although he feels he could do more, and although the work of the Parliament is slow, he also thinks that perhaps it is

better to let them get on with the work at their own natural pace. Guanai itself is on a very beautiful savannah near Manapiare, with surrounding mountains of 2500 metres. The conical Parliament building sits in the middle of a natural amphitheatre; when the airplane takes off, it must effect a spiral ascent of more than three thousand metres to get out toward Ayacucho. All the CEPAI-fostered agricultural and herd activity goes on there, it is the most active that is left. The elements for a transition from the previous regime, overly dependent on the purely economic aspect, is now in place; one project is to set up an FM station which transmit to all the area's families in Piaroa- this has been funded by the government Culture Ministry but the money has not yet come through. Health, Education, Culture in general, and Production- aspects of Piaroa reality the Parliament much tend to allow the strength to fend off Creole pretensions to this most fertile area.

This at least is Korta's vision, and is now being tested on other ethnic groups, for instance the Panare from the Caicara area of the middle Orinoco, close to Tauca. (We have filmed part of this work – seven hours worth of Betacam material – some scenes from this have been forwarded to Paris). In the case of the Panare of E'nepa, they decided as a result of the course to form a General Council overseeing area sub-councils, process which turned out to be very strong, leading to a cultural review which is shaping a whole new approach to their culture, and therefore their standing within Venezuela.

In economic terms, (and in terms of health, education, language, culture) the idea is that small groups of Indians will now come to Tauca for training, but volunteers will no longer be sent out as was the case with CEPAI, leaving the work in the field up to the Indians themselves. The Jesuits- and the Salesians- are adjusting to the new dimension of Korta's work, more and more important as CEPAI enters a process of increasing decadence. Korta feels this is so because the cooperative has lost sight of its original goals. Causa Amerindia is now a Foundation, with Directors from the different religious orders on its Board, (Capucines, Salesians, Jesuits), so as to reorganize the Church's approach to the work. The least that can be said, is that Causa Amerindia and its material expression at Tauca and its indigenous Self-awareness educational work, represents a new current of thought about how to approach the reality of the American Amazonian Indian, which is destined to have a great impact on his future...As is the founding of the 'Indigenous University at Tauca, (see end of the Introduction), which is having an enormous impact among the ethnic groups in Venezuela. In the context of the enormous structural crisis taking place in the enveloping society, in 2002 these indigenous groups see Korta's activities in this direction, with their full participation, as one of the few signposts pointing to a possible way to survive and expand without losing their identity.

## CONCLUSION

“One last thing, consider the arrogance of our society, which thinks that it is the one to teach the indian everything, and the one to tell him what to do. And yet indigenous society is superior to ours: there are no social or economic differences or classes, it is an egalitarian society which works very well in community terms. There is great solidarity among these peoples. In humanist terms, their way of life is far superior to ours. And this is sufficient reason to want to protect it, it is part of our heritage, of humanity’s cultural and social legacy. And if this is not done, the Amazon basin itself will wither away, because the one is part and parcel of the other, indigenous peoples and their habitat; a fragile, vital symbiosis. This should be meditated on by the powers that be, and not only here in Venezuela.”

*Jose Maria Korta Interview. 1998*

John Dickinson, Caracas, Venezuela, October 2002.  
[jondic54@hotmail.com](mailto:jondic54@hotmail.com)

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### Some thoughts on the Narrative in: *'Ajishama, The White Ibis'*

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... its a summary of work done by Jose Maria Korta in Venezuela with the indigenous ethnic groups. However its not a biography, its more a description of thought in motion, as we see Korta adapting to experience and insight, as he strives to find ways to strengthen the indigenous cultures. Starting over thirty years ago, he acts to wake the indian stronger in economic productive terms (Kakuri); as he moves forward, the focus shifts to the preservation and strengthening, of culture and identity (Yarikajé, Tauca.) As we view the current project unfold, that of an Indigenous University, we can only speculate on what will be next. In any case, the new does not invalidate the old, everything depends on time and circumstance.

... the film allows a glimpse of indigenous realities and issues in the Orinoco/Amazonic region through Korta’s work, so that we also have a chance to think about these problems from our point of view. What can our contribution be, how can we help in this work which is also our concern... can/could be... the viewer’s reaction.

There is no omniscient narrator here, we have applied the device of ‘many voices’ that so many of these ethnic groups use to tell their stories, myths, history- in this case, interviewing many, of those who have participated in Korta’s work these past thirty years. The story moves from mouth to mouth, individual to individual, back and forth in time...a storytelling that could be familiar, maybe meaningful, to both our indigenous and Western audience.

We uncover discarded and forgotten material to be able to go back and see some of what these voices and faces are talking about with such passion. We also film our own, when necessary, particularly as we move toward the present. The Yekuana ceremony that frames the documentary, the shaman’s invocation there, suggests that Korta’s work is in some way summoned by indigenous needs, today’s heartbeat of a history that has always inhabited this limitless jungle, these ancestral mountains...

So, in a Venezuela that has no history, where everything is forgotten, the film sets out to retrieve this tale of Korta and the indians, using to a large extent first-person narrative so we can feel the energies, know the people. This ‘oral’ form uses our technology to approach traditional story-telling, so that Ajishama’s tale can vibrate to the mythical resonance of the White Ibis, leading the stars back to heaven...

...because in the end what counts isn’t this story in particular, we’re not saying Korta’s way is the only way, we, simply present his example without taking out all the ambiguities and problems it presents, so that the spectator can react and ask, what can I do to help sustain these indigenous peoples, why do I care.

Its not an easy film, today’s viewer is used to everything being served up on a plate. Here there are conflicting views., unresolved situations ... and a lot of talk that includes us, because as we become part of the narrative, we find we have work to do here. We could help keep diversity in the world, caring for it the way Ajishama-Korta- cares.

J.D, Caracas October 2002