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Regional Socio-Political Changes and Amazonian Indigenous Peoples. New Social Spaces of the Manchinery Youth

Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen

Introduction

In my article I discuss how recent regional socio-political changes in Brazilian Amazon have opened new social spaces for the Amazonian indigenous youth, and a possibility to acquire symbolic capital. I have studied young generation of the Manchinery, who live in the state of Acre, Brazil. This topic has been in center of my Ph.D. thesis tailored as a comparative study of worldviews and social actions of the Manchinery youth, between 14 and 24 years of age, in two different contexts, in the indigenous territory and the capital of Acre, Rio Branco. In cities the encounter of new beliefs, habits, technology, and social realities is different than in indigenous territories, where the new ideas are expressed through the state health services, environmental agencies, and education politics of the state.

The study of Amazonian indigenous people has provided a range of ethnographical material on various ethnic groups, showing the process of cultural transformation and social change, as well as established relations with the state, international capitalism and cooperative economies [see e.g. Jackson 1983, 1995, Gow 1991, Turner 1991, 1993]. However, such studies usually describe only one specific ethnic group, and rarely took into account the complexity of cultural influences. From the 1990s,

some anthropological studies demonstrated how various ethnic groups "found" their ethnic roots. Terence Turner [1993], who has worked among Kayapo Indians, addressed the reproduction and the reorder of culture among native peoples, and used the concept "contemporary culturalism". Jean Jackson [1995] draws attention to "the politics of Indianness" that emerged due to interactions between indigenous people and governmental and non-governmental officers. Since introduction of the new discourse of the postmodern period, the native peoples have used the notions of culture and ethnic difference as a tool for the construction of their autonomy, and way to take the control of their life, and to mark their identity. Marshall Sahlins [1997], who has done ethnographical work on the Pacific islands, stated that globalization and other capitalist phenomena have actually generated a historically unprecedented diversity of cultural forms, and calls anthropologists for "the modernization of indigeness."

In my studies of the indigenous peoples of the Lowland South America, the youth has been taken as an social construct composed of different age categories, indigenous education system and schools. However, the native Amazonian youth has mainly been presented through the prism of initiation rituals, which have been a central rite in almost all indigenous communities of the Amazon Basin [see e.g. DaMatta, Seegers, Viveiros de Castro 1997, Fernandes [1948] 1989, Hugh-Jones 1979, Fabian 1992, Lagrou 1997]. Nevertheless, today, the majority of the young native population do participate in contemporary youth culture. In general, in recent years there has been a growing interest in youth studies in researching the youth as an active agent producing something on its own in a modern multicultural context [Massey & Jess 1995; Wulff 1995]. These studies have presented an important aspect of the different kinds of youth and related them to the issues of globalization, modernization and ethnic identity.¹

Firstly, I describe the regional socio-political changes in Acre, and then the implications for the social spaces of Manchineri youth in the villages of their indigenous territory as well as in the city applying the theo-

¹ Western scholars have understood modernization as a process by which social institutions changed the human world and continue sweeping across the globe [see Giddens 1990]. Therefore, many times discussion on modernization hides the idea that it originates from the West. In fact, colonial legacy of Latin America, as well as contemporary globalizing forces have also shaped the state modernization processes in Brazil, and positivism and the French philosophy of enlightenment was already the leading principle of colonialists. The concept of modernity is a periodizing term but do not necessarily refer to something innovative, progressive, and dynamic and opposed to the remote past.

ry of social construction of reality of French anthropologist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, the place of social agent in the social system is determined by one's resources available, the volume of capital, its composition, and the change in these two properties over time. For Bourdieu, the main forms of capital are cultural, economic, social, and symbolic ones. These capitals exist only in a relation, since it is like energy, which only has its effects in the social field in which it is produced and reproduced [Bourdieu 1977, 1984]. I have done ethnographical fieldwork among the Manchinery in Acre during the period of 14 months (four months in the indigenous territory and ten months in the capital of the state) in 2003-2005, and the basis of my methods have been interviews, participant observation, video recordings, and drawings made by the native youth.

The context of contemporary socio-political changes in Acre

In the course of the 19th and 20th Century, rubber fever changed completely the history of Acre and its indigenous people. At the end of 1970s, the second big social change occurred when loggers and ranchers, supported by the government policies, bought land from the state of Acre, and indigenous groups and independent rubber tappers were forced off their lands. Consequently, Indians, rubber tappers, and rural workers started to claim for their land rights, and formed a group that was called *povos da floresta*. The trade union leader, Chico Mendes, was one of the leading persons of this new social movement, and in 1988, when he was assassinated, devastation and violence in the region finally aware an international attention. The strong social movement in Acre resulted in the establishment of various environment protection and social development projects, the emergence of pro-Indian organizations, and associations of different indigenous ethnic groups. Indigenous movement organized the first co-operative economical, educational, and health care projects in the native territories. In addition, it should be remembered that in 1988, after military rule, for the first time, the new Brazilian constitution ensured the cultural and political rights of the indigenous population [Ramos 1998: 19].

In the state of Acre the urbanization process started at the time of the rubber fever, and was followed by migration from rural areas, when the price of rubber fell down. Similar to other Amazonian cities, the urbanization process in Acre has been very fast until today [see also Browder

John O, Godfrey Brian J., 1997]. In 2006, the population of Acre numbered 669,736, of which approximately 70% lived in urban centers. Temporary and permanent residencies of indigenous people are still increasing in the urban centers of Acre. According to National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), in 2002 the indigenous population of Acre, which is constituted by 14 different ethnic groups, numbered 12 086 in the indigenous territories, of which 2 500 resided in Rio Branco area.

For the state's indigenous groups and people living in poor neighborhoods, the election of the governor, Jorge Viana, in 2000, brought a new hope. He has implemented various social and developmental projects as well as attempts to recognize and promote the diversity of the region's ethnic backgrounds. In 2000 the State Cultural Foundation organized for the first time a cultural meeting of indigenous groups, *Encontro de Culturas Indígenas do Acre e Sul do Amazonas*, which in 2004 already presented nearly 20 different ethnic groups from two linguistic families, the Pano and the Arawak. The biggest cultural meeting is usually held in Rio Branco on the national day of Indians on April 19th. At the federal level the establishment of the post of the Secretary of Indigenous Peoples (*Secretaria dos Povos Indígenas do Acre*), which was founded in 2003, has been a proof of a new political recognition of the indigenous issues, as well as many recently founded state offices (such as SEATER, IMAC, and Cultural Foundation of Acre) responsible for the indigenous population. Moreover, in 2003 a museum was inaugurated to present the rural populations' way of life in the forest, their beliefs, and traditional practices. This was a part of the politics of the new federal government, who use a slogan "Government of Forest." Today most ethnic groups have founded their own associations in order to defend their rights, to receive assistance in educational, health, sanitary, and economical areas. Furthermore, in 2004 six indigenous candidates were elected to the local governments.

New symbolic strengths among Manchinery in the indigenous territory

The Arawak-speaking Manchinery population live in Brazilian Amazon, in the state of Acre, close to Peruvian border.² In 2004 they numbered

² There are various studies on present Arawakan peoples, such as Piro, Machiguenga, Ashaninka, and Panoan group Conibo-Shipibo, who are culturally related to these groups. For the first time the Man-

880 living in the indigenous territory called Mamoadate [FUNASA 2004], where they carry out agricultural activities, hunting, breed cattle. Their main economic activity is selling agricultural products, principally rice and beans in the nearby municipalities. In 2002, in the city of Rio Branco the Manchinery population numbered 128 [GMI-UNI 2002], being already the third biggest native group that had migrated to the capital of the state of Acre.

The oldest Manchinery man told me that before the contact with the rubber patrons, they lived in villages by the Yaco River, and each village had a chief, *hjemunatu*, and various types of shamans as their spiritual leaders. During the rubber boom the Manchinery were forced to work as slaves in the rubber production, and their traditional village life was broken. In 1977 the Manchinery were granted their land by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), who nominated a leader for their first village. Later more people moved to the area and today there are ten villages, each one with its own chief, who usually is the person who had come to the location first.

By the end of 1980s, the leader of the first and the biggest village started working in the indigenous organization in Rio Branco, where he has stayed until today. From the 1980s onwards, the attitudes to indigenous groups have changed in Acre, and the construction of new social identities and ethnic actors, such as indigenous officers have been present. The leaders of Mamoadate have participated in meetings of the ethno-political movement in Rio Branco, and their new challenges have been to negotiate with the state authorities and NGOs to demand health and education services, and security for their territories. This situation has increased the temporary migration movements between Mamoadate and Rio Branco, where, until the end of 1990s, the Manchinery used to live very isolated.

Today many new social actors have appeared within indigenous communities in Acre, like indigenous teacher, person responsible for agriculture and environmental matters (*agentes agro-florestais*), and representative of health matters (*agentes de saúde*), since pro-Indian organizations

chinery were mentioned in historical documents by the end of 19th Century (for instance by William Chandless), but until my research there was only one Master thesis on the Manchinery, that based on ethnographical material collected during a short period among few Manchinery families living next to the indigenous territory [Marcelo Simão Mercante 2000, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis] and few governmental documents.

of Acre have been pioneers in promoting education in indigenous communities. Young people of the villages have usually taken all these new functions, since they are better educated, speak Portuguese, and, generally, have already visited more municipalities assisting older relatives, or, buying and selling agricultural products. Therefore, they also accompany the visits of governmental officers and representatives of organizations, act as interpreters passing new information to the other community members. In some negotiations outside of the village they are even given a responsibility to act on the behalf of the leader of their village.³

These young people that have different responsibilities in their villages have in face a power due to their knowledge of new matters and their improved knowledge of Portuguese language. This conditions produces a cultural capital, which according to Bourdieu [1986: 243] refers to knowledge, skills, and qualifications. In addition, these young people also accumulate their social capital that refers to their social networks, memberships, friendships, confidence, honourability, and respectability that are essential for social life.⁴ The social capital is also produced in inter-ethnic relations that occur during the training courses and visits to the urban areas and visits of governmental and non-governmental officers to the villages. The accumulation of symbolic capital always requires a slow-process of co-option, initiation, or genealogical position, and can be used only in the recognized social field [Bourdieu 1977, 1984: 114, 118-119]. The new roles have brought new criterions for the reputation for competence, image of respectability, and honourability that are linked with the moral order. The Manchinery still have very low economic capital, but their symbolic capital and accumulation of prestige, is for them the source of power.

³ Terence Turner [1993, 53], who has investigated the Kayapo who got rich due to their gold resources, also mentions that a new elite of the Kayapo, are the leaders and "young technocrats" who control the material goods of the community.

⁴ The concept of social capital has been very popular in social and economic sciences since the 1980s, although it is still very complex and not clearly defined. The most influential theories on social capital have been formulated by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam. Social capital has been used to refer to continuous social relations, norms, confidence, and co-operation that improve the efficiency of economy and realization of individual objectives. About cultural capital Bourdieu has argued that it has three forms, embodied state (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body), objectified state (cultural goods, pictures, books, dictionaries), and institutionalized state (educational qualifications).

When I asked the one youth native what are the qualities that a chief of the future should have, the emphasis was on the ability to communicate with non-Manchinerys.

I think that if we chose a new person, it would be a learned one. A learned person who knows how to go to the front. If we put an old person, I know that for the village it would be good, but when he went invited to meetings in the city, he would not talk anything. But a learned person knows Portuguese. [Aldo, Jatoba village]

The youth said that their difficulty, especially of young girls, is that they cannot speak Portuguese and, thus, express what they think. One of the adolescents also said that they do not have an access to information and to “explanations”, and many were pleased to ask me what the words such as *biodiversity*, *document*, *project*, *indigenous* did mean, since they had heard the state officers to mention them various times. Those who had learned new concepts in the training courses or from the discourses of the government, such as *sustainable development* and *preservation of natural resources*, liked to use them during our discussions.⁵ In Bourdieu sense the adolescent benefit from the new possibility by using their logic of practice, and actively represent their awareness of these new ideas that fit well to the reality of their communities.

*In the villages the education is highly regarded virtue,
My dream is like this, We will study, because we really have to study and
learn. Without studies we are nothing, isn't it. [Ivanuzia, Extrema village]*

The school is a respected social space, and before going to the classes the pupils always take a bath and change new clean clothes, usually a school t-shirt, received from the government or neat “white men’s” clothes. Peter Gow [1991: 229-251] has investigated the meaning of the schools for native people, and also states that the school is major symbol of state recognition and residential legitimacy, similarly to land title. It is a different context of references, and teachers call students by their Portuguese names in contrast to their Manchinery names usually used within the community. The intellectual aspirations are one of the instruments for

⁵ See Hall 1992 on articulation in the post-modern time.

social reorder, and the state-school education is one of sources of power and a mean to control the contemporary time of change and uncertainty.

In the case of Manchinery, the new social roles have also provoked a change in attitudes to tradition. The example of that could be one of the youngest "agente agro-florestal", who after completing his first course in Rio Branco said that there he was asked to sing Manchinery songs or tell some stories, but he did not know any. Therefore, now he said,

Now I will try to learn, when participating in the course of CPI [Comissão Pró-Índio / the Pro-Indian Commission], because they tell us to sing in the classes. (Artur, Lago Novo village)

At the same time the few old people, who still have the knowledge of myths, songs, dances, and healing, have become increasingly important. The knowledge of own culture and tradition has become essential forms of education, and the youth know that the old people are the ones to keep the valuable information. Moreover, those who have been in the training courses in the city, usually participated also in the shamanistic ceremonies of other tribes there, and after coming back they ask the old people to organize the similar rites in their communities. For Gow [1991: 241-242] schoolteaching defends native people from the slavery, and shamans defend native people against the forest and river demons. However, among the Manchinery shamanistic practices, such as *ayahuasca* ceremony, have always been participated by various community members, and still provide important knowledge of the spiritual world.

The old people are also taken to cultural meetings in the municipalities of Acre, in which the indigenous traditions are represented. These cultural meetings, which have increased over the past years, allow people to express their own culture and build awareness of traditions of other indigenous groups, and therefore, have a considerable spiritual significance, as well as they serve as political manifestations. I was told that since 2001 the Manchinery started to practice their traditional dances due to their first cultural presentation in Rio Branco. One of the adolescent, who had participated in these events, said that before he had never even heard about the traditional dances, but now he realized that they are appreciated. Native tradition has become more and more discussed due to the public discours in which the preservation of ethnic knowledge is addressed, although rarely fulfilled due to financial problems of the government.

Urban Manchinery youth and new indigenous spaces

Since the 1980s, some Manchinery families have migrated to urban centers due to the work in indigenous organizations and intra group conflicts. The young Manchinery living in Rio Branco stated that they had come to the city due to the moving of their parents, studies, search for an employment, or joining of other relatives, who were already living in the city. The majority of the Manchinery youth were born in the city and have very limited knowledge of life in the indigenous territory.

When urbanized indigenous youth were asked what was the most important thing for them, the answer was always "to study" and "to finish their courses." Moreover, the opportunities to have employment in indigenous or cultural organizations, or the projects of the government for indigenous peoples that have appeared in recent years, were highly valued among them. They are often the only significant forms of employment, they could obtain. I identify this as their strategy to avoid the marginalization that majority of the migrants residing in poor suburbs of the city has faced. Almost all young people interviewed also stated that they would like to learn more about their tradition, and lamented that their knowledge of Manchinery language and tradition was poor.

For the urban Manchinery youth indigenous political and cultural meetings in the city were the possibilities to meet up with Indians of their own ethnic group, and other ones originally from the remote indigenous territories. In these meetings indigenous youth participate in ritual dances, use different costumes and objects, such as indigenous handmade bags, necklaces and bracelets, which were usually worn with pride. In addition, the only continual ritual, the *ayahuasca* ceremony, takes place in Manchinery houses in the city. For the indigenous adolescent these events are a forum to learn traditional knowledge, since their parents have usually been living in the city already for a long time, and they were not able recite mythical stories or sing them.

The knowledge of indigenous customs, stories, beliefs, and history of the ethnic group is in fact a cultural capital, which is different from school knowledge provided by state education. The Manchinery in their own villages usually consider ones living in the city as a persone who does not belong to the native world because of the lack of tradition. There is an invisible line between the urban and rural indigenous communities, which

on both sides is manifested by their differences of the way of life, nutrition, traditional knowledge, and the use of language.⁶ There have also been complaints that the Indians working in organizations do not have contacts anymore with their traditional territories. However, currently cultural expertise is important, and even the Brazilian population has also started to value native knowledge, such as natural medicine.

Cultural capital can be converted into social capital, since it promotes new social networks, including those in which occurs interaction between the indigenous and white Brazilian population. In the urban space the youth produce the sense of community, social capital, in various social fields, among their own ethnic group, indigenous ethno-political movement, and movement of indigenous students. The other social fields in which I have observed the youth to accumulate their social capital in the urban space are the group interested in shamanistic practices and groups of youth cultures that are especially represented at school. The experience of belonging to community is important to the youth, and the styles of dress, bodily practices, conduct of honour, and obedience to rules are produced in groups. As Hall argues globalization processes emerge a new interest for local matters [Hall 1992: 304-305, see also Garcia Canclini 1995]. The production of symbolic capital in the city, has increased social inclusion of own ethnic group and other indigenous groups.

Modern indigenous *habitus*

I suggest that the Manchinery youth have recognized their possibilities in different social situations. In the village the most significant new social field of practices is the indigenous school which form the contexts of the government policy, despite the fact that the natives try to construct their own schools based on their own social realities. It has its own *habitus*. In Bourdieu's social theory *habitus* is a set of dispositions and internalized possibilities, which enable a person to orientate in social situations,⁷ and

⁶ On the significance of the food on the social relationships of Amazonian native people see e.g. Gow [1991] and McCallum [1997].

⁷ By *habitus* Bourdieu explains that social actors do not act by a conscious reflexion of actions, logical control, but with a reason, they do or do not have an interest for acting in certain way. Bourdieu follows in footsteps of Marcel Mauss, and Bourdieu's objective is to find an alternative to Sartre's subjectivism and the objectivism of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

in my research this concept explains well the indigenous youths' ability to use different cognitive structures and rules in the social field.

In the city the indigenous adolescents have *different habituses* in previously presented various social fields. In own ethnic group, other indigenous groups (especially ethno-political movement), and the group of people interested in indigenous traditions, especially in shamanism, the youth benefit from having an *indigenous habitus*. For instance when participating in cultural gatherings the Manchinery youth openly manifest themselves to be a part of the indigenous population, and thus to be different from other Brazilians. Their cultural and ethnic background unites various ethnic groups, and has also caused hybridization of indigenous cultures. Entering this social field is relatively easy, requiring only the admission of being an Indian.

The appearance of new indigenous habitus is a common for many Amazonian cities [see e.g. Pereira da Silva 2001], and, moreover, indigenous youth, especially ones living in the urban space, do not fit in the traditional representation of Indians, who can have various habituses and circulate between various social fields, from the school where they can be dressed in jeans to shamanistic ceremonies in which very different logic is applied. This cannot merely be a result of the increased migration movements towards urban areas, neither a new ethnic identity. In contemporary Acre it is linked with socio-political changes that have positioned the indigenous peoples in a new light in the social system. The changed power relations between the white and indigenous populations have improved the position of indigenous people and promoted their symbolic cultural and social capital, which are seen in the political acknowledgement of the indigenous population at the state level. This has been done to improve the cohesion of the state's population and have legitimated of indigenous cultural capital, their knowledge of environmental and natural medical issues, and therefore has new effectiveness as a source of power.

Discussion

In the case of the Manchinery youth, they do not assimilate into the other river-dwelling societies, neither in the city into the poor neighborhoods' migrant population, but create their own social space. In this view, the indigenous adolescents are active social agents, both in rural and urban

space, and take various responsibilities due to their symbolic social and cultural capital. These can be acquired mainly in the rituals, as presented, and in the state education system. In this sense they do, as described by Terence Turner [1993] that indigenous communities apply their own structural principles in the construction of contact situations with the national society.

Moreover, for my study groups cultural and ethnic preservation has significance especially for their self-representation and own position in the community. Bourdieu [1987: 134] might regard it as symbolic struggle taking form on individual level, in which "one may act by trying to change the categories of perception and evaluation of the social world, the cognitive and evaluative structures."⁸ In contrast, previously the ethnic preservation has not been seen as part of a new intellectual discourse of indigenous communities. For instance Jean Jackson [1995] only discussed native peoples' discourse on cultural preservation in local politics due to the need to demonstrate Indianness in order to obtain benefits from the government and NGOs.

For Bourdieu [1977: 169] tradition is what he calls *doxa*, that is taken for granted, unquestioned, and silent. However, we can see that, contrary, today the tradition is "discovered" again, reinvented, reinterpreted and discussed. Rather cultural traditions should be considered as "metaculture" as it is pointed out by Greg Urban [Urban 2001]. My material on Amazonian young Indians in the reserve and the city show that rural and urban people are connected by various social, intellectual, and cultural relations. Rural inhabitants have become visible, as they have become seen from the city, while the symbolic capital and identity of urban Manchinerys receives its strength from the village, and they bring new representations to the center from the periphery. In Amazonian native communities tradition and culture has come more to the *field of opinion* in the Bourdieu sense, that is the field of competing discourses [Bourdieu 1977], and main reason for this is the socio-political change in indigenous matters, especially at the local level, but also at the national and international levels. This has facilitated the indigenous population to establish its new place in the social structure where it can produce its own symbolic social and cultural capitals.

⁸ According to Bourdieu, the symbolic struggle can also take a form on the objective level, to demonstrate the strength and cohesion of the group.

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