



**AJANKOHTAISTA:
POIKKITIETEELLINEN VÄITÖSKIRJA INTIAANINUORTEN
ELÄMÄSTÄ**

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My dissertation discusses the lives of young natives in Amazonia. It deals with the questions of the fluidity of culture and the establishment of ethnic categories. The aspect of alterability in my study was captured in the photograph that I chose to be the cover of the printed version of my thesis: the always changing river, which is the focus of the image. A study of indigenous Amazonian youth is relevant and timely for a wide number of reasons. Over recent years, the passage of native adolescents into adulthood has been influenced by many factors and changes, such as technological developments, consumer culture, and increased access to national education. It is especially native young people who seem to be under two kinds of pressure: on the one hand, from their cultural traditions and, from the other – the nation state and surrounding urban cultures. Young people adapt more easily to new influences since they are in the process of seeking answers to their own individual developments. My study adds a Brazilian, Amazonian and urban dimension to the existing literature on the native youth.

In 2000, when I first met with indigenous young people in Brazil, I observed that adolescents were influenced by global and national youth cultures. This was on the Day of the Indian, 19th April, which is dedicated to the reflections of present Indians. I was in Recife, in north-eastern Brazil, one of the cities where Indians organized demonstrations before the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of Brazil. I was deeply affected by the participation of Indian adolescents who proudly walked side-by-side with elders from their communities to show that Brazil had first been inhabited by Indians and that they were still strong, even if marginalized. The mixture of cultural traditions caught my curiosity as young natives were wearing clothes derived from urban cultures together with traditional body and face paintings.

I wanted to know how young natives experienced and lived their lives, and what mechanisms they used to cope with the modern, globalized and urban world. I realized, as also others had concerning ethnic awareness in general, that the indigenous youth showed their Indian characteristics. From the 1990s onwards, a number of studies have demonstrated how various ethnic groups ‘discover’ their ethnic roots. In the spirit of post-colonialism, Terence Turner, working with the Kayapo of Central Brazil, Jean Jackson with the Columbian Tukanos, and many others, such as Alcida Ramos, Beth Conklin and Laura Graham, drew attention to the rise of the so-called culturalism. This was explained by the interactions between the Indians and governmental and non-governmental organizations. The abovementioned scholars, as well as other anthropologists – such as Peter Gow – emphasized the reproduction of cultures, claiming that cultures already constitute transformations of prior transformations.

My task was to understand the position of the indigenous youth in this context. In order to study young Indians of Brazil, I decided to begin a study on young natives in the Amazon region. I hypothesized that the relationship between the indigenous peoples and urban and non-native cultures could be best studied in a region where the majority of the native population still lived – in reserves. I carried out a case study in Acre, a state in the extreme west of Brazil. The initial research topic of my master’s thesis changed from the Indians of India to the Indians of the Amazon region.

APPROACHING ARAWAK-SPEAKING MANCHINERIS

I focused on the Manchineri, since this was the third biggest indigenous group who had migrated to the federal capital of Acre and there was little ethnographic information on them. The Arawak-speaking Manchineri number some 1,000 people distributed between the reserve and urban areas. My initial plan was, in fact, to study only urban natives, since I did not want my presence as a researcher to influence the indigenous communities too much. However, I soon observed that indigenous territories had already been influenced by state programmers even if state officials had little knowledge of the indigenous way of life. Moreover, many Indian families in the city told me that I should carry out a study in the reserve, since it was there that I would see how the majority of Manchineris live. This was also challenging as no such extensive study had been carried out on them. Thus, my research on the youth had a comparative perspective: covering those young Manchineris living in the indigenous territory of Mamoadate, and the ones resident in the state capital, Rio Branco.

From the end of the 19th century, the Manchineri were forced to work in rubber industry. Today their reserve is the largest indigenous territory in Acre. Besides hunting and gathering, people are engaged in small-scale agricultural activities and cattle breeding. Manchineris have started a cultural recuperation through multicultural education and they have designed the first initiatives for cultural revitalization projects with the help of state and non-governmental organizations.

My attempt was to search for the most typical elements maintained, altered and created in the current lived worlds of the Manchineri youth. The concept of the *lived world* refers to everyday experiences, recognizing the dynamic and changing nature of reality, as well as the world as it is experienced, lived and explained. The studied group consists of the Manchineri youth from 14 to 24 years of age. Fieldwork methods included interviews, participant observation, photographs, video recordings, and drawings. The use of drawings was an especially excellent way of gathering information, since it seemed easier for the young people to draw than explain what they thought and remembered. My fieldwork data has been complemented by ethnographic material produced by the Apurinã and Cashinahua youth living in Rio Branco.

PERSPECTIVES IN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF YOUNG MANCHINERI

By applying a multidisciplinary theoretical framework – principally theories of sociology, anthropology and study of religion – I first of all realized that there is a plurality of social agents with which the native youth interact today, and young people take different positions and have different opinions depending on with whom they interact. The actors in the Manchineri youths' lived worlds are the native youngsters' own ethnic group (with its divided sub-groups, specifically the urban and reserve group division), ancestors, super-human agents, other indigenous groups and non-natives.

Moreover, the contemporary rites of passage to adulthood prepare young people to interact with these actors. Many of the earliest ethnographies show that in Lowland South America, initiation rituals held at puberty have occupied a central place in almost all indigenous socio-cosmologies. These initiation rituals vary considerably by content from one community to another, and they have been argued to be a shift from childhood to adulthood. However, these studies tended to overlook young people's own experiences and interpretations of such rituals. Thus, I felt compelled to research the practice of native youngsters' initiation ritual in the context of today.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF PRE-ADULTHOOD

The Manchineri traditional puberty ritual still allows young people to learn about themselves, their own ethnic group and personal qualities. However, according to my findings, there is not just one rite of passage today, but *various rites* which the youth have to go through. Besides the traditional initiation ritual, contemporary rites of passage to adulthood include state-education, learning traditional practices, shamanism, matrimony, and transitions between reserves and urban areas. These ritual actions transform the youth into independent thinkers and provide important psychological support for their development and identity formation. Studying is a contemporary rite of passage, a temporary period designed to prepare a young person to become an independent member of society. Cultural traditions also have to be comprehended

in a new way since they contribute to young people's integration and quality of life, as natives have to think about and articulate more precisely who they are or who they are not. In the city there are no many older relatives who remain the source of traditional knowledge – whereas in the reserve young people lack qualified teachers at their state-funded schools. Furthermore, for the young people in the reserve, visiting the city is a milestone in their active agency, just as visits to the reserve may be for young people from the city. This space away from home is usually the temporal space where cultural categories are maintained and created.

The long transition to adulthood prepares the youth to act with contemporary social actors and things that they consider important: new social roles in their communities, modern formations of prestige, new responsibilities, and in a more general sense a desire to be respected. Formerly, rites of passage prepared young people to relate with the unknown forest, and for those young Indians living in the reserves, traditional practices and rituals still provide the means to interfere with nature. Previously, their native communities were directly dependent on nature and a wide variety of spiritual beings, but today, other powers – such as the nation state – affect native peoples from the outside, especially in the form of healthcare, education, territorial legislation, forest management, as well as non-governmental organizations, but also illegal loggers, traffickers, and so forth. People attempt to build close bonds with these powers in order to maintain balance and tranquillity. The actions linked to these powers are a recreation of the world, and a way to control new unknown social spaces.

MULTIDIMENSIONALITY AMONG YOUNG AMAZONIAN INDIANS

By complementing ethnographic material produced together with urban Apurinã and Cashinahua youth, the study shows that the current power relations constituted by new social contacts, ethnic recognition, and co-operation with different institutions have resulted in the formation of new social fields. The present-day native youth act in various social fields: within the *ethnic group*, *youth cultures*, *shamanism*, *ethno-political movements*, and *indigenous students*.

When focusing on these fields, it became evident that they comprise the strategies adopted by young Indians to break through social and cultural barriers. The capacity of young Amazonian Indians to act in contemporary social fields produces them as full social persons. This way a person is connected to other people, which enables them to perceive their ethnicity, status, family, gender, professional category, age group and so forth.

The study also argues that the elements of the lived worlds identified in the ethnographic material can be divided into these social fields. My results indicate that interestingly ethnicity is composed here by various traditional elements of Amazonian Manchineri societies which include the proximity of relatives, respect, young couples, puberty rituals, and shamanism (comprising ancestors, advisors, and the consumption

of *ayahuasca* natural medicine). But there are some new elements – recent technologies and the learning of traditional practices – that are also issues in the social fields of indigenous students and the ethno-political movement. Youth cultures are the most distant from the social field of the ethnic group, since global youth cultures are usually used as a way to minimize cultural differences.

The youth have come to rupture the image of the ‘other’ through new indigenous representations, especially in urban areas. One of the reasons for these changes is the role played by urban-rural interactions. Young Indians produce and maintain meanings of cultural categories by specific socio-cultural processes, and they highlight the boundaries that divide them into distinct ethno-social groups. Corporeal and spatial distinctions of their own culture provide the prime means for categorizing behavior, and similarly, for creating and maintaining a traditional system of values as a viable resource for adjusting themselves to the demands of the changing social circumstances. For Amazonian peoples, the ideas of aesthetics and sociality determine the ideas of wholeness and integration between the centre where every human acts, and the margins which form the periphery of social life.

Finally, the Amerindian thinking of *perspectivism* (a theory which claims that each subject views the world from a perspective residing in the body and that there exist certain similarities between humans, spirits and animals) defined by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro was an important theoretical key for understanding the interpretation of how young Indians make sense of their *habituses*. I have found that these habituses differ from the idea of a “habitus” as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, whose ideas I have applied in my theoretical framework. My study shows that for young Indians a habitus is a transformation, an attempt to change or to communicate with things and agents in certain positions, and about producing similar bodies. In fact, the youth said that one has to adopt a different *rhythm*. A rhythm is an expression that refers to the senses and moves of the human body. Here I have detected something that is especially linked with embodied Amazonian lived worlds. My study on young Amazonian Indians already raises further theoretical questions, and I think this is important when we approach something we regard as meaningful.

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Filosofian tohtori Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen on tutkijana Helsingin yliopiston Renvall-instituutin iberoamerikkalaisessa keskuksessa. Hän on mukana kahdessa Suomen Akatemian rahoittamassa projektissa: ”Man and Nature in the Western Amazonian History” ja “Cultural Systems, Folk Religion and Modernization in the Amazon”.