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Indigenous Rights and Ethno-Development: The Life of an Indigenous Organization in the Rio Negro of Brazil

Abstract

Following a successful campaign to end the unlawful practices of trafficking that brought them to Manaus, indigenous Tukanoan women from the Upper Rio Negro established a local indigenous organization with which to plan and manage their own ethno-development, including cultural heritage activities, institution building, revenue development, health and legal services, community, and other initiatives. The case provides an opportunity to explore indigenous ethno-development, a concept at the heart of the theory and practice of Shelton (Sandy) Davis.

No seguimento de uma campanha bem sucedida em Manaus para terminar com práticas de tráfico ilegais, mulheres indígenas da tribo Tukano do Alto Rio Negro fundaram uma organização indígena local com o fim de planejar e gerir o seu próprio desenvolvimento etnográfico, incluindo atividades culturais e patrimoniais, reforço institucional, desenvolvimento de rendimentos, serviços de saúde e legais, iniciativas comunitárias e outras. Este caso oferece uma oportunidade para estudar o desenvolvimento etnográfico, um conceito central na teoria e prática de Shelton (Sandy) Davis.

Keywords

Ethno-development, indigenous women, Northwest Amazon, NGOs, Etno-desenvolvimento, mulheres indígenas, Noroeste Amazônico, ONGs

Indigenous Rights and Ethno-Development: The Life of an Indigenous Organization in the Rio Negro of Brazil

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Indigenous Craftswomen of Upper Rio Negro (photo: J. Chernela)

INTRODUCTION

A key origin narrative from the Brazilian northwest Amazon recounts the journey of Pamori Busokü, the ancestral anaconda canoe from whom all Tukanoan peoples are said to have emerged. The narrative recounts the ascent of Pamori Busokü from a distant, downriver location up the Rio Negro to its headwaters.

There the primordial ancestral vessel, said to be a canoe, turned round to face downstream, and from its body emerged the clan ancestors of the many Tukanoan language groups: Cubeo, Desana, Wanano (Kotiria), Bará, Barasana, Makuna, Arapaço, Piratapuia, and others (M. Azevedo [Ñahuri] and A.N. Azevedo [Kumarõ] 2003). A subsequent narrative, recognized by some Tukanoan clans, has a more recent ancestor reverse the voyage of Pamori Busokü. In that variant, the ancestor travels down the Rio Negro to the city of Manaus where he is shot by a soldier. Transformed and empowered by the wounding confrontation, the ancestor returns upriver to his kin, now as a ship laden with bounty from the modern urban world (Chernela and Leed 2001, 2003).

For the indigenous women who were subjected to illegal trafficking from their villages in the Upper Rio Negro to Manaus between 1965 and 1980, the transformations were analogously wounding and empowering. Lured by promises of luxury, the women were transported downriver where they served as unpaid and underpaid domestic servants in military households. Creatively negotiating their way through obstacles, the women drew upon resources to overcome difficulties, constructing in the process new lives and new meanings. In doing so, they delineated a trajectory from urban isolation and confinement to collectivity and what I will here call self-development or ethnodevelopment. This paper examines that process, linking it to larger questions of indigenous peoples, poverty, and development. It follows the women from their arrival in the newly instituted free tariff zone in Manaus during the long period of military dictatorship through their later organizational successes in the Brazilian democracy of the twenty-first century, and finally to the challenges faced in shaping a suitable development model. The case provides us with an opportunity to consider a three-decade experiment in indigenous development as the concept was envisioned by one of its principal proponents, Shelton (Sandy) Davis.

ETHNO-DEVELOPMENT

The term “ethno-development” is relatively new. It appears to have been coined in 1980 by Rohini Talalla in his monograph, *Ethno-development and the Orang Asli of Malaysia* (Talalla 1980). Two years later the term was incorporated into development discourse at a UNESCO conference in Africa where it was used to refer to remediation for government policies and development strategies that threatened ethnic identity and self-determination (UNESCO 1982). The notes from that meeting set the foundational principles of ethno-development:

If we adopt the definition of ethno-development proposed by those responsible for this project, to the effect that it is a means of countering ethnocide by enabling ethnic, minority and/or exploited groups to revive the fundamental values of their specific culture with a view to strengthening their ability to resist exploitation and oppression and

in particular, their independent decision-making power through the more effective control of the political, economic, social and cultural processes affecting their development, then we can safely affirm that the golden rule by which any ethno-development policy ought to abide, should be to ensure that all citizens of African countries, irrespective of their ethnic origin, enjoy the fundamental freedom to live their distinctive cultural lives. This is what we may term the principle of cultural democracy and the right to be different.

Two general approaches may guide this policy: to begin with, suitable procedures should be devised for determining the part assigned to culture in the vast undertaking aimed at ensuring the overall development of peoples; secondly consideration should be given to the establishment of original cultural spaces in the light of our knowledge of the cultural heritage in question and the need to protect it; this is the essential foundation for a creative process free from the shackles of centralizing and standardizing ideology. (UNESCO 1982)

Since then concepts of ethno-development, self-development, and “development with identity” have been part of a new perspective from which to rethink the assumptions underlying conventional development models. The term “ethno-development” has come to refer to development policies and processes that are sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples and, where possible, controlled by them (Bonfil Batalla 1982; Wright, 1988; Bengoa 1993; Stavenhagen 1990; Hettne 1996; Clarke 2001; Partridge et al. 1996; Davis 2002). Clarke (2001) lists four principles on which the new development models rest: cultural pluralism, internal self-determination, territorialism, and sustainability (Clarke 2001, from Hettne 1996).

As a founding member of the inter-disciplinary unit responsible for social and environmental quality in World Bank financing in Latin America and the Caribbean region, Davis has been a principal force in advances toward ethno-development[1]. Between 1990 and 1994 he published a series of papers on development and indigenous peoples (Davis 1993a, 1993b; Davis and Wali 1992; Davis and Ebbe 1993; Davis and Partridge 1994). In 1995, largely under his influence, the Bank initiated its first experiment in ethno-development, the Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadoran Peoples Development Project (Redwood 2000).

Davis’s vision built on positive qualities of indigenous societies, such as ethnic identity and capacity to mobilize labor, capital, and other resources for shared goals. Davis maintained that development involving indigenous peoples must be built “upon the cultural strengths of the indigenous populations...[and] entail their active participation” (Davis and Partridge 1999:2). He favored programs that aimed at “enhancing the ability of the indigenous organizations to design their own development strategies and formulate their own development projects” (Davis and Partridge 1999:5). From the 1986 through 2004 when he retired, Davis’s was a consistent voice in the international development community in his position that development was not a monolithic concept. Into that context he introduced two rather new ways of thinking: first, the anthropological perspective that knowledge and value are not universal across

peoples and cultures; and second, a commitment to human rights and a comprehensive knowledge of its instruments and history.

I refer to Davis in this paper principally because he was a major contributor to international policy, theory, and practice on the matter of indigenous ethno-development. I also refer to Davis because his concern for indigenous human rights and wellbeing inspired many of the actions the paper describes.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, LABOR, AND POVERTY

More than 1.3 million people are recruited by intermediaries into forced labor in Latin America (ILO 2005). Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to this type of human rights abuse. In Brazil, where the government acknowledged such practices in 1995, indigenous workers have been documented in illegal logging, cattle ranching, sugar plantations, and domestic labor. The last of these forms of labor exploitation is the most difficult to monitor and to regulate. The practices are enabled and perpetuated by conditions of extreme poverty that limit workers' options and render them vulnerable to predatory opportunism.

Income inequality in Brazil has personal, racial, regional, and historical dimensions. From 1970 through 1990, the early stages of the events recounted here, income distribution in Brazil was highly concentrated (Hudson 1998). During the 1980s, Brazil's Gini coefficient for the distribution of household per capita income rose from 0.574 in 1981 (Ferreira et al. 2006) to 0.63 in 1990 (Hudson 1998). With a nine percent increase in eight years, Brazil's inequality became the second highest in the world, after Sierra Leone (Ferreira et al. 2006). In 1990 the richest 5 percent of the population received 36.6 percent of the national income, while the poorest 40 percent received only 7.2 percent (Ferreira et al. 2006). Not surprisingly, the period was characterized by a decrease in the percentage of workers with formal labor contracts, and an increase in those employed in the informal sector (Hudson 1998). Domestic labor, an activity allowing employers to deduct wages according to services provided, and which is notoriously unregulated, easily slipped into the informal category.

There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and poverty. In Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, indigenous peoples have chronically constituted the poorest sector of the economy. A 2009 study from the United Nations shows that indigenous peoples, who comprise only five percent (an estimated 370 million people) of the world's population, constitute about one-third of its 900 million extremely poor rural people (United Nations 2009). According to the study, 38 percent of indigenous people in Brazil live in extreme poverty, more than twice the national figure (United Nations 2009; Osava 2010).

The Tukanoan women who were brought downriver to serve as unpaid domestics were drawn into the recruitment with promises of high wages that would help them assist upriver families. Between 1965 and 1980 hundreds of indigenous women were flown 1200 km from their upriver, forested villages to Manaus, a city of over one million people.

The case of the Tukanoan women who were transported to the city to work as domestics is one of many examples where agency is complicated by limited options. In its breach of international and domestic law, this case may be judged as “trafficking.” However, it also shares important similarities to enduring forms of structural abuse where ethnicity, gender, and class are bases for discrimination. In such instances, paternalism has played an important institutional role. The situation can only be understood within a broader economic historical context.

I briefly sketch the circumstances that led to their removal from home villages to the city as household domestics. In the aftermath of that confinement I explore the development of support networks and the challenges they encountered in their pursuit toward economic autonomy and agency. A starting point for the discussion is Manaus itself, with its relentless drive toward modernity. I briefly review the quixotic rise and fall of the city, from booms in rubber to electronics. It was in these conditions of rapid economic growth and modernization that the Tukanoan women were brought to Manaus to labor as domestic servants.

IMAGI(-NI-)NGS OF MODERNITY: MANAUS

The Amazonian city Manaus is noted for its resolute imperative toward modernity and its disregard for obstacles, both social and topographical. Manaus is situated 1500 km upriver from the mouth of the Amazon where its two major tributaries, the black Rio Negro, and the white Rio Solimões, merge to form the principal river. About it on all sides lie great expanses of standing rainforest. Despite its remoteness from other population centers, Manaus has long invested in its iconicity of cosmopolitanism. Its trajectory is perhaps the most notorious of urban histories as income, first from rubber exploration, and later, electronic manufacture, bankrolled two of the largest modernist projects in the New World.

From the late nineteenth-century Manaus was the improbable vision of a Paris of the Tropics on the banks of the Amazon River. In the boom period following the rise of rubber (*Hevea Brasiliensis*) on the world market, Manaus would be transformed from an unruly river trading post into a prestigious metropolis. The Manaus of the Eurocentric imagination celebrated the accomplishments of the second industrial revolution, with electrical lighting, indoor plumbing, motorcars, and trams. Faithful to principles of sixteenth-century

Rome as interpreted by Haussmann for Paris, earthworks were laid down to fill low-lying areas for large boulevards; standing forests were removed for ornamental landscapes. The diverse realities that had characterized Manaus prior to the boom were replaced by a new bourgeois elite. The height of the rubber boom, however, was short lived. No sooner had Manaus inaugurated its signature Opera House in 1896 than Asian production began to outpace Amazonian. As Asian rubber dominated the market, the Amazon city lost its principal export commodity and receded to a backwater.

MODERNITY REDUX: THE ZONA FRANCA OF MANAUS

Manaus continued relatively unnoticed until the 1960s when a newly installed military junta prioritized the economic integration of the nation. In an attempt to bring economic development to the northern frontiers and thereby integrate the Amazonian interior into the industrial south, the federal government in 1967 created the Manaus Free Trade Zone (*Zona Franca de Manaus*), a 10,000 km² duty-free zone within an otherwise protected economy. Law (Decree) 288 of 1967 outlined new fiscal policies to attract industrial assembly plants to the north by allowing exemptions on steep import duties.

Investors reacted quickly to the new incentives, transforming Manaus into a major center of commerce. From a failed Paris of the Tropics the city now earned the ambivalent reputation as a New World Hong Kong. Once the riverfront city that stagnated after the collapse of the rubber boom in the early 1900s, Manaus ranked in 1990 as Brazil's largest manufacturing center after São Paulo (Chernela 2000; in press). The modernist agenda was at last realized. By the turn of the twenty-first millennium, the boom period of the *Zona Franca* had surpassed the boom of the rubber years both in duration and in wealth creation.

The lure of jobs in the *Zona Franca* caused the population of Manaus to surge from 173,000 in 1960 to 309,900 in 1970, and to 611,000 by 1980. Two-thirds of the population of the state of Amazonas, formerly rural, was now concentrated in Manaus. Employment rose correspondingly, as virtually all of the state's revenue came from the tariff-free industrial sector, which produced \$7 billion in products and employed 137,000 people. Services of all kinds were at a premium.

With the sudden influx into Manaus of entrepreneurs and skilled laborers from the industrial south and overseas, the demand for domestic servants was steep, driving a thriving trade in indigenous women as domestics to Manaus, spurred forward by the tariff-free zone. Between 1964 and 1980 hundreds of indigenous women—Tukanoan speakers from the headwater streams of the Rio Negro along the Colombian-Brazilian border—were transported some twelve

hundred kilometers to the city for purposes of forced domestic labor. I refer to the collective identities of the women involved by the designation “Tukano,” referring to the Eastern Tukanoan language family to which most of the women belong.

INDIGENOUS POLICIES / INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

The project to draw indigenous women to Manaus was a product of the larger goal of assimilating the Indian into Brazilian culture as specified in the Indian Statute (*Estatuto do Índio*) of 1973. Under the Statute, indigenous persons were designated *tutelados* (wards), a position analogous to minors that placed them under the legal protection of the state and its surrogates. Among the latter were the missionaries of the Upper Rio Negro. Accordingly, it fell upon the ecclesiastical missionaries of the frontier regions to carry out the civilizing and assimilationist agenda of the state. This was accomplished largely through the mission’s boarding schools. Besides fundamental skills in computation and Portuguese literacy, the compulsory boarding schools of the Upper Rio Negro prepared girls for vocations of “domestic service,” educating them in laundering, ironing, sweeping, cooking, and scrubbing.

The combined roles of the frontier missions as educators and border patrol during Brazil’s military dictatorship brought the mission centers into close cooperation with the military who provided the remote outposts with crucial support and resources (Chernela 1998). The missionary-military alliance led to the routine of sending young girls to serve in military households as undocumented domestic workers. In return, it was thought, the young women would benefit from the lived experiences of westernization; they would lose their indigeneity and become incorporated into the “developed” society.

In Manaus the women were subject to a series of separations and confinements. They were removed from rural village life with close kin to live among strangers in an unfamiliar urban environment. Their labor was kept unofficial to avoid compliance with national labor laws, which could be cumbersome and costly to employers. The women were unaware of their rights to a fair wage, to limitations of the workday, or to information. Several were confined behind barriers (such as locked gates or doors). Many were not permitted to leave the apartments where they worked and lived. They were without social contacts or support in the city. They lacked access to agents with political and social leverage through whom they might obtain resources or information. They were unable to contact one another, and were often unaware of one another’s whereabouts.

Advocacy for the women involved four different strategies whose impacts were integrative and cumulative: 1) appeal to an international human rights tribunal whose allegations of ethnocide received world-wide media exposure; 2) censure by the community of mission peers and authorities who condemned and ended the practice; 3) development of a network for the victims of trafficking that involved rights awareness and mutual support; and 4) addressing problems of discrimination and self-determination in the context of international development agencies and donors.

SHELTON “SANDY” DAVIS AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

As an anthropologist conducting fieldwork in the Upper Rio Negro between 1978 and 1983 with respites in Manaus, I had been often asked to deliver gifts to the women by their upriver relatives. I was surprised to find the women living in poor conditions and confined within military compounds.

Aspiring professionals of the 1970s had been provided a model of the synergy in combining scholarly excellence with principled, global action in the example of Sandy Davis. Three years after he received his Ph.D. degree in Social Anthropology from Harvard in 1970, Sandy founded the first US documentation center on indigenous peoples of the Americas, *Indígena Inc.*, in Berkeley, California. This was followed in 1975 by his founding of the Anthropology Resource Center (ARC) in Boston, where he served as executive director. The approach of both NGOs centered on information dissemination, a strategy that had proven effective by the international human rights organization Amnesty International. According to this model, the act of exposing an abuse is an effective means to combat it.

In 1979 Sandy Davis and Robin Wright of ARC were compiling a document for the forum “On the Rights of Indians of the Americas,” to be held by the Russell Tribunal in the Netherlands and solicited cases. The “unfreedoms”—to borrow a term from Amartya Sen (1999)—that afflicted the lives of the Tukanoan women brought to Manaus had recently come to light. In 1979, therefore, together with friends and colleagues from the human rights sector and Salesian communities, I collaborated in the creation of a dossier documenting the case of the indigenous women from the Upper Rio Negro[2].

INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE: THE RUSSELL TRIBUNAL

The dossier was submitted under the signature of the well-known Brazilian playwright Marcio Souza and presented by the indigenous Tukano spokesperson, Alvaro Sampaio.

At its hearing in December of 1980, the Russell Tribunal found the Salesians of the Brazilian Upper Rio Negro in violation of international conventions ILO No. 29 (1930) and No. 105 (1957) which prohibit “trafficking in persons for purposes of labor exploitation, in particular forced and compulsory labor and other slavery-like practices.” The Tribunal revealed a thriving trade in Indian domestics from the Upper Rio Negro, calling the case “the greatest trafficking in young girls from the Rio Negro to other parts [of the nation]” (Wright and Ismaelillo 1982). The Tribunal, which exposed the practice in the media, reported that the women were transported against their will, withheld from knowing their destination of employment, and placed in unpaid or underpaid positions of domestic service. Moreover, the report alleged that the women were neither aware of their legal rights nor able to return to the indigenous region (Wright and Ismaelillo 1982:17).

After his testimony at the Tribunal, Alvaro Sampaio made this statement to the press:

The Tukano Indian population is suffering a nightmare...the signs are in the numbers of Indian women who have been abandoned with their children. They are the reminders of so-called “progress.”...The work is hard and the hours long; they do not have Sundays or holidays off, and they do not receive a minimum salary...Many of the women employed as domestics are not well-treated and are frequently humiliated...In the end they become detribalized and have no way of forming a better and more secure future. They...can only take care of the children of the lieutenants, captains, and brigadiers [whom they serve]. For the Indian child, there is nothing. The future of the Indian women who live this way is short. Woman has always been the basis of life for us...[But now] many of our Indian women will end up in dancing bars in Manaus. Some of them are acculturated to white life. Others drink beyond their limit and become an embarrassment to their people and to the missionaries who sent them there...I call this ethnocide. (CIMI 1981; author’s translation)

The Russell Tribunal is an independent initiative created in 1966 by British philosopher Bertrand Russell to apply the standards of the Geneva Conventions to contexts where they are neglected. Created and agreed upon by the member states of the UN in 1949, the Geneva Conventions are intended to ensure that crimes against humanity committed during the Second World War will not recur. Legal measures to address grievances at the international level, however, are limited. By creating a public hearing, the Russell Tribunal brings public attention to abuses of international humanitarian rights that may be recognized normatively by the Geneva Conventions, but are not dealt with by existing international jurisprudence. Lacking legal status, neither the procedures nor the decisions of the

Tribunal are recognized as having legal validity (Barat 2010). Since its findings remain allegations, all means of holding parties accountable for possible violations are subject to the political will of the nations involved and the extrajudicial networks of advocacy surrounding the case. In order to end the named abuses, it is incumbent upon external entities to apply the public testimonials of the court strategically. In this context, the role of anthropologists, NGOs, and peers, is critical.

The testimonials and rulings of the Russell Tribunal (or People's Court, as it was called), on Indigenous Peoples in the Americas garnered international attention. The most relevant responses came from members of the Salesian order. The Order was especially vulnerable to the allegations of the Tribunal for several reasons. First, its presence in Brazil was conditional on its compliance with the domestic laws of the host nation. Second, its authorization and maintenance rested on its membership in the worldwide Salesian Order and the transnational Church of Rome, of which it was a part. Actions by Salesians in any part of the world reflected on the Order as a whole and should, ideally, require its approval. In the case of trafficking in indigenous women the good standing of the Salesian Order was at stake.

By linking the local Salesians to the larger transnational body, the court called into question the reputation of all members of the Order, whose representation as worldwide advocates of indigenous peoples and impoverished classes was at stake. Unable to deny these activities, and not willing to normalize them, it was the Salesian peers who put an end to impunity and abolished the practice. The National Brazilian Catholic Church, with a strong record of advocacy in issues concerning indigenous peoples, published this commentary on the tribunal:

The Salesians of the Rio Negro...have attempted to defend themselves against these accusations...[but] have never denied the actual "cultural massacre" of the Indians of the region. (Many of these Indians are now migrating to Venezuela and Colombia, or have sought refuge in the outskirts of the city of Manaus, where they are ashamed to be recognized as Indians.) The Upper Rio Negro today has been transformed into a kind of "Salesian feudalism"...Thousands of Indians in the region, considered to be the largest Indian area in the country, are losing their culture, their traditions, their customs, their identity and even their languages. For Bishop Dom Miguel Alagna, this is called "the integration of the Indian into the national community." For the authors of the Tribunal case, it is ethnocide" (CIMI 1981).

Obtaining censure by the national community of mission peers and authorities who condemned the practice was a major achievement of the Tribunal.

BUILDING LIVES: ETHNO-DEVELOPMENT

The successes of the Tribunal were immediately felt. Less than a year after the start of the hearings, in 1981, the Territorial Prelature of the Rio Negro, with its six large mission centers, was transferred to a newly created Diocese of São Gabriel da Cachoeira. The Salesian mission was fundamentally transformed and the boarding schools dismantled. The first school to close was at the mission headquarters in São Gabriel da Cachoeira. Between 1985 and 1987 the boarding schools of Iauareté, Taracuá, Pari-Cachoeira and Assunção of the Içana were also closed, as was the girls' boarding school in São Gabriel.

Data from nineteen women who had worked as domestics through the mission system prior to 1980 showed that fourteen received no salary at all. The remaining five had received some monetary compensation, yet those wages were far below the legal minimum. Immediately following the Russell Tribunal, this trend reversed. Of fourteen women hired after 1980, the year of the Tribunal, all but two received salaries. These advances were not the end; instead, they were the beginning.

Removing the iniquities and obstacles to improving the lives of the indigenous women who were brought to Manaus was an important step. It was, however, but the first of many cumulative actions toward building and improving wellbeing and agency.

Scholars have recognized a matrix of oppressions at the intersections of race, gender, and class. The approach provides a multidimensional perspective on identity and oppression based in the understanding that regimes of oppression such as racism, sexism or classism do not operate separately, but rather cumulatively (Castagno 2005; Mihesuah 2003; McCall 2009; Volpp 1996; Yuval-Davis 2006). Race, gender and class are all implicated in the political relations and conditions in which indigenous women found themselves carrying out domestic labor in urban Manaus in the seventies. It was indigenous women, not indigenous men, and not white women, who were in the roles of domestic servants in Manaus. And, although they were laborers, they were exempted from protective Brazilian labor laws by the Indian Statute of 1973. It may be said, then, that indigenous women were subjects in a matrix of oppression produced by numerous, confluent, historic factors.

In his essays on "development as freedom," Amartya Sen (1999) points to the "urgency of rectifying many inequalities that blight the well-being of women and subject them to unequal treatment; thus the agency role must be much concerned with women's well-being" (1999:190). The intersection of race, gender, ethnicity and class is especially salient in the case of indigenous urban domestics, for whom many forms of inequality are compounded.

The project to remove the “unfreedoms,” then, was the first part of a larger effort by the women to improve their lives as transcultural residents. One major step in this direction was the formation of a civil society organization that would represent them and serve their needs. For this reason, the women, together with their advocates[3], created AMARN (Numia Kurá).

SUPPORT NETWORK: AMARN/NUMIA KURÁ

Most indigenous associations in Brazil have their origins in the 1990s, after the two decades of military rule (1964-1985) in which civil society organization was severely limited (Ramos 1997; De Paula 2008). Among the few exceptions to these is Numia-Kurá/AMARN, *Associação de Mulheres Indígenas do Alto Rio Negro* (the Association of Women from the Upper Rio Negro), founded in 1982. Today, AMARN is the oldest registered indigenous association in Brazil as well as its longest-lived.

The population that created AMARN was a minority population with distinct characteristics. Their language, values, and customs were not shared with the majority population with whom they entered into economic transactions, nor by the international development community on whom they depended for financial support. The women were speakers of indigenous languages who shared a common heritage with upriver relatives with whom they maintained strong cultural and personal ties. Yet they were also urban residents, whose wellbeing depended on their successful participation in the metropolitan milieu in which they lived.

AMARN’s origins in 1982 began with informal gatherings at which those present developed strong bonds. Meeting in a comfortable setting with hospitality served as a familiar and effective vehicle for knowledge- and problem-sharing, which led to collective discussion of solutions and eventual program development. The group soon registered as a not-for-profit organization for Indigenous Women from the Upper Rio Negro (*Associação de Mulheres do Alto Rio Negro/Numia Kurá*), AMARN[4].

Speaking of AMARN, Rosa Helena Dias da Silva, professor of the Federal University of Amazonas State in Manaus, wrote, “It was one of the first spaces in the city where they [the indigenous women of the Upper Rio Negro] could be themselves” (De Carvalho 2007).

CIVIL SOCIETY STATUS

The women who formed AMARN were committed to finding a common ground among one another and to establish a harmonious working relationship with several other communities. Among these were the a) upriver rural communities to which they maintained strong connections; b) the larger community of indigenous advocacy organizations; and c) the metropolitan center in which they resided.

One of the greatest obstacles to overcome in the development of AMARN was obtaining articles of incorporation as a not-for-profit Civil Society Organization under Brazilian law. The process involved many arduous procedures that were especially unsuited to indigenous societies. For example, to be recognized as a legal entity, the society would have to name a board of directors with a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. There were several problems involved in creating such a directorial entity. The egalitarian character of the Association was crucial to its functioning. Instituting a hierarchy of authority in which a minority of persons makes decisions for the whole, or awarding some members special individuating status was anathema to the culture of the Association. Moreover—and this was borne out—to create such an entity would put at risk the reputations of those who occupied leadership positions. Feelings against leaders were strong; it could be expected that anyone who was called a leader—or who acted like one—would experience strong criticism.

In naming a Board of Directors as required for civil society status, therefore, AMARN women creatively adjusted procedures to their own values. They named a president, secretary and treasurer, as was required, but to the office of vice president, which allowed for multiple names, they listed all members not named to other offices. Although the president and other officers were assigned responsibilities, they were provided none of the powers often attached to those offices.

MOBILIZING ALLIANCES

One of the first of AMARN's projects involved expanding and mobilizing networks to increase social capital. Although bonds among the members were strong, their linkages to resources and sectors of power were undeveloped. Because their immediate needs involved accessing medical and legal services, the first step involved creating a network of medical, legal, and other influential professionals within the community. "Friends of AMARN," as the network was called, extended the social, economic, and political reach of members so that they could secure sorely needed resources and services. Finally, the Friends network provided AMARN with visibility in numerous arenas that proved critical for their

economic survival and longevity. In 1982 there were very few NGOs to link local grassroots entities with centers of power. The Association created vertical ties to those who were able to assist the Association in a manner paralleled today by linkages between grassroots organizations, large NGOs, and funders.

Among the early concerns of the women, after health, were workers' rights and security. Brazil's Fair Labor Laws, established in 1934, guaranteed workers compensation for services through a fair wage policy phrased in terms of a minimum monthly salary. All laborers, including domestic workers, were entitled to safe and healthy working conditions, a minimum wage, a limited workday, remunerated vacations, and a weekly day of leisure[5]. A registered contract provided legal oversight and the benefits of retirement compensation.

In order for the women to make use of existing legal mechanisms, they had to obtain documentation through a series of cumbersome procedures (complicated by indigenous peoples' legal status as wards of the state in the early 1980s). Legal experts met with the women to make choices known to them and to explain procedures. Literate, experienced, members were matched with non-literate, inexperienced ones, so that each woman might obtain her necessary documentation. These simple procedures of information sharing, mutual assistance, and activating legal rights proved to have profound consequences for members.

EARLY FUNDING: CAPACITY BUILDING, GOVERNANCE, AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the newly democratic Brazil experienced a surge in international NGOs that were concerned with the rights of indigenous people, women, and development. A new culture within multilateral financial institutions was emerging, with funds earmarked for "local" or "indigenous" projects. These were channeled through cosmopolitan NGOs who competed for the funds by proposing activities with local communities. In a process where transparency and accountability were highly valued, the few credentialed, registered, indigenous organizations had special advantage.

In 1984 therefore, the Association applied for and received funding from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). That funding made possible the service programs and organizational efforts of the early stages of the Association. A portion of the funding supported the participation of AMARN members at national and international meetings on women and indigenous peoples, creating important articulations with international political forums and organizations. This contributed to a growing sense of dignity and purpose among members. The Association also purchased a house to serve as its meeting

headquarters. However, the largest portion of early assistance was dedicated towards capacity building, a category that subsumes skill enhancement of numerous kinds.

When they first assembled in 1982 to assess needs, the indigenous women who formed AMARN suffered from economic deprivation but were well endowed in social capital. They had common origins, multiple kin-based articulations, strong patterns of solidarity, and shared social and cultural norms. They were driven by common needs and values toward solutions that would improve quality of life. They brought to the endeavor skills, provided by their community upbringing, in social organization and interpersonal commitment. At the same time, they required capacity development in numerous areas related to urban life, project planning and development. Acquiring these skills was enabled through the grant from the UNDP.

The learning curve encountered by the women of AMARN was steep. To achieve “full participatory development,” a basic value to the members, they found it necessary to learn a myriad of tasks from scratch. These tasks included:

- Customizing meeting procedures to conform to the schedules and necessities of participants;
- Conventionalizing systems of record-keeping and documentation to expedite data storage and retrieval;
- Cataloguing data in order to review progress over time and learn from experiences;
- Identifying a range of productive activities that would attract revenues and were suitable to their skills and interests;
- Identifying local event spaces in order to market products;
- Targeting market niches where ethnic identity contributes value;
- Identifying national and multinational investors for capacity-building and institutional development;
- Familiarizing themselves with the language and culture of international funders in order to develop project proposals;
- Identifying functional roles according to project need; establishing task allocation according to availability and individual preparation;
- Maintaining a consensual approach to decision-making; and
- Carefully avoiding attaching roles to tasks.

By 2011, the members had taught themselves a range of tasks from bookkeeping to fundraising. Besides their initial training, they were compelled to accompany changes in communications technology. These tasks, from the most technical to the most managerial were mastered and transmitted to a new generation of young women. The women developed important hands-on experience in organization building. Through trial-and-error, they sought a common ground among members and with suppliers, exhibitors, funders, and clients.

Throughout the exploration of skills necessary to effectively manage and accomplish set goals, the members attempted at all times to adhere to their indigenous vision of development, which required a number of unusual steps. First, the women were unaccustomed to decision-making processes and leadership roles where a few individuals made decisions on behalf of an entire group. They therefore adopted a decision-making structure built upon models of consensus. They evolved a participatory framework for joint decision-making in which egalitarianism was paramount, the rules of the game were transparent, and team effort was highly valued. Personal advancement at the expense of others was frowned on, but group effort was celebrated. While this was considered cumbersome to some international donors, from the standpoint of the members it was an important arrangement that conformed to their fundamental values.

INFLUENCE

From the outset, women who contributed to the creation of AMARN brought their experiences and organizational skills to other endeavors, actively participating in the vanguard of the indigenous organization project in Brazil. AMARN women, for example, played distinguished, pioneering roles in the development of COIAB (*Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira*), created in 1989 and now the nation's largest indigenous federation. Members of AMARN were also a driving force in the creation of COIAB's Department of Women (DMI-AB, *Departamento de Mulheres Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira*) and have served as inspirations to women's indigenous associations throughout Brazil (Verdum 2008:10-11). For example, in 2001 AMARN was one of two entities that organized and led the first Meeting of Indigenous Women of the Brazilian Amazon (*Encontro de Mulheres Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira*). The step catapulted a growth of indigenous women's organizations throughout Brazil[6].

These achievements earned the women of AMARN recognition among international funding institutions who recognized, in the words of the Program Officer for the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)'s Indigenous Peoples Program, the far-reaching "political impacts of the organization" (Chernela 2010, personal communication with NORAD Program Officer for the Indigenous Peoples Program, Feb 25, 2010).

CRAFT PRODUCTION AND INCOME GENERATION

In 1987 AMARN launched a new initiative when the municipality of Manaus, responding to growing income from ecotourism, dedicated public space to the

display and sale of indigenous crafts (Chernela forthcoming). AMARN joined other indigenous organizations in creating an indigenous market space amid the appliance shops and rubber boom buildings of downtown Manaus. The Association installed an outlet in the Praça Clementino Aranha, one of the principal squares of the city. The bazaar-like atmosphere includes eighteen stalls for traditional crafts, maintained by about 90 representatives of indigenous collectives (De Carvalho 2007).

A crafts program was appealing to the members of AMARN since it would generate income and provide opportunities to work with upriver relatives, who were beginning to form their own associations. The women built and installed three looms in the AMARN headquarters where they could work in one another's company. Basketry items such as purses, containers, and hammocks were assigned retail values based on the costs of raw materials, hours of production, and market value. The Association established mechanisms to obtain raw materials from upriver relatives—the suppliers—and to sell finished goods to local and international buyers. From a small group of clients at the outset (many from the “Friends of AMARN”), the reputation and number of customers grew. Eventually, clients extended to large industrial firms, including the state oil corporation, Petrobras, and to overseas buyers.

As an income-generating activity whose products carried the identity of the producers, AMARN craft production attracted funding from international agencies for sustainable development. Principal among these was NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, which began funding AMARN in the year 2000. NORAD's project with AMARN had involved two related goals: to “strengthen organizational development” and to “professionalize handicraft production toward self-sufficiency” (Chernela 2010, personal communication). With NORAD's assistance, the Association made improvements to its headquarters and purchased basic office equipment, including needed computers.

With time, the commercialization of the enterprise grew in scale. By 2004 an arrangement with UN-BSOL, Petrobras' Amazon operations unit, accounted for 30 percent of handicraft sales. The partnership with Petrobras is part of a larger project in social responsibility and development by the firm to provide social assistance to the indigenous communities of the region (Mauro Martinez, manager of the UN-BSOL, as reported by Francisco José Lima da Silva, April 21, 2006). Being prominently situated in Manaus, and holding certification as a tax-exempt organization, AMARN was an appropriate partnering choice for Petrobras' social assistance initiatives.

CONSIDERING PROFITABILITY

After seven years of what the members saw as a success, it came as a surprise when NORAD brought the arrangement to a halt. The agency alleged that the Association lacked “progress in professionalization” and “financial profitability.” The goal of NORAD’s partnership with AMARN, according to its Program Director for the Indigenous Peoples Program, was the “strengthening of indigenous culture.” According to the Program Director, NORAD was drawn to AMARN for the political acumen it showed in what he characterized as “a strong, driving voice” in the formation of indigenous organizations (Chernela 2010, personal communication).

Despite AMARN’s status as a not-for-profit organization, by “professionalize,” the NORAD Program Director explained, AMARN’s crafts enterprise would have to become profitable. As he noted, “we continued to see lack of progress in the professionalization of crafts. There were no analyses of how to turn this [crafts endeavor] into something that would be able to have a profit, even though we had workshops for several years to tell them how to go about this” (Chernela 2010, personal communication).

NORAD had financed workshops on subjects such as computer use, business management, and market demand, yet it had not seen progress on these fronts. Misunderstandings persisted. The same NORAD spokesperson reported that by 2008 “they realized that something was not right [i.e., lack of profit]. We let them know that in the long run Norway would not continue funding them unless they showed progress...took steps toward being self-sufficient...We had a physical limit” (Chernela 2010, personal communication). The partnership was terminated in 2008.

When NORAD made its decision to withdraw funding, AMARN was at a height of activity and income generation. In 2007, the association counted eighty crafts workers among its members and reported an income of USD \$7,000 per month. With monthly office expenses at approximately USD \$1,000, there remained USD \$75/month per person, a sum said by members to be sufficient to buy food and clothing for each member and her family and additional funds for upriver relatives and children’s school enrollment. Art-ns were paid per piece, and the majority of funds rolled back into the Association.

In April of 2007, the legal minimum salary in Brazil was 380 Brazilian Reais (BRL), the equivalent of USD \$190[7]. If each member of AMARN was receiving less than half of the minimum salary, from the standpoint of NORAD, this indicated that income from crafts was not sustaining its producers. Worse, it was not producing a surplus that could be reinvested into the enterprise to ensure increase future growth. The calculations for the AMARN allocation, however, are based on the assumptions of a forty-hour workweek, a condition that would not

likely describe the time invested by most of the eighty crafts workers. AMARN women carried out their craft production at times of convenience—evenings and weekends. The members of AMARN were receiving something akin to the present-day Bolsa Família, a minimum amount per household or person, to ensure wellbeing. The largest portion of the earnings, moreover, were directed toward collective activities and services. The issue at hand was not competence per se to obtain profit, but differences in goals and values.

DISCUSSION

The funding withdrawal and its justification revealed that the two entities—the civil society organization, AMARN, and the assistance agency, NORAD—subscribed to two different development models. The evaluation by the funding institution reflects a discrepancy in values between it and AMARN. A common ground that was thought to exist did not.

The example reveals the discrepancies in models of development, often assumed to be universal. It allows us to consider the assumptions that underlie notions of development and consider both implicit and explicit goals associated with them.

From the outset, the objectives of the project were misunderstood. From the point of view of the funders, the purpose of the Association was to generate individual, sustaining wages. From the point of view of the members, however, income was generated in order to maintain the Association and its services. For the women, income allowed the perpetuation of the association; if income was the means to an objective, that objective was the society itself. The civil society organization AMARN/Numia Kurá had become a community.

To participate in the Association was to be part of a vibrant social project that provided its members with two highly valued benefits: agency and wellbeing. Through participation in the Association, women had become active agents of change, dynamic promoters of their own social transformations and their own wellbeing. In this sense, agency and wellbeing were indivisible, a concept that is perhaps at the heart of ethno-development.

The initial goals of AMARN—to increase autonomy and community among members—had been met. Simple methods of knowledge sharing and networking did lead, eventually, to greater self-determination and access to services and resources. They provided the members of AMARN with the skills and instruments to better manage their own lives. Choices for those improvements were not always expected. As outsiders discovered, networking and social ties were valued *not* as mere tools to obtain resources, but as goals in their own right.

Over time the lives of members changed. Some returned upriver; most, however, remained in the city. Of the latter, some married, others found residence with relatives or companions, and still others remained as resident domestics. Of the latter, most opted to leave elite households and take up live-in employment in the middle class neighborhoods surrounding AMARN. Within a few years, members of diverse ages and occupations had concentrated themselves in a small area within walking distance of one another and of AMARN. Their choices reflected values and priorities centered on conditions of dignity and autonomy. These specifically entailed a just workplace in proximity to community and strong relationship ties.

In hindsight, the indicators of AMARN's perceived organizational crises in leadership and financial stagnation had been present since its inception. By comparison with its early stages, and considering the origins of its members, the income generated in 2007 was highly satisfactory to its members. Its allocation might be best understood as a form of rebate, rather than salary compensation. AMARN was founded as an association dedicated to mutual assistance rather than capital accumulation and it continued to be so.

VALUES

By the conventional assessment of one of its donors, AMARN appeared to fail or fell short as an organization because it was not profitable (this, despite its status as a society without profitability as a goal). But the measures of success or failure here may be ill suited to the goals to which the Associates themselves aspired.

The urban setting of the Association and the engagement of its members in the wage labor force obscures the roles of the Association in the revitalization of the indigenous identity and the formulation of a uniquely indigenous vision of development. AMARN had its beginnings as a society to serve the needs of the indigenous women facing discrimination and unlawful restrictions on their rights and freedoms. It was established by the very women whom it benefited. Many of the solutions that have allowed AMARN to thrive are the very practices found by donor organization to be "unprofessional." Many of the values on which the Association was founded, such as resource pooling, knowledge sharing, empowerment and self-determination, are potentially undermined by the pursuit of short-term profit maximization. Entrepreneurial models that involve withholding capital for saving or reinvestment may not be appropriate for indigenous societies, where distribution of wealth is as important as its accumulation.

Like many other indigenous associations, AMARN had discovered an incompatibility between its own goals and values and those of the funders.

Incompatibilities between the donor and the indigenous association are manifest in the differing priorities of the two entities. The model of development for AMARN differs from some of the more austere income-centered approaches that can be found in conventional development models. AMARN members placed high value on security, health, autonomy, and social relationships; these amounted to minimal necessary conditions for human dignity. Although opportunities for wealth creation through market capitalism may be higher, so too are uncertainties and insecurities that an alternative approach, such as the one advanced by AMARN, attempts to avoid. On the other hand, the funder appears to assign higher value to labor-intensive, risk-taking activities, and the achievements that come from competition and innovation. While AMARN's strategy may bring lower returns and collective solutions rather than higher returns and individual solutions, risk is minimized, while sociability and security are maximized. The latter model prioritizes inter-generational sustainability, to adequately provide for current and future necessities and well-being through pooling, rather than dividing, resources.

There is ample evidence that such misunderstanding between development donors and indigenous recipients is widespread. The numbers of indigenous organizations judged to have "failed" according to similar criteria is high. In Brazil it includes national-level associations, such as COIAB, the coordinating body of indigenous associations of Brazil, also facing withdrawal from OXFAM and other funders. In the words of the NORAD Indigenous Program Director, there are:

Very few indigenous organizations that are not in one way or another in trouble with their financing partners or the justice department...In spite of the donors...it's almost chronic! I don't have any solution to that. We are trying to intensify our work on monitoring and to reinforce the need for transparency. (Chernela 2010, personal communication)

POVERTY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND ETHNO-DEVELOPMENT

Domestic servitude constitutes a global human rights concern. The ILO estimates that 2.4 million people throughout the world are lured into forced labor as a result of human trafficking at any given time (ILO 2005), with women and girls accounting for about 80 percent of victims (UNODC 2009). In trafficking, the forced migration of persons for purposes of illegal employment, gender and racial discrimination converge with institutional and economic power inequities to drive women and girls into situations where they are subject to constraints and abuses of their rights and freedoms.



AMARN craftswoman in kiosk in Downtown Manaus (Photo: J.

Chernela)

The issue of trafficking is embedded in broader institutionalized “unfreedoms” (Sen 1999) that include racial and gender discrimination, income, wealth inequities, working conditions, and access to judicial mechanisms. For its eradication, and in order to ensure that domestic workers are finally provided with equal protection of their rights, it is necessary to address the root causes of trafficking. Providing everyone with full, productive, and freely chosen, decent, work can attack the root causes.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND SELF-DETERMINATION: SHELTON (SANDY) DAVIS AND DEVELOPMENT

Some of the lowest per capita incomes in the Latin American region are found among indigenous peoples. These inequities leave indigenous groups and individuals vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In 2002 Sandy Davis, who wrote often on this matter, argued that there is:

Nothing inevitable about the poverty faced by indigenous peoples. Large-scale investments in education targeted at indigenous people and tailored to their specific linguistic and cultural characteristics could play a significant role in equalizing the income-generating characteristics of indigenous and non-indigenous populations and improve their productive success in both market and non-market activities...The combination of increased investments in human and social capital, based upon new participatory methodologies and a respect for indigenous cultures and identities, lies at the heart of current strategies to combat poverty among indigenous peoples. (Davis 2002:233)

Davis was a principal force behind indigenous rights and ethno-development, the twin subjects of this paper. His approach is perhaps well summarized in the following citation:

This idea of indigenous or “self-development,” sometimes referred to as “ethno-development” or “development with identity,” is recognized and is a central tenet of the International Labor Organization (ILO) 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. Article 7 of ILO Convention 169, for example, states that the ‘the peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions...and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development.’ (Davis 2002:233)

In 2002 Davis enumerated the fundamental principles of indigenous development. He held that ethno-development must be “culturally appropriate;” it must be “based on full consideration of the options preferred by the indigenous peoples.” They should take into account “local patterns of social organization, religious beliefs and resource use;” and it “should support production systems that are well adapted to the needs and environment of the indigenous peoples.” Mechanisms should be included in such plans for the “participation by indigenous peoples in decision making throughout project planning, implementation and evaluation,” and where indigenous peoples have their own representative organizations these should be used as “channels for communicating local preferences” (Davis 2002:234).

If we apply a single measure of value to evaluating projects we will have overlooked the needs (as well as the successes) of some of the most marginalized sectors of society. Although the terms “ethno-development” and “self-development” were introduced later, AMARN serves as an important example of these concepts, offering many lessons to be learned in promoting indigenous development in Latin America. As a reflexive project, AMARN has continually subjected itself to its own evaluations, according to the values shared by its members. Its achievements and errors provide ample material for considering the

challenges entailed in such efforts as well as the many of the obstacles in the way of such ethno-development.

CONCLUSION

The early human rights case and the subsequent organization serve as a forum and practicum in international and national rights of indigenous peoples and domestic laborers. For the women of AMARN, the knowledge and awareness gained during and after the hearing provided the basis for actions, claims, and negotiations later employed by the women to improve their lives and increase their participation in the new democratic society that followed. The consequences of the decision had lasting impacts on the victims of the abuse. The outcome of the Tribunal, as well as the processes surrounding it, contributed to a growing literacy in human rights and the possibilities for invocation of these rights toward praxis and empowerment for the indigenous women at the center of the case. It contributed to their confidence and capacity in engendering an incipient indigenous movement in Amazonia that began, with their participation, in 1982. The same women who were brought to Manaus without awareness of their rights became leaders in local and national efforts in human rights and indigenous rights.

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NOTES

1 Davis was a senior sociologist in the Social Policy and Resettlement Division of the World Bank’s Environment Department from 1991 through 1997 and Principal Sociologist in the Social Development Department of the World Bank from its creation in 1997 to August 1998.

2 I had collaborated with some of the same colleagues in demarcating the indigenous lands of the Upper Rio Negro in 1978.

3 Throughout this process the anthropologist played a role.

4 Its example was soon followed by a sister institution in 1989, the *Associação das Mulheres Indígenas de Taracua, dos Rios Uaupes e Tiquie* (Amitrut) (Sacchi 2003).

5 On June 16, 2011 the International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted Convention 189, known as the Domestic Workers Convention (ILO 2011). Its purposes are the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor; the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation; guarantee of fair terms of employment and decent living conditions; protections against all forms of abuse, harassment, and violence; and, generally, promotion and protection of the rights of all domestic workers (ILO Convention 189). However, by July 20 of 2012, only one in three domestics in Brazil were working with formally contractual employment that would place them under the protections of the national labor laws (Anchieta 2012).

6 In 2007 the northeastern organization, the *Povos Indígenas do Nordeste, Minas Gerais e Espírito Santo* (Apoimne) called a meeting of indigenous women (women “warriors,” “*guerreiras*”). In the same year the *Povos Indígenas da Região Sul* (Arpin-Sul) called, for the first time, a meeting of indigenous women of the central south (Verdum 2008:11).

7 In 2007 the Brazilian Real (BRL) was the equivalent of \$1.82 USD.

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