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Speed of Socio-Cultural Change
Among Tribal Indian Populations
of the Americas

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Batalla

I. Professor Batalla, in an excellent article, considers the defense of gradual socio-cultural change as an expression of "Conservative Thought in Applied Anthropology (1970)". Although, in the case discussed by Batalla, this probably happens there are very important areas that escape his point of view. This would be the situation of the so called "tribal selvaticos", Indian populations in the Americas.

In the interests of Applied Anthropology in the Americas perhaps the main distinction that can be formulated is the one between Peasant and Tribal Indian societies. Tribal populations are characterized by a more simple technology, non political centralization and low demographic concentrations. Peasant populations would be integrated in larger socio-political environments, have larger demographic concentrations, and a more complex economy with participation of some sort in an external market. In terms of Steward's classification (1949) it unfortunately reaches only South American Indians, Marginal and Tropical forest groups would be "tribal" while Andian and Circum-Caribbean groups would be "peasants".

To make the situation more complicated there is the trend of Tribal groups becoming Peasant groups. A situation of interethnic contact in the way defined by Cardoso de Oliveira (1964) would be some phase of the process of "integration" of Indians to the National society, that is a phase of their process of becoming Peasants. Ribeiro defined these phases in terms of "Levels of Integration to the National Society", (1957). Tribal populations that became Peasants could have, in the Brazilian case, the example of the majority of Indian populations during history. Previous Peasant populations, therefore, would then be added to the new Peasants. Members of societies that arose from the history of interethnic contact.

The importance of the distinction between Peasant and Tribal

populations for Applied Anthropology arises from the need of the different policies.

Fast socio-cultural change can mean for the Peasant groups, land ownership, broken economic exploitation etc. For Tribal populations a radical change will mean exactly the opposite, lost political autonomy, lost land ownership, and entrance to a system of economic exploitation. They become Peasants, with all the weight that the concept peasants have in terms of social class. One strong possibility is their disappearance during the process of change.

Epidemics have been a pervasive aspect of the contact situation. Originally Indian groups did not have resistance to such diseases as measles or colds. Peasant populations because of their centralized political system, the existence of stocks and their original sizes had a higher resistance against epidemics. Although paying a high price in lives they could survive. Among Tribal populations, as shown by Ribeiro (1956) the trend is the disappearance of tribal populations and death rates of 70% in diverse cases. Some sort of control of contact with the members of the national society together with health assistance is therefore necessary. A non controlled contact would be the requisite for "fast change" and non controlled contact is also the requisite for epidemics.

If, by one side, the development of economic and social ties has these effects, by the other the problem is not only of land ownership but epidemics, political domination etc. Socio-cultural disorganization is a threat as important as any other against Tribal populations. Naturally it is correlated with these other aspects but it is, by itself, one aspect that is extremely important. It is an important category of analysis for the Applied Anthropologist, with some autonomy and its own

own processes. Examples here can be very dramatic as in the case of the Bororo Indians who decided to kill all the children of their village by a conscious decision to end a meaningless social life. The problem however is not only of normative crisis with psychological consequences. Socio-cultural disorganization has effects that naturally reach all levels including the economic. Economic disorganization tends to mean hunger with the cumulative results on the process of socio-cultural chaos and on the lives of people.

II The only example in Applied Anthropology where there was the search for gradual integration of Tribal populations to the National society is the example of the Xingu Indian Park in Brazil. It was made possible by the individual action of the Villas-Boas Brothers. They were responsible for the creation of the Xingu Indian Park and its survival.

Xingu Park has a population of about 1,800 persons living in an area of about 22,000 km². The Park has two political areas on the North and on the South. The ~~North~~^{South} groups are the so called "xinguanos" in the literature of the area. They speak different languages but have reached an amazing level of socio-cultural uniformity. Villages have populations varying from 30 to 150. They have the same rituals, same locality and descent rules, as well as a formally equal kinship system. Economy is also the same, based on slash and burn agriculture and fishing.

Historically the Upper Xingu was a region of refuge. The Indians were pushed into the area by convergent Pioneer fronts. The first "Caraiba" (term by which the Indians call non-Indians) to visit the area was the German Anthropologist Karl Von den Steinen in 1884. In 1940 the Brazilian government created posts of permanent assistance.

All the groups of the Park suffered the effects of epidemics. Steinen found a population of about 3,000 in the South groups. In 1954 and 1955 the figure dropped to about 650. Today there are about 900 persons in the South region of the park. For the North groups we have no figures.

The important facts for the purpose of the present paper, is that with the possible exception of some groups of the North region, the groups of the Xingu Indian Park did not break with what Firth (1964) called "line of break of social structure". Great transformations occurred because of demographical drop, introduction of metal instruments and the participation on an Indian reservation with a post structure. The main forms of relationship between individuals and groups are kept however.

I would now like to concentrate on the South groups and to display a model of their economic system and try to preview what would happen with "fast changes" occurring.

In the Upper Xingu perhaps as important as the Kinship system is the grouping of people along very simple sex lines, men and women. In the center of the village is the men's house. In this house are the Karytu (Kagutu, Djakui) flutes that women are forbidden to see. Women therefore are forbidden to enter this house that is called "Karytu's" house. The term "Karytu" denotes not only the flutes but also the ritual and the house where the flutes are played, and a spirit associated with the ritual, and the masculine community of the village. Mens solidarity is built mainly on their common participation of the Karytu complex.

The Karytu complex is expressed through a system that begins to operate in the human body. In the Upper Xingu diseases are always considered a result of witchcraft. The witch, by manipulating certain

techniques makes a mamae, a spirit, which penetrates the body of the victim and causes disease. Mamaes are usually associated with age or sex categories. The most important category however is Karytu.

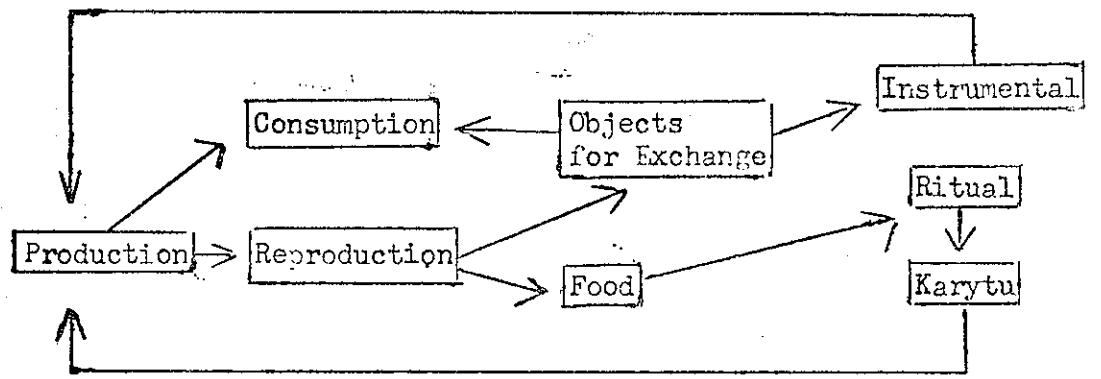
When a person is sick the medicine man is called to identify the mamae responsible for the disease. In order to obtain a cure it is necessary to perform the ritual correspondent to the mamae. Once free of the spirit the cured person is responsible (by the performance of the ritual) for the rest of his life. This person is called the "owner" of the ritual. He has to "pay" by his performance of the ritual ~~and~~ by giving food or gifts to the players.

Karytu is the most important ritual. Being associated with the mens collectivity it is in some way associated with the well being of the whole community. Almost everynight it is performed. The flutes are played in the village plaza and the women are locked inside the home. Almost every evening, men gather around the men's house and there is a food distribution by the owner of the ritual. For this reason the owner of Karytu is usually a person with a strong domestic group behind him and is one of the most important men in the village.

In some way the owner of Karytu has reinforced his power by the ownership of the ritual. He has the only mechanism to make men act corporatively in this non centralized political system. There are some tasks that need all the men of the village acting together. These are mainly house building and the slash and burn ^{stage of the} agriculture practiced. Therefore the individual ^{who} that plans to plant a manioc garden or ^{to} build a new house will have to "pay" the owner of Karytu ^{with} food to make the men work together. During the collective work of the men, the spirit is considered to be present and all

the work is done as a part of the ritual. The flutes are played almost all the time.

Karytu, by its role in collective masculine work is therefore one of the bases of the economic system of the Upper Xingu. The economy of these Indians can be understood as a system of "simple reproduction". There is no "investment" in the modern sense and the economy produces just enough to continue through time. Upper Xingu economy can be represented by the model below:



Part of the production will go directly to consumption and part will go to reproduction (the term "investment" must be avoided because of the relationship that it brings to a modern market economy). Part of the production used in preproduction will be food and part will be tools, ceramics etc. This food will be used mainly for the "paying" of rituals and mainly for Karytu. Karytu occupies the same function as tools such as bows and arrows or fishtraps. It is essential to the continuity of the economic system and therefore to the survival of these people.

III Some thirty years ago a missionary went to the Xingu region and began to preach that Karytu is the Devil. He began to associate Karytu with negative things. Fortunately he did not stay there long enough to change the minds of the Indians. This would also be the case of diverse chiefs of

of posts in other Indian societies that try to change Indian society without trying to understand it.

In other Indian groups other missionaries have been attempting recently a very different approach to the problem. Depending on the situation of particular tribes a missionary that is highly proselyte can be better than nothing. This is not however the case of the Upper Xingu Indians because of their low level of contact with the national society.

The result of permanent contact with anyone interested in transforming Tribal society without knowing the society ^{as illustrated by} ~~has for examples~~ the majority of Tribal populations already with economic, social, and political ties with the national society. The manipulation of "gifts" such as metal tools or medicines (a necessary fact of a contact situation) ^{can easily work for} will make very easy the transformation of Indian society. The problem is that the transformation generally does not follow the ^{of} ~~route~~ planned by the agents of indigenism if their interest is the improvement of the condition of the Indians.

Naturally everything can be reorganized but the breaking of the ritual Karytu complex, for example, would mean the breaking of the only form of collective male work. This would have the worst consequences in a human group of about 100 persons with a low level of ^{complexity} ~~skills~~ and a group subjected to other pressures. That is, a society that lacks elasticity to change. In order to change such a society it is necessary to have a previous understanding of the society.

I hope that we can draw the following conclusions from this paper:

First: Essential measures for protecting the Tribal Indians is the gaurantee of land. But this is not all. It is necessary to have a knowledge of Indian society and the rational planning of its intergration.

Second: Some analysis have given attention to the effects of the internal organization of tribal Indian groups on the contact situation. This is the case for example of the excellent analysis of Laraila and Matta (1967). These analysis helped us to understand very important dimensions of a contact situation. Now I believe it is time to do ante-facto studies of the Indian spciety and the pioneer front before the contact situation is stabilized and the Indians pay the price for it.

Third: The rational control of social change can be done, in the case of tribal populations, only in a contest of gradual transformation. Usually to support this point of view, ethical elements of cultural relativism are reminded, "respect for a different way of being". This is a highly legitimate base but as in the case of the Xingu ritual complex shows it has other implications. More than an ethical problem it can also be a problem of physical survival of human beings.

Fourth: Applied Anthropology and studies of Social ~~Organization~~ ^{Structure} are usually kept apart. While the former still have an elementary theoretical elaboration the later has reached a very sophisticated level. If Cultural categories are considered to be important to Applied Anthropology a bridge must be built between the two fields.

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