The Amazon Anthropology

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This study aims to demonstrate who the Amazon man is, where he came from, how he used to live and how he lives nowadays. The Amazon scenario in the past, when it was almost untouchable compared with the present situation, after the economic, social, political, and environmental challenges. The methodology used was the reading of the books of authors and articles that made possible a better interpretation and development of the present work, through the interweaving of the authors’ ideas.

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1. Introduction

Anthropology is a Greek word composed by two others: Anthropos and Logos. Logos means science or study of a certain subject; Anthropos means Man, in its generic sense, marking the quality of the Human Being as a species detached from the others. Anthropology is the science concerned with studying man and humanity as a whole, covering all of its dimensions. The classical division of Anthropology distinguishes Cultural Anthropology from Biological Anthropology. Each of these, in its construction, harbored diverse currents of thought.¹

Socrates related to human qualities: Justice, honor, beauty, goodness, are not qualities found in nature, they do not possess the phisis² as its essence. They are, in fact, qualities strictly related to the capacity to judge of the human being. Philosophy strives to know in a clear and rational way the nature, the human being, and the universe that surrounds us and the metamorphosis that takes place in them.

The human being as a constituent part of nature, lives, depends and is related to the historical, social, economic, and political circumstances that arise during its existence. It is the only being capable of producing culture that is consubstantiated as a fabric of multiple determinations. Culture codifies and mediates the relation of men to the world and of them to each other; informs the eyes with which man sees and understands the world. Conflict is the most human of the ontological constituents of man. For Suess, “Cultural activity, while dilating natural boundaries, is an emancipatory work. Cultures are historical projects of life, codified in social relations, images, myths, worldviews, work and leisure” (2002).³

Nature, culture, and man are in the Amazonian territory, where the inhabitant of the waters and the forest has a unique identity resultant of his way of life.

The Amazonian cultural complex comprises a traditional set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and ways of life that form the social organization and a rudimentary system of knowledge, practices and uses of resources extracted from the forest, rivers, lands and waters responsible for economic subsistence developed by Amazonian man and society. A historical

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process inherited from the Indigenous, to which assimilation and diffusion were incorporated through institutions, instruments, techniques, incentives and motivations transplanted by the European settlers and Northeastern immigrants who defined the current social economic structure based on an agro-mercantile-extractive economy, oriented to external markets and linked to the dominant centers of the exterior and center-south of the country.4 (1966, 117)

Ecological complexity is considered in its paradoxical aspects, especially in the relationship between the human being and nature. According to Benchimol,

There is a relationship and virtual independence between human society and nature, represented by the biosphere, atmosphere and geosphere. In them coexist, coexist and coexist man, flora, fauna, fish, rivers, seas, lands, other factors and agents abiotic that characterize the different ecosystems that give sustentation to the life.5 (2001, 7)

The Amazon rainforest is composed of an area of more than seven million km² (2.702,715 million square miles) constituting a territory immensely rich in biodiversity and characterized by being a tropical rainforest with hot and humid equatorial climate. The Amazon basin is considered the most extensive and voluminous in the world, with 20% of all fresh water from the earth’s surface. This grandiose configuration renders the Amazon planetary observation and curiosity, which creates a scenario of perspectives about the ecological potential of its unique biodiversity.6

Who are and how the inhabitants of this immense territory live? This small study intends to contribute to the knowledge of the Amazon anthropos and to present a little about the Amazonian universe.

2. The Inhabitant of the Amazon

Knowing the Amazonian world is a great adventure where there are so different and unique cultural habits of the people and the reports of scholars, settlers, visitors, migrants, and those who came to know and fell in love changing their homeland by the Amazon experience.

Caboclos,7 riverside settlers,8 caboclo riverside settlers, rubber tappers.9 The Amazonian man is the result of the confluence of distinct social subjects—Amerindians10 of the meadow and/or firm ground, blacks, northeastern and European of different nationalities (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, etc.)—who inaugurate new and unique forms of social organization in the Amazonian tropics.11 (2017)

The indigenous had a very important contribution in the formation of the Amazonian society, in the miscegenation with the white man. It was an important piece in the local workforce, as a slave and as a worker, they contributed to the transportation of goods by the rivers through their knowledge of the region and by acting as rowers and carriers. They lived in societies in which men practiced hunting, fishing, and food-gathering. The women otherwise practiced small scale farming and flour-making, although they also collaborated with men in fishing.

The boiled tucunáres12 were soon taken from the pots and placed before us. The husbands of creatures like these women must be happy. It is undeniable that Indigenous and mestizo women are excellent administrators; They are more diligent than the men, and most of them make flour and sell on their own account, enjoying much more credit with the merchants who make the river trade than the men of the family.13 (Henry Walter Bates 1825-1892)

The conquest of the Amazonian space occurred during the process of Portuguese colonization and the exploitation of the rubber tree, through penetration of the great fluvial courses and establishment of human nuclei that represent a permanent sovereignty linked to a socio-economic enterprise. The economic activity
consisted in the collection of native spices, woods, species and exotic birds and animals destined for export to Portugal.

At that time, there was intense migration from the Northeast region to the North region, expressive contingents of Northeasterns in most cearenses. The conquest of the Amazonian space was marked by pioneering, adventure, unforeseen events, as to the successes or failures common to ventures of this nature.

The men who faced the Amazon forest to extract the raw materials it offers, both vegetal, animal, as well as minerals, these of its subsoil, or to implant agrarian or industrial nuclei generating of the regional economic goods and resources realized and realize an Enterprise of giants that stand out in the framework of men from different social groups and of work activities that compose the Brazilian society.  

The traditional communities are related to a type of economic and social colonization, with reduced accumulation of capital, not using waged labor. Independent producers are involved in small-scale economic activities such as agriculture and fishing, collecting, and handicraft production. Economically, therefore, these communities are based on the use of renewable resources. An important characteristic of this mode of mercantile production is the producer’s knowledge of natural resources, their biological cycles, eating habits, etc. According to author Filho, 

The indigenous material culture has provided ample knowledge about the environment, remedies from plants and animals, handling of fibers, household items sold in the whole world, such as: The hammock, agricultural techniques of cutting and burning, the recovery of degraded areas, forest enrichment, domestication of animal and plant species with emphasis on manioc and various tubers, and the art of fishing. (2006, 105)

The centuries of indigenous presence in the Amazon gave us gifts such as chestnut, peach palm, cacao, babassu, cassava, rubber, dozens of species of hardwood, clean and abundant water, a rich fauna and a variety of other components of the tropical economy.

The Amazonian society is openminded, cordial and welcoming, incorporating new values and techniques. It is important to maintain regional peculiarities and identity, despite the cultural process of settlement and human occupation the multidiversity of peoples and nations. Today, through ethnic and cultural miscegenation, there are millions of descendants of the indigenous who inhabit the river banks, lakes, villages, hamlets, and cities of the regions, also called riparians. Despite the great massacres the forest peoples have suffered since the arrival of the colonizers and the process of extinction as victims of violence, disease, and decay of living conditions, many indigenous groups resist and keep alive the culture and identity, despite the threats and dangers of the actions and projects that modernity has brought.

The Amazonian anthropos possesses peaceful and contemplative behavioral characteristics with apparent listlessness, affection to the land and placid life without ambitions. The Northeastern man, who migrated to the Amazon in search of work, has a vibrant, audacious temperament and a spirit of adventure. Both constitute the Amazonian society.

3. The Cities

The Amazonian cities have the characteristics of the Brazilian colonial cities. There were more villages than cities and generally empty, as people spent much of their time in the jungle or on river trips in collecting, transporting, and marketing products, only gathering in the festivities, which were so many and so time-consuming as to cause admiration in English naturalists. There was a certain harmony of the population
with the environment, so much so that despite the predatory activity, the limits of sustainability were not crossed. Once capitalism reached the region, social transformations and their impacts took place.

Due to the need for a military force, the fortress of São José do Rio Negro was created in 1669. Later, in honor of the most influential Indian tribe in the region, it was renamed Manaus, which beginning because it is a strategic place situated at the confluence of two great navigable rivers, serving as a control spot against possible Spanish or Dutch invasions.

Manaus expanded from village to city and received the title of “Paris of the Tropics.” Large avenues are lined with trees, paved with cobblestones of Portuguese granite. Squares with monuments and fountains, carved in bronze, marble, and cast iron. The exuberant Amazon Opera House. The Amazonian caboclo occupied the riverside areas of the municipality and those who were urbanized, learned a profession and began to occupy the space of the local workforce.

In the rubber phase, patriarchal power concentrated on the great rubber seringalists and with the establishment of the Free Zone leading to the end of the patriarchal model stimulating the competitiveness between the individuals for the profit of few and accentuating the difference between the classes.

The Manaus Free Zone is a business and industrial area created in the city of Manaus, capital of the State of Amazonas, whose main objective is to attract companies and promote greater occupation and territorial integration with the North region of the country. Currently there are more than 500 companies installed in its domains. Officially, in Decree-Law No. 288 of February 28, 1967, the Manaus Free Trade Zone is:

A free trade area of import and export and special tax incentives established with the purpose of creating in the interior of the Amazon an industrial, commercial and agricultural center endowed with economic conditions that allow its development, due to the local factors and the great distance, Which are the centers that consume their products.18 (2017)

When the Manaus Zona Franca was created, the State expanded the scope of tax incentives and legislation was approved providing special tax incentives to private companies that settled in the Amazon. The immediate consequences were positive, as the streets were paved, the electric power grid was modernized, the telephone network was built and a new airport was built. The cost of living improved with imports of foods that were sold at cheaper prices than nationals.

The location of the city offers many advantages; The climate is healthy, there are no mosquitoes in place, the soil is fertile and appropriate to all kinds of tropical culture… the city lies at the confluence of two large navigable rivers… located in the center of the equatorial region in a territory almost Vast as Europe… with river communication with the Atlantic, on the one hand, and the republics of Venezuela, New Granada, Ecuador and Bolivia on the other. (Henry Walter 1979)

As the urban population increases, there is a gradual loss of traditional culture through changes in food and clothing habits, rising living costs, the need for more labor, unnecessary deforestation and loss of quality of life.

The river settlers maintained a partial society, although they depended on the cultivation of the land, especially of the cassava, they practiced activities as fishermen, craftsmen, extractivists, generally developing the jute culture which sale was destined to obtain money for their purchases in the city.

In the social imaginary of the people, the city has always been identified with freedom, with the overcoming of the idiocy of rural life and its traditional values. The appeals for liberation that the Free Zone presented to the man from the interior of Amazonas soon proved misleading and tragic for the majority who, escaping isolation and abandonment of the interior life, did not achieve in the city the promised existence less isolated and abandoned.
4. The Forest and the Rivers

Throughout this process of population of the Amazon natural resources were used by man for his survival. In the culture of the Amazon, indigenous and caboclo man, these resources were to meet the needs of their subsistence. However, for the settlers the forest was seen with glances of greed and began to explore it in disorder. The crossing of these human races and the evolution of the techniques of exploration refer us to the society that exists today in the Amazon.

The capitalist side, understands that nature exists to serve man. Nature belongs to men and man is nature’s all-powerful master. The speed, grandeur, and impact of human action and management have assumed such a greatness that it begun to threaten the existence of forests, rivers, animals, many of them already extinct by the inability to resist the speed of their use, abuse, and degradation, while natural resources remained passive and slow in their recovery, reconstruction and recycling process.

Preserving the environment is the only way to take care of the survival of the species, the quality of life and the dignity of the people. It is the opportunity of all of us who live in the Amazon to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve social prosperity without destroying natural resources. Conserving the environment is our commitment, competence and reason to exist.  

The Amazon is a set of very delicate ecosystems, formed by rain-forest-soil-rain-rain-units, etc., in which each of the three is indispensable and irreplaceable. Unlike other soils in the world, where forests sustain themselves thanks to the fertility of these soils, in the Amazonian landscape the situation differs radically: With few exceptions, it is the rich forest that sustains a soil that is almost always poor. By removing the forest cover, not only the forest is lost, but the soil and fauna in it.

The vision of Amazonian sustainability for Benchimol is consistent with the perspective of the Amazonian integration of public policies articulated in favor of an economically viable, ecologically adequate, politically balanced and socially just development. For in this way, the Amazon will cease to be an ecological utopia and will become a sovereign reality. According to Fearnside, “Biodiversity contributes to making Amazonian forests very valuable, leading to the conclusion that they must be protected. Protecting the Amazonian forests requires understanding the deforestation process, policy changes such that the actors are motivated to maintain the forest instead of cutting it” (2003, 38).

The access to the Amazon region is an important point to understand its isolation, which facilitated the beginning of river transportation, at first, for the defense of the territory and for the disposal of all products that have driven and are responsible for the intense flow of products for domestic consumption and extensive. It would be impossible to live and produce in the Amazon if the region were not equipped with means of transport and navigation that allowed the transport of people and products. The conquest, settlement, frontier, economy, food, and life in the north are interdependent with the river, water, and transport.

The Amazon man’s homeland is not only the land, but the river because it has economic and eco-sociological expression. From the river, a life calendar is created where the economy, work, crops, harvests, cuts, fisheries, abundance, and scarcity that alternate between the two seasons of the fluvial year, drought and rain. As Bauman says,

The identities are fluctuating, if some of them are launched from the moment the person is born by what is around him, others are chosen and determined by the person in other social circumstances. Identity is not solid, but liquid, depends on the paths traveled, the relations of belonging, especially for those marginalized by globalization.
Despite all the exuberance of the Amazon rainforest, as well as the immense hydroelectric potential of the region, Benchimol\textsuperscript{24} came to the conclusion that the Amazonian botanical wealth also represents its economic poverty. The understanding that once the ecological balance has been broken by the withdrawal of the forest, the Amazon will emerge as a great desert, it makes up the world expectation of forest conservation, in which national sovereignty suffers interference in Amazonian management in an attempt to keep intact the forest. Giddens says, “The consequences of modernity in the construction and reconstruction of a supposed regional identity in the Amazon, when he says that Amazonian man is not crystallized in time, despite seeking to maintain his traditional practices, receives different influences from urban-industrial society” (1991, 87).\textsuperscript{25}

Nevertheless, the current socio-political world scenario allows one to understand how the Amazônida,\textsuperscript{26} not only the citizen born in the Amazon, but the one who adopts the Amazon as its stronghold and defends it in a conscious and committed way, that is, the planetary citizen which awakens to the new world order, to the perspective of continuity of life on Earth from respect for the environment.

5. Final Considerations

The Amazon anthropos has developed through history and social and economic contingencies, bringing with it the legacy of the experiences of the Amerindians and the peoples who came to the region and contributed with their work and cultures.

Although the City of Manaus is the capital of the state and concentrates the majority of the population, presenting a certain level of development, the interior of the Amazon, where the river dwellers live is very undeveloped and sparsely populated (with few people living there). Access is only by river or air. This represents a challenge for those populations that are isolated by geographic and economic conditions.

After the golden phase of rubber, with the opening of the Free Zone generated jobs and investments, but also brought disappointment to the entire population that left the interior of the state to have a better quality of life in the capital Manaus. Manaus grew disorderly and poverty and violence increased.

There was investment in tourism to show the forest to the tourists, fauna, and flora exuberant but this did not bring economic return and employment to the population that depends almost exclusively on the Free Zone. There is still much to be done so that forest man can live in contact with his roots and achieve a better status through education, employment and social rights.

In Amazonas, the only possibility of overcoming cultural heteronomy and barbarism in the process lies in the decision of the Amazonian people to take the task of thinking and reorienting the destinies of their culture, their history as a challenge based on praxis and of his memory, toward a human, ethical and civilized ecology.

It is necessary to guarantee due respect to the vulnerable nature and the way of the beings of the Amazon, of their idiosyncratic potentialities. Government’s managerial actions must have convergence for man—a central figure in this process—helping to develop in the field of their possibilities. The man from the Amazon can no longer be abandoned on the roadside, on the banks of the rivers, waiting for the new routes of development projects that do not consider them as subjects with history. The responsibility belongs to everyone.
Notes

2. Physis means the set of all things, the origin and constitution of all things that exist. Available at https://oficinadefilosofia.com/2011/04/03/physis-cosmos-arche-logos/ accessed on 08.10.2017.
7. Caboclo is the designation given in Brazil for the individual that was generated from the miscegenation of an Indian with a white.
8. Riverside settlers are those that reside in the vicinity of the rivers and have the artisanal fishing as main activity of survival.
9. Rubber tapper is the typical character of the rubber tree region. It is the one that extracts the latex from the rubber trees and enables its transformation into natural rubber.
10. Amerindian is used to designate the natives of the American continent, replacing the words “Indians,” “Indigenous.”
12. Tucunaré is a species of fish present in the rivers of the Amazon and much appreciated by the population.
13. Bates, Henry Walter (1825-1892) was an English naturalist and explorer famous for his trip to the Amazon, along with Alfred Russel Wallace, to collect zoological and botanical material for the London Museum.
14. Cearenses are the people who live in Ceará State in the northeast of the country.
17. Manaus is the capital of the State of Amazonas.
19. Zona Franca is the industrial district that produces home appliances and electronic devices.
26. Amazônida is the one who lives in the Amazon and defends it.

Works Cited