

Janet Chernela holds a PhD in anthropology from Columbia University and is Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the University of Maryland. She has conducted fieldwork and consulting work in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru and is author of numerous articles and a book, *A Sense of Space: The Wanano Indians of the Brazilian Amazon*. She has worked with the Indigenous peoples of the Upper Rio Negro basin in Brazil for over four decades and, together with its members, participated in the founding of the indigenous women's association, AMARN-Numia Kurá.

BACKGROUND

As I look back on my career of fifty years, I find that I am more than ever convinced of the importance of anthropology. I am grateful for having spent my life in its ambit pursuing important questions and working for change.

My first recollection of place was of our home in post-WWII Long Island, not far from an early site of the United Nations. It was a reminder that a world improvement project was underway, and I gladly joined it.

As an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin, I noticed the scarcity of female professors. The few that did exist were in the Department of Anthropology: fully three women in a department of about twelve.

As a student of the liberal arts, I was intrigued by the underlying integrative processes of history and the everyday lives of ordinary people. I found in anthropology a discipline that recognized the importance of these seen and unseen processes and that provided a view of human existence extending beyond the frontiers of the European world. What's more — it seemed that women might be accepted into this field.

In 1969 I joined the staff of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, where I worked as an instructor and, later, assistant to the Curator of South American Peoples. Margaret Mead, who was neither a full curator at the Museum, nor a full professor at Columbia University, maintained two non-tenured, underpaid positions at both institutions. Mead—an iconoclastic

feminist— was an important role model and source of encouragement to the young women at the AMNH. One of her innovations was a small women's group, in which I participated.

This was the early stages of what is now called the Second Wave of Feminism. I dabbled in several women's groups and participated in, among other things, the 1970 sit-in at the editorial offices of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. We protested the magazine's portrayal of women and demanded an all-female editorial staff.

The group that became an important influence in my personal and professional life, however, was a group of women anthropologists in New York City that came to be known as the Ruth Benedict Collective.

Like participants in other consciousness-raising groups, members of the RBC took turns reflecting on our own lives. Consciousness-raising, which Paulo Freire described as "action-reflection," proved to be a powerful tool that raised critical awareness and led to personal transformation and political insight.

The process unveiled the many patterned ways that we, as women, had internalized prevailing ideologies that kept us in line as the second sex. But, as anthropologists, we also viewed this systematic socialization through a comparative lens. We experienced one another as both witnesses to and objects of our own sociocultural analyses. The dynamic back-and-forth inspired fresh perspectives and led to novel connections, contributing to

ongoing themes that would play out differently in each of our lives.

Understanding one another on both personal and professional levels turned out to be a precious and irreplaceable resource. (Early versions of some of these themes can be heard on a Pacifica radio recording made by members in 1971 (BC1587C, 1971).

The Ruth Benedict Collective gave rise to several off-shoots. One of the new branches opted to emphasize public anthropology: a group that, in turn, gave birth to the New York Women's Anthropology Caucus (NYWAC), and later, the International Women's Anthropology Conference (IWAC).

In 1975 I entered the PhD program in anthropology at Columbia; and in 1978 my fieldwork in the Northwest Amazon of Brazil began.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Working among the Indigenous Tukanoan people in the Amazon basin of Brazil, I gravitated to women's activities, concerns, and viewpoints. I was especially drawn to the position of women in social life, as they were regarded as outsiders.

Having married outside their family village and language group into those of their husbands, adult women would be forever foreigners in the villages of their husbands and children. Although these women had barely been noticed by previous researchers, I found them to be central to the formation of common ground and mutual knowledge across a vast area of 110,000 km² (42,471 mi²). My work explored the critical role of women as political intermediaries between groups. This positionality was crucial in maintaining peaceful, mutual interdependence among communities that might have otherwise been at war.

When women are included in the analysis, what emerged was not a series of discreet ethnicities, but a multiethnic, cosmopolitan, society.

Theirs was the work of *communitas*. This played out in many ways. Women's sense of themselves as outsiders was expressed most poignantly in song exchanges known as "texted weeping" that took place during ceremonies when a woman's own relatives were present. In the many song exchanges of this type that I recorded and wrote about, women sang about their personal misgivings and private longings. On those occasions, their shared sentiments of outsidership were transformed through the performative process into a ritually demarcated "community of outsiders."

Another project of mine focused on women's roles as farmers. In the West, people often assume that farming is a male responsibility. But, among the Tukanoans, it's women who plant, manage, and harvest the crops. The roots of manioc (cassava), the principal crop planted, account for about 70% of the food consumed.

To an outsider, manioc plantings might look alike, but these women were able to identify no less than 137 different subspecies. To my surprise, they closely followed the performance of each variant, trading to achieve the best outcomes. As in-marrying outsiders, new wives were able to introduce new varieties and to barter among themselves.

Women's crucial role as conservators of biodiversity in Amazonia has traditionally gone unacknowledged.

These research projects were part of a longer research program that included ethnohistory, regional economic exchange, narratives, language acquisition, and language ideology.

ACTIVISM

Alongside fieldwork, research, and writing, I integrated activism into my work. In 1980 I worked with two human rights collaborators to bring a case of trafficking of young Indigenous girls before an international human rights tribunal. The young women had been transported from mission boarding schools in the Brazilian Northwest Amazon to distant cities where they labored as unpaid and underpaid household domestics in the home of military personnel. We brought their case before the Fourth Russell Tribunal on the Rights of the Indians of the Americas, whose panel of judges deemed it to be trafficking.

The women's testimony and the widespread dissemination of their grievances led to the end of the practice, and, within three years, the area's mission boarding schools were closed.

Following the Tribunal, I worked with the same women to create an association that sought to "evolve collective solutions to common problems." The women established a center in Manaus, with a bilingual school and a crafts cooperative. AMARN-Numia Kura, as it is known, is now an independently funded NGO and the longest-lived women's Indigenous organization in Brazil. Three generations of associates recently celebrated their 45th anniversary.

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