

AMACULT

Cultural Systems, Folk Religion and Modernization in the Amazon

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The aim of this project has been to study comparatively the native Amazonian, indigenous as well as mestizo cultural systems as resources for interpreting and relating to the processes of modernization. Among the indigenous groups and the semi-urban mestizo population, the interpretations of modernization processes are intricately tied up with the cultural systems of folk religion in general and nature beliefs in particular. Thus, it has been our aim to examine how the processes of modernization are systematically linked with the cultural systems of folk religion and especially with the Amazonian people's models of nature. Nature, for many Amazonian peoples, exists only as relations to the different human and non-human beings.

The processes of modernization include the social, cultural, political, legal and economic transformations taking place in people's immediate surroundings. For instance, governmental measures to implement state education and health care system in the rural areas affect the cultural understandings of local communities. At the level of cultural experiences, modernization shapes the belief systems of Amazonian peoples, like shamanistic healing sessions and mythic narration that have extensively changed in last years. Our data have been formed among three groups, with whom we have had previous experience: two indigenous groups: the Manchinerys living in the state of Acre in Western Brazil and the Piros in Southern Peruvian Amazon, and the semi-urban Mestizo population at the outskirts of Iquitos area, North-East Peruvian Amazon.

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