

Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626

Volume 3
Issue 2 *Including Special Section: The Body in Amazonia*

Article 2

December 2005

Mutually Exclusive Relationships: Corporeality and Differentiation of Persons in Yine (Piro) Social Cosmos

Minna Opas
University of Turku, Finland, mirop@utu.fi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Opas, Minna (2005). "Mutually Exclusive Relationships: Corporeality and Differentiation of Persons in Yine (Piro) Social Cosmos", *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70845/2572-3626.1018>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol3/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Mutually Exclusive Relationships: Corporeality and Differentiation of Persons in Yine (Piro) Social Cosmos¹

MINNA OPAS

University of Turku, Finland
miurop@utu.fi

“What do you think we are going to cook for dinner when we have no food? You’d better tell us when you have game!” Such exclamations are frequently heard among the Yine (Piro),² especially when women complain to their spouses about food scarcity. To keep the family well fed requires the joint effort of both parents. While the man’s duty is to bring meat home, the wife’s is to cook. It is also the wife’s responsibility to apportion the catch, and send parts to family members and co-parents (*compadres*). Food production requires much effort from both husbands and wives, as *real food* (Gow 1991:7, 101–103, 114) does not include easily obtainable foods such as rice, bananas, lentils, and sweet potatoes. Rather, real food is comprised of relatively scarce foods, especially those provided by men, such as game meat (*nikchi*) and fish (*sbima*). If these are not available, women may refuse to cook for the family. They may also abstain from intimate relations with their husbands, or even generally avoid their presence.³ This conjugal tension is growing today, as game animals have receded further into the forest, and as hunting has become more laborious. As a result, the Yine quite often spend a whole day drinking *koya*, the manioc beer that takes away the sense of hunger.

Corporeal elements and their analogues (especially foods, beverages, sexual fluids, and physical closeness) are of central importance for the dynamics of kinship relations among the Yine. It is through embodied processes such as sharing food, exchanging sexual fluids, and living close to their kin that the Yine form, maintain, and regulate relations to each other. Such daily bodily exchanges are manifested in multiple and often subtle ways. For example, individuals who prefer to eat alone rather than share food are considered socially more distant than those who produce and consume together. Spatial distance leads to social distance, and Yine people easily forget to include in their list of kin relatives those who live in a different community and with whom contact is infrequent. Furthermore, it is through the same embodied logic that closeness is created. This explains why, for instance, marital relationships are often established without a

ceremony and the new spouses simply start sleeping together. Since very similar observations have been made throughout the region,⁴ we are now in a position to generalize and propose that this “language of the body” (i.e., the physiology and interaction of bodies, see Conklin 2001a:145) is a central organizing element in the social life of many Amazonian peoples.

In addition to the formation of social relations through the body, one can find in various Amazonian societies the idea that bodies themselves are relationally constituted through corporeal interactions. This conception of the body is evident in ideas relating to gestation and care of the newborn. The Yine say that a fetus results from the fusion of the mother’s menstrual blood and the father’s semen.⁵ It is through these bodily fluids that the newborn remains connected to its parents during several months. As the bodies of a father, mother, and child are all interconnected, any social misconduct by the parents may harm the child or cause physical alterations. For example, the soul of an animal killed by the father may seek vengeance by causing bodily transformations and pain in the child. This danger is due to the underdeveloped and unstable state of the infant’s human body during the first months of its life. To grow and become a human person, a baby must interact socially, as well as be fed with properly produced food, starting with manioc beer (*koya*) and homemade fruit drinks (*serolga*), before moving to “real” solid food.

Nevertheless, for the Yine, as for many Amazonian peoples, no one ever becomes a fully completed human—there is no end to the process of becoming a person.⁶ To live well, the Yine need to live close to their kin. This is the only way to achieve a “minimum level of stability” (Vilaça 2005) and to consolidate their shared existence as proper human beings. In order to live well, the Yine people try to eliminate all possible obstacles to their progress of becoming fully human, including the danger represented by individuals who drift away from the bodily-moral ideal of what it means to be a Yine person. For instance, during my stay among the Yine, two men who had engaged in an intimate sexual relationship were asked to leave the community. Since physical closeness is thought to produce similarity or consubstantiality, the Yine were worried that the two men would “contaminate” other people, especially adolescents.⁷ The danger of becoming “Other” (which includes a range of deviant or improper Yine behaviors) in the Yine world is perpetual, and much social energy is dedicated to restoring similarity (or making others similar). Success is measured, for instance, in terms of Yine people’s ability to transform the bodies of other indigenous people (or anthropologists) into bodies like theirs (see also McCallum 1997; Overing 2003). However, problems arise from the fact that nonhuman persons are as keen as human ones to transform others into beings similar to themselves.

Amazonian anthropologists are paying growing attention to the perspectival relations people entertain with the “multiple actors of the universe” (Descola 2001:108). Several authors have noted that corporeal elements such as food and physical closeness are significant not only for interhuman relations, but also for transforming human and nonhuman beings into Others (Lima 1999:111; Viveiros de Castro 2004:474). My purpose in this article is to look at these transformations from a slightly different angle, and to argue that, among the Yine, the body is significant not only because it is through the body that persons can turn into other kinds of persons, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because it is morality bound with corporeality that determines the boundary between human and nonhuman existence. As the narratives analyzed below demonstrate, simultaneous involvement in bodily interaction with humans and nonhumans and the mixing of these two categories lead the Yine to act towards their kin in ways that are considered immoral, hence inhuman. I start with some observations on previous Yine ethnographies and a discussion of Peter Gow’s work on the formation of Yine kinship relations. I then examine the delineation of the categories “human” and “nonhuman” through three narratives. All address the relationships that Yine people have with various nonhuman persons, each emphasizing different corporeal elements. I look at food sharing and physical closeness in the context of Yine encounters with the souls of the deceased, examine the role of sex and proximity in Yine relations with the brocket deer, and describe the way in which these corporeal elements are negated during drug-induced encounters with the mother spirit of *gayapa* (in Spanish *toé*, *Brugmansia sp.*). In the concluding section, I return to the Yine category of nonhuman persons to examine it more closely.

APPROACHES TO YINE ETHNOGRAPHY

The Yine are an Arawakan-speaking indigenous group living in Central and Southeastern Peru, as well as in Brazil, close to the Peruvian border. In spite of the Yine having for a long time been considered the most influential indigenous group of Central Peruvian Amazonia, where they controlled various long-distance trade networks (Santos-Granero 2002:28; Román 1983:95; Zarzar 1983:52–55), the ethnographic studies on the Yine remain surprisingly scant.⁸ Given the particular focus of the present discussion, I specifically turn here to the work of Peter Gow, who, over the last fifteen years, has published extensively on Yine history, culture, mythology, and shamanism. His publications concerning kinship and the dynamics of food distribution among the Yine are especially relevant here

(Gow 1989, 1991, 1997, 2000, 2001). In his monograph *Of Mixed Blood*, Gow shows how early kinship relations among the Yine are formed through care in the form of food gifts that over time, enable the child to develop memory and knowledge (1991:124, 159; see also McCallum 2001). The child too young to speak has no developed memory of its parents. But when the child starts using kinship terms, people consider that knowledge is developing, and the parent-child relationship starts maturing “from one in which the parents take care that their physical connection to the body of the child does not harm it, into one in which gifts of food, given out of love for the child, evoke the child’s love for its parents and other kin” (Gow 1991:160–161). According to Gow, the child’s use of kinship terms corresponds to the child’s reciprocation of the love it has received from adult kin in the form of food. Later on, the memory of care received in childhood triggers the adult’s will to live close to his or her kin (Gow 1991:167; see also Lagrou 2004:256). As mentioned above, these ideas have been further developed in recent works on Amazonian kinship and relationality. Amazonian anthropologists now understand more clearly the versatility of roles the body plays in the formation of social relations, as well as the role played by social relations in the formation of bodies.

Gow was also one of the first authors to extend this relational view to the nonhuman realm, although his observations exclusively concern Yine relations with the souls of their dead kin. Amongst the Yine of Urubamba, he remarked, sick people are susceptible to receiving visits from their dead relatives, which awake in the former the desire to die in order to be with the latter. Such longing for death, he argued, is directly connected to the memories of care formed through sharing food during a person’s lifetime (Gow 1991:186). My observations among the Yine of Madre de Dios, which support Gow’s interpretation,⁹ go further in highlighting the centrality of food transactions not only in relations formed during peoples’ lives but also in the actual creation of relations between living and dead kin.

FOOD FROM THE DEAD

A woman in the Yine community of Diamante in Southeastern Peru once told me about a family crisis that took place in April 2000, during the country’s presidential elections. A sick and old man was left alone in the village, as his relatives had to travel to another village to vote. They left food for him to eat, and explicitly instructed him not to bathe in the river, where the river’s mother spirit could harm him. When they returned, the old man refused the food they offered him, saying that he was full, as his

dead aunt Eva had come to cook for him in their absence. However, the fireplace was cold, and there was no trace of cooking or food preparation. Nonetheless, the old man persisted in his story, and eventually died, no doubt, according to his family, as a consequence of his acceptance of food from a dead person.

This story highlights the role of food gifts in uniting kin through networks of care, love and respect. For the Yine of Madre de Dios, food is of focal significance not only in peoples' relationships during their lifetime, but also in their encounters with dead kin, during which food gifts are extended across the boundary of death. If the souls of dead relatives (*samenchi*)¹⁰ visit the living, it is with the explicit intention of taking them along by cooking for them, and offering them food.¹¹ As Yine people have repeatedly explained to me, it is not the presence of a dead loving relative as such that kills the old or the sick.¹² Rather, it is the act of exchanging food with the dead that brings about "soul loss." It is through food that a person reestablishes a former kin relation and the memories associated with it, and consequently desires to "live" with the dead (see Gow 1991:187; Conklin 2001b:197; Rival 2005:297; Teixeira-Pinto 2004:237). Such situations are highly ambiguous, given that the two relationships, one with the living and the other one with the dead, can never coexist for long. Even when they overlap, these relationships remain mutually exclusive. In the story of the old and sick man, accepting food from his dead aunt meant refusing food from his real living kin. The latter were quick to interpret his choice as a sign that the old man no longer wished to belong with the living, not because he had ceased to love or respect them (the old man continued to call his relatives respectfully with the appropriate kinship terms, and they, in turn, reciprocated the love by killing a valuable chicken for him to eat), but because *it was too late*. The relatives had left the old man behind, and, during their absence, he had reestablished the former relation of care with his aunt, thus activating the process by which he would be transformed into a dead soul, that is, die (see Taylor 1993).

The woman who told me this story condemned her own family and the old man's closest relatives for leaving him alone in the village. In her view, leaving prepared food behind to prevent food offerings from the dead (Conklin 2001a; Lagrou 2004:256–257; Rival 2005; Rival and Whitehead 2001a:8) had not been a sufficient precaution. What this man would have needed was the continued closeness of his living kin (Gow 2000:47, 49–50; Lagrou 2000:162), since the dead do not dare to come and offer food to a person surrounded by other humans. As human persons are formed only in relation to the living, the presence of others is necessary for the bonds of kinship to remain active and strong. As we shall see below, food and solitude are important themes also in many human-nonhuman

encounters, in particular in Yine encounters with brocket deer, to which I now turn.

BROCKET DEER, SEXUAL RELATIONS, AND MADNESS

Yine social relations extend beyond the realm of living and dead kin, to include animals, as well as a wide range of other nonhuman persons. A man once told me about his adventure with a grey brocket deer (in Yine *kshoteru*, *Mazama sp.*). When the man was still a bachelor in his early twenties and lived with his parents, a brocket deer woman¹³ seduced him, and he went to live with her in the forest for three to four days. In addition to seeing the deer as a woman—looking just like one of his former lovers—he saw the aerial roots of a tree as a man-made hut, and other humans as tree-like stiff figures. He went back to his community once during these extraordinary days, but did not feel comfortable there, and returned to the forest where he had all he really needed: a woman who offered him good food. The man explained how his acceptance of food from, and eating food with, the brocket deer had deeply pained his mother. He now realized that, to her, it meant that he no longer desired her food. His mother's pain had been made greater by the fact that for her and other fellow villagers, the deer had not been feeding him proper food, but inedible fruits. In the end, his relatives had to drag him back to the village where a healer managed to cure him after months of therapy.

This story shares some characteristics with the previous one. First, it is through eating with a nonhuman person—a brocket deer—that the hunter began his relationship with her. This led him to refuse food from his mother and to stop interacting with other relatives. Second, the Yine say that the brocket deer, like other nonhumans, tends to appear to humans only when they are alone (see also Teixeira-Pinto 2004:235; Taylor 1993:669). Here too it is distance from living kin that triggers the encounter with a nonhuman person. The man encountered the deer woman while hunting alone. Third, the longer the relationship between the hunter and the deer woman lasts, the more intense it gets. After seducing the man, the deer woman threw a charm on him, which intensified their relationship even further. The charm rendered the man vulnerable by altering his state of consciousness, causing his perceptions to change, and making him experience things from a different perspective.

The transformation of a person's perspective from that of a human being to that of a soul or of an animal takes place in progressive stages, each deepening the new position (the new corporeal perspective). In Amazonia, such transformations are usually achieved through intermediary substances

such as foods, tobacco, or bodily fluids (Conklin 2001a; Fausto 2004). In the first Yine case described above, the old man did not die right after having accepted food from his dead aunt's soul, but inevitably progressed towards the realm of the dead, as if sliding towards it. He remained connected to his living kin until his ties to the dead became stronger than his ties to the living. In a similar fashion, the hunter who chose to live with the brocket deer also remained attached to his human relatives for some time. For instance, he went back to the village to visit them. His social attachment to them was weakened, but not beyond repair.

The contrasting fates of the old man who accepted food from his dead aunt and that of the hunter who accepted food from the deer woman raise, however, one question. Why did the former get transformed for good and died, while the latter could be saved? I suggest that the answer lies in the type of relationship activated in each encounter. The relationship between the soul of the deceased and the old or the sick usually amounts to that of a former caregiver with the person she or he cared for, a mother and a child, for instance. Food exchanged between caregivers and care receivers makes up a key substance in the gradual formation of relationships and persons, even when gifts of food reunite a caregiver and a care-receiver located on different sides of the boundary between life and death. By contrast, the sexual attraction that unites a male hunter to a she-animal is of a conjugal nature. Yine spouses or lovers do not usually engage in mutual food exchanges prior to living together. Therefore, when the brocket deer offers food to her human spouse, no memories of care and consequent desire to live with her are triggered in the latter. The hunter's desertion is temporary, and his commitment to the brocket deer woman new and impermanent. However, the more he stays with the deer, and the more they sexually interact as husband and wife or as lovers, the weaker his humanness becomes; his perspective eventually transforms into that of a deer (cf. McCallum 1997, 2001:166). As far as the Yine are concerned, such a transformation is that of a moral person into an utterly immoral being.

For the Yine, who see morality and immorality as corporeally manifested in the actions of a person, to be human is first and foremost to be moral (see Storrie 2003). Human kin are persons who relate *morally* to each other. True human beings like the Yine address each other using kinship terms, live close to their kin, engage continuously in relations of food giving and food receiving, and practice only licit sex.¹⁴ Any weakness or failure causes a person to become distanced from his or her kin. The cases discussed above present various ways of detecting that such distancing has taken place and that a person has been transformed. Abnormal eating behavior may be the signal of such separation and distancing. For instance,

when bewitched or sick, a person usually loses his or her appetite, and isolates himself or herself from other people. Bewitched people may start eating charcoal, ashes, dirt, or even—if they are men—their own penises.¹⁵ As these substances are not produced by humans, they are not considered to be proper food (Gow 1989:579; Carsten 1995:233; Fausto 2004:168; Lagrou 2004:251). Their consumption, a sign that death is close, is highly repugnant and strongly disapproved of. The same judgment is passed on people who eat foods offered by souls or animals. Such food is not proper human food either. Even if nonhuman persons see the food they offer as real food, human persons know perfectly well that the souls of the dead eat moths¹⁶ and brocket deer eat inedible fruits from the forest. Therefore, to eat “food” offered by nonhuman persons amounts to a shift of perspective (cf. McCallum 1997).¹⁷

The transformation into an immoral, i.e., nonhuman, being may also be detected from other ways in which a person’s conduct towards his or her kin is radically altered. Ethnographic examples illustrating the many ways of transforming alterity into sameness and potential affinity into kinship abound in Amazonian anthropology (Viveiros de Castro 1992; 1998; 2004; Rival and Whitehead 2001b; Vilaça 2002; Rival 2005). Among the Yine, potential affines are turned into kin, for instance, by means of intimate relations. Yine people have always sought or taken spouses from other ethnic groups. These become kin by co-residing and producing food together with their affines, and by having sex with their spouses and producing new babies. Also the stories about the brocket deer emphasize the sexual side of social relationships. A brocket deer metamorphosed into a human being aims at transforming humans into beings that resemble it through making love to them. This also explains why the hunter mentioned earlier was saved from death: he had not yet made love to the deer woman. Stories about brocket deer making love to humans always end up with the latter turning mad, which, in Yine thought, is an expression of immorality.¹⁸ The Yine say that a mad person no longer feels ashamed (*giwa patewata*). Shame is an attribute of a person’s moral condition—an understood failure to behave properly. Normally, a man would feel ashamed of failing to act in an acceptable and considerate manner towards his close kin. However, sexual interaction with nonhumans brings about a radical change. The hunter, for instance, willingly eats inedible substances, tears off his clothes, and acts violently or in a sexually grotesque manner. Although people explain this state of madness as “not thinking” or “not feeling ashamed,” they do not readily conceptualize it as a mental state—as we would—but, rather, as a corporeal condition. Morality—or the lack of—gets expressed corporeally (through action), rather than in thought.¹⁹ In the Yine world, then, animals may

try to behave like the potential affines of human persons, and transform the latter through sex, an activity through which kin are made. However, animals are nonhuman persons, who cannot become legitimate kin to Yine people without violating the latter's tranquil conviviality (see Overing and Passes 2000:7). Consequently, we again observe here that the two sets of Yine relationships are incompatible. Given the central importance of the body and its desires in the constitution of social relations among the Yine, to satisfy one's bodily desires in relation to nonhumans involves the twin process of withdrawing from old social relations, and generating new ones (Gow 1989:581).

TOÉ AND TEMPORAL RELATIONSHIPS

In the cases examined so far, interactions between humans and nonhumans are characterized by the same moral ideals as human-to-human interactions. Good life is based on mutual respect, and manifested through the closeness of co-residence, physical proximity, and the giving and receiving of food and sex, all processes that transform potential affines into kin. Moreover, as argued above, to accept these components of "living-well" in one relationship (human-to-human) automatically means to negate them in the other (human-to-nonhuman).²⁰ I now wish to consider a third type of relationship found in Yine social world, in which the use of hallucinogenic substances leads to the negation of all the constituents of the good life, both in human-to-human and in human-to-nonhuman interactions.

Unlike the Yine of Urubamba (Gow 2001:138), the Yine of Diamante prefer *toé* or *gayapa* (*Brugmansia* sp.) to *ayahuasca* or *kamalampi* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*). Whereas almost all the adults in Diamante have taken *toé*, I only know one man who uses *ayahuasca* regularly. Whereas any adult Yine may take *toé*, *ayahuasca* is only taken by healers or witches. The Yine drink *toé* to cure a number of illnesses, to solve witchcraft and sorcery cases, or to recover lost property. Accounts of *toé*-induced hallucinations vary. People generally see the mother spirit of the hallucinogenic plant appearing to them under the form of a short, dwarflike man, or as a western style doctor, busy curing the *toé* drinker. The hallucinogenic drink enables the drinker to see deceased people, as well as some plants and animals as humans. The mother spirit of the *toé* plant guides the drinker along a path, pointing to dangerous and malevolent beings that are to be avoided. The effects of the hallucinogenic drug can last several hours, or up to two days, depending on how much *toé* one has ingested. The Yine, who are perfectly aware of the dangers involved in taking *toé*, still do so deliberately in order to transform

their vision of the world. Drinkers who fail to please the mother spirit either undergo no transformation at all, or, worse, run the risk of falling victim to nonhumans encountered during hallucination. They may get ill and die. To achieve a safe and successful transformation, *toé* drinkers must behave and relate to other beings appropriately. This requires the total *negation* of relations of social proximity with *all* beings, especially when these relations involve food or sex (see also Gow 2000:57; Lagrou 2000:157).

A Yine who intends to take *toé* distances himself or herself from other people both physically and socially. The drinking session always takes place away from people and animals, especially barking dogs (cf. Crocker 1993). Apart from the *toé* drinker (and his caretaker) no one else is present. This physical removal is thought to protect both drinker and villagers, as the latter appear to the former as malevolent beings. To immerse themselves in the hallucinatory state, drinkers loosen their social relations with kin. In this case—which contrasts with those involving dead relatives and brocket deer—transformation is not feared or avoided by remaining close to kin. To the contrary, transformation is sought after through voluntary isolation (Teixeira-Pinto 2004:231, 235). Social detachment from kin is also achieved by withdrawing from food exchanges before, during and after drug taking. Drinkers stop eating a good time before taking *toé*, as the intoxication causes violent vomiting. For the Yine, the hallucinogenic drug has powerful cleansing properties; it cleanses the body of all greasy substances and filth (Gow 2001:139). Dieting continues for a few days after the *séance*. People who have drunk *toé* must not eat salt or hot peppers (*aji*), or food cooked in a pot from which water has boiled over. They cannot accept food offered by neighbors or menstruating women. A *toé* drinker who has not followed these restrictions risks becoming gravely ill, in fact, more ill than she or he was before the *séance*. *Toé* drinkers stop eating food not only to dissociate themselves from close kin, but also to facilitate their total immersion into the hallucination. The mother spirit of *toé*, it is said, does not need food or a family, nor does she offer food to *toé* drinkers.²¹ This means that the mother spirit of *toé*, unlike the soul of the dead or the brocket deer, neither seeks to enlarge her social network, nor to gain new affines who could be turned into kin (Taylor 1993:671).

The transformation triggered by *toé* intoxication represents a total negation of relations based on food exchange and sexual intercourse. *Toé* drinkers must abstain from sex to achieve a successful and safe transformation. As mentioned earlier, sexual relations have the potential of turning affines into kin. To be fully moral, a human person avoids all sexual intimacy with very close kin. In the same way, to relate sexually to the mother spirit of *toé* would be unthinkable. Gow (1991:152) has

observed that Yine people who use *ayahuasca* seek to treat the plant with respect by not consuming it just after making love. *Toé* drinkers act similarly. Those who do not avoid sex risk great dangers during the process of transformation, as the mother spirit will not guide them or help them avoid encounters with malevolent beings.

Why should all the attributes of the good life, then, be negated in encounters with the mother spirit of *toé*, and not with other nonhuman persons? I suggest that the answer lies in the temporary and voluntary nature of this particular relationship. Interaction with the mother spirit of *toé* is deliberately sought after, but it is not meant to last more than a couple of days. By contrast, souls and brocket deer intend to interact with human persons for as long as they possibly can. Their objective is “to make kin out of others” (Vilaça 2002), even if the dead cannot be companions for the living, nor animals live with people in relationships. Whether human persons seek short-term relationships with nonhuman persons, or nonhumans seek long-term relationships with humans, they all do it in a way that reveals identical moral qualities and socially salient corporeal aspects of Yine life. As with human relationality, interaction with nonhumans centers on food, sex, and closeness. Encounters with the mother spirit of *toé* are just different from other encounters in that they force Yine people to relinquish all constituents of tranquil conviviality.

CORPOREALITY AND THE DIFFERENTIATION OF PERSONS

The Yine world is a “social cosmos.”²² In daily life, Yine people socially interact with many different beings: other humans, souls of the dead, a range of powerful animals, and many different spirits. For Philippe Descola (1996b:98–99), the entities that compose the human universe have a meaning only in the relations that constitute them. Accordingly, the study of the Yine “nonhuman” category necessarily involves the study of how this category is related to the “human” category. Following Descola’s mode of reasoning, it is the relationships between human and nonhuman persons that merit closer examination.

In this article, I have examined the role played by different corporeal elements and their analogues in demarcating the boundary between human and nonhuman existence in the Yine lived world. The discussion was based on the observation that Yine social relations extend beyond the human sphere to include many nonhumans as well. I started by showing that Yine social relations are constituted through living close to other persons, giving and receiving food, and interacting sexually. It is through these corporeal

relations that persons are formed. As the intermediary substances in the relation get internalized, the value of the relation becomes a part of the corporeality of the two subjects put in relation (McCallum 1997, 2001; Descola 2001:108; Fisher 2001:123; Lagrou 2004:247). A person's identity overlaps with the identities of other subjects, whether they are human or nonhuman. Consequently, a person's "openness," without which conviviality would not be possible, is also a source of great vulnerability, given that it is through such openness that human and nonhuman subjects interact (Pollock 2004:211). This fluidity of social and physical identities is characteristic of Amazonian indigenous societies in general (Conklin 2001a; Henley 2001; Pollock 2004:211; see also Carsten 1995:224, 235).

A second part of my argument has centered on the role of bodily constituents and their analogues in defining or adjusting the lithe boundary between human and nonhuman subjects. This distinction is made in areas of the body and morality. To be a rightful human person in the Yine world one must behave morally towards one's kin. Moral actions include exchanging food gifts, living close to each other, addressing each other by kin terms, and engaging in legitimate sexual relations. The same characteristics of good life apply equally to Yine interactions with nonhumans. Therefore, it is only when the consequences of a person's actions are taken into consideration that the difference between humans and nonhumans becomes visible. Given that the same approved code of action applies within the Yine society and with all the nonhuman beings that people the cosmos and the Yine mythic past, and given that the common state of all mythic beings was humanity, the only possible way to distinguish between different forms of existence is the exclusionary nature of human-to-human and human-to-nonhuman relations. Madness, withering away, and death are signals indicating that the incompatible categories "human" and "nonhuman" have been mixed during the process of relationality. This mixing up occurs when persons have taken part in one another corporeally.

There are, however, no clear-cut boundaries between the categories "human" and "nonhuman." Both humans and many nonhumans are persons. This explains why social interactions between people and nonhumans are possible (Lima 1999; Storrie 2003; Vilaça 2005). Yet, the Yine often explain that nonhumans "are people but not quite people." The brocket deer looks and behaves deceptively like a human person, until its immoral request for sex gives it away. The soul of a dead relative appears very human in its desire to offer food, and longs for physical proximity, until it becomes clear that what the soul really tries to do is to sever the bonds between its human kin and this human person's living relatives.

As for the relationship with the mother spirit of *toé*, we have seen that it does not conform to the Yine embodied moral ideals. Even though being persons, nonhumans are *different kinds* of persons. In addition, and as discussed in the introduction, humans never become complete human persons. Their humanity is vacillating, and contact with nonhuman persons may cause some individuals to cross the boundary that separates humans from nonhumans. Therefore, the Yine greatly value living close to their kin, as this physical proximity is probably the only way they have of ensuring the continuity of their human existence. The multiplicity of kinsmen and women provide the ideal—the only possible—context for true sociality (Gow 2001:67). What makes humans human, according to the Yine, is the ability to act out moral relations while surrounded by one's kin.

NOTES

1. I did 12 months of fieldwork between the years 2000 and 2005 in one Yine community in the Madre de Dios area in Eastern Peruvian Amazonia. The research was funded by the Academy of Finland (project no. 201114) and the Finnish Cultural Foundation. I wish to thank Laura Rival for her suggestions concerning this article and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

2. In this article I have used the term *yine*, which means “people” in the Yine language, is the preferred self-referential term. The term “Piro” has been the common convention used in most anthropological literature but recently some researchers have started to employ the term Yine in their writing (see Belaunde 1993; Huertas 2004; Smith 2003).

3. Janet Siskind (1975:103–104) has discussed the exchange of meat for sex among the Sharanahua. Even though Yine women prefer good hunters as spouses, the Yine never actually practice this kind of exchange (See Gow 1989, 1991:126).

4. See among others Seeger et al. (1987), Conklin (2001a:145), McCallum (2001:167–169), and Rival and Whitehead (2001a:8).

5. In the context of discussions on conception, the Yine also refer to semen as “father's blood.”

6. The idea that Amazonian persons are thought of as “processual” and “relational” has been noted by many scholars (e.g. Conklin 1996; McCallum 2001:168; Taylor 1993; Vilaça 2005).

7. The Yine people think that the meanings attached to different substances (food, sexual fluids, et cetera) are transferred or shared along with sharing the substances. They thus become constitutive of the two persons in the relationship. By continuing this kind of action, the homosexual condition of these two men becomes reinforced further. This is considered by the Yine to be disturbing

and harmful, if not also dangerous, for the rest of the community. According to Yine ideas of what it means to be socially moral and corporeally proper persons, homosexuality is thought to contradict Yine ideals. It is feared that to allow a homosexual relationship to continue in the community opens up the possibility of other young people being seduced into similar behavior. The spread of homosexuality would be more likely because these men would act as models leading to behavior morally destructive of the community.

8. See Alvarez (1955, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1965); Baer (1969, 1974); Farabee (1971); Forrer (1957); Matteson (1951, 1954, 1965); and Smith (2003).

9. While Gow's work concentrates on the Yine in the Bajo Urubamba area (Central Peru), my own field research was conducted in the Madre de Dios area (Southeastern Peru). There are some notable cultural differences between these two regional groups, even though many Yine families have relatives living in both regions.

10. Gow (2000) translates the term *samenchi* as "self" instead of "soul."

11. Among the Yine, it is women who prepare and distribute the food provided by men. They are also usually responsible for offering food. However, food offered by men may also work at building up the memories of a child, which in turn creates an adult who will be better prepared to provide care for a child in the future. It is also not unusual that a man calls his fellow male kin to eat with him, even though the food has been prepared by his wife or some other female relative.

12. As Peter Gow points out, healthy adults do not desire to join the dead because the dead live in a paradox: even though they feel lonely and desire company, they cannot keep each other company. It is only the sick, who have lost their vitality and "are already separated from the processes of life," who desire the company of the dead (Gow 1991:187; Gow 2000:54).

13. The metamorphosing brocket deer may be either a male seducing a woman or a female deceiving a man. According to the Yine, the only type of brocket deer that can take a human form is the grey brocket deer. Most Yine will not eat the flesh of this animal, either because it is thought to be a demon, or simply because they find the flesh smelly and disgusting (Gow 2001:65; Farabee 1971:56).

14. Gow (1991) writes about these forms of moral behavior as attributes of respect. Among the Yine, sexual relationships with close kin and with nonhumans are especially condemnable.

15. In the cases of witchcraft and sorcery, the Yine victim loses his or her appetite, and drifts away from the domain of kin and other human beings. In other words, the victim's social person "decomposes" (Gow 2001:88–89; 1991:180; Descola 1996a:365; Mentore 2004:140).

16. Not all Yine agree on this point. Some say that the dead do not eat anything.

17. Wilbert (2004:39) shows how in the Warao spirit world food has an opposite role. Declining food offered by a nonhuman establishes a relation between the human and nonhuman as they are not competing for the same food supplies.

18. This kind of activity is reported also among the Wanhíwa among whom a shaman may send “a great wind to where the intended victim is, and the victim goes mad (*ikaka*). According to various reports, he begins to eat ashes from the fire” (Wright 2004:91). The Piaroa also conceptualize a lack of proper social action towards others as madness (Overing 1985).

19. The mad person, however, is not considered to be fully responsible for his or her actions. Like the bewitched, he or she is seen as an innocent victim, not a wicked wrongdoer. The symptoms of animal seduction and bewitchment are similar, and the brocket deer analogous to the witch. Both cause their victims to become sick and eat inedible substances. And in both cases, nothing can be done to save the victim.

20. Gow (2001:149–150) shows that shamans are the only persons capable of maintaining both types of relationships simultaneously.

21. Gow (2001:136) mentions Yine hallucinatory experiences where the mother spirit of *toé* takes the drinker to eat and drink at the houses of powerful beings. The only context in which I heard of something similar was when people told me about afterlife in Christian Heaven.

22. Philippe Descola asserts, although quite provocatively, that “Amazonian cultures are cosmocentric rather than sociocentric” (2001:108). I prefer to characterize the Yine world as being at the same time cosmocentric and sociocentric. Social relations are what matters most to the Yine. Social relations, however, are not restricted to relations between humans. They extend to nonhumans as well.

REFERENCES CITED

Alvarez, Ricardo

1955 “Los Piros.” *Misiones Dominicanas* 211:456–460.

1959 “Galería de Piros Ilustres.” *Misiones Dominicanas* 235:41–52.

1960 *Los Piros: Leyendas, Mitos, Cuentos*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Tropicales Pio Aza.

1962 “Ritos Piros de la Iniciación.” *Misiones Dominicanas* 256:35–39.

1965 “El Piro y la Religión.” *Misiones Dominicanas* 271:1–9.

Baer, Gerhard

1969 “Eine Ayahuasca-Sitzung unter den Piro (Ostperu).” *Bulletin de la Société Suisse des Américanistes* 33:5–8.

1974 “The Pahotko-Masks of the Piro (Eastern Peru).” *Bulletin de la Société Suisse des Américanistes* 38:7–16.

Belaunde, Luisa Elvira

1993 “Yo solita hacienda fuerza: Historias de parto entre los Yine (Piro) de la Amazonía Peruana.” *Amazonía Peruana* 28–29:125–145.

Carsten, Janet

1995 “The Substance of Kinship and the Heat of the Hearth: Feeding, Personhood, and Relatedness among Malays in Pulau Langkawi.” *American Ethnologist* 22:223–241.

126 Minna Opas

- Conklin, Beth A.
 1996 "Reflections on Amazonian Anthropologies of the Body." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 10(3):373–375.
 2001a "Women's Blood, Warriors' Blood, and the Conquest of Vitality in Amazonia." In *Gender in Amazonia and Melanesia: An Exploration of the Comparative Method*. Thomas A. Gregor and Donald Tuzin, editors, pp. 141–174. Berkeley: University of California Press.
 2001b *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Crocker, William H.
 1993 "Canela Relationships With Ghosts: This-Worldly or Otherworldly Empowerment." *The Latin American Anthropology Review* 5(2):71–78.
- Descola, Philippe
 1996a [1993] *The Spears of Twilight: Life and Death in the Amazon Jungle*. New York: The New Press.
 1996b "Constructing Natures: Symbolic Ecology and Social Practice." In *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*. Descola, Philippe and Gísli Pálsson, editors, pp. 82–102. London: Routledge.
 2001 "The Genres of Gender: Local Models and Global Paradigms in the Comparison of Amazonia and Melanesia." In *Gender in Amazonia and Melanesia: An Exploration of the Comparative Method*. Thomas A. Gregor and Donald Tuzin, editors, pp. 91–114. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Farabee, William Curtis
 1971 [1922] *Indian Tribes of Eastern Peru*. New York: Kraus Reprint Co. [Originally published by the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology].
- Fausto, Carlos
 2004 "A Blend of Blood and Tobacco: Shamans and Jaguars among the Parakanã of Eastern Amazonia." In *Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*. Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, editors, pp. 157–178. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fisher, William H.
 2001 "Age-Based Genders among the Kayapo." In *Gender in Amazonia and Melanesia: An Exploration of the Comparative Method*. Thomas A. Gregor and Donald Tuzin, editors, pp. 115–140. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Forrer Sisler de Insley, Jeanne
 1957 "Sambo—un cuento Piro." *Sobretiro de Folklore Americano* 5(5):2–16.
- Gow, Peter
 1989 "The Perverse Child: Desire in a Native Amazonian Subsistence Economy." *Man* 24(4):567–582.

- 1991 *Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1997 "O Parentesco como Consciência Humana: O caso dos Piro." *Mana* 3(2):39–65.
- 2000 "Helpless: The Affective Preconditions of Piro Social Life." In *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*. Joanna Overing and Alan Passes, editors, pp. 46–63. London: Routledge.
- 2001 *An Amazonian Myth and Its History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Henley, Paul
- 2001 "Inside and Out: Alterity and the Ceremonial Construction of the Person in the Guianas." In *Beyond the Visible and the Material: The Amerindianization of Society in the Work of Peter Rivière*. Rival, Laura M. and Neil L. Whitehead, editors, pp. 197–220. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huertas Castillo, Beatriz
- 2004 *Indigenous Peoples in Isolation in the Peruvian Amazon*. Copenhagen: IWGIA.
- Lagrou, Elsjé
- 2000 "Homesickness and the Cashinahua Self: A Reflection on the Embodied Condition of Relatedness." In *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*. Joanna Overing and Alan Passes, editors, pp. 152–169. London: Routledge.
- 2004 "Sorcery and Shamanism in Cashinahua Discourse and Praxis, Purus River." In *Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*. Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, editors, pp. 244–271. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Lima, Tânia Stolze
- 1999 "The Two and its Many: Reflections on Perspectivism in a Tupi Cosmology." *Ethnos* 64(1):107–131.
- Matteson, Esther
- 1951 "Piro Myths." *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 4. Berkeley: The Kroeber Anthropological Society, pp. 37–87.
- 1954 "The Piro of the Urubamba." *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 10. Berkeley: The Kroeber Anthropological Society, 25–99.
- 1965 *The Piro (Arawakan) Language*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McCallum, Cecilia
- 1997 Comendo com Txai, comendo como Txai: A sexualização de relações étnicas na Amazônia contemporânea. *Revista de Antropologia* 40(1):110–147.
- 2001 *Gender and Sociality in Amazonia: How Real People Are Made*. Oxford: Berg.

128 *Minna Opas*

Mentore, George

- 2004 "The Glorious Tyranny of Silence and the Resonance of Shamanic Breath." In *Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*. Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, editors, pp. 132–156. Durham: Duke University Press.

Overing, Joanna

- 1985 "There is No End of Evil: The Guilty Innocents and their Fallible God." In *The Anthropology of Evil*. David Parkin, editor, pp. 244–278. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 2003 "In Praise of the Everyday: Trust and the Art of Social Living in an Amazonian Community." *Ethnos* 68(3):293–316.

Overing, Joanna and Alan Passes

- 2000 "Introduction: Conviviality and the Opening up of Amazonian Anthropology." In *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*. Joanna Overing and Alan Passes, editors, pp. 1–30. London: Routledge.

Pollock, Donald

- 2004 "Siblings and Sorcerers: The Paradox of Kinship among the Kulina." In *Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*. Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, editors, pp. 202–214. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rival, Laura

- 2005 "The Attachment of the Soul to the Body among the Huaroani of Amazonian Ecuador." *Ethnos* 70(3):285–310.

Rival, Laura and Neil L. Whitehead

- 2001a "Forty Years of Amazonian Anthropology: The Contribution of Peter Rivière." In *Beyond the Visible and the Material: The Amerindianization of Society in the Work of Peter Rivière*. Rival, Laura M. and Neil L. Whitehead, editors, pp. 1–18. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rival, Laura M. and Neil L. Whitehead (editors)

- 2001b *Beyond the Visible and the Material: The Amerindianization of Society in the Work of Peter Rivière*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Román, Luis

- 1983 "Aproximación a una Realidad aparte: la convivencia Piro-Campa." In *Relaciones Intertribales en el Bajo Urubamba y Alto Ucayali*. Alonso Zarzar, and Luis Román, pp. 87–121. Lima: CIPA.

Santos-Granero, Fernando

- 2002 "The Arawakan Matrix: Ethos, Language, and History in Native South-America." In *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area in Amazonia*. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero, editors, pp. 25–50. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Seeger, Anthony and Roberto da Matta and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

- 1987 "A Construção da Pessoa nas Sociedades Indígenas Brasileiras."

- Sociedades indígenas e indigenismo no Brasil.* João Pacheco de Oliveira Filho, editor, pp. 11–29. Rio de Janeiro: Marco Zero/Editora UFRJ.
- Siskind, Janet
 1975 *To Hunt in the Morning.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith Bisso, Alejandro
 2003 “Del ser Piro y el ser Yine: Apuntes sobre la identidad, historia y territorialidad del pueblo indígena Yine.” In *Los Pueblos Indígenas de Madre de Dios: Historia, etnografía y conyuntura.* Beatriz Huertas Castillo and Alfredo García Altamirano, editors, pp. 127–143. Lima: IWGIA.
- Storrie, Robert
 2003 “Equivalence, Personhood and Relationality: Processes of Relatedness among the Hoti of Venezuelan Guiana.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9(3):407–428.
- Taylor, Anne Christine
 1993 “Remembering to Forget: Identity, Mourning and Memory among the Jivaro.” *Man* 28(4):653–678.
- Teixeira-Pinto, Márnio
 2004 “Being Alone amid Others: Sorcery and Morality among the Arara, Carib, Brazil.” In *Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia.* Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, editors, pp. 215–243. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Vilaça, Aparecida
 2002 “Making Kin Out of Others in Amazonia.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8:347–365.
 2005 “Chronically Unstable Bodies: Reflections on Amazonian Corporalities.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11(3):445–464.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo
 1992 *From the Enemy’s Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 1998 “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(3):469–488.
 2004 “Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies.” *Common Knowledge* 10(3):463–484.
- Wilbert, Johannes
 2004 “The Order of Dark Shamans among the Warao.” In *Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia.* Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, editors, pp. 21–50. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wright, Robin
 2004 “The Wicked and the Wise Men: Witches and Prophets in the History of the Northwest Amazon.” In *Darkness and Secrecy: The*

130 *Minna Opas*

Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia. Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, editors, pp. 82–108. Durham: Duke University Press.

Zarzar, Alonso

- 1983 “Intercambio con el enemigo; etnohistoria de las relaciones intertribales en el Bajo Urubamba y Alto Ucayali.” In *Relaciones Intertribales en el Bajo Urubamba y Alto Ucayali.* Alonso Zarzar and Luis Román, editors, pp. 11–86. Lima: CIPA.