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## Gender and Sociality in Amazonia: How Real People Are Made

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societies—the pursuit of *ayahuasca* and shamanic rituals being one example—contains the risk of new misappropriations of indigenous wisdom and threatens indigenous peoples' intellectual property rights. The illegal and indiscriminate trade of *ayahuasca* in the face of international prohibitions could lead to its proscription among the populations that traditionally use it. By raising these ethical questions regarding *ayahuasca* usage, the book contributes to an important discussion that is especially relevant in the current process of globalization.

In its diversity of topics and viewpoints, *O uso ritual da ayahuasca* is certainly a heterogeneous book. While there is a disparity of quality in the articles, the overall presentation of the volume contains various ways of and significant perspectives for understanding *ayahuasca* in different cultural contexts. Its value as a contribution to knowledge goes beyond its unifying themes. Taken as a whole, the volume both challenges conventional frontiers of scientific knowledge and points out new issues and questions—epistemological and methodological—concerning the use of *ayahuasca* in cultural and religious practices. Finally, it is necessary to highlight the fact that this book is one of the few published works to offer a state of the art overview of this topic. The survey contained within it is, without doubt, the most extensive up to now. Among its main achievements are the articulation between the ethnographic and analytic richness provided by case studies and the provision of an overall view through its more synthetic chapters, which serve as a guide to readers unfamiliar with the topic.

*Gender and Sociality in Amazonia: How Real People Are Made.* Cecilia McCallum. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001. xii + 208 pp., figures, table, references, glossary, index. \$70.00 (cloth); \$23.00 (paper). ISBN 1-85973-449-9; ISBN 1-85973-454-5-NPB. [[www.bergpublishers.com](http://www.bergpublishers.com)]

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Cecilia McCallum's *Gender and Sociality in Amazonia* is a bold and novel theoretical statement on the issue of gender and inequality in Amazonia. Pulling no punches, McCallum criticizes the view that oppression of women is a social universal in indigenous Amazonia. She points out flaws in the prevailing anthropological epistemologies used to address this topic and lays out a contrary argument for gender complementarity, drawing on ethnographic data on the Cashinahua of Acre, Brazil, for support. The book's main strengths are its thought-provoking theoretical frameworks and proposals, its strong critiques of previous work on gender in Amazonia, and particularly its application of the latest developments in gender theory to the field of

Amazonian studies. The book also has a number of serious flaws, particularly in the application of ethnographic data to support the author's theoretical position, and in several contradictions between the positions McCallum takes and the concepts she actually uses. However, the innovative approaches she takes to revising anthropological analyses of gender in Amazonia make this book an essential baseline for future theorizing on the issue. Whether readers agree or disagree with her, she makes important arguments that will have to be considered carefully.

The primary contention of the book is that male dominance is not a universal in indigenous Amazonia. McCallum is careful to point out that she is not arguing the opposite of this—that indigenous Amazonians are sexually egalitarian. Rather, she maintains that seeing men and women as bounded groups linked by a simple hierarchical relation placing men above women is an oversimplification of a process involving relations that are complexly negotiated and contested in everyday situations. Relations between men and women are not a “simple structure of fixed relations” (p. 157). The Cashinahua are portrayed as an example of an indigenous Amazonian people among whom women are not subservient, but rather are coparticipants in the production of sociality. Most of the book is devoted to showing gender complementarity, the importance of women, and the absence of systematic oppression of females among the Cashinahua.

In the process of making her main point, McCallum makes a variety of secondary theoretical statements of great interest. Perhaps the most salient of these is her trenchant critique of past approaches to Amazonian gender that have focused on “rituals of sexual antagonism,” and particularly of Thomas Gregor's analysis of Mehinaku gender. Drawing on Marilyn Strathern's *The Gender of the Gift* (1988), McCallum argues that interpretations of Amazonian ritual that use the model of sexual antagonism are based on notions of “sexual identity” that are more questionable than enlightening (p. 163). She points out and questions what she sees as nonexplicit but problematic presuppositions in the work of Gregor, Janet Siskind, and Robert and Yolanda Murphy. In particular she challenges the unquestioning assumption that “man” and “woman” are natural biological categories. She also challenges the idea of “men” and “women” as naturally occurring collectivities with associated identities, and the notion of sexual antagonism as it affects questions of gender inequality in Amazonia. These are important and stimulating critiques that scholars focusing on gender in Amazonia will have to address.

McCallum's book is marred by flaws in her use of ethnographic data and by some logical contradictions. For example, in arguing for the use of the concept of “sociality” (p. 67), she aligns herself with Christina Toren's argument that the concept of “society” is a theoretically obsolete, reified abstraction. It is thus disturbing to find her discussing “Amazonian societies” repeatedly in the last chapter (p.158), and to read her justification for referring to “the

Cashinahua” as if this was a real entity (see pp. 13–14), even as she admits that this is a “construction” (p.14) based on fieldnotes, photos, and other data. This is a case where her theoretical adventurousness outruns her actual application of theory. “Society” is certainly a problematic concept, but as her own writing demonstrates, it is not yet a useless one.

Also disturbing are logical flaws in McCallum’s application of ethnographic data to support her theories. An example is her construction of the concept of Cashinahua “female leaders” to bolster her argument that “female agency is constitutive of political processes and to illustrate how far women have exercised power” in Amazonian societies (p. 158). She starts by presenting a statement from a Cashinahua informant, Elias, clearly stating that, while there were female leaders in the past, in the village in question—Recreio—there are currently no female leaders: “Women were also leaders. Here [i.e., in Recreio], no one has become a leader yet among the women. There isn’t one” (p. 69). The Cashinahua informant goes on to describe the role of past female leaders as involving organization of labor: “She would call: ‘Let us go together [to the garden] and get food!’” (p. 69). On the next page, McCallum argues that when the wife of a leader serves food to guests (in the ethnographic present now), she “played the part of female leader” (p. 70). McCallum (p. 102) reiterates this point later: “The male leaders’ wives serve the food that they have prepared to the men. In doing so, they behave as *ainbu xanen ibu* (the female leaders to whom Elias referred).” However, Elias described a woman organizing the labor of her kin and affines for food production, whereas McCallum applies the concept to a woman serving food to guests, a very different action. Finally, after starting with an informant’s statement that there are no female leaders, and arguing that there are women who “play the part” or “behave as” female leaders, she states that there are female leaders: “Women’s production is celebrated by women themselves in semi-ceremonial collective expeditions that female leaders organize” (p.108). This line of argumentation is unconvincing because even as she presents evidence of Cashinahua female leadership to support her theoretical position on Amazonian gender, it is hard to get over Elias’ blunt assertion concerning female leaders: “There isn’t one.”

Despite the occasional self-contradiction and logical flaw, McCallum’s book is thought-provoking and makes a very significant scholarly contribution. It is, in my view, the most innovative presentation of ideas on Amazonian gender in recent years. Especially valuable is the final chapter, in which McCallum draws on a thorough understanding of current concepts in gender theory, applying these to indigenous Amazonia. She connects data on gender in Amazonia to recent work by Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Donna Haraway, Henrietta Moore, Lila Abu-Lughod, Marilyn Strathern, and others in a clear and illuminating way. Her critique of work by other Amazonianists on rituals of sexual antagonism, grounded in her knowledge of broader gender theory, is

thus an important theoretical statement that cannot be ignored. This book brings the study of indigenous Amazonian gender into the twenty-first century. It will be essential reading for anyone interested in gender in Amazonia.

*Pacificando o branco. Cosmologias do contato no Norte-Amazônico.* Bruce Albert and Alcida Rita Ramos, editors. São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2002. 532 pp., maps, plates. R\$110.00 (cloth). ISBN 85-7139-355-9. [www.editoraunesp.com.br]

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All study of contact between Western society and indigenous peoples suffers from the fact that the colonial invaders have writing whereas American Indians do not. The literature of the contact frontier in Brazil is almost entirely in Portuguese, English or other European languages. On the rare occasions when indigenous views are recorded, the speakers suffer from imperfect command of Portuguese. More seriously, the authors of such studies—however sympathetic and well trained they may be—inevitably have difficulty in penetrating the very different native values and mind-sets.

This book is a long-awaited attempt to rectify this imbalance. The title, *Pacifying the White Man*, refers to the many instances when indigenous peoples believe that it is *they* who have pacified (the discredited old word for “contacted”) the aggressive agents of our society. Both editors have gained a profound understanding of Yanomami language and thinking. They restrict the geographical remit of the book to the north and west of Amazonia—an arc from Acre to the Rio Negro, Roraima and Brazilian Guiana north of the Amazon, with incursions into Colombia and French Guyane.

The French anthropologist Bruce Albert is a close friend of Davi Kopenawa, the shaman who has been projected as the international spokesman of the Yanomami. Davi Kopenawa’s identification of gold excavated from the earth by *garimpeiro* prospectors with malignant spirits and vapours that could devastate all humanity makes this one of the most important papers in this book.

The editors have grouped their seventeen chapters into four sections. “Trade Goods, Words and Diseases” includes a paper by Catherine Howard on how the Waiwai “domesticate” some manufactured goods into their own idiom, and one by Dominique Buchillet on how the Desana of the Upper Rio Negro try to explain the advent of white men and the terrible increase in malaria. A section called “Alternatives and Ethnicity” contains Albert’s paper as well as studies of how the Matis of the Javari valley and Waiãmpi of French Guyane and of Brazilian Guiana redefine their identities to come to terms