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Kinship with Monkeys: The Guajá Foragers of Eastern Amazonia

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to bear on his analysis of the exploitation of Amazonia—in both an environmentalist and developmental sense—and his vision of the history of such processes is valuable. Unfortunately, it also underscores the difficulty—perhaps impossibility—of reconciling the two opposed cosmographies. Little's conclusions about the future of Amazonia seem pessimistic, but they offer important guidelines for understanding that trajectory.

***Kinship with Monkeys: The Guajá Foragers of Eastern Amazonia*. Loretta A. Cormier. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. xxvi + 234 pp., notes, references, index. $29.50 (paper). ISBN 0-231-12525-9. [www.columbia.edu/cu/cup]**

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Although a number of authors have commented on the common custom of Amazonian peoples to make pets of the same animals they hunt, this book is original in its detailed and nuanced discussion of the bonds—ecological and metaphysical—that link the Guajá with the monkeys that they eat and at the same time adopt and treat affectionately as pets.

The Guajá are a Tupi people presently living in western Maranhão. Since the nineteenth century they have been known as foragers. However, it seems likely that the Guajá were once horticulturalists who then abandoned agriculture, probably several centuries ago, as attacks by Brazilian settlers and more powerful indigenous peoples forced them into increasing nomadism to evade their enemies. The Guajá even lost the skills to make fire, and were forced to carry firebrands from camp to camp.

In the 1970s, with growing regional development, the survival of the remaining Guajá bands was threatened by reduction of their habitat and introduced diseases. FUNAI (National Foundation of the Indian) attraction teams contacted a number of these groups and settled them on reserves in the neighborhood of other groups that were traditionally their enemies. Cormier carried out her study at Caru, where approximately 100 Guajá, under the tutelage of FUNAI, are making the transition to a horticultural way of life. Cultivated manioc and other domesticates have almost entirely replaced the *babassu* nuts that were the Guajá staple before contact. But they continue to rely on hunting and fishing for animal protein, and for the Guajá monkeys are the most highly valued game species as well as their favored pets.

In the second chapter of Cormier's book she points out that over the 10,000 or more years that human and nonhuman primates have been sharing the New World habitat, their interaction has had multiple effects on the ecology

and social life of both. In recent times the export trade in primates for medical research and as pets brought some species close to extinction before export was made illegal by most South American countries. In a number of regions, deforestation and the resulting constriction of habitat threatens both the subsistence of monkeys and the indigenous Amazonians who depend on them for food.

As part of her research, Cormier carried out a study of Guajá ethnobotanical knowledge, comparing it with William Balée's study of the neighboring horticultural Ka'apor. Her findings corroborate Balée's in that the Guajá recognize the names and uses of fewer plants than the Ka'apor. She also learned that the Guajá know more about plants that are eaten by game, primarily monkeys, than about those eaten by humans: "The emerging picture seems to be that the Guajá rely on a few reliable plant resources (babassu in the past, which is being increasingly replaced with domesticated manioc) with the *diversity* of their plant knowledge geared toward plants that are eaten by game" (p. 51). Cormier suggests that the selective retention of plant knowledge most useful to foraging indicates a process of "cultural selection" rather than undifferentiated cultural loss. Flexibility may have been the key to Guajá survival as they simplified or abandoned cultural elements that were no longer relevant to a way of life based on foraging.

Like other Amazonian peoples, the Guajá conceive the natural world as an extension of their social world. In discussing how Guajá relate to monkeys as kin, Cormier frames her analysis in terms of the "social cosmology" of such authors as Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: "A central theme in their work is that animism does not merely consist of attributing a spiritual nature or other human feature to nonhumans in the abstract, but is fundamentally about social engagement. This reformulation of animism is beginning to shed new light on the prey-pet paradox in Amazonia, cannibalistic cosmologies, and kinship construction" (p. 86).

The Guajá include monkeys in their social system by referring to them in kin terms similar to those they apply to their human relatives. The Guajá speak in general of beings in the natural world as *har piana,* same-sex matrilateral siblings. The Guajá apply this term to same-sex siblings who are raised in the same maternal household. The term implies a kind of affinal relationship, since females have no recognized role in reproduction. The term *har pihár* , same-sex patrilateral sibling, is that which designates a consanguineal relationship. Partible paternity, which the Guajá consider necessary for the proper development of the fetus, provides each individual with a set of "biological" fathers. The relationship between same-sex siblings is basically egalitarian and companionable rather than rivalrous, and Cormier believes that the extension of these terms to the nonhuman world, including the animals that the Guajá hunt, turns the consumption of prey into a kind of symbolic

endocannibalism.

Same-sex sibling terms are used not only to define Guajá relationships with nonhuman beings, but they are also applied to relationships between other plant and animal communities that are believed to share a special relationship. As a community, the Guajá have a *har pihár* relationship with the howler community, and howlers are the preferred game of the Guajá. Howlers are also linked to the Guajá through a creation myth according to which the divinity Mai'ira originally created howlers from human beings. Other divinities that dwell in the *iwa,* where Guajá go after death and which men may visit in life through the *karawár* ritual, are associated with animal species that they specialize in hunting. Themes of siblingship, predation, and consumption are interwoven throughout Guajá cosmology.

The Guajá make pets of many kinds of animals, but monkeys are in the majority. Women decide the fate of young animals captured by men, and once an animal is adopted as a pet it is never eaten. Young monkeys are breastfed, named, nurtured, and in general treated as dependent children. In Cormier's view, pet monkeys, who often outnumber people in a Guajá household, help to satisfy women's maternal feelings and augment sexual attractiveness by projecting a desirable image of fertility. Cormier provides no quantitative demographic information in her book, but Guajá women must have lost many children both before and after contact, and may have low fertility. Significantly, the Guajá say that in the *iwa,* the other world of the Guajá, women's past and sacred forms do not keep pets: "They are said not to need them because they have many children" (p. 116).

When Cormier offers an explanation of why the Guajá make pets of the same animals that they hunt and kill, she bases her argument on Descola's concept of "protectionism," which involves "a combination of predation and reciprocity, wherein nonhuman groups are seen as dependent on humans for their reproduction and welfare" (p. 87). According to Cormier:

> The apparent contradiction between monkeys as kin and monkeys as food is logical in terms of Guajá ecology, social organization, and cosmology. Most forms of life are part predator and part prey, interconnected in the same kinship matrix. Consumption is a biological, social, and cosmological act whereby those consumed are transformed and transported to the sacred *iwa* (p. 158).

This book is ethnographically valuable and fascinating to read when Cormier describes the web of social relations that links the Guajá with their monkeys. The illustrations, drawings by James Cormier, are sensitive interpretations of Guajá life. Cormier's description of the Guajá cosmology is both important in itself and in helping the reader to understand the complex ways in which the Guajá identify with the natural world that surrounds them. *Kinship with Monkeys* is an important addition to the growing literature on animism and how it relates to social practice in Amazonia.