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Variations on Hunting and Care: Ownership, Kinship, and Other Interspecific Relationships in the Eastern Amazon

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On a typically wet morning during the Amazonian rainy season of 2007, I followed Wiraho (a friend from the Juriti village) and his family out of their village on yet another hunt. We crossed a manioc garden and then the old field that separates their settlement from the forest. A cluster of white butterflies took flight as we stepped into the trees, and the beauty of the scene prompted me to ask my companions, “What are those butterflies called?” Wiraho answered, “Their name is *p̃ỹñỹ x̃ñ̃m̃* [white butterflies],” adding “*kamytxa’á p̃ỹñỹ*.” “They are the tortoise’s butterflies.” I asked whether that was the name of their “species,” to which he exclaimed “No!” and went on to say that the butterflies are *kamytxa’á nimá* or “the tortoise’s pets.” Although the Guajá look after various animal cubs in their villages, it was the first time during my research that anyone had mentioned that *animals also have pets*. From then on I noticed people talking about a recurring process in Guajá ethology that identifies some animals as rearing other animals through a specific *theory of relatedness*: here animals and people participate in the same world and see themselves as rearing (*jara*) others known as their cubs (*nimá*).

In the Guajá language these rearing or fostering *relations* are referred to through the verb *riku*:¹ tucandeira ants are reared by howler monkeys (*Alouatta belzebul*), peccary (*Tayassu pecari*) rear surucucu snakes (*Lachesis muta*), electric eels (*Electrophorus electricus*) own various fish species and are themselves reared by spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*). Each type of honey (and there are dozens) belongs to a *jara* or rearer, and many of the animals hunted by humans are reared by other animals. Alongside this multiplicity of interspecies relations, and although the Guajá do not use the term *marriage*, the notion of *riku* applies to conjugal relations between men and women who live together. The Guajá seem to suggest that the concept of *riku* guides their theories about interspecific relations (which involve animals, humans, and spirits) and ideas about conjugality. The ontological continuity between mastery and marriage is therefore not a symbolic allegory that connects humans and nonhumans in conjugal terms by analogy, such as a shaman and his celestial wives (e.g., Fausto 2008:350–51) or in mythological intraspecific marriages (ibid.). In this case, the conjugal relation is thought about as a *fostering/caring* relation and is therefore homologous to other worldly relations in many ways.

The ethnography that illuminates these relations was elaborated during fieldwork among the Guajá. They live along the Turiaçu, Gurupi, and Mearim Rivers in the northwestern area of Maranhão State in the Brazilian Amazon near the border of Pará, and currently number approximately 500 people spread out over five villages and three Indigenous Lands (*Terras Indígenas*). Their nomenclature has oscillated in the anthropological literature between *Avá* (“people”), *Guajá*, and *Avá-Gujá* (Balée 2013:xi). Following Balée, and as a question of textual concision, I use the term “Guajá” here, as *ava* is a well-known Tupi-Guarani term also used by other peoples. Little known in the ethnological literature, if not for William Balée (1994, 2013), Louis Carlos Forline (1997), and Loretta Cormier (2003), the Guajá would be entirely unknown in Americanist debates if they were not famous for not practicing agriculture: apparently they never mastered the cultivation of specific produce, not even corn and manioc. This situation has started to change in the last twenty years, with younger generations being “taught” to cultivate manioc for flour production, as well as other agricultural produce, by agents of the Brazilian federal agency for Indian affairs, the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI). Although the Guajá have already been contacted and had their territories protected, they have suffered at the hands of land invaders, cattle farmers, smallholders, and loggers, who have occupied the

state of Maranhão's last forest areas, which are among the most deforested areas in continental Amazonia.

My exploration of the riku relation among the Guajá aims to arrive at an ethnographic definition of kinship. In this endeavor the various ways that the Guajá think about “being together” (*pyry*) or “living together” (*ikú pyry*) is key and prompts my reflection on the Amazonian figure of the *owner* through one of its least broached aspects—conjugalinity. Owners are used as an image-guide (a *fiction* whose relational aspects are mobilized [Strathern 1988:134]) in dialogue with the anthropological literature in Amazonia and beyond (e.g., Descola 2005:482–90; Fausto 2008; Knight 2012:337; Jimenez and Willerslev 2007:44) to bring out salient dimensions of kinship.

In theories of Amazonian kinship, *affinity* transcends relations among kin and is broadly understood as a useful abbreviation for “what might be a ‘grand unified theory’ of Amazonian sociality” (Viveiros de Castro 2001:19, 2002a:422): forms of alliance and production that counter a genealogist-terminological model. Complemented by *consanguinity*, the concept of affinity takes on various forms that “not only determine referents other than our own but involve other components” (ibid:407). Current interest in the anthropology of kinship has therefore produced analyses that seek to understand the life processes of people associated with each other, people who coexist as kin “who live each other’s lives and die each other’s deaths,” as argued by Marshall Sahlins (2011a; see also Strathern 2014). Although such “relationalism” is not absent from classical analyses (Strathern 1995:12; 1988:269), it has now come to redefine kin relations through the body, personhood, gender, and—in the Amazonian case—through war, predation, trade, and shamanism.² Since the 1970s, through the work of authors concerned with incorporating complex local cosmological frameworks into kinship studies, South American indigenous ethnology has therefore defined kinship as an adage for more extensive compositions: the production of a good life (Overing 2003; Gow 1991, 1997), for example, in a region marked by virtual sociocosmological hostilities (Viveiros de Castro 2002a).

When I began to trace Guajá genealogies at the beginning of my fieldwork in an attempt to understand the marriages and collect kin terms in their language, I was struck by how people constantly defined men’s and women’s “togetherness” (*pyry*) in the same way that they might explain why women rear animals; why each type of honey has a specific “honey owner” (Garcia 2010:236–43); or even (based on their sophisticated ethological perceptions) why different animal species are frequently found together or nearby, as if they *walked alongside* one another. When kinship came up people would therefore take the conversation to another conceptual field, gravitating toward ideas such as *nixa’á* (“to rear like children,” “to rear like a spouse,” or even “to grow”). A woman might therefore formulate the phrase, *jahá amixa’á ta hamenime*,³ “I will rear him to be my husband” (literally “I am going to transform him into a husband”), just as a man who seeks to marry will commonly say *a máj ta harimiriko rame*, “I will rear her as a wife” (“I will transform her into a wife”).⁴ A couple will also refer to a daughter’s planned marriage with the phrase *máj mǎnǎ*, or “I will send (my daughter) to be reared by him.”

Aiming for an ethnographic definition of kinship, this article engages in issues related to the figure of the *owner* in the Amazon, proposing a dialogue with a seldom discussed aspect of this subject—namely, its relation to conjugalinity. I argue that relationships included in the universe of “familiarity” and “mastery” are not only coextensive with the field of kinship; they also reveal a very particular conception of humanity, self, and personhood. The process of Guajá kinship can only be understood if we move beyond the issue of Amazonian affinity and articulate it with certain aspects of the familiarity and mastery theme. This article is an attempt to think inclusively about kinship, the mastery/owner theme, and some ecological questions in an ethnographic way.

The Art of Being Together

Guajá sociality therefore makes use of the relational verb *riku* (or *ruku*, depending on the speaker) to measure the proximity and distance between different beings in the context of the Amazonian sociological sense of potential affinity.⁵ This is a continuous process that produces new relations between people (signalling paternity and maternity, for example) and things (generating the possession of certain objects, for example), and finds resonance in the regional ethnological literature through well-known relations of ownership and mastery involving people, plants, animals, and spirits (see, for example, Bonilla 2005; Brightman 2010; Brightman, Fausto, and Grotti 2016; Cabral 2012; Costa 2013; Descola 1986, 2005; Erikson 1987, 2012; Fausto 2001, 2008; Gallois 1988; Hugh-Jones 1996; Kohn

2007; Lea 2012; Lima 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2002c). The Guajá indicate that an intimate relation between marriage and mastery exists, something that draws me to make a partial connection between *owners* and Guajá kinship—rather than reifying the former by automatically and analogically transporting it into the latter—to produce an *ethnographic critique* of the broadly disseminated notion of ownership in South American ethnology.

The Guajá call “marriage” *riku* or *rukú*,⁶ a verb that can be translated as “being with” and is a common rendering for the Tupi-Guarani verb *-ikó* (*iku* in Guajá).⁷ In Portuguese the Guajá implement this idea with the verb *criar*, “to rear”/ “to take care of”/ “to grow”; however, identifying the term in this way—and not as “to marry” or “to be associated with”—points less to their lack of understanding about the Portuguese lexicon and, in my view, more to an alternative theory of conjugality. An anthropological translation could therefore associate *riku* with generalized relatedness in Amazonia, which prescribes asymmetrical relations based on the concepts of *owners* and *masters*: controlling figures on one side of these relations—and include parents (F, M) and spouses (W, H) among the Guajá—while on the other side we might find prey, domestic animals, honey (and bees), fruit and vegetables, and also children and spouses (again) for the Guajá. In this way, we can think of *riku* as both a state of being and a state of transformation, a “becoming,” as it were, related to actions such as cultivating and grooming. But this is not necessarily for a function, properly speaking, but also for creating and establishing a person, pet, object, etc., that engages with societal-nature nexus in a meaningful way.

For example:

- The relation between a mother and her children is understood as a *riku* relation.
- The conjugal tie established between husband and wife is called *riku*.
- The relation between humans (*awa*) and tame animals (called *nimá*)—usually wild cubs caught during a hunt and reared in the village—is *riku*.
- Objects are talked about in the same way: one has a *riku* relation with the arrow, knife, piece of cloth, or any other object that one owns. In the Guajá context, control is more meaningfully expressed through rearing than possession: *a'e riku* (“I rear it”) is the immediate response given when someone says they own something.

These translations remind us of the Achuar, who perceive the domestication of crops against a broader backdrop of social and magical relations of domestication (Descola 1986:245–46). Similarly, “walking together with” auxiliary spirits is the primary condition for shamanic activity among diverse peoples in the region, and *rearing* (captured) animals is not only the counterpart to predation but a specific type of relatedness (Cormier 2003; Erikson 1987, 2012; Taylor 2001; Lea 2012:339–45).⁸ One encounters this relation among the Yudjá of the upper Xingu region in their characterization of manioc beer—a body more like a fleshy substance than a vegetable porridge—which is produced and *cared for* by its owner in the same way that one cares for (rears) a child (Lima 2005:299–300). This can be found in diverse Amazonian sociocosmologies in which practically everything should be *reared* at one level and then *affinized* at another.

Generally speaking, it is an idea as polysemic as the languages spoken by Amazonian peoples:⁹ patron, master, representative, owner (Viveiros de Castro 2002c:82), among so many others, are forms that impede any attempt to override one term with another. In Guajá, the category associated with “tame animals” (*nimá*) is always *jara*, a well-known Tupi-Guarani term for “owner,” which appears here as much as “rearer” (“one who makes life possible”), “one who walks alongside,” and “carer,” for the purpose of comparison.¹⁰ *Riku* is the verb that connects those who rear/care for and those who are reared/cared for, *jara* and *nimá*, a relation that might be better understood as a *method for producing collective life* (Lima 2005:96).

Partial Variations

Beyond humanity, life in the forests of Maranhão unfolds through various prescriptions and partnerships established between animals and plants within a life network that recalls Eduardo Kohn’s (2013:78) notion of *an ecology of selves*. These beings directly (and mutually) participate in each other’s lives, coexisting through rearing (*riku*) relations, like the white butterfly (*p̃yñĩ x̃ũn*) and the tortoise (*kamytxa’á*). Table 1 lists a selection of examples.

Species	In Relation With:	Type of Relation	Features of Relationship and Comments
Bearded saki monkey (<i>Chiropotes satanas</i>)	<i>Kakj̄</i> (a type of hawk)	Ownership	Calls owner by song
Red brocket deer (<i>Mazama americana</i>)	Agouti (<i>Dasyprocta prymnolopha</i>); some species of butterflies	Ownership	These animals' color is an index of ontological continuity between their respective species.
Agouti; coati (<i>Nasua nasua</i>)	Brazilian squirrel (<i>Sciurus aestuans</i>)	Ownership	These animals' color is an index of ontological continuity between their respective species.
Howler monkey (<i>Alouatta belzebul</i>)	Night monkey (<i>Aotus infulatus</i>); Bullet Ant (<i>P. clavata</i>)	Ownership	According to Guajá, the relation between these two species of monkey is given by their preference for denser, darker, and more protected forest areas.
Peccary (<i>Tayassu pecari</i>)	Surucucu snake (<i>Lachesis muta</i>)	Ownership	The peccaries rear certain species of snake.
Capuchin monkeys (<i>Cebus apella</i>)	Black-handed tamarin monkeys (<i>Saguinus niger</i>)	Ownership	N/A
Tapir (<i>Tapirus terrestris</i>)	<i>Tapihub</i> bullet ants	Ownership	The <i>tapihub</i> ants are referred to as <i>tapi nima</i> or "beings reared by tapir."
Blue-crowned trogon birds (<i>Trogon curucui</i>)	Nine-banded armadillo (<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>)	Pets	These birds are called <i>tatu nima</i> or "animals reared by armadillos" or "armadillo pets."
Black-fronted nunbirds (<i>Monasa nigrifrons</i>)	Howler monkey (<i>Alouatta belzebul</i>)	Pets	These birds are <i>wari nimá</i> or "animals reared by howler monkeys" or "howler monkey pets."
Cicada species known as <i>jakaramuhūm</i>	Babassu palm tree (<i>Attalea speciosa</i>)	Pets	These cicadas are "babassu palm trees' pets."

Species	In Relation With:	Type of Relation	Features of Relationship and Comments
Tarantulas	Capuchin monkey (<i>Cebus apella</i>)	Pets	The tarantulas are <i>ka'I nima</i> , the “capuchin monkeys’ pets.”
Cocoa thrushes (<i>Turdus fumigatus</i>)	Capybara (<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>)	Pets	These birds are called “capybara pets.”
Scarlet macaw (<i>Ara macao</i>)	White-lipped peccary (ayassu pecari)	Pets	The scarlet macaw is thought to be created by a white-lipped peccary.
Giant armadillo (<i>Priodontes maximus</i>)	Tapir (<i>Tapirus terrestris</i>)	Pets	Those armadillos are called <i>tapi nima</i> , or “animals reared by the tapir.” That this is the largest armadillo in the region brings them closer to the tapir, the largest mammal.
Maranhão slider turtle (<i>Trachemys adiutrix</i>)	Boa constrictor (<i>B. constrictor</i>)	Pets	These turtles can be thought of as “boa constrictor pets.”

Table 1. Some Types of Interspecies Relationships.

In the rivers, fish and other beings also have *riku* relations:

- Piaba fish are also called *xabó ipirá* (“the peccary’s fish”) and are therefore reared by peccaries.
- Eels, called *mabúa*, are animals reared by electric eels.
- Electric eels rear various fish.
- In turn, alligators rear sliders (*Trachemys adiutrix*), electric eels, and trahira fish, among other aquatic animals

And a range of relations are also identified between beings and elements seemingly different from each other:

- The catfish called “gurijuba” fish rear small snakes called *i'i jumai*.
- Trahira fish (*Hoplias malabaricus*) rear snakes called *tareruhu mai*.

In all these cases, *jara* → *riku* → *nima* relations appear to be homologous and *riku* is the vector between the poles. This relational form is both normative and open—to paraphrase Philippe Descola (1993:127)—and, as such, we shouldn’t expect the Guajá to actually list an inventory of all possible relations between living beings. However, rather than attempting a complete understanding of this cosmos by identifying who is whose *jara/nima*, at stake here is the observation that many beings only exist due to their relations with other types of beings: that some beings will be “reared” (or taken care of) by others or at least—to go with the literal translation—“will be with” others.

In the early part of the rainy season, between January and March, the pequi fruit harvest brings large swarms of black flies (*pĩ'ũ* in Guajá). The Guajá identify this joint occurrence with reference to the sociocosmological continuity between insects and fruit, whereby pequis are called *pĩ'ũ nima*, “beings reared by black flies” and, in their turn, black flies are *mykja'á jara*, or “pequi owners.” Delicious pequis are therefore always savored alongside inconvenient black fly bites, experiences that have been “blended” (*pãmẽ*) and will always appear “together” (*pyry*). In the same way, the Guajá say a group of celestial entities linked to shamanism (the *karamara*) send rain; they control water and periodically send it to the

forest. Although the Guajá historically subsist on hunting and collecting, they see the forest as a cultivated space (much like other Amazonian cosmologies such as the Achuar's and the Waiãpi's) and warn that the *karawara* do not send rain to deforested areas because where there are no trees, there are no fruit and no more animals to feed on them. As they are also hunters (*watama'á*), the *karawara* cultivate the forests on Earth for their prey. Deforestation, a phenomenon with cataclysmic consequences for Amerindian peoples, shatters these relations, leading to the emergence of a world full of black flies but no pequi-trees, in other words, owners without creatures to rear.

Animals that consume large amounts of the same fruit can also be that fruit's *jara*, so that *pacas* (a large rodent) are *jara* to the tiny black-nightshade berries they eat (*Solanum americanum*, called *wãwã'á* in Guajá). This is not to say that other animals—such as agoutis, deer, tapir, and peccary—do not eat these fruits. But pacas are their greatest consumers. These berries are therefore known as “paca food” (*kararubu nimi'úa*) or as being *close* to pacas, which is why these animals are their *jara*. Various other plant species also have owner-rearers, and some of them are even classified according to the names of their animal owner, such as “cotia manioc” (*akuxí tĩrĩmĩ*), “toucan pequis,” and “howler monkey food” (*warivá*), among others. Vines (*ipoja'á*) are also generally known as plants reared by howler monkeys and are therefore called *wari nimá*, which literally means “beings reared by the howler monkeys.” Beyond the human world many of these beings conduct their lives in the total absence of human will. As simply one among many, the difference between humans and other living creatures is not either “necessarily the clearest, the most stable or even the most important” (Viveiros de Castro 2007:109).

Enemy Things

The first time I heard the Guajá talk about a “rearing” capacity was in a conversation about objects: a woman by the name of Amỹpirahã asked for a knife as a present when I next returned to the Juriti village. “A big knife,” she emphasized. When I asked her why she wanted a big knife she responded, “*a'e riku tá*,” translating it to Portuguese herself: “So I can rear it!” Objects will always have an owner-rearer, even if they are frequently passed around and might acquire a new owner along the way. The relation between diverse objects and those who own them is described as a “growing” (*riku*) relation, something that can be illustrated with the relation between a hunter and his arrows (see also Garcia 2018).

Although Guajá men have hunted with firearms (*maka*, the term used for rifles) since contact, they all still keep a stock of arrows, which only work adequately when they become “angry” (*-imahy*) during the hunt, in the same way as humans. For their “anger” to develop arrows must undergo a lengthy process of strengthening by being fed and poisoned. Arrows feed on blood (*bany*) and their hunger is satiated by being rubbed onto the raw flesh of a recent kill: animal blood feeds the object (*banimi'úa*, “my food”) and is the “poison” (*bany*) that will be launched at the prey: this is the only use made of animal blood, as it is extremely poisonous, which means all meat should be properly roasted or cooked in water to be consumed. As Takya, an elder, once told me: “Blood is like the arrows' medicine (*pobã*) but like poison for the Guajá.” Once laminated with the blood of slain game animals, the arrows are left to dry on a platform above a fire so that they might feel pain and thus be “hardened” by the smoke (*tata txin*) rising from their hearths, a process that turns their color to a dark, coffee-like blackish-brown. This finishing process signals that they are ready to be used again to inject the Guajá's prey with poison and pain.

The Guajá say that the multiple ways in which a man stimulates his arrows are *riku* (growing) relations and that his ability as a hunter is partly based on these ties. In other words, men make and rear their arrows by manufacturing them, “feeding” them, and repairing them whenever necessary. Fabrication is thus only the first step en route to ownership, and no hunter can own arrows simply by making them; ownership necessarily implies “rearing” (*riku*). Analogous ideas are used in relation to rifles and munitions: arrows yearn for and are polished with blood in the same way that rifles yearn for and are polished with oil, which satiates their hunger and keeps them “strong” and active. However, the firearms' anger is far greater, as they are “crazy” (*waky*), “angry,” (*imahy*) and “hostile” (*mibua*). As the seasoned hunter Piraima'a told me, “Lead is uncontrollable.” Unlike arrows, lead kills everything, even the animal cubs that could be taken as pets. Or as another hunter, Hemokoma'a, once commented, arrows “like” the little *nima* (pet) animals in much the same way as people, so cubs were rarely killed before the Guajá began hunting with rifles. On the other hand, cartridges are “crazy” and kill everything. As a result, during a hunt for howler monkeys when two infants were taken but only one survived—the other died from

a wound to the leg before we returned to the village—those present spoke sadly of how the cartridge had killed the baby, that cartridges are very poisonous and angry, that they are crazy and different from arrows that know (*akwá*) to leave the young alive.

Animal Strategies

The *ajŷ* are small cannibal ogres (sometimes specters), “small beings, as tall as children, and very ugly!” who live in old camps, tree hollows, holes, and dark areas of the forest. They control certain game animals and afflict hunters with *ba’aera* (a type of spell) that leaves them *panemubum* (“luckless”), as discussed elsewhere (García 2012). Some of the animals that the Guajá hunt the most, forest deer, brown brocket, agouti, paca, and coati, are kept by the *ajŷ*, so an encounter with them is always a possibility.

During one hunt involving approximately ten people, we cornered a paca (*Cuniculus paca*) and an agouti (*Dasyprocta aguti*), both of which ended up hiding inside a fallen tree’s hollow trunk. We quickly blocked the trunk’s openings to trap the animals, while also looking for a hole beneath which we could build a fire to smoke them out or suffocate them. We thrust our machetes into openings hoping to wound them and also attempted to seize them with our hands. Needless to say, we used great caution when doing this for fear of being bitten. Two hours passed; the paca then carelessly left itself visible and within striking distance, although still inside the trunk, whereupon Takya, an experienced and elder hunter, fatally struck it with his machete. Soon afterwards, the agouti was killed with several club and knife blows. Upon pulling it from the tree trunk, we found that it was a paca and not an agouti as we had previously thought. When I asked some of the hunters about this “mistake” they told me that the agouti had always been there but was “transformed” (*ipirimá*, “to change skins”) into a paca by the *ajŷ*, the agoutis’ *jara*, so that its greater strength would enable it to bore a hole in the trunk and thus escape.

Other hunters present began to recall similar episodes involving pacas and agoutis, and in almost all of them the *ajŷ* transformed the agouti into a paca so that it could save itself from the hunters. Such transmutations were never spontaneous but fostered by the *ajŷ*, who could also change other animals with their *ajŷ mytũ*, the “*ajŷ*’s breath.” These transformations from one species into another was always symmetrically between two substitutable beings within the *ajŷ* taxonomy. The coati (*Nasua nasua*) can therefore be transformed into an opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*) and vice versa, or a forest deer (*Mazama americana*) or brown brocket deer (*Mazama gouazoubira*) can have the color of their coat changed to grey to become grey brocket. However, the *ajŷ*’s power is limited, so many animals, such as peccaries, tapir, and monkeys (except for the night monkey), are excluded from these transformations (see García 2018:338–42).

Furthermore, deer, pacas, and agoutis that the *ajŷ* rear have relations of consubstantiality between them similar to that of close relatives (called *harapibiará*). According to the Guajá, the relations between them are *riku*: from its point of view, a paca is the agouti’s owner (*jara*) and is reared (*nimá*) by the deer. Although they are all under the cannibal *ajŷ*’s field of influence, these animals are conceived along a continuous axis that identifies some as rearing others. Such relations are not treated as abstract contemplation about the world but have a direct effect on people’s lives, especially, as we have seen, when it comes to hunting. However, *riku* also operates as a sociological principle representing the articulation of relations between diverse beings without necessarily engaging the human perspective. The Guajá simply are trying to *conceive how the animals conceive* these relations. Whether certain butterflies are reared by the tortoise or the black bearded saki rears the capuchin is an issue that concerns those beings alone. The relations therefore are beyond the realm of human perception.

Cockroaches

Riku also operates between close relatives to produce consubstantiality and genealogical proximity (Viveiros de Castro 2002b:157) and can characterize forms of adoption (Fausto 2001:413–18), something that Cormier describes among the Guajá between women and their pets. In her book *Kinship with Monkeys*, women’s fondness for rearing dozens of creatures in the villages (some had five or more monkeys) impressed on her the existence of a direct relation of adoption—above all with howler monkeys—which turns the small animal into a woman’s “child,” whom she also breastfeeds. Also, according to Cormier, Guajá women also find that pets are a sort of “adornment” and enhances the women’s

beauty. And monkeys are also considered beautiful in their own right. Cormier equally emphasizes that desired attributes of “femininity” and “maternity” are obtained by rearing these animals (Cormier 2003). Somewhat differently however, I would argue that the idea of *nimá* is not limited to relations between pets and their owners: the former are a type of progeny (*nimá*), but as we have seen *nimá* can also be used for any being that is under a *jara*’s (owner-rearer) influence.

As discussed by various authors (see Cormier 2003 on the Guajá case; Erikson 1987, 2012; Fausto 2008), while the relation between reared animals and their owners seems like adoption, the *jara* position can also be attributed to a child’s mother (and sometimes father). As such, a woman knows how to be an owner to a pet when she already knows how to own her children: when a child cries, the statement “*ajábó ja pe!*” or “take him to his owner!” is synonymous to “take him to his mother!” Since one of a mother’s main tasks is to guarantee growth (*nixa’á* or “his growth”), a *jara* can therefore be understood as being closer to the idea of *iva* found among the Yudjá (Lima 2005:95–96), that is, *someone who makes life possible* for certain beings (such as children or pets), rather than to “proprietor.”¹¹

Another example that can clearly illustrate this idea’s reach emerges from my Guajá interlocutors’ common statement that “a Guajá village can be an uncomfortable place!” This remark underscores how the Guajá feel more at home in the cool, free forest where they lived until their recent contact. The village is still something new, a space that came as part of the “domestication package,” along with agriculture, utensils, and the rifle. It is a “ugly” (*mānābhŷ*) place when compared to the “beautiful” (*pārābhŷ*) forest. As with other Amazonian peoples, the Guajá villages were formed alongside official government outposts (called Indigenous Posts), and the village itself is often called “FUNAI,” the acronym for the National Indian Foundation. Their *tapiris*, or forest shelters, gave way to wattle and daub houses, and the concentration of people brought with it chickens and dogs, but also many cockroaches.

Examples	<i>Riku</i> /Creation/ Caring Relations (<i>jara</i> /creator/ carer → <i>nimá</i> /created)
Parents and children	<i>Awa</i> (humans) → <i>awa</i> (humans)
Husbands and wives	<i>Awa</i> (humans) → <i>awa</i> (humans)
Wives and domesticated animals	<i>Awa</i> (humans) → animals
Sucam and cockroaches	<i>Karai</i> (nonindigenous) → pests
Deer and pacas; all the relations between <i>jara</i> and animal <i>nimá</i>	Animals → animals
Animals and bees/honey	Animals → animals/food
<i>Ajŷ</i> and night monkeys	Nonhuman ogres → animals

Table 2. Some possibilities of *riku* relation

Especially during winter nights a multitude of cockroaches can be seen wandering all over the houses in and around the things and food that the Guajá keep in the straw roofs and in crevices within the walls. On these humid winter nights they climb up legs, crawl around bodies, and in and out of clothes, anywhere from head to toe. While talking about the discomfort caused by the cockroaches, Wiraho explained that they are “Sucam’s responsibility.” They are, therefore, held to be the responsibility of the Public Health Campaign Administration (former agency or administrative unit of the National Health Foundation or FUNASA) because agency employees periodically visit the village to spray the poisons that keep the cockroach population under control. Wiraho claimed that the cockroaches are *sucam nimá* or “Sucam’s pets,” creatures whose lives and control Sucam, their *jara* (owner/rearer), provided. Each time Sucam employees go to the village, they are therefore not just seen to be exterminating the cockroaches but controlling them. Much like ticks and certain species of snakes, cockroaches are a nuisance for everyone, and if it were up to the Guajá they would keep them away. However, when they say that ticks and cockroaches only live through their *jara*, they emphasize that the presence of these pests indicates a lack of control at a sociological level, wherein the relation with and between

nonhumans can be thought about like the relation between people rather than as an environmental imbalance.

Walking Together

As we have already seen, relations between a range of beings semantically gravitate around the idea of *riku*, which affects different forms of subjectivity, among them humanity and conjugality. In Table 2 (see above) I have summarize some of these possibilities.

In diverse South American sociocosmologies (for example, among the Achuar, Waiãpi, and even the ancient Tupinambá) marriage is described as a process of taming (see Taylor 2001) in which the wife is often promised in betrothal while still very young. In the Achuar case, as many wives were once the fruit of warlike expeditions, marriage is modelled on a relation of “violent capture,” in which there is a close connection between conjugality, taming, seduction, and hunting (Taylor 2001:49). For the Waiãpi (see Gallois 1988) the “preyification” of women (the metaphorical association of a woman into a prey) of women is subordinate to their generally wild state, requiring early capture and domestication for their transformation into wives. The same once took place among the Parakanã, who favored young women “because older women were more difficult to tame and sometimes resisted being captured” (Fausto 2001:300). A young woman must therefore be transformed into a wife and various reasons (economic, ecological, and sexual) were behind the preference for marrying a close and young relative. Chief among them is that a wife must be “reared” so that she will not fly into an uncontrollable rage, a potential for every unmarried woman.¹² Women thus cannot grow without being married and should not take too long to find a husband as they might become “angry,”¹³ something akin to what Fausto (2001:432) shows for women the Parakanã kidnapped. There is a direct relation between “anger,” “food,” and “marriage,” where food placates anger and makes marriage possible.

Among the Guajá, men and women use various common phrases to illustrate the conjugal process, such as *maj maná* (“I will send her (for him) to rear”), as previously observed, but also *apy ta hamiriko nime* (“I will catch him/her as a husband/wife”) or *amëmakwá ta bârëbë* (“I will tame him/her”). These phrases can be used by couples of all ages while they are still getting to know each other and deciding on future plans. A young man called Xiparenxa'á who very much liked (*mapary*) a young girl called Majrá from another village, therefore explained how the idea *amëmakwá* (“tame”/“accustom”) illustrated “courtship,” and how it is analogous to the woman who brings an agouti cub back from the forest to rear. According to Xiparenxa'á, “The agouti arrives angry and has to be calmed,” and that phase of proximity and conquest, *mapary* (“like”) or *maparaly* (“acquire the taste for”), is translated with the idea *amëmakwá*. This process can take years and does not necessarily mean that the one who “tames” and “rears” (*riku*) will end up “together” (*pyry*) with the woman.

By describing all these examples I hope to have emphasized that *jara* is whoever “is together” (*riku pyry*) with someone but does not necessarily mean control over her/him. Being together is a guiding principle in Guajá sociology. Many other commonly used ideas contain it, such as *harimiriko imakwa ta bapyry*, or “bringing the wife to wait near me,” to justify intergenerational unions; during marriage men and women also say they are married or refer to their spouses through the sentence *amãja* or “I reared.” Another idea, *watá pyry* (“walk together”), summarizes life in Guajá villages. At the same time, generational asymmetry is implicit in these conjugal meetings as an important variable in this process, as revealed in this article’s opening episode. Everything therefore takes place as if *riku*, the relation par excellence, prescribes this imbalance.

This mechanism for spousal production maintains all differences and is mediated by both men and women.¹⁴ As a modulator of alliance, *riku* can be applied to both sexes: husbands rear wives and wives rear husbands. Widowed women who remarry therefore say that they must “rear” (*riku*) their young husbands, otherwise the latter might become deeply melancholic, jeopardizing their productivity as hunters—potentially the worst thing that can happen to a man. Through the union between young men and women generations older, something characteristic of avuncular ties prescribed by Guajá terminology, as in other Amazonian cases,¹⁵ Guajá women can literally declare *jabá amixa'á ta hamenime*. By this they mean “I will rear him to be my husband,” denoting the physical development of a being through the notion of *ixa'á*. Women therefore transmit their knowledge of tracking prey, as Wiraho once told me when recounting how his older wife taught him to “walk” (*wata*) in the forest—that is, to hunt. In short, on one side there are angry women; on the

other, there are melancholic men, both undesirable states that a matrimonial union can effectively resolve.

Conclusion—The Ownership Fiction

This article began by discussing the notion of *owner* and its implications (and correlate ideas of *mastery*, *familiarization*, etc.). When considered in conjunction these associated terms can serve as an organizing principle, image-guide, or anthropological fiction (Strathern 1988:10) to better problematize kinship among the Guajá. My discussion of this fiction has focused on the fact that, as a concept, *riku* allows us to jointly conceptualize both kinship and interspecific relations in a way that accounts for the understanding that both animals and plants are interwoven into this universe in a type of cosmic economy of *caring*, to paraphrase Nurit Bird-David's powerful image (1992).¹⁶ This does not mean I am advocating for the abolition of the notion of owner, but rather that we should take care to give it ethnographic grounding. I have not sought to demonstrate the inapplicability of any specific concept.¹⁷ Instead my aim has been to use ethnographic analysis to reveal a relational domain to which the metaphor of owner/ownership seems to provide one of the keys, but not a complete solution.

One of the characteristics of the Guajá *riku* in comparison with analogous Amazonian relations is that it can be associated as much with a theory of generalized relatedness (Viveiros de Castro 2002a:422) as with an ontology of familiarization, the latter positing a world permeated by *owner*-type relations (Descola 2005; Fausto 2008). These relations occur in different spheres of life without necessarily reducing one to the other or, as Marilyn Strathern writes, “in a world *where social relations are the objects of people's dealings with one another*, it will follow that social relations can only turn into (other) social relations, and social relations can only stand for (other) social relations” (1988:172, emphasis in the original).

As a concept that underwrites a variety of relations, the *owner* concept can be seen to articulate very different orders: matrimonial/alimentary/sexual, animals and humans, and animate and inanimate beings, among others. It posits a replicating mechanism for reproduction that brings different beings closer to each other, cutting across the boundaries that we conceive between species and relations. The possibility that we might find relations everywhere can certainly constitute a disconcerting fact (Strathern 1995:10), but my intention has been to show how (if not *relations*, then) *care* and *partnership* are actually everywhere in the Guajá world, even if at unequal levels of complexity and scale.¹⁸

As a concept, *riku* seems to come close to being the Guajá's own idea of *relation* or something similar, which is given particular form by marriage. To paraphrase Jimenez and Willerslev (2007:537), my ethnography suggests this Guajá concept can be understood as an “indigenous re-description of the Euro-American concept of the relation.” In the case in question, aside from raising hypotheses relative to how my interlocutors conceive of the interactions (and the very life) of other beings among themselves, *riku* as an idea of relation attempts to account for the interaction between humans and a vast group of beings.

On the other hand, by defending *relation*—which is our own “concept of companionship” (Strathern 2014:8)—we run the risk of unintentionally reifying the idea of society by other means (ibid.:11). So even if there is a certain element of untranslatability within the idea of *riku*, I have attempted to enable its translation by correlating ideas of rearing/caring with kinship to present a native and creative means of thinking about the latter theme (e.g., Carsten 2000; Franklin and McKinnon 2002; Bamford and Leach 2009; Sahllins 2011a, 2011b; for Amazonia, see Coelho de Souza 2006), presented here through the conjugal alliance. Kinship is therefore a specific and varying case of a broader idea of relation, a *theory of relation* in which conjugality is a possible variation.

From this ethnographic standpoint Amazonian sociality appears as a revision of ideas such as *relation*, *kinship*, and other similar terms, which I use with the intention of conceptually twisting them rather than inserting them into our conceptual universe.¹⁹ I have not tried to associate wives and husbands with tame animals, but by establishing connections that would be unlikely in the “West” between different entities (Strathern 1995:15–16) observe how one field becomes like another in this (cosmo)logic. This does not mean that relation is everywhere (even though it is in many places, as seen above), but that it almost always appears somehow for someone, much like the perspectival idea, precluding the existence of an “absolute spectator” (Lima 2005:88)²⁰ that is able to continuously penetrate into different levels of reality, as in a process of self-similar construction (Strathern 1995:18).

Riku should be observed not as an “intra-anthropological” operator (capable only of explaining marriage), but as a “trans-ontological operator” (that associates humans and nonhumans), with the view that *humanity* is not the essence of kinship (Viveiros de Castro 2007:107). To think through this process of relational production, kinship is removed from its terminological zone of comfort and considered through relations identified with “mastery,” which obliges us to rethink the latter. In other words, at least in the Guajá case, mastery and conjugality appear as metaphors for each other, instantiations of a broader set of relations of *rearing*, *growing*, *caring* and *raising*, or—simply—*riku*.

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Notes

¹ In previous works I’ve wrote “*riku*” as “*riko*.” In a recent review of the Guajá language (with the support of linguist Marina Magalhães, whom I thank), I started to adopt a new spelling for the verb, and *riku* seems to be the correct form.

² For an important discussion about this theme see Overing (2003).

³ *jabá amixa'a ta hamenime/* “I will create “my husband”

⁴ The suffix *r-ame* (or, sometimes, *nime*) at the end of the phrase denotes a translative function that, as it suggests, indicates that *harimiriko*, “my wife,” will still be a wife. But this will only happen after her body grows properly.

⁵ On the “three affinities,” see Viveiros de Castro 2001, 2002b:128.

⁶ The pronunciation varies according to the village. These can be quite distant from each other and their linguistic exchanges have varied with time, resulting in small lexical differences.

⁷ Very common in Tupi-Gurani languages, linguists and anthropologists have translated the cognates *-reko* and *-teko* in different forms. In Guarani, for example, *-reko* is a transitive verb that can be transcribed as “to have,” “to rear (animals),” “to plant,” “to guide (a person),” and “to walk together” (Dooley 1982), among other meanings, all of which can also be expressed through the idea of *riku* among the Guajá.

⁸ The numerous relations that Amerindian peoples establish with their cherished tame animals (from wild animals to pigs and chickens) is well documented in a part of the ethnological bibliography, including among the Guajá (Cormier 2003).

⁹ According to Carlos Fausto: “As far as I know all Amazonian languages possess a—historically stable—term that designates a position involving control and/or protection, origin and/or ownership, that is applied to relations between people (human or non-human) and between people and things (tangible or intangible)” (Fausto 2008:330).

¹⁰ The term *jara* has cognates in several Tupi-Guarani languages, referring to the ancient Tupi (Dooley 1982). Its generic translation can be “owner,” “master,” or even “guardians” (of knowledge, for example), as it appears in recent works (Benites 2014:13).

¹¹ This theme has sparked several debates in the contemporary anthropology of kinship, which are embodied in discussions about *nurture* and “by analyses that, by incorporating food exchange and sharing, and its resonances and effects on affects and dispositions, promote interrogations into the divide between *nature* and *nurture* that underlies modern conceptions of kinship, as well as (and inevitably) many of the anthropological reflections about the theme” (Coelho de Souza 2006:3). See also Battaglia 1985; Strathern 1999; Carsten 2000; For Amazonia, see Gow 1997; Overing 1999; Rival 1998.

¹² Much like a mirror image of the Melanesian case (and not just due to local endogamy versus clan exogamy), in which “women are already wives by virtue of being sisters” and that marriage only reveals the transformation from one state to the other (Strathern 1988:228–29), I suggest that in the Guajá case (as well as in much of Amazonia) a sister

(to evoke the terms of the Melanesian ethnography) should be transformed into a wife by another man.

¹³ In the same way that among the Parakanã “the husband ‘creates’ (-*pyro*) his pre-pubescent wife by giving her game” (Fausto 2001:432), the act of feeding one’s wife (and in-laws) is one of the husband’s primary attributes during this period.

¹⁴ It is important to note that men provide a long bride service, lasting many years, during which the husband must provide his intended family with meat and other food. There are therefore differences between what men and women are thinking about and what it means to “raise” spouses; however, the idea of *riku*, “being together,” is a situation created by conjugality whereby each tames the other seems productive for both cases.

¹⁵ As among other lowland South American populations, (such as the Parakanã, Trio, Cinta-Larga, Panare, as well as the ancient Tupinambá), the Guajá have a Dravidian variety of kinship terminology (or type A cross, according to Trautmann and Barnes 1998) characterized by transgenerational equations and avuncular preference in marriage rules. The Guajá kinship system is duly described by Cormier (2003) and recently reviewed in my work (Garcia 2010).

¹⁶ I am referring to Bird-David (1992) idea, the “cosmic economy of sharing” (see also Ingold 2000a; Ingold 2000b).

¹⁷ “The hope here, then, is for something more comprehensive than simply demonstrating the inapplicability of this or that particular Western concept” (Strathern 1988:12).

¹⁸ “Let us say, then, that anthropology distinguishes itself from other discourses on human sociality, not by holding any firm doctrine about the nature of social relations, but, on the contrary, by maintaining only a vague initial idea of what a relation might be” (Viveiros de Castro 2013:483).

¹⁹ “When faced with ideas and concepts from a culture conceived as other, the anthropologist is faced with the task of rendering them *within a conceptual universe that has space for them*” (Strathern 1987:256; *apud* Corsín Jimenez and Willerslev 2007:541, fn 7, emphasis added).

²⁰ Although there are beings with privileged (though not absolute) points of view, such as humans and *ajj*, as we have seen.

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