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## Animism, Cannibalism, and Pet-keeping among the Guajá of Eastern Amazonia

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## Animism, Cannibalism, and Pet-keeping among the Guajá of Eastern Amazonia

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A number of recent works on religion, sociality, and ecological adaptation have addressed the role of animism, cannibalism, and pet-keeping practices among varied Amazonian groups (Descola 1994, 1998; Erikson 2000; Fausto 1999; Taylor 2001; Viveiros de Castro, 1992). In this essay, an attempt is made to reconcile these works with the beliefs and behaviors of the Guajá of eastern Amazonia.<sup>1</sup> Animistic and cannibalistic beliefs order Guajá interactions in ecological, sociological, and cosmological domains of their culture. While the Guajá do not literally practice any form of cannibalism, it is a central trope for the way they view death and relations of consumption. The Guajá are similar to several recent descriptions of Amazonian groups who also link predation and sociality through modeling relations to some game animals on kinship relations (Århem 1996; Conklin 2001; Descola 1996; Rival 1993; Taylor 2001). Thus, every act of animal predation is a social act. Because pets are often obtained when their mothers are killed for food, social relationships with pets are predicated upon prior acts of predation.

The specific configuration of animism, cannibalism, and pet-keeping among the Guajá relates to social organization and mode of production. The Guajá are a foraging people with relatively egalitarian<sup>2</sup> social relations in their acephalous society. The social relations they describe with game and other nonhuman beings are similarly characterized by social egalitarianism. The importance of monkeys as pets can be linked to the importance of monkey hunting in Guajá ecological adaptation. Furthermore, the relationships of the Guajá to prey and pets are divided along gender lines with men relating to animals as hunters and women relating to animals as mothers.

### GUAJÁ HISTORICAL ECOLOGY

The Guajá Indians are a traditional foraging people living in eastern Amazonia in the state of Maranhão, Brazil. The first clear historical account

of the Guajá was in an 1853 report by the then President of the province of Maranhão, which described them as residing in roughly the same vicinity as they are located today (see Gomes 1985). Sporadic references to them exist over the next 100 years or so, describing them as nomadic foraging bands relying heavily on babassu palms, monkeys, and tortoises as major subsistence items. They were also reported to keep large numbers of monkeys as pets (e.g., Beghin 1951, 1957; Carvalho 1992; Dodt 1939; Gomes 1988; Meirelles 1973; Nimuendajú 1948; Nobre de Madeiro 1988; Parise 1988). Two recent works have also described Guajá monkey hunting and monkey pet-keeping (Forline 1997; Queiroz and Kipnis 1991).

Due to their nomadic lifestyle, the Guajá remained relatively isolated until the construction of the BR-222 roadway through their territory in 1969. Contact with non-Indians increased after construction began on the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD) railway for the Ferro Carajás mining project in 1985. The consequences were deforestation, divestment of much of their traditional foraging grounds, and many deaths from infectious disease and, in some cases, outright murder (see also Cormier 2003). Today, there are approximately 200 Guajá who have at least periodic contact with one of the four indigenous posts established in the region by the Brazilian Indian Agency, FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Índio). Approximately fifty to seventy-five remain full-time foragers, uncontacted by non-Indians.

Referring to the Guajá as traditional hunter-gatherers is not wholly accurate in terms of their historical ecology. First, William Balée (e.g., 1988, 1994, 1996) has described the Guajá as relying on old fallow plant species and has provided convincing evidence that they were at one time themselves agriculturalists. Thus, the Guajá are likely neither continuous foragers nor completely independent foragers. The shift to hunting and gathering seems to have occurred after a period of agriculture, and is itself dependent on the secondary forest created by agricultural activities. This ties into the so called “wild yam question,” raised in the 1980s, that argued against the possibility of independent hunter-gatherers living in the tropical forests (e.g., Bailey et al. 1989; Headland 1987). While the Guajá have not engaged in direct trade relations with agriculturalists, they have apparently depended on them indirectly through adaptation to anthropogenic forests.

Secondly, the Guajá in contact are rapidly changing and most have begun to adopt some agriculture under the direction of the FUNAI. In ethnohistorical perspective, it is likely that ten to fifteen thousand years ago, the antecedents of the Guajá were foragers; five hundred years ago, they were agriculturalists; two hundred and fifty years ago, they became

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foragers again; within the last twenty-five years, many of the Guajá have begun to adopt limited agriculture. While all labels distort and stereotype to some extent, the term “hunter-gatherers” (or “foragers”), given the qualifications, is at least useful as a heuristic device in describing many of the features that the Guajá have in common with other groups so labeled. The basic social unit among nomadic foragers tends to be the family band. As such, there is relative egalitarianism among same-sex, same-age members of the group, with no specialized roles of headmen or shamans, and a fostering of independence and individualism. Gender dominance, while it exists, tends to be relatively weakly expressed. Conflicts between individuals and between family bands tend to be resolved through avoidance rather than confrontation, and family bands do not typically engage in cooperative organized warfare against other groups. More important than anthropological labels, the Guajá, perhaps ethnocentrically, place a high value on the merits of their way of life in opposition to that of other Amazonian groups and of Western society (see also Cormier 2003).

### ANIMISM

Animism is central to the way the Guajá view their relationships with both the natural and the supernatural world. Recently, a number of reformulations of the notion of animism have appeared in the literature, including the work of Phillippe Descola, Nurit Bird-David, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. A common theme that has emerged is the importance of understanding animism as a social relation. It is not merely attributing a spiritual nature or other anthropomorphic feature to nonhumans. Animism is fundamentally about social engagement, according to these reformulations.

Descola (1992, 1996) describes animism as a mode of identification that is a symmetrical inversion of totemism. He argues that while totemic systems model social relations based on the discontinuities in nature, social relations within the group in animistic systems are extended outward towards nature (see also Århem 1996). At first glance, these views might appear to be mirror images of each other in that both posit analogues between the perception of nature and the perception of kinship. However, the locus of the modeling is critical. Totemism suggests that kinship is in effect a natural phenomenon, while animism suggests that nature is, in essence, a social manifestation.

Bird-David (1999) draws on Marilyn Strathern’s (1988) notion of relational personhood in describing animism as a relational epistemology

among the Nayaka of India. The Nayaka have a notion of *devaru* (“superpersons” or “persons with extra powers”), which refers to a supernatural power exhibited in some animals, landscape features, and humans undergoing spirit possession. The term does not translate well into English, for while it refers to beings, it is, moreover, the manifestation of the engagement of the Nayaka with other beings. What is key here is that *devaru* do not have an a priori existence, but become known through their social interactions with the Nayaka. For example, the category of elephants is not necessarily associated with *devaru*, but specific individual elephants can become known as *devaru* superpersons through their interactions with the Nayaka.

Viveiros de Castro (1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2001) links animism to what he terms “perspectival multinaturalism,” and describes the notion of “meta-affinity” as a generic mode of relating in Amazonia. He has been critical of the conceptualization of animism as an epistemology, viewing it as primarily an ontological relation. Perspectival multinaturalism suggests that Amazonian groups perceive nonhuman beings as possessing a humanlike soul, but differing in their physical forms and in their habitual modes of engagement with the environment. Central to Viveiros de Castro’s description of Amazonian animism is the attribution of a subjective point of view to others. Although nonhuman beings appear outwardly different, they see themselves operating according to the same cultural behaviors as humans. For example, when a jaguar drinks blood, the jaguar sees himself as a human drinking manioc beer. Viveiros de Castro argues that these meta-affinal relationships link humans and nonhumans, whereby the generic “brother-in-law/enemy” term is often applied to game, supernatural beings, and other groups of people. In Western society, “brotherhood” would serve as a meta-consanguineal node of inclusiveness, whereas in Amazonia, the meta-affinal node of “brother-in-law” functions somewhat similarly.

The Guajá basically conform to Viveiros de Castro’s model in terms of their meta-affinal classification of nonhuman beings. An important distinction, however, is that they do not use the “enemy/brother-in-law” term for non-Guajá others, but rather, the companionate matrilateral same-sexed sibling, which can be considered a type of affinal relation. Thus, the eating of prey is always a social relation. Two of the Guajá sibling terms of reference that are applied within the group are also used to describe their relationship with plants, animals, supernatural beings, and non-Guajá Amerindians: *harəpiharə-te* and *harəpiana*. The first, *harəpiharə-te* is the term that the Guajá use for their same-sexed patrilateral siblings, while *harəpiana* is the term for same-sexed matrilateral siblings.<sup>3</sup>

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The Guajá reckon consanguineal relations through males, but they also have the notion of plural paternity that is commonly found in Amazonian groups. Beckerman and Valentine (2002) recently devoted an entire volume to exploring this concept in numerous lowland South American cultures. The Guajá are similar to many of the groups described in this volume in their belief that fetuses are created from the buildup of semen and that any man who has sex with a woman during a pregnancy can be considered to be a “biological” father. In the case of the Guajá, plural paternity is viewed as requisite. Successful completion of a pregnancy is thought to require the semen contributions of more than one man. The modal number of fathers for any given individual is three, and individuals rarely share the same identical set of fathers. Thus, consanguinity is best considered partial. The Guajá do not believe that mothers have consanguineal relationships to the children they bear. However, the kinship term of reference applied to nonhumans is that of the matrilateral sibling, that is, the sibling who is not a consanguine but who is coresidential. The Guajá are raised in the household of the mother with all of their matrilateral siblings and some of their patrilateral siblings, but they always have patrilateral siblings outside of the household.

The use of sibling terms for non-Gujá others reflects the basically egalitarian social relationships among same-sexed individuals of similar age. While the Guajá also distinguish between the matrilateral and patrilateral opposite-sexed siblings in their terminological system, these terms are not applied to non-Gujá others. One explanation is that the opposite-sexed siblingship involves a role differentiation that the same-sexed siblingship does not. Although gender hierarchy is weak among the Guajá, it does exist with opposite-sexed relations involving a type of power differential not present in same-sexed relations, particularly for those of similar age.

Most non-Gujá beings are classified with the matrilateral sibling term, *harɔpiana*. The use of a sibling term marks an important difference between the Guajá and descriptions of several other groups who describe game in kinship terms where nonhuman others are often classified with the affinal brother-in-law/enemy term (cf., Fausto 1999; Taylor 2001; Viveiros de Castro 2001). Specifically, Viveiros de Castro (2001) has argued that the purest affines are brothers-in-law who remain classificatory affines rather than actual affines. He argues that literal affines become attitudinally consanguine through such mechanisms as teknonymy.<sup>4</sup>

If one accepts Viveiros de Castro’s premise that a purer form of affinity exists through the potentiality of a marriage relation rather than the actuality of a marriage relation, then it is possible to conclude that the matrilateral

sibling may represent the purest form of affinity among the Guajá. For matrilateral siblings, there is no need for a real or potential marriage to link them. They are linked as children raised by the same mother but who do not share fathers. Even through the mother, it is not the mother's marriage that is relevant to the matrilateral sibling relation. Rather, it is the nonoverlapping father set created by the mother's prior sexual relationships.

The *harəpiana* relationship through the mother can also be considered to represent the most affinal relationship among the Guajá (with the exception of the mother herself) because all other categories of relatives can be partially consanguineal due to plural paternity. Even the mother's brother, who is terminologically encoded as a male ego's brother-in-law and a female ego's husband in their avunculate system, may be a partial consanguine to a male ego.<sup>5</sup>

Here, it might be difficult for ego (B) to marry his sister's daughter because ego (B) and mother's brother C could be patrilateral *harəpiharə-te* through father (A).<sup>6</sup>

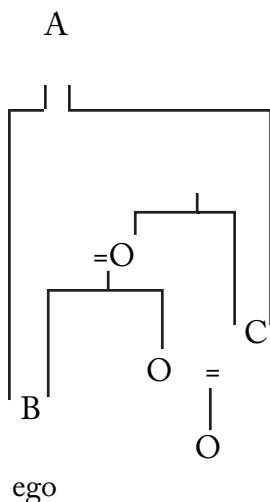


Figure 1: Plural Paternity with Mother's Brother and Avunculate Marriage

## CANNIBALISM

Cannibalism is an umbrella term for a wide variety of cultural practices and perceptions not only among Amazonian groups, but just as importantly,

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in outsider evaluations of Amazonian peoples. Arens (1979) challenged the credibility of accounts of cannibalism, arguing that the fascination with cannibalism tells more about ethnographic imagination and the exoticizing of others than it tells about actual cultural practices. While Conklin provides the most extensive documentation of Amazonian cannibalism to date, she also warns that political motivations for describing other groups as cannibals are “one of the oldest smear tactics in the game of ethnic politics” (2001:3). Clearly, a danger exists in applying the term uncritically in that it can both distort cultural meanings and have very real negative consequences for the people themselves.

The above caveat notwithstanding, cannibalism, like animism, is an important trope among a number of Amazonian groups. Anthropophagy is practiced in some groups, but even when it is symbolic, symbols have real effects in ordering perceptions and experience. Two contrastive categories that have been used to classify cannibalism are endocannibalism and exocannibalism, distinguishing the practices of eating one’s own kin versus the eating of those who are outsiders to the group (see Dole 1985). Conklin (1995, 1997, 2001) has differentiated the two forms that have both been practiced by the Wari’. Among the Wari’, endocannibalism involved mortuary ritual, mourning, and honoring of the dead, while exocannibalism involved warfare, hostility, and enemy capture. Further, while endocannibalism involves the social obligations to eat one’s affines, the Wari’ described enemies as subhuman and eating them as the equivalent of consuming animal meat.

Although Guajá symbolic cannibalism is founded on social relatedness, it seems generally to have more in common with descriptions of predatory/warfare exocannibalism than compassionate/mortuary endocannibalism. However, the dichotomy itself is problematic. For example, Viveiros de Castro (1992) described the Tupinambá practice of giving captives to their sisters as temporary husbands—prior to cannibalizing them—making them affinal brothers-in-law. Among the Wari’ it is also the affines who bear responsibility for eating the dead (Conklin 2001). Whether in mortuary endocannibalism or predatory exocannibalism, these two cases are similar because they involve the eating of affines.

The line is further blurred because mortuary cannibalism can take predatory or symbolic forms. For example, while the Araweté have a class of beings similar to the Guajá *aiyã* in their *Áñə* cannibal ghosts who prey upon the living, they also have a form of symbolic mortuary cannibalism (Viveiros de Castro 1992). Upon death, the souls of the Araweté are eaten by cannibal divinities who resurrect them from their bones. Similarly, when an individual dies among the Eastern Tukanoan Makuna, he or she is believed to be cannibalized by the divinities (Århem 1996).



Predatory cannibalism of interred bodies has been documented in Whitehead's (2001) description of *kanaimà* ritual killing in the Pakaraima Mountains in Guyana. According to Whitehead, *Kanaimà* shamans twice hunt their victims. Arguably, one could characterize this form of exocannibalism as "mortuary" because of the specific association of ritual consumption with burials (however, see Conklin 2001:xxiv). Victims are captured and the process of slow torture transforms the hunters into sacred predators and the human victim into a nonperson. The moment of death initiates a reversal, where the process of decomposition transforms the nonperson into a sacred form, and the *kanaimà* become potential prey to both the sorcerer/Lord Jaguar and the kin of the victim. The body is hidden from the *kanaimà* by relatives, and it must be hunted again. Cannibalization of the juices from the putrefying corpse of the divine victim transforms the *kanaimà* back into the mundane realm.

Among the Guajá, while the general eating of prey can be considered as constituted in meta-affinal relations, an important feature of their symbolic cannibalism involves preferential consumption of forms of life that are considered to be partial consanguines. While most non-Guajá beings are classified as matrilateral *harəpiana*, there are two exceptions. One is the *haima* spiritual sibling, which receives the patrilateral sibling term, *harəpiharə-te*. Each Guajá is named for a type of plant, animal, divinity, or landscape feature with which he or she shares in a collective spiritual nature. For example, one common name among the Guajá is *Takwari* or "bamboo." Thus, a person named *Takwari* is a spiritual sibling with both bamboo and anyone else named *Takwari*. It should also be noted that the differing spiritual siblingships among patrilateral siblings also serve to mitigate pure consanguinity.

The second exception involves the use of a siblingship term to describe populations that are considered to stand in a closer relationship to each other than the general meta-affinal matrilateral siblingship. The Guajá use the patrilateral term *harəpiharə-te* or the term *harəpiana-te* interchangeably to describe the relationship. The term *harəpiana-te* includes both the *-na* suffix, which negates, de-emphasizes, and qualifies; as well as the *-te* suffix, which verifies, emphasizes, and validates. It can be translated as a "truly maternal sibling" or perhaps even as a "true-false sibling." The *harəpiana-te* term is not used within the local kinship group and is only used to describe relationships among populations, including natural species and classes of supernatural beings. Examples of *harəpiharə-te* / *harəpiana-te* siblingships among populations are the relationship between the Ka'apor capuchin and the brown capuchin; the collared peccary and the white-lipped peccary; and the inaja palm and the babassu palm. The Guajá as a whole are in this relationship with only one population, the howler monkeys,

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which are a key game species for them, particularly in the wet season (see Cormier 2002).

While the Guajá conceptualize all consumption as eating of related others, their symbolic cannibalism emerges even more fully in these unique *harəpiharə-te / harəpiana* sibling relationships. Beings are viewed as specializing in the consumption of forms of life with which they are closely related. For example, the divinity *Mariawa* is the chief hunter and overseer of the squirrel monkeys. By virtue of his name, he is a spiritual sibling with the *mariawa* palm (*Bactris setosa* Mart.). In the Guajá creation myth, squirrel monkeys were created from *mariawa* palm, a palm that the squirrel monkey utilizes heavily in the wild. Thus, the squirrel monkey consumes *mariawa*, is consumed by the *Mariawa* divinity, and is itself transformed or *ex-mariawa*. Not all relations of consumption are as well ordered as that of the squirrel monkey. However, specialized consumption of one's transformed self or spiritual sibling is a common theme in Guajá cosmology.

For the Guajá themselves, this kind of relationship can be found with both the howler monkeys and the *aiyā* cannibal ghosts, both of which are ex-humans. In the Guajá creation myth, the creator hero, *Mai'ira* transformed a group of Guajá into howler monkeys and instructed the Guajá to eat them. The Guajá themselves are preyed upon by the *aiyā*, who are the ghosts of their dead. The Guajá believe human death is ultimately due to the cannibalization of their spirits by the *aiyā* ex-humans. While these relationships of consumption are clearly conceptualized as predatory, they are not merely predatory. Consumption transforms earthly beings into sacred forms and transports them to the sacred place of the Guajá celestial sky home.

## PET-KEEPING

Recently, several researchers have explored the role of pet-keeping in Amazonia including Descola (1994), Erikson (2000), Fausto (1999), and Taylor (2001). Fausto's (1999) model draws on the work of Descola (1994) and incorporates Amazonian predatory exocannibalism, warfare, shamanism, adoption of children, and the prey/pet paradox. Fausto describes the relationship between a pet and a pet owner as adoptive filiation and argues that it is the structural equivalent of the relationship between a father and an adoptive child. These relationships are described by Fausto as prototypical relations of symbolic control in Amazonia. Further, these relationships can be structurally linked to the relationships between a shaman and a spirit familiar and that of the killer and the victim in cannibal warfare. What is key for Fausto is that all of these relationships involve

social reproduction. “Others” are needed to produce the identities of subjects within the group. Fausto makes a strong case for these structural linkages and his model seems far-reaching. He provides numerous ethnographic examples of shamans referring to their spirit familiars as “pets.” His findings are further supported by the Tupinambá practice of referring to their enemies as pets (Viveiros de Castro 1992) and the Kalapalo’s use of the same term to refer to their pets and their adopted children (Basso 1977).

The prey/pet paradox in Amazonia is a “paradox” only in terms of the Western perspective. In Western society, animals that serve as companions and animals that serve as food sources are generally segregated into distinct categories. Companion animals are generally tabooed as food, and the idea of eating a dog, cat, or other animal viewed as a human companion seems repugnant, cruel, and even unnatural. In Amazonia, the same types of animals that are hunted for food are nurtured as pets. Pets are typically acquired when their mothers are killed for food, and the infants are taken and raised by the people. Although there are a few exceptions in some Amazonian groups, as a general rule, once an animal is designated as a pet, it is not eaten as food (e.g., Crocker and Crocker 1994, Erikson 2000, Kracke 1978, Lizarralde 2002, Rival 1993, Shepard 2002, Taylor 2001).

The Guajá are dedicated pet-keepers, and the most important pets are monkeys. It is notable that over the course of fifteen months of my fieldwork, ninety monkeys were kept as pets in a village of just over a hundred people.<sup>7</sup> A variety of other animals are also kept as pets to a lesser extent, particularly tortoises, birds, and agouti. The Guajá say that there are no animals, with the exception of snakes, that they would not keep as pets if it were possible to do so. Pet-keeping seems to be a long-standing tradition, rather than one developing with their current transition to a more settled way of life. Early reports of the Guajá prior to their incorporation into FUNAI villages described them as keeping numerous monkeys as pets (Beghin 1951, 1957; Gomes 1988 [citing 1853 report by the President of Maranhão]).

Fausto’s principal argument that the relationship of people to animals in Amazonia involves social reproduction is apt for the Guajá. However, while both symbolic cannibalism and pet-keeping are well integrated into the Guajá culture, the specific features of the warfare-cannibal complex, shamanistic supernatural control, and the adoptive father role do not apply well to them. The difference likely relates in part to features of their social organization, which in turn relate to their way of life as hunter-gatherers.

First, the warrior role is not valorized in Guajá society. Within the group, the Guajá place a high premium on cooperation and resolve conflicts through joking relationships or simply avoiding conflict by moving away into the forest. It is unlikely that the Guajá engaged in organized warfare

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Figure 2. Guajá child  
with pet capuchin

as a band level society, particularly when their neighbors were larger tribes. Older informants do describe hostilities with neighboring tribes in the past, but the Guajá response was primarily to attempt to elude enemies rather than engaging in institutionalized warfare. In addition, the lack of institutionalized warfare likely plays a role in why the meta-affinal term of reference applied to game is the companionate matrilateral sibling rather than the enemy brother-in-law. As an aside, the Guajá do attribute predatory cannibalism to their enemies in the past. However it is difficult to determine whether they have actually witnessed this practice or if it is part of their own ethnic politics in demonizing their enemies.

A related difference is Fausto's linkage of shamanism, like warfare, to prototypical relations of symbolic control in Amazonia. The relationship of the Guajá to the divinities is best described as "demand sharing," a characteristic form of reciprocity among foragers (Peterson 1993). Arguably, both are forms of social control, but a distinction exists between control through appropriation and control through appealing to the norms of social obligation. When the overseers of animals and other divinities are encountered, the Guajá ask them for favors rather than co-opting their powers. An additional difference in the way Fausto's model manifests itself

among the Guajá as foragers relates to social reproduction of the identity of the shaman. For the Guajá, interactions with divinities involve differential production of social identities only along gender lines. The shamanic ability to interact with supernatural beings is generically characteristic of all adult men. It is not associated to a ritual specialist for the group.

In addition, the pet-keeper/wild pet relationship is linked more closely to the mother/child relationship than to the father/adopted child relationship. When infant animals are acquired through the killing of their mothers for food, they do not automatically become pets. The wives of hunters determine whether they will be eaten or kept. However, once an animal is designated as a pet, it is never eaten. Its primary caretaker is a Guajá woman, and the woman is considered to be the pet's "mother."

Taylor (2001) has described a somewhat similar relationship among the Jívaroan peoples, arguing that the pet position is modeled on the parent/child relationship, and that pet-taming is viewed as a form of mothering. In addition, Taylor describes women as linked to game in Jívaroan beliefs so that the "taming" of women in marriage is viewed as similar to the "taming" of pets. She believes that this explains, in part, the notion that women are natural pet-keepers among the Jívaro.

The Guajá do not seem to view marriage as a taming of women, but they do share with the Jívaro a similarity in their perspective in that women are believed to have a special, natural relationship with pets, which men lack. Women are said to "know" pets in a way that men do not. Furthermore, they believe that animals subjectively categorize men and women into the hunter and nurturer roles. Animals are said to "desire" the women while they "fear" the men.<sup>8</sup> The Guajá view animals as viewing them in terms of their basic division of labor along gender lines (perhaps a form of perspectival multinaturalism). The hunting and mothering division of labor is also reflected in the enculturation of children. Girls as young as five can become the "mother" of a pet, while young boys are given toy bows and arrows. While boys play with pets, they do not become their primary caretakers. Young boys will sometimes take practice shots at pets with their toy bows and arrows, and this is never reprimanded by parents. In fact, these behaviors are often praised by singing hunting songs.

Pets also serve to enhance the culturally valued image of female fertility. Women who have had a miscarriage are given monkeys to breastfeed, and women past their childbearing years have the greatest number of pets. In the sacred celestial home, the ultimate destiny of the Guajá at death, all women are said to be pregnant and breastfeeding young children. However, women do not keep pets in the celestial realm because, they say, women already have children there. Pets on earth can be considered to serve as surrogate children for women. In addition to being considered children,

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pets are also incorporated into the kinship system to a degree where they are often given kinship terms of address, such as *čikari*, “sister” or *čia’ə* “little mother’s brother,” which further integrates them as members of the family.

An additional perspective on Amazonian pet-keeping is provided by Philippe Erikson (2000). He interprets pet-keeping and hunting as similar in that they involve the incorporation of animals into human social life. Pet-keeping is seen as a counterbalance to hunting as a means of appeasing one’s conscience in killing prey and as a means to appease the supernatural overseers of animals. In contrast, Descola (1998) has been critical of the psychological perspective on pet-keeping, arguing instead that the problem of conscience with regard to killing animals is more Western than Amazonian. While Descola’s point is well taken, I nevertheless believe that psychological factors do come into play in Guajá pet-keeping. For one, a moment of cognitive dissonance seems to occur when infant animals are captured. The infant animal—prior to a woman’s making the decision as to its fate—is in a liminal state where there is uncertainty whether its destiny will be as a pet or for the pot. In addition, pet-keeping does involve sentiment among the Guajá. While the Guajá do not seem to keep pets due to fear of retribution by the overseers of animals, they do keep them, in part, because they are companions to humans with whom they develop affectionate bonds.

## CONCLUSION

Guajá animism, symbolic cannibalism and pet-keeping bear much similarity to similar practices in other Amazonian groups. The specific configuration of these practices and beliefs among the Guajá seems to relate in part to their way of life as hunter-gatherers with an emphasis on monkey hunting. Guajá recent culture history as hunter-gatherers likely extends back no further than 250 years. It is possible that many features of Guajá prey/pet relations have ultimately derived from a past history of tribal warfare. However, regardless of the origin, their current practices and beliefs are constituted in their current way of life. In terms of their ecological adaptation, the importance of monkeys to their diet is reflected in the cosmological significance of monkeys to their culture. In addition, non-Gujá others, including prey animals, are not viewed as enemy affines, but as companionate affinal siblings. In part, this is likely due to the lack of institutionalized warfare, at least in Guajá recent history. In addition, the kinship terms used for non-Gujá others are same-sexed sibling terms, reflecting the basically egalitarian relationships among same-sexed individuals of similar age. Symbolic cannibalism is expressed through

egalitarian relations of consumption, both in the Guajá relationship to nonhumans and in the relationships of consumption they perceive as occurring among nonhumans.

The division of animals into the dual categories of prey and pets is consistent with role differentiation in Guajá society, which is essentially limited to a division of labor along gender lines. The Guajá both view themselves as relating to animals through their roles of men as hunters and women as mothers, and they view the animals themselves as perceiving their engagement with Guajá society through these roles. I have argued that pet-keeping can be best understood as a form of mothering among the Guajá. I do not doubt the validity of the linkage between pet-keeping, predatory warfare, and shamanism in other groups, but it does not seem to apply well for the Guajá. I suspect that the role of women in pet-keeping is not so much unique to the Guajá, but is a relationship that has not yet been fully explored in other groups.

Taylor (1996) has argued that as a general rule, Amazonian peoples view death as homicide in that it is ultimately attributable to human agency. Among the Guajá, personified agency applies to non-Gujá beings as well, with preferential consumption by beings that are partially one's own kind. Guajá animism involves more than attributing a spiritual or human nature to other beings; it involves the respective points of view among other beings. For the Guajá, it is the human nature that they share with howler monkeys that makes them the preferred prey. For squirrel monkeys, it is their own *mariawa* nature that attracts them to the *mariawa* palm.

At the risk of sounding like a vulgar materialist and revealing my own ethnocentrism and culture shock as a suburbanite experiencing the tropical forest, it appears to me that the importance of the idea of cannibalism derives in part from the nature of the Amazonian forest itself. While consumption is part of the web of life everywhere, it is a truly inescapable part of daily experience in Amazonia. Any living thing that does not move quickly enough is eaten. Even quickly moving, culturally armed human beings are partially consumed by a host of biting flies, gnats, mosquitoes, intestinal worms, and other parasites. It seems that one is continually being eaten by something. If the ocean is a common metaphor for island people, cannibalism may be a common metaphor in the richly biodiverse Amazonian forest. Such an interpretation should not be taken to suggest that culture history does not play a central role in transmitting ideology. But rather, the natural environment of Amazonia at least serves constantly to validate the logic of cannibalistic ideologies. Cannibalism may not necessarily be good to think, but it is perhaps, easy to think in the Amazonian environment.

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## NOTES

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1. See also Cormier (in press and 2000).
2. Although my use of the term will be clarified, it should be stated at the outset that the term “egalitarian” is problematic. It is used here to describe first the lack of a clear role of authority or special influence of a chief or headman, next the relatively egalitarian relationships among same-sexed individuals of similar age, and finally a weak expression of gender dominance.
3. Mother’s sister’s children stand in the same relationship.
4. Conklin (2001) describes the notion of consanguinealization of household affines among the Wari’ through sharing of body substances such as breast milk, semen, and sweat.
5. The Guajá have a Dravidianate or two-line prescriptive terminological system with the avunculate encoding of spousal terms (i.e., a female ego’s mother’s brother is “husband” and a male ego’s sister’s daughter is “wife”).
6. It should be noted that partial consanguinity does not necessarily prevent another from being an affine. An affinal link can be emphasized over a consanguineal link so that a sexual or marital relationship can occur.
7. Many monkeys died and were replaced. Thus, there were not ninety monkeys present at one time in the community, but ninety different monkeys were in the community over the course of fifteen months.
8. According to Taylor (2001), women are structurally “half animal” and men are structurally “half-enemy” among the Jívaroan peoples. Although the Guajá do not seem to view men and women in this way, it is interesting that the Guajá view monkey perception of humans in a similar light, in that they “want” women and “fear” men.

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