

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

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 5

June 2008

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Recommended Citation

Steverlynck, Astrid (2008). "Cannibals, Amazons, and Social Reproduction in Amazonia," *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol6/iss1/5>

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Cannibals, Amazons, and Social Reproduction in Amazonia

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Cannibals and Amazons have been portrayed as part of the Amerindian world since the arrival of Columbus in the Caribbean. On the 6th of January 1493, while on the island of Hispaniola, Columbus learnt that "... toward the east there was an island where there were women only" (Columbus 1960:140). By the 13th of January he had identified the island as Matinino—modern Martinique—and a few days later he added that "at a certain time of the year men came to them from the ... island of Carib ... and that if they [the women] gave birth to a boy they sent him to the men's island and if to a girl they let her stay with them" (Columbus 1960:152).¹ Thus, the island of Matinino became the first abode of the Amazons in the New World, with their male cannibal partners living in the neighboring island of Carib (Columbus 1960:152). Columbus' description reflects a medieval worldview expressed through a European discourse of otherness and the unknown which, with roots in Ancient Greece, puts Amazons and anthropophagi on center stage.² It is on the basis of such European presumptions about the nature of the people to be found there that the Amazon and the Caribbean received their names.³

In recent years, a native discourse on Amazon-like women and cannibalism has started to emerge in anthropological investigations of Amerindian societies, revealing a complex system of ideas.⁴ In lowland South America Amazons and cannibals represent much more than *otherness*: they offer a metaphorical commentary on the world, as well as on the nature of being human and on social relations. If ideas about cannibalism relate to the relationship between men and the outside *other*, the discourse on Amazon-like women relates to the relations between men and women within society; both represent two essential links in the chain of social relations that enable society to reproduce.

In this essay, I will explore the relationships between the discourse on cannibalism and the discourse on Amazon-like women in lowland South

America through an exploration of Amerindian ideas about the creative process in order to set out the framework for a more general discussion about the significance of Amazons and Cannibals in Amerindian cosmology and social life.

WOMEN, MEN AND THE PROCESSES OF CREATION IN AMAZONIA

In Amazonia all forms of life (humans, spirits, animals, plants and the natural world at large) share a homogenous principle of vitality—or vital essence—that establishes a certain familiarity among them. Differences between and within species are understood in terms of bodily appearance correlated with certain kinds of behavior rather than in terms of essence or soul. Viveiros de Castro (1998:478) argues that the body is the locus of difference in the sense that it endows the wearer with affects and capacities that make difference socially significant. Within society, the fundamental differentiators are male and female bodies that endow men and women with different affects and capacities (McCallum 2001:166). Male and female bodies constitute a basic structure of difference that acquires a distinct meaning in different societies since the nature of this difference is culturally elaborated.

Vital essence, which implies homogeneity, is manifested in different body substances like blood, semen, saliva, bones, hair, teeth, and also in natural substances that have the power to transform life, like poisons, medicinal plants and hallucinogens (Roe 1982; Crocker 1985:44-45; Taylor 1996). Furthermore, vital essence is manifested according to the logic of body differences; women have vital essence in the form of menstrual blood, while men's vital essence is equated with semen. It is the differentiation of this homogeneous vital essence in different bodies that constitutes men and women as socially creative human beings (Belaunde 2006). Both menstrual blood and semen are creative, dangerous and life-giving substances, but they have different qualities that reflect the differences between male and female bodies and between their creative potential. Among the Bororo, "*Raka*—'blood' or *élan vital*—animates every being and enables it to accomplish those actions appropriate to its kind. By virtue of *raka*, men hunt and women gather, birds fly and jaguars kill their prey" (Crocker 1985:36). Furthermore, the Bororo distinguish between two creative principles: *bope*, "the principle of all organic transformation" and *aroe*, a principle of spiritual vitality, transcendental essence, soul, or, sometimes, name, "the representatives of immutable categorical form"

(Crocker 1985:33-35). The Desana also distinguish between two creative principles that they relate to female and male fertility: "*Boga*, an efficacy, a power female in context like the uterus, the warm fire of the hearth, associated with river and fish. It has a complementary aspect, *tulari*, the male energy associated with the forest—the two together are fertilization and fecundity, the great current that circulates" (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:54-55).

Female Creativity

In Amazonia, female creativity is related to menstruation, in turn associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Among the Barasana, vital essence is called *He*. Female *He* or menstrual blood is equated with fire, both fire for singeing and fire for boiling. The former, related to the release of menstrual blood, burns and is destructive, while the latter, related to the period of retention during which the fetus develops in the womb and absorbs heat, is fertile, creative and transformative.

Menstruation is a natural and periodic occurrence that is beyond women's control. The cycle of menstruation is related to the monthly cycle of the moon as well as to the wider natural order of the seasons. The Barasana, who describe rain as the female ancestor *Romi Kumu's* menstrual blood, relate the annual seasonal cycle of wet and dry seasons to the menstrual cycle of *Romi Kumu* (C. Hugh-Jones 1979:157-159, S. Hugh-Jones 1979:175-179), thus representing women as harmonizing with nature and the seasonal rhythms of the cosmos. Natural periodicity is fundamental since it accounts for the continuous, natural renewal of life. Menstruation represents the periodic changing of internal skin that rejuvenates, which in turn relates women to snakes shedding their skin periodically in a kind of natural rebirth (S. Hugh-Jones 1979, Belaunde 2006). By incorporating this natural periodicity in their social role, women ensure the periodic renewal of all life. This is reflected in women's routine work in cultivation and manioc processing (C. Hugh-Jones 1979:180; Rivière 1987).

Women's creative powers are equated with processes of natural transformation in the universe. Pregnancy and birth, as well as the natural internal process of rejuvenation, involves transformation (Belaunde 2006). At a symbolic level and in broad terms, women's activities can be related to a process of combination and creative transformation of different substances analogous to the process of pregnancy and birth where different substances (male and female, us and other) are mixed in womb-like containers to create new life. At the physical or biological level,

women cook different foods in containers, such as children in their wombs, and manioc roots inside the feminine earth. At the sociopolitical level, through marriage and reproduction, women 'cook' society by incorporating the *other* and creating kinship inside the womb-like longhouse. Women are also responsible for the production of foodstuffs and other products that are fundamental in the creation and maintenance of alliances in the context of ritual and exchange (S. Hugh-Jones 1993). Through their role as producers and reproducers women bring together *us* and *other*, as well as consanguineal kin and affines, thus creating kinship within the group and promoting alliance and cooperation between groups. In short, female agency in the creative process is related to women's power to transform.

Male Creativity

Male creativity is associated with semen. As a creative, vital substance, semen is very different from menstrual blood, though they are both manifestations of the same vital essence. While menstrual blood is constantly recycled and renewed, semen is seen as a finite substance; its loss results in the loss of vitality.⁵ In order to reproduce, men gradually die. This is reflected in all spheres of male creativity: men use destructive fire and kill living trees in order to clear the manioc field; they kill animals in order to obtain meat; and, in previous times, they killed men in order to reproduce society (see below).

Men learn to preserve their vitality and use their inseminating powers towards the social good through the control of bodily orifices and sexual restrictions in ritual contexts. When the Barasana initiates learn how to play the sacred flutes and perform the *He* House rituals, they learn how to use their inseminating power in a socially creative way that leads to the reproduction of the social order (the male descent group) and the universe at large. The theme of control is fundamental in the *He* House rituals since it is "controlling creation [that] makes male birth different from female birth" (Jackson 1995:114). Control goes hand in hand with fierceness and aggression, essential components of male agency in the creative process. These qualities, usually emphasized during initiation, turn the initiates into male adults and warriors. In previous times, as among the Tupinambá (Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985, Fausto 1999), this process involved the killing of an enemy. Among the Canela, initiates, who are called *pepyé* (which means "warrior" or "warrior people") are asked if they are "ready to go out and kill the enemy" (Crocker 1990:273).

In the northwest Amazon, as in the rest of lowland South America, hunting is associated with masculinity. Hunting symbolically represents

men's participation in the processes of creation at the physical, social and cosmological levels (Siskind 1973; Kensinger 1984, 1989; Århem 1996; S. Hugh-Jones 1996; Fausto 1999; Lorrain 2000). The hunter is a provider of meat, which is the highest valued food (S. Hugh-Jones 1996:126). At the social level, C. Hugh-Jones (1979:192) shows how the production of meat is metaphorically concerned with marriage and reproduction.⁶ The distribution of meat reinforces social ties within the village and creates new ones. Moreover, meat distribution is a fundamental aspect of ceremonial occasions and of exchanges with the outside. Finally, through hunting, men interact with other realms of the cosmos: they establish predatory relations with nature, which are mediated by the work of shamans, who, through the performance of ritual and food shamanism, strive to maintain balanced reciprocal exchanges between humanity and other beings. To conclude, the ideological discourse underlying hunting represents male participation in the processes of reproduction of life, society and the cosmos as active agents through the exercise of aggression and control. In Århem's words, "[P]redation ... is a "male" mode of procreation" (1996:189).

Exchange and Control in the Processes of Creation

Social reproduction depends upon the institutionalization of gender complementarity, that is, the proper interaction between men and women, conceptualized in terms of exchange. Everywhere men and women perform complementary activities related to their intrinsic qualities as creators. Turner (1979) describes the division of labor as a structure compatible with male and female socialization roles, roles that relate to biological factors and bodily processes characteristic of the creative potential of men and women. In general, men hunt, cut and burn fields, and deal with the outside, while women care for children, relatives and gardens, process foods and have a nurturing role that creates familiarity and kinship within the group. This does not mean that the division of labor is fixed and everywhere the same, since it is based on the cultural elaboration of difference, but that some activities are associated, at a symbolic level, with the essence of male and female creativity.

Some groups have a division of labor by which men's and women's spheres of work are strictly separated, such as among the Barasana and the Mundurucú. Others blur the differences, and allow men's and women's activities to overlap. Kulina men cook when they are on their own—as most Amazonian men do—and fish and collect, while women hunt small game and go alone on collecting expeditions as ambitious as men's hunting treks (Lorrain 2000). Among the Achuar, women who own hunting dogs

also own magical songs that further their dogs' hunting abilities, and thus influence hunting in general. They occasionally hunt their own game, and participate in war expeditions as food-carriers (Descola 2001). The Achuar regard both gardening and hunting as risky endeavors with unpredictable outcomes. Nevertheless, "each sphere of practice is governed by a specific set of preconditions that is clearly assigned to one of the sexes according to its purported predisposition for a particular regime of sociability" (Descola 2001:98). While women relate to plants as their consanguines, men relate to animals as affines. Descola remarks that "[E]ach gender deals with humans and nonhumans alike according to its particular abilities: women convert affinity into consanguinity within the [endogamous] nexus and treat their plants as children; men are in charge of affinal relations and treat the beings of the forest as in-laws" (2001:99). Thus, both men and women perform essential and complementary roles in the process of transforming affinity into consanguinity and kinship, and each does it according to the logic of their creative potential. These examples speak of the many dimensions and complexity of gender relations in lowland South America, but at the same time they show that underlying these cultural and symbolic elaborations there is a structural difference constituted by male and female creative potentials that results, in the last instance, from sexual differences. As Rival says, "it is from this basic difference that more abstract and vague principles, such as femaleness and maleness are extrapolated to articulate what divides and unites, or what separates and connects, in society" (Rival 2005:4).

While exploring Barasana ideas about conception, Christine Hugh-Jones (1979:117) says that both men and women are believed to share responsibility for the formation of the fetus, although in terms of substance (menstrual blood and semen) their respective contributions are not well defined. Throughout Amazonia, the process is prone to undergo cultural elaboration and manipulation, depending on the degree to which men feel the need to control women's creative powers. Men stress their own participation in the creative process to the detriment of female contributions of substance when faced with the uncontestable fact that regardless of the origin of the contributing substances, the creative mixing and transformation can only occur inside the woman's womb. In the same way, Kulina men choose garden sites, decide on the size, clear and burn trees and do the initial planting of manioc in a symbolic act of "insemination." The only female role strictly performed by women is that of re-planting cuttings during the harvest of manioc tubers. The process by which manioc grows and is transformed inside the female earth must be started by men, who thus gain some control over it (Lorrain 2000).

All processes of creation in Amazonia can be understood in terms of a philosophy of life that constitutes an “elementary structure” underlying Amerindian society: “the universe exists, life exists, society exists, only insofar as there is contact and proper mixing among things that are different from one another” (Overing 1981:161). More than twenty-five years on, numerous ethnographies continue to prove the validity of this statement. Proper mixing is achieved through exchange between different entities: humans and spirits, humans and animals, allies and enemies, kin and affines, and men and women. Such exchanges are established through social organization so that “society itself becomes a logic for maintaining a balance, a proper relationship among items in the universe that allows society to perpetuate itself” (Overing 1981:164). Difference is at the basis of exchange and constitutes its ideological limit, since it is never really overcome: “toda troca contém um potencial assimétrico” (Viveiros de Castro 1993:191). Tension and conflict are therefore inherent to the elementary structure (Viveiros de Castro 2001; Vilaça 2002), including the particular forms of social organization that have resulted from historical processes of inter-group contact, ecology, demography, and so forth (Gow 1991:279). The result of the interaction between the ideology that underlies the elementary structure and social organization produces particular gender ideologies that affect the roles of men and women in society. Langdon points out that gender ideology is part of a larger ideological system that is:

...multifaceted, and even contradictory, with respect to the images of male and female ... the aspects that are selected to invest sexual relations with meaning are influenced by the social institutions that bring the sexes together in various ways ... differences in community structure, kinship, marriage patterns, and sexual segregation affect what a group selects and uses as part of its culture of gender. (Langdon 1984:22)

Myths explore the tensions and contradictions that are part of the processes of creation in all its dimensions, biological, social and cosmological. Both Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971) and Roe (1982) dedicated large volumes to the analysis of the processes of creation as they are represented in Amerindian cosmology. In particular, myths explore the ambiguity of creative power. Semen and menstrual blood are similar substances, equally potent, creative and dangerous, but unlike semen that can be controlled by men, menstrual blood remains a natural occurrence that is beyond the control of women (S. Hugh-Jones 1979:250). Excessive accumulation and release of menstrual blood can lead to a process similar to the universal flood or conflagration, since menstrual blood is equated with rain and with

fire. As Bidou remarks, “le sang qui s’écoule périodiquement du ‘banc de règles’ de la femme constitue, chaque fois, une irruption du monde *pobe* [vital essence] dans le monde des gens, irruption dangereuse si elle n’est pas contrôlée par la pensée du chamane” (Bidou 1983:35). The release of menstrual blood has more or less negative or dangerous connotations that are reflected in the restrictions placed upon menstruating women. For Belaunde, “O sangramento é uma capacidade feminina de conhecimento, implicando conseqüências sociais das mais significativas, e pode ser visto como um poder feminino, ao invés de um índice da subordinação feminina” (2006:226).

In myth, women are represented as excessively open, curious, sexually uncontrolled and disrespectful of boundaries. In primordial times, before the social order was established, women became pregnant through contact with sources of vitality other than socially controlled male semen. This danger is widely expressed in the mythology of lowland South America where forest spirits come to copulate with women during the night, women take on animal lovers (e.g. the caiman, the tapir, the anaconda) and fruits are containers of vital essence that have the power to impregnate women (e.g. the umari fruit in the mythology of northwest Amazonia). Thus, women may be impregnated by different manifestations of vital essence. In ancestral times men competed with the natural world for the reproductive capacities of women. Only through the establishment of social order and the control of female sexuality can society be preserved.

Exchanges between men and women in general constitute the fabric of life, especially those resulting from the division of labor, which define the married couple. Pregnancy, birth and the rearing of children are the result of a series of exchanges between husband and wife. But there is one thing that women cannot give away or exchange: their vital essence, since it is only fertile inside their bodies. This is represented in myths where women are portrayed as difficult and unreliable exchange partners, since:

[É]changer c’est séparer, se séparer de ..., raison pour laquelle l’échange est radicalement fondateur du social. Quant aux femmes, c’est une autre affaire: soit elles prennent sans rendre (c’est l’image du vagin qui garde la pierre blanche de Baribo dans le mythe desana), soit elles ne veulent pas recevoir (c’est l’image du vagin qui refoule au dehors le sperme de Kaaritairi dans le mythe curripaco). (Bidou 1996:73)

Such themes are closely associated with the *vagina dentata* myths that are widespread in lowland South America.

These myths reflect the *potential* for male control of female sexuality that is inscribed in the elementary structure that differentiates the sexes.

The elementary structure does not necessarily entail a value judgment about the negative or inferior qualities of female creativity and the positive or superior qualities of male creativity. Male creativity, based on aggression and predation also has negative or destructive qualities that need to be controlled. But, unlike women, men are able to exercise such control voluntarily through ritual and restrictions, because it is in the nature of their creative potential to be able to do so. While men never give physical birth there is one thing that women do not do, and that is to kill humans, as Rival (2005) asserts for the Huaorani and Descola (2001) does for the Achuar. Rival attributes the difference in the relational potential of the sexes among the Huaorani to differences in body-soul attachment, "the main difference between men and women relates to the way in which their souls are attached to their bodies" (2005:18). She continues,

While the propensity of the soul to detach itself from the body is more pronounced in men, the person's fixed (soul) and processual (body) features form a more unitary whole in women. This is why men can become *pii* [related to soul and vital essence and manifested in acts of fury] while women merely have *pii* like everything else that lives. (Rival 2005:19)

This relates men to the predatory world of animals, life taking, and violent death, while it relates women to the world of plants, symbiotic mutualism (natural abundance) and life giving.

These ideas about body-soul attachment among the Huaorani make sense in the context of our argument. Women relate internally to *pii*, since *pii* is attached to their bodies. Female creativity, the manifestation of vital essence in a female body, is placed within their bodies. In order to control women's *pii* or vital essence, that which constitutes female creativity, it is necessary to control women. Men, on the other hand relate externally to *pii*, in order to participate in the processes of creation they have to compete actively with the world of animals and spirits for *pii* and incorporate *pii* through controlled aggression, ritual and restrictions. But Rival argues further that among the Huaorani, women are on the side of social control since they work at containing the fury in affinally-related men within the sphere of consanguineal relationships (personal communication, 2008). Thus, through their roles of wives and mothers, women contribute to the socialization of men, to the taming of men's *pii* towards the social good. Once women accept their social role as transformers of affinity and producers of consanguinity that leads to the reproduction of society, they do exercise social control. But this social control depends on a previous step that accomplishes the cooperation of women.

The creative process is a complex interrelated system that involves all

living beings. Social reproduction depends on a chain of creative processes that require certain kinds of relationships at the different stages between men and women, humans and spirits, humans and the natural world of plants and animals. All relationships are equally important in the process of creation because one stage will depend on the previous one and will condition the next. The nature of these relationships depends on the nature of the entities that constitute them and will also determine the nature of the process occurring at a particular creative stage. Depending on which stage or aspect of the creative process of social reproduction we are focusing on, either men or women will appear to be in control. Nevertheless, Lorrain (2000) argues that male roles in politics, shamanism and cosmology encompass female roles in production and reproduction throughout Amazonia, and that this encompassment results in gender hierarchy: "even though [Kulina] women and men are complementary and interdependent, and to that extent enable each other, this mutual and reciprocal dependence is none the less hierarchical" (Lorrain 2000:301). Men control women in many different ways that may not necessarily appear to be coercive or violent because this structural gender hierarchy becomes part of the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977; Lorrain 2001:271).

AMAZONS AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Given the nature of male and female creativity described above, there is inscribed in the elementary structure a *potential* for the negation of exchange and cooperation between men and women. This tension constitutes the basis of the myths of Amazon-like women.

The Amerindian myths about Amazon-like women relate that in ancient times women who lived by themselves away from men possessed some cultural object essential for the establishment and continuity of society: *ciba* and *guanin* among the Taino (Pané 1999), greenstones in the lower Amazon (Barbosa Rodrigues 1899, II:3), *yurupari* flutes among Tukanoan and Arawak groups (Fulop 1956, I:355-366; Biocca 1965:269-281; S. Hugh-Jones 1979; Panlón and Kenhiri 1980:51-125; Jackson 1983:188, 1992; Correa 1992; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1996:3-14), *karokö* trumpets among the Mundurucú (Murphy and Murphy 1974:88-9), *kauka* flutes among the Mehinaku (Gregor 1977:255; 1985), ceremonial axes among the Gê-speaking Apinayé (Nimuendajú 1939:177), and bullroarers and ritual masks among the Yamana and Selk'man of Tierra del Fuego (Gusinde 1961; Bamberger 1974; Chapman 1982). The mythical exchange is in some cases represented as amicable, as with the Apinayé or

the Ikamiaba women of the lower Amazon, but it can also be violent as in the northwest Amazon or among the Mundurucú. Objects obtained by men through exchange with mythical women allow the former to control the processes of creation through shamanism and exchange in the political sphere. This mythical exchange, moreover, results in women menstruating, thus defining the nature of women's creativity and their role in the processes of creation, while at the same time justifying the need for male control of female creativity.

The stories represent two fundamental and intimately related mythical events: first, the separation of male and female creative powers, which constitutes the basic difference underlying all exchange and social life; second, the emergence of society through the establishment of social relations between men and women conducive to the reproduction of social life and the universe. The Taino myths (Alegría 1978; López-Baralt 1985; Sued-Badillo 1986; Arrom 1989; Pané 1999) relate that the Taino people emerged from the cave of Cacibajagua (in the region of Caonao in the Dominican Republic).⁷ The culture hero Guahayona, who convinced the women to leave the cave, took them to, and left them on, the island of Matinino.⁸ He then met a woman from the sea, Guabonito, who gave him ciba stones and plates of guanin, cured him of his skin sores, and gave him a set of new names, thus marking his transformation into a social adult male. Guahayona, now called Hiaguali Guanin, went on to Guanin, a place related to the Island Carib (Pané 1999, ch. 1-6).⁹ Meanwhile, the men of Cacibajagua obtained new women with the help of the quadruplets *caracaracol* and the woodpecker Inriri Cahubabayael, who turned eel-like creatures coming down a tree into women by piercing them—i.e. opening vaginas¹⁰ and causing the first menstruation (differentiation of female creative powers). The *caracaracol* were Island Carib shamans (Taylor 1954; Steverlynck 2003). Thus, the Taino obtained marriageable women through the help of Island Carib shamans, marking the role of the *other* and exogamy in the reproduction of society.

In the myth, Guahayona obtained ciba stones and guanin plates from Guabonito, which gave him shamanic powers and the ability to control reproduction and the creative process as leader and shaman (*bebique*). Guanin plates were prestige objects made of an alloy of copper, silver, and gold that the Taino obtained through exchange with Island Carib (Nagy 1982). Guanin plates represented mediation and creative power, reflected in its brilliance and smell (Robiou Lamarche 1986; Steverlynck 2003). Ciba were little marble-like stones figuratively carved (in the shape of lizards, fish or frogs); they represented female fertility, the fertility of crops and rain (Las Casas 1967, ch. 120). The power of ciba

as a shamanic object is associated with the creative powers of women, i.e. their ability to transform life and reproduce society. Ciba were used by the shaman during curing sessions (he would suck ciba stones out of the patient's body) and in his maracca, and they were exchanged by men—especially elite men—during marriage transactions. While ciba represents female fertility related to menstruation, they gave men shamanic powers that allowed them to control the reproduction of life and society through shamanism and exchange.

Barbosa-Rodrigues collected three stories in the lower Amazon about the Ikamiaba women of the Nhamunda River who lived by themselves and exchanged greenstones or *muyrakytã* with men (Barbosa Rodrigues 1899, II:3). These stones came in many shapes and colors; soft when submerged in water, they became hard at the contact with air. The Ikamiaba women had abandoned the men of their tribe to establish themselves at Yacy-Taperê or Mountain of the Moon on a sacred lake called Yacy-Uaruá (Lake of the Moon). Every year they would fast and hold a feast in honor of the moon, Mother of the *muyrakytã*, who dwelled at the bottom of the lake, and from whom they would receive precious *muyrakytã* stones in various desired shapes by diving in the lake. Like the Amazons of other parts of the world, the Ikamiaba of the Nhamundá had made an arrangement with the men of their tribe, who could only visit them once a year. Male children born of such unions were given to their fathers, while girls remained with their mothers, who rewarded the fathers with gifts of *muyrakytã*.¹¹

Boomert (1987) shows that greenstones or *muyrakytã* circulated as objects of ceremonial exchange between elites in very much the same way as ciba did, that is, during marriage transactions and peace making ceremonies, as forms of non-commercial payment to establish or maintain alliances between tribal segments or chiefdoms. They were also used as means of death compensation, “just as other types of ‘primitive valuables’ in other stateless societies elsewhere in the world” (1987:37). The exchange of greenstones led to the incorporation of the *other* through alliances and, ultimately, to the construction of kinship and society through marriage and reproduction. It represented, in the same way as ciba among the Taino, a form of social reproduction and continuity controlled by men within the political sphere. Men thus controlled female creativity through the control of greenstones, and turned it towards the reproduction of society.

The sacred flutes of the *He* House rituals are a fundamental Barasana symbol, which, according to mythical lore, had been hidden by the Creator in the river, and were first discovered by the women (S. Hugh-Jones 1979:265-6). Before the Creator had a chance to teach the men how to play, the women, led by the female ancestor *Romi Kumu*, stole the

flutes and ran away along the river beds, leaving the men behind. Women now played the flutes, performed the *He* House rituals, and became very powerful, while the abandoned men, left with all the female chores to do, were living in fear. Moreover, since the women also refused to have sex, men worried about the future of humanity, until one day an ancestor helped them to get the flutes back through shamanism. In some versions, the ancestor made new flutes and taught the men how to blow them, thus giving them the powers of shamanism. Men punished women by blowing in the direction of their vaginas, which caused them to menstruate, and weakened them. In other versions, men rammed the instruments inside women's vaginas, and learnt from *He* Anaconda (known more generally as the culture hero Yurupari) how to play the flutes and celebrate the *He* House rituals, which constitute the very foundation of Barasana society.¹² If women have lost the flutes and shamanic power to the men, they have gained the power to menstruate; and if men cannot menstruate, they have gained the Yurupari flutes and the power to control the creative process. Here too, the necessity for men and women to exchange through cooperation and complementarity arises from the initial differentiation of male and female creativity. The myths show that without shamanic control, female creativity would lead humanity back to the asocial world of Amazon-like women, which reverses the Barasana's voyage along the ancestral river beds from primordial chaos, where animal or spirit lovers continuously threaten to mix what should remain separate, to real society. The episode of the sacred flutes represents the establishment of a social order preserved through the proper celebration of the Yurupari rituals. This is why Barasana women are not allowed to see the sacred flutes, and why they would be killed if they did. The Mundurucú and the Mehinaku, who respectively call the sacred instruments *karokô* and *kauka*, and threaten indiscrete women with gang rape, have a similar complex of myths and rituals (Murphy 1958:89; Murphy and Murphy 1974:88-9; Gregor 1985). Mehinaku men explain that it is the spirit Kauka who rapes the women. Both Murphy and Murphy (1974) and Gregor (1985) agree that rape in this context is not "the expression of personal sexual or aggressive needs, but a group response to an open challenge of the patriarchal system" (Gregor 1985:104) directed towards women who openly threaten the role of men and challenge male authority.

Among the Apinaye, the society of Amazon-like women is linked to a well-known Amazonian myth about a caiman lover, which emphasizes the uncontrolled and untrustworthy nature of female sexuality. It is after discovering that the men had killed and eaten their caiman lover that the women moved away to form the Cupêndia tribe, which systematically

killed all male newborn and reproduced itself without male intervention (Nimuendaju 1939:177). In another myth about the lives of the Cupêndia (Nimuendaju 1939:178, Wilbert and Simoneau 1956:335), we learn that these women were expert hunters who hunted collectively, carried bow, arrows and clubs, and played gourd flutes, which are normally played by Apinaye men. Like Apinaye warriors today, these women kept anchor-axes in their houses, which they used to kill enemies in battle. Anchor-axes are also the badge of office of the Apinaye chief (Nimuendaju 1946:153). Furthermore, the Cupêndia led an intense ritual life, performing running races and beating male visitors. One day, they were challenged to a race by two men who asked that the winner be allowed to elect one of them as wife. But the two men, outrun by each of the marriageable girls, had to return home "as single as they were when they had left" (Nimunedaju 1946:136). Real women cannot outrun men, or live on their own; and they must get married.

The Cupêndia are represented as fulfilling all the necessary activities and social roles conducive to social order and continuity. In contrast to Tukanoan and Mundurucú Amazon-like women, the *Cupêndia*, are above all social beings. Jara (1988:67) argues that the Xikrín Amazon-like women, who are related to the East and lead an extremely ritualized life, rather than being marked on the side of nature as cannibal monsters and other anomalous beings, are marked on the side of the supernatural. I would argue that the emphasis on ritual marks the *Cupêndia* as super-social beings, since it is within the ceremonial sphere that social roles and relationships are defined among the Apinaye. The myth emphasises the importance of the ceremonial system in the reproduction of society. This fits well with the lack of attention paid to biological procreation among the Cupêndia. What is important for the reproduction of Apinaye society is not so much the sexed individual but the social and ceremonial role that he or she fulfils (Da Matta 1982). Cupêndia society survives not because of women's biological capacity to procreate but because these women prioritize ceremonial life. The Apinayé, who managed to create a stable equilibrium between society and nature, men and women, centre and periphery that limits human, in particular male, anxiety about the reproduction and continuity of society, do not need to refer to supernatural powers or images of control and domination.¹³ The distribution of creative power among men and women is not called into question, nor is there any attempt on the part of men to appropriate the creative powers of women at the ritual level, or to control female sexuality through images of violence or sanctioned real violence against women.

The myths of Amazon-like women, like all myths, are concerned

with many things (Murphy 1959; Bamberger 1974; Gregor 1977; Jackson 1992). Elsewhere, I have analyzed these myths by focusing on the relationship between myth and social organization (Steverlynck 2003) on the one hand, and the meaning of exchange and the nature of social relationships on the other (Steverlynck 2008). Here, I have discussed the question of reproduction and control reflected in these myths in the context of Amerindian ideas about the creative process. The myths concern the differentiation of male and female creative powers and the establishment of proper social relationships between them. In the Barasana and Mundurucú cases, the myths put social order in the hands of social human beings—male hunters, warriors and shamans—who can mediate and control all exchanges. Among the Apinaye, social control is exercised mainly through ceremonial life, which involves both men and women, and gives them equal status, as is illustrated in the myth about the Cupêndia. Myths and related rituals, therefore, are not about male domination of women per se but about the social control of reproduction. Since control in Amazonia is ideologically a male quality, it is men who mostly exercise this control.

CANNIBALISM AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

While the myths of Amazon-like women relate to the social control of sexuality and birth, ideas about cannibalism are concerned with the social control of death. The relationship between cannibalism and social regeneration has been frequently pointed out. Death throughout lowland South America is elaborated in terms of cannibalism. Death always comes as an attack from the outside, as actual aggression or as sorcery; it produces an *other*, the dead person that needs to be separated from the living. The enemy *other*, through the image of cannibalistic predation, makes this separation effective since the vital essence of the deceased is incorporated by the cannibal *other*. Vilaça (2000) has shown how among the Wari' affines effect this transformation of the deceased into an *other* in the eyes of the deceased's kin through endo-cannibalism. She proposes that "edibility is the only irrefutable proof of non-humanity [*otherness*, the dead as opposed to the living]" (2000:84). At the same time, the deceased contributes to the revitalization of the enemy's group that incorporates the dead *other*. Cannibalism creates both difference (since what is eaten is always an *other*) and identity (through incorporation); it works as an operator in the continuous exchange between *us* and *other*. Through death and cannibalism, while kin becomes an *other*, the *other* becomes part of *us*,

thus contributing to a process of regeneration that involves the creative mixing of different substances through ritual and restrictions.

Cannibalism plays a fundamental role in the socialization of death. Among the Tupinamba killing an enemy was a necessary condition in the passage to adulthood, transforming the killer into a social person capable of reproducing the group. The incorporation of the *other* is vital in this transformation. After killing an enemy, the killer underwent a period of seclusion during which he became indissolubly linked to the enemy through putrefaction and absorption, a process understood in terms of cannibalism, even when real cannibalism did not take place (Forsyth 1983, 1985; Albert 1985; Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985; Viveiros de Castro 1992). Like women who mix different substances in their wombs through pregnancy in order to give birth, the killer also absorbed the blood (vital essence) of the enemy *other* through images of cannibalism. The killer achieved alterity and was transformed—reborn—into an adult capable of reproducing society. Furthermore, vengeance made social regeneration through death and cannibalism a periodic affair, analogous to female menstruation. Among the Tupinamba (Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985) death in enemy hands was “social death,” an honorable death since one of us killed this way would allow us to kill one of yours, and the spiral of vengeance would thus be preserved. A certain complicity was established between killer and enemy victim which allowed vengeance, originated in past acts of vengeance, to generate future vengeance, creating a permanent hostile relationship between the groups involved. Through anthropophagy, the whole society participated in this vengeance; everybody could say: “I’ve eaten many of yours.” Commensality delimited social units and defined enemy groups, while vengeance maintained periodicity that made death a predictable and necessary, socially controlled affair.

Affinity and cannibalism are fundamental operators in the process of incorporating the *other* in order to reproduce the self. The parallel between these two processes is reflected for example in the Tupinamba practice of transforming the enemy into an affine, before he was killed and cannibalized (Carneiro da Cunha and Viveiros de Castro 1985), or in the marriage between the enemy gods (*Mai*) and Araweté deceased women (Viveiros de Castro 1992:217). The enemy is a potential affine (Viveiros de Castro 1993) who contributes to the social reproduction of the group through consumption, in the same way that potential affines are incorporated to the group and contribute to the reproduction of the kin group through marriage, pregnancy and birth. Albert (1985) shows that exo-cannibalism applies to people in this category, and not to complete strangers or to closer groups involved in reciprocal exchange (ritual, commercial, etc).¹⁴ Viveiros

de Castro (1993:185) remarks that “o esquema geral de toda diferença, como atesta abundantemente a etnologia amazônica, é a predação canibal, da qual a afinidade é uma codificação específica, mesmo que privilegiada.”¹⁵ Even societies that have a strong ethos of peace and harmony, like the Piaroa of Venezuela, relate affinity with the dangers of cannibalism. The danger of being eaten by an in-law is always present “since in-laws are strangers, metaphysically different from self, and therefore liable to eat you” (Overing 1986:137). Even though the Piaroa do not practice cannibalism, the discourse of cannibalism is fundamental in their dealings with the outside, “all killing is a form of cannibalism although indirect, and death a process of being eaten” (Overing 1986:135). As Sahlins (1983:88) once said, “cannibalism is always ‘symbolic,’ even when it is ‘real.’”

Other practices can be assimilated to this generalized discourse of cannibalism. Practices like trophy head-hunting among Jivaro groups and the acquisition of teeth from enemy victims among the Yagua are concerned with the same process of social reproduction that involves both the construction of social identity and the marking of difference (Lévi-Strauss 1971, 1984; Chaumeil 1985; Taylor 1985). Taylor points out to the regenerative aspect of these practices:

...l'incorporation (dans tous les sens du terme) de l'identité captée s'effectue par le moyen d'une conception et d'une gestation masculines, précondition symbolique nécessaire à la procréation féminine; en somme, les hommes se rendent gravides du mort afin que leurs épouses puissent, dans l'ordre du réel, donner la vie. (Taylor 1985:161)

Among the Shuar, for example, the power of the *muisak* (the vengeful soul) contained in the *tsantsa* increases the fertility and creative power of women (Harner 1972:193). Among the Yagua, women wore the teeth belt procured by their spouses especially during the sowing of the fields to increase the fertility of the crops (Chaumeil 1985:152). Fausto proposes a model of social reproduction where masculine activities of hunting, warfare, ritual and shamanism are related to a general “schema of familiarization” that involves the “appropriation of subjectivities from the exterior into the *socius*” (1999:938) through the “transformation of a relationship of predation (real or virtual) into control and protection, modeled as the passage from affinity to consanguinity” (1999:937). In this context, cannibalism becomes the idiom through which such transformations are effected in real or symbolic terms.

Given the homogeneity of the human and natural worlds based on the sharing of substance in lowland South America, “[A]ll is cannibalism, since what is eaten is always human” (Vilaça 2000:102). Århem (1996)

shows that among the Makuna hunting involves negotiation between the shaman and the Spirit Owner of the game; the spirit of the prey is returned to the Spirit Owner by the shaman in exchange for the safe consumption of the prey, a process analogous to the de-humanization of the deceased Wari' (Vilaça 2000; Conklin 2001). This is accompanied by other ritual exchanges between the shaman and the Spirit Owner of the Game. Through predation (understood as cannibalism) and shamanism men establish a reciprocal relationship with the natural world that leads to regeneration. Arhem (1996:189) remarks that "predation, reconstructed as exchange, explains death and accounts for the regeneration of life."

CONCLUSIONS

Amerindian cosmology describes life as a finite pool of vital energy that circulates between the different spheres of existence (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971; S. Hugh-Jones 1979; Chaumeil 1985; Århem 1996; among others). The circulation of vital energy involves ideas about death and the regeneration of life mainly through eating and birth. Given ideas about human-nature relatedness, all eating can be understood in terms of cannibalism, and death is always a process of being eaten, while birth is the result of sex and pregnancy. The relationship between sex and eating has been stressed by many authors and is related to the centrality of bodily processes as an idiom for the representation of social concerns and creative processes (Seeger et al. 1979, Gow 1989). It is in the context of relationships of demand centered around the satisfaction of certain desires for food and sex that married men and women constitute society and are able to produce children (Gow 1989:575). In Amazonia, images of cannibalism haunt the sexual act that leads to conception and birth. Gregor (1985) indicates that among the Mehinaku, the genitals of one sex are the food of the other. The vagina is a mouth, an image generalized in the *vagina dentata* myths, while the penis is said to be hungry for the vagina. Food production and sex happen within a relationship of reciprocity and complementarity that constitutes the basis of society. The same reciprocity and complementarity are sought in the relationships with the outside world through cannibalism and predation, which become socially creative with the establishment of affinity, leading in turn to marriage and birth. In this way, cannibalism and predation contribute symbolically to the process of physical reproduction of the group, ultimately achieved by women.

Cannibalism, real or imagined, deals with the social control of death, but the physical reproduction of individuals cannot be achieved through cannibalism alone. The physical dimension of death can only be

overcome through an equally physical process that involves the mixing and transformation of substances in the womb of a woman. This process, in its physical, social and cosmological dimension, is the focus of the myths of Amazon-like women and the rituals associated with them that explore the complementary nature of male and female creativity and establish social relationships between men and women that lead to social reproduction. While cannibalism emphasizes male agency and control in the relationships with external entities, those between *us* and *other* (other humans, animals, spirits), and the creation of affinity, the myths of Amazon-like women are concerned with the relationships between men and women within the group and the creation of kinship through sex, female creativity (pregnancy and birth) and male-female cooperation. Cecilia McCallum describes the construction of sociality as a process that involves two types of relationships that complement each other:

...male-male affinity allows men's engagement with male beings of the outside to transform them from supposed enemies into potential male affines. It implies the subsequent activation of male-female affinity, as men turn inwards again towards women. The process continues from here until eventually kinship is produced. (McCallum 2001:180)

This process involves both a discourse on cannibalism and a discourse on Amazon-like women and sexuality. Both discourses rely on the intrinsic qualities of men and women that constitute the elementary structure of Amerindian cosmology, while at the same time, they also reflect the particular social and cultural contexts in which they emerge. Thus, some groups practice cannibalism while others only talk about it, and still others display practices that could be assimilated to the same complex of ideas. Likewise, the myths of Amazon-like women appear in different forms in different groups, reflecting the culture of gender of each particular society. These discourses point to the importance of the social control of both men and women in order to achieve the reproduction of society and the regeneration of the universe, the alternative being chaos and destruction.

There is a lot more than aggression, control and domination in Amerindian discourses of Amazon-like women and cannibalism. The two discourses put together summarize the essence of social reproduction in Amazonia and represent the most fundamental concern of Amerindian societies. It is therefore not surprising to find references to Amazons and Cannibals throughout the voyage relations of the earliest explorers (Steeverlynck 2005). Given the life threat that the encounter with Europeans represented to Amerindian groups, it is understandable that they should articulate their concerns through the idiom of Amazons and Cannibals.

Amazons and Cannibals, fundamental symbols linked to the potent forces of the cosmos, to impulses and to desires, reflect the ambiguity, tension and mystery of the creative process.

NOTES

Acknowledgements. I thank the editor Dr. Laura Rival for her constructive comments and suggestions as well as the anonymous referees of this paper. I also thank Dr. Peter Rivière for his valuable feedback since the beginning of my work on this subject. And my students for their interesting questions.

1. The greek Amazons were known as the daughters of Ares, the god of war; they ruled their own country and were well known for their abilities as warriors, their courage and their strength. The Amazons established their realm in Scythia, on the Thermodon River:

...to the men she [the queen] assigned the spinning of wool and such other domestic duties as belong to women. Laws also were established by her, by virtue of which she led forth the women to the contest of war, but upon the men she fastened humiliation and slavery. And as for their children, they mutilated both the legs and the arms of males, incapacitating them in this way for the demands of war, and in the case of the females they seared the right breast that it might not project when their bodies matured and be in the way; and it is for this reason that the nation of the Amazons received the appellation it bears. (Diodorus 2.45)

Strabo describes the Amazons' sexual encounters with their neighbors:

...they have two special months in the spring in which they go up into the neighbouring mountain which separates them and the Gargarians. The Gargarians also, in accordance with an ancient custom, go up thither to offer sacrifice with the Amazons and also to have intercourse with them for the sake of begetting children, doing this in secrecy and darkness, any Gargarian at random with any Amazon; and after making them pregnant they [the Amazons] send them away; and the females that are born are retained by the Amazons themselves, but the males are taken to the Gargarians to be brought up; and each Gargarian to whom a child is brought adopts the child as his own, regarding the child as his son because of his uncertainty. (Strabo 11.5.1)

Both Heracles and Theseus fought against the Amazons. But the most famous Amazon during the Middle Ages was the Amazon queen Penthesilea who fought by Hector's side against the Greeks (See Kleinbaum 1983; Tyrrell 1984; Steverlynck 2003).

2. The three monstrous races that appear in Columbus's Journal, and which will appear again and again in different accounts, were mentioned in Herodotus (anthropophagi, 4.128; cynocephali, 4.191; amazons, 4.110-117). See Kleinbaum 1983; Lestrignant 1997; Steverlynck 2003.

3. The word "cannibal" derives from the native "carib," a people that Columbus described as man-eating tribes based on his own interpretation of the native

context (Hulme 1992). The river Amazon was named by Francisco de Orellana, who in 1542 went down the river and, according to Carvajal, fought against a group of women (near the mouth of the Trombetas river) whom he identified as "amazon warriors" (Carvajal 1988:212 on).

4. On cannibalism see Forsyth 1983, 1985; Whitehead 1984; Albert 1985; Carneiro da Cunha et al. 1985; Erikson 1986; Overing 1986; Viveiros de Castro 1992, 1998; Journet 1995; Fausto 1999; Vilaça 2000; Conklin 2001; among others. On Amerindian Amazons see Bamberger 1974; Murphy and Murphy 1974; S. Hugh-Jones 1979; Gregor 1985; López-Baralt 1985; Sued-Badillo 1986; Boomert 1987; Jara 1988; Jackson 1992; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1996; Steverlynck 2005, 2008; among others. I refer to Amazon-like women in Amerindian discourse in order to differentiate them from the European Amazons.

5. This belief is widespread in lowland South America, it is particularly well described for the Bororo (Crocker 1985), see also the case of the Apinayé (Da Matta 1982), and the Barasana (S. Hugh-Jones 1979).

6. Rival (1996) shows how the choice of hunting weapons among the Huaorani is deeply embedded in social relations. See also Århem (1996) on the social dimension of the relationship between the Makuna hunter and his prey.

7. The Taino myth is particularly important because it is part of the first recorded body of myths in the Americas and shows that the stories of Amazon-like women are constitutive of Amazonian society and cosmology. I follow Arrom's rendering of Pane's *Account* (Pané 1999).

8. When Columbus was in Puerto Rico, during his first voyage, he was told that in Matinino, there were women who lived by themselves, see above the introduction.

9. Híaguali is related to Híali, the son of the incestuous relationship between a man and his own sister, who when discovered fled the tribe and was transformed into the moon. This myth is widespread in lowland South America and was recorded by Breton (1665) and Taylor (1952) among the Island Carib. Guanin was a place associated with the Island Carib.

10. The parallel between this episode of the myths and the South American myths of the "Wooden Bride" (Lévi-Strauss 1973) has been pointed out by Alegría (1978:69) and López-Baralt (1985:53-60), among others.

11. This seems to be European elaboration. There are no other stories in lowland South America that mention this sort of arrangement. Nevertheless, as Hugh-Jones argues, new ideas are incorporated into mythical narratives in culturally specific ways that make sense in the mythical context and to the people in question (Hugh-Jones 1988:148; Gow 2001).

12. This is part of a cycle of myths where the origin of the flutes is related to the death of the culture hero Yurupary. From the ashes of the burnt body of the culture hero grew a Paxiuba palm that was subsequently cut into pairs of Yurupari flutes. See S. Hugh-Jones 1979: 284-286 where Yurupari appears as *He Anaconda*.

13. It is significant that among the Apinayé, the *vayangá* or shaman is mainly a curer, and although it is recognised that he has special abilities that allow him to communicate with the spiritual world his mediation is not required in everyday

life. Furthermore, the special ability of the shaman does not give him any power at the social level, since he does not control the reproduction of life and society any more than everybody else (Da Matta 1982).

14. The same has been pointed out by Erikson (1986) for Pano groups, Taylor (1985) concerning head-hunting among the Jivaro and Chaumeil (1985) concerning the Yagua practice of collecting the teeth of enemy victims.

15. Viveiros de Castro (2001) develops this concept of affinity further.

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