

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MARRIAGE IN LOWLAND SOUTH AMERICA



BENDING AND BREAKING THE RULES

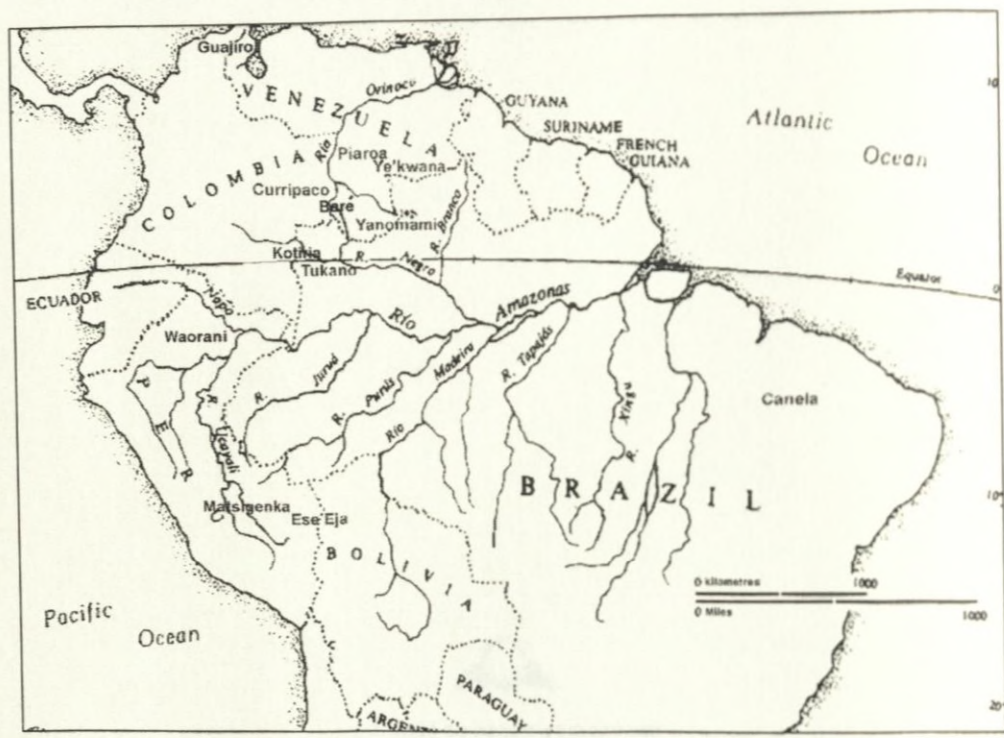


The Anthropology of Marriage in Lowland South America



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Lowland South America. Map by Samantha Elgersma.

The Anthropology
of Marriage
in Lowland South America

Bending and Breaking the Rules



Edited by Paul Valentine, Stephen Beckerman,
and Catherine Alès

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Marriages, Norms and Structures

The Dilemma of Finding a Wife
among the Piaroa of the Sipapo

ALEXANDER MANSUTTI RODRÍGUEZ

Kinship studies are one of anthropology's most interesting, prestigious, and elaborated areas of knowledge. Considerable effort has always accompanied this approach. Morgan (1980), Lévi-Strauss (1981), Dumont (2004), and more recently Needham (1977), Heritier Augé (1981), and Godelier and colleagues (1998), to name only some of the most noteworthy, all illustrate anthropologists' long demonstrated skill at modeling kinship systems.

Perhaps due to the nature of the kinship phenomenon, its highly formalized study has centered more on the structural rather than the phenomenological approach. One of the collateral effects of this structural focus is a difficulty in understanding situations that differ from the norm. It is presumed that when behaviors differ frequently from that expected, the system is not functioning well. When these behaviors significantly contradicted the implicit logic of the system, they were treated as irregular.

It was necessary to break from the dominance of kinship terminology structures, seen as closed, self-explanatory systems, in order to introduce the complexity of their interactions with other social spaces, so as to facilitate a reinterpretation of this area of study based on new principles. This approximation has been deeply influenced by Lévi-Strauss's seminal 1949 work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, despite Lévi-Strauss himself having warned since the 1960s (2004, 148–49) that it is an error to as-

sume kinship systems are the principal means of regulating interpersonal relations.

Taking up this suggestion and helping develop this new approach, Needham (1972, 166–81) made a valuable contribution by distinguishing three analytical levels: the first is that of rules, primarily juridical rules, that are derived from what the subjects believe should be observed; the second level is that of behavior and practice, expressed in statistical terms; and the third level consists of the terminology and structures that define the system. We understand, as Lévi-Strauss warned us, that each of these levels implies different determinants. Further, such an approach opens the doors to an analysis not merely alluding to the "pathological" but rather providing an opportunity to explain that which is left unexplained when viewing kinship only in terms of structural oppositions or societal ideals.

No less useful has been the possibility of creating models to see how they function over a long period of time (Århem 1981b; Chagnon 1968b; Mansutti Rodríguez and Briceño Fustec 1993); that is, to incorporate time and its consequences into our models to arrive at new conclusions about the limitations of our constructs. We have applied one of these models, helped by mathematician Cristina Briceño Fustec (Mansutti Rodríguez and Briceño Fustec 1993), to see the increase in relative age discrepancy in successive genealogical generations in the Piaroan world, and to confirm that some of the "irregular" behaviors generated in daily life and marriages are necessary in order to diminish age discrepancy between intragenerational and intergenerational marriageable individuals and maintain the effectiveness of the governing kinship structure. Without allowing intergenerational or incorrect marriages, a Dravidian kinship system tends to become entangled by the growing dispersion of members of the same kinship generation along the pyramid formed by different demographic cohorts.¹ For instance, as the years pass, ego's son may be older than some of his classificatory grandparents, or ego's daughter may be many years younger than all her potential husbands. When this pattern occurs, when the age distribution of the population and the kin terms are so out of kilter, then new irregular marriages, for example between cross-generational egos, have the capacity to redefine the allocation of relationship terms and provide a mechanism to readjust the kinship nomenclature to the demographic reality.

With greater experience, and having developed kinship studies that include economic relations, demography, ecology, and politics, and with

the crucial help of computerized systems, we are able to return to the interpretation of particular cases, without their being obscured by the randomness of individual case histories.

In this chapter we describe and interpret a number of case studies that in other circumstances would have been considered irregular or deviations from the canonic norms of the kinship system.

The Piaroan Kinship

The Piaroan kinship system can be defined as a Dravidian type due to the emphasis placed on generations and the contrast between affinal and non-affinal relatives in GO, G+1 and G-1 (Dumont 2004; Godelier et al. 1998). The most interesting aspect of the system is that it guarantees all the Piaroans may be consanguineous relatives even though the Piaroans themselves appear not to be conscious of these relationships. Automatically applied grammatical rules, acquired by Piaroans as they learn to speak, also apply to these same kinship norms in such a way that the relationships generated become deeply embedded in social experience.

As figure 2.1 demonstrates, Piaroan terminology divides the ego's kin into ego generation and the two generations surrounding ego as affinal and non-affinal. Affines are (i) those whom ego can marry in his or her own genealogical generation; (ii) their parents in the first ascending genealogical generation; and (iii) those with whom ego's children can marry. The non-affinal relatives, referred to in the literature as consanguineous relatives, are (i) those whom ego cannot marry of his or her generation; (ii) their parents; and (iii) the members of the generation below ego's whom ego's children cannot marry.² We are considering the simplest of Dravidian systems.

The structural logic of this system is implacable. The generational world close to ego remains divided into two groups; those to whom ego and his children can be married and those to whom they cannot. Matrimonial norms establish that one should marry cross-cousins. If the system is to function with its structure rigorously intact, then the contracting parties should be bilateral cross-cousins. Distinct from other Dravidian lowland societies (Henley 1996, 35; 1987, 258; Silva Monterrey 2007; Thomas 1983, 346), cultural norms do not permit marriages between uncles or aunts and ego, nieces and nephews and ego, or between grandparents or grandchildren and ego. Finally, the most favored marriages are between the

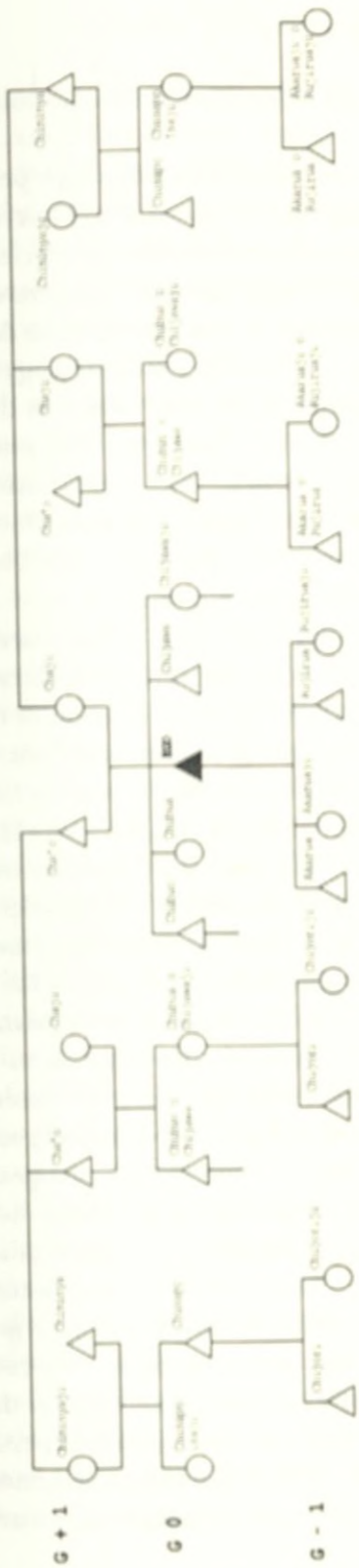


Figure 2.1. The Piaroan kinship terminology (male ego). (Mansutti Rodriguez and Briceño Fustec 1993).

cross-cousins, the closer the better. These marriages bolster alliances and endogamy.

Seen this way, the system should promote a high percentage of marriages between consanguineous spouses. In fact, however, this is not the case. Of the 256 marriages about which there is information and which fulfill the requirement that their progenitors' births were registered, only 24 (9.38%) can be demonstrated to conform to some degree of consanguinity between spouses.³ A more complete genealogy might raise this figure; the increase would be among those related in the second, third, and fourth ascending generations.⁴ However, it would not cause changes in the numbers of marriages between first cross-cousins because these genealogies have already been included. Of these 24, 17 were between first cross-cousins, five between second cross-cousins, one between uncle and niece, and one between father and daughter.

Although the low frequency of consanguineous marriages appears to be counter to the norm, this is not the case. Our information indicates that all adults believe that their marriages conform to the rules. Young people say they have little knowledge or interest of these rules.

There are other interesting data on the Piaroan marriage system. One kind relates to how the generations are defined by the kinship terminology of ego's and the two ascending and descending generations, a feature that we refer to as genealogical generations. We consider that there is an age displacement within each of these generations, a product of the wide age differences accumulating from one generation to the next due to the births of groups of siblings born of the same mother (Mansutti Rodríguez and Briceño Fustec 1993). This displacement produces two interesting phenomena. The first is that the wide age differences among individuals of the same genealogical generation result in a scarcity of possible spouses of a marriageable age.⁵ The second feature is that marriageable generations in isolated areas differ in age from each other so that the young may be uncles, aunts, or even grandparents of young people in other places (Mansutti Rodríguez and Briceño Fustec 1993). In these instances, marriages among young people belonging to different genealogical generations, who under no circumstances could be considered as cross-cousins, act as an ideal mechanism to reclassify the kinship network on the basis of new marriages. These new marriages become a reference point to rename all the relatives associated with both family groups and reinitiate the cycle with individuals of comparable ages. Although these marriages may ap-

pear to violate kinship rules, in fact they are transformed into a tool that resets the system, correcting for inconsistencies.

Demographic dispersion also reduces the availability of spouses in these communities. We estimate that the demographic density among the Piaroa in 1982 (when the population had already undergone at least 20 years of accelerated growth) oscillated around 0.25 persons per square kilometer. Fifteen years earlier, the time (1967–1968) Overing, Boglar, and Monod did fieldwork among the Piaroa, the biggest communities scarcely reached 30 people and formed part of regional groups, and each composite group's area was about 400 square kilometers on average.⁶ In the harsh and mountainous territory of the Piaroa, this was a significantly large area of land for neighborhoods. If we consider the population as a stable pyramid, 100 people in one neighborhood (a very optimistic hypothesis) would have had to be distributed among all the age groups. If ego could only marry single women of his genealogical generation—that is, those women whom ego called *chusapo isaju* and who were part of the pertinent age category between 10 and 15 years of age—and if among the 16 single young people in that age bracket, eight were male and eight female, then four would be ego's siblings or parallel cousins. This means that only four would be ego's cross-cousins, for whom ego would have to compete with his three siblings to gain a spouse. Up to this point the situation seems feasible from ego's perspective, but we know that these small groupings, less than 500 individuals, were highly dependent upon demographic whim; that the actual distribution did not correspond to the statistical model of age and gender just described. Neither does this model take into account the effects of other factors, like recurring epidemics, which can devastate a cohort of children, who along with the elderly are most likely to be subject to these scourges. Additionally, as differentiation by age can distribute members of the same generation into different generational categories, we can see that the four young women who could be ego's marriageable cross-cousins may already be married, or be too young to marry, and that other young marriageable women are unavailable to ego because they have been classified as belonging to generations other than ego's. In other words, the act of finding a mate becomes more and more complicated and might only be understood if we realize that in spite of the value the Piaroa place on close family marriages, we have many cases of young adults leaving their home regions to seek adventure and ending up marrying far away from their original villages.

Besides the restrictions that are part of the system, and that originate in natural events like the dispersion of births, gender, and population, the new hierarchical relationships among settlements also are beginning to influence matrimonial alliances. According to the results of research carried out in the area (Mansutti Rodríguez 1988; 2002), the Piaroan settlements can be classified into three categories: farms inhabited by an extended family; communities where there are two intermarried extended families; and those villages where three or more extended families create complex networks of marriages (Mansutti Rodríguez 1988; 2002).⁷ According to this classification, of the 256 marriages registered in Sipapo in the 1980s, 190 were among inhabitants of villages, 35 were among members of communities, and 31 were among individuals living on farms. It is even more interesting to note that although 70 people came from family farms, 53 of them were married to people coming from the largest villages. In the two family settlements or communities, there were similar results: more than 50% of the alliances were established with people from the largest villages. Our data indicate that 80% of the marriages registered in Sipapo were with people from the large villages and that within this group, 59.5% of those marrying came from small settlements. This trend signifies that not only does the availability of marriageable people affect the distribution of Western wealth that comes with village life; it also creates the conditions that lead families in small settlements to seek alliances with the wealthier village people. Marriage is reaffirmed as a political act.

Marriages are also affected by the new religious movements that have sprung up during these changing times. The most visible are the Evangelicals who have been building a new system of leadership and new relationships among communities based on their shared faith.⁸

The Evangelicals meet frequently in different places where they celebrate their services and rituals. These encounters have come to replace the Warime festivals (Mansutti Rodríguez 2006) as situations that offer opportunities to cement alliances. The Catholics, although less active in creating encounters, have also had an impact on the young people. They meet during the years that they are studying at mission schools, freed from family ties and fueled by a liberal climate that promotes affairs.

When we look at this whole context of relationships bypassing the kinship system, the growing distance between norms and actual events is not surprising. The restrictions and new conditions that affect marriage

choices explain many of the alliances. That which seems to be abnormal about the logic of structure helps to mitigate the consequences of the weakness of the system and even normalizes it.

At first glance it seems paradoxical that in the long term, those marriages outside the canon support the apparently cumbersome system and help enable the realization of the canonical ideal. The circulation and meeting of individuals, with their biological reproductive capacity, allow them to take advantage of the flexibility of the kinship terminology's allocation and reconfiguration of kinship networks to assimilate and normalize Piaroa marriages between relatives who are not classified as cross-cousins (*chusapo* or *chusapo isaju*), the ideal marriage category. They can be redefined to correspond to the ideal, and include older brother and older sister (*chubuo* or *chubua*), younger brother or younger sister (*chijawa* or *chijawaju*), nephew/son-in-law or niece/daughter-in-law (*chujori* or *chujoriju*), or even eldest brother/eldest sister (*akarua* or *akaruaju*), younger brother/younger sister (*rujirua* or *rujirujaju*), aunt/mother-in-law (*chimiyaju*) or uncle/father-in-law (*chimiya*). All these marriages violate the normative system. In this way, social practice corrects the distortions created by the kinship system operating in a small population randomly distributed.

We examine a few case studies in which the marriage choices that individuals make do not correspond to the logic of their kinship terminology. We also explore individual histories in the light of a system of matrimonial alliances in which the logical choices of the participants are mediated by circumstances apart from the terminological system.

Case Studies

Love: Shamanic Power and Forced Migration

In about 1970 a Piaroan couple fell in love. They lived in communities along the Cuaó River in times when matrimonial orthodoxy was the norm. The young man, named Paris, who lived with his parents, decided to declare his love for a young woman, and she accepted him. Immediately the young man ate with the young woman's family and, with the permission of his in-laws, moved his hammock to their house. Both were classified as cross-cousins. What the two had not foreseen was that an old

chanting-shaman, a *meyeruwa*, who had earlier announced his intention to marry the girl, would come persistently to claim her.⁹ The couple and the young man's family felt themselves under attack by the *meyeruwa*, and for fear of the chanter, decided to flee and settle along another river system, where it would be more difficult for the chanting-shaman to harm them with his spells. They fled in fear, but their fear was never stronger than the emotional ties that bound them together. Their decision involved not only themselves but also the rest of the young man's family. In this case, to save their marriage the young man and woman and his family group rose up against the exercise of arbitrary power employed by the chanting-shaman.

Loneliness: Vulnerable Women and Post-Marriage Residence

Yawika was young, intelligent, and capable. He was the only son among three groups of descendents of a great chief named Rafa, a Lord of Warime, a chanting-shaman (*meyeruwa*), and a chief of commerce and neighborhood (*tjujaturuwa*).¹⁰ He was renowned as the most powerful chief along one of the great rivers in the Sipapo watershed. In spite of having had various spouses he only had three children: two girls and a boy.

Rafa's territories were along the headwaters of the Autana River, near the commercial path to the neighboring Marieta River along the harder mountain route, where he had various business partners with whom he maintained close ritual relationships, both of friendship and commerce. In his neighborhood Rafa had three plots of land productively planted that he used alternatively. One day he was told that on the Marieta River, Miru Kuapo had died, leaving orphaned a prepubescent girl and a boy. He decided to adopt the children and arranged the marriage of his eldest son to the girl. The kinship relationships between the two varied depending upon which kinship network was selected to establish them. One was chosen that defined them as cross-cousins, and when the girl had her first menses, the marriage was consummated. In this way the great chief avoided having to send his eldest son, Yawika, to do bride service for some other eligible bride's parents in their neighborhood or community.¹¹

Yawika did not like his wife. Nevertheless, they were able to form a strong domestic group and had six children; three boys and three girls. Yawika's eldest son married a woman who had separated from her first husband. The son, in a similar fashion to that of his father, took his bride to settle in his father's community, going against norms prescribing that

couples recently united should live, for several years at least, in the bride's family's house.

In these cases, the post-matrimonial residence rule was avoided.

Passion: Sentiment and Manipulating Kin Connections

In the 1990s Agapito was about 40 years old. Twenty years earlier, he was a highly eligible bachelor. He had recently graduated from the Salesian Missionary School at Isla de Ratón, where he had learned to service combustion engines and had been contracted by the state to build houses. Although he showed no great capacity for leadership, he had authority in spite of his youth. The families of young Piaroan women in his community and surrounding communities tried to win him over, but unlike most of the other young men of his age, he did not want to commit himself. He lived as adventurous a life as a young Piaroan man of his age and time could. His father was a liberal man; an extraordinary leader and a visionary for his time, who had decided not to influence his children's marriage choices. Nevertheless, neither Agapito nor his father had reckoned on the stubbornness or persistence of Luisa Elena, Agapito's father's sister. She wanted a man like Agapito to be her daughter's husband and her son-in-law. She was married to an older man and felt she needed the services of a son-in-law, and so she began to put great pressure on her brother and urged him to persuade his son to marry this patrilineal cross-cousin. After a short time Agapito gave in and married his cousin. Very soon she was pregnant, as is usual among the Piaroa. The couple settled in his wife's community, while Agapito's paternal family nearly all lived in another community. Luisa Elena and her daughter demanded a lot from Agapito and made his life difficult.

One day Agapito was discovered making love to a young woman. She could either be classified as his aunt or cross-cousin, depending upon the kinship links used to define the relationship. Since he was a married man and since it could be calculated that he had entered an incestuous relationship with his aunt—if the connection were defined through the young woman's mother's family line—Agapito was thrown out of his lover's house and abandoned by his wife.

Single again and subject to rumors of the local community, he was judged harshly. Nevertheless, Agapito and the young woman were in love and persisted in their relationship. In a short time the rumors died down and the young woman's mother accepted them. Agapito and his parents-

in-law decided that the way to legitimize the relationship was to classify it through the young woman's father's family line, according to which Agapito and his lover were cross-cousins. After 20 years, they have had five children.

Shame: Incest and Kinship Terminologies

Ramona is a middle-aged woman. She is raising two sons and two daughters. In the community where they live, their situation is marginal because they do not have active kinship ties with other family groups. When we interviewed her, she was living with a senile old man who had come to visit the area and had stayed with her.

When we asked Ramona about her previous life, she spoke to us about her children's father and how he had died many years before. He was, according to her, a cross-cousin.

As the interview progressed, a reconstruction of her parents' family history indicated to us that the link between Ramona and the children's father was obviously a close classificatory father-daughter relationship. When we returned to the area, we visited her and raised the topic again. She began to cry and told us that the relationship had been father-daughter, and that from the outset her incestuous marriage had brought her bad luck and ruined her life. Nevertheless, she and her husband carried on their life together and constructed a kinship relationship that from the outside appeared to be legitimate.

She explained her marginal situation in the village. If she had stayed where she was born, many people would have known of the incestuous relationship with her husband. They went to a village where their kinship relations were defined by the places that they occupied in the kinship network of her eldest daughter's husband. This reference facilitated the creation of a terminological system that achieved an apparent consistency and legitimacy. She was no longer an incestuous wife. Rather, she had transformed herself into the mother-in-law of her daughter's husband. From that point on she wove a network within her new community, while the old network, geographically distant, remained in place as a potential source of support if she were ever to need it.

Solidarity: Evangelical Ties and Kinship

The relation between the Piaroa and the Hiwi is tense. The Piaroa are semi-sedentary horticulturists who maintain fruit trees. The Hiwi were

nomads until quite recently and do not hesitate to chop down trees when they have fruit, or to enter and make use of others' gardens when necessary. The values of both peoples are in sharp contrast and frequently result in conflicts.

Nevertheless, within the Piara system of land settlement, there is an exceptional case. In the community of Cañó Piojo, the Hiwi and the Piara have established a number of inter-ethnic marriages. What brings together two such dissimilar peoples in the same communal area? The Evangelical religion and the charismatic leadership of MJ, who, as pastor, has encouraged these marriages and inter-ethnic collaboration. In spite of the fact that the village has hardly grown, and that a number of individuals have been expelled from the community, nevertheless, it is extraordinary that these two ethnic groups have lived together for over 40 years, even though there have been many conflicts.

In fact, sharing the Evangelical religion has become a very important criterion, although not the only one, that decides whom people may marry. Opportunities to arrange marriages arise during religious services and celebrations, as we have already noted. Belonging to the same faith changes a family's frame of reference and the active kinship networks determining whom ego is most likely to marry, which make possible alliances that once seemed impossible—villages half Piara and half Hiwi.

Ambition: Kinship and the Pull of the City

Juanita is a likeable young woman. She has shown lots of initiative: she studied in the Salesian Mission School through the second year of high school and then decided to explore the world. She went as far as San Fernando de Apure, a *criollo* city on the banks of the Apure River. There she had various jobs as a maid and established relationships with young *criollo* men. Nevertheless, she returned to Amazonia without children and met a Piara teacher with whom she lived and had two children. The man came from the Samariapo River, where he had his family. Because of the distances between the family groups, it was easy to create a system of kinship based on their marriage; in consequence, their marriage turned them into cross-cousins.

Juanita grew tired of her husband and left him; he drank too much, mistreated her, and even raped one of her nieces. The family supported her. A little while later Juanita met another Piara teacher in Puerto Ayacucho, who came from an Evangelical district near the city. As Juanita's

father was a leader in his community and was interested in the growth of the village he had founded, she convinced her new husband to work as a teacher in her father's village. They made their lives there and remained in the community until her father died and her husband retired. After that, Juanita and her nuclear family moved to Puerto Ayacucho, where they remain.

It is clear that Juanita's matrimonial decisions, supported by a father, were always oriented toward having at her side someone who would bring her close to the object of her desire—the West.

Fear: Marriage and Shamanic Power

In 2000 an old shaman, a master of Warime and well-known *soplador* or sorcerer (*yuwawaruwa*), decided to move from the Cuaio River to the Autana River in the watershed of the Sipapo. This old shaman was considered to be very dangerous. Another shaman, who lived in the area to which he moved, was a chanter (*meyeruwa*). His authority in that sector of the river was incontestable. He was not a Lord of Warime, but his powers as a chanter derived from the "Lord of Báquiros" and protector of a *poitjiana*—that is, a "stone mother of the fish" who maintained the supply and variety of fish in the Autana River.

When the old *yuwawaruwa* settled along the Autana River, the *meyeruwa* came to visit and learned that the *yuwawaruwa* had a 12-year-old son; he offered the *yuwawaruwa* his 18-year-old-granddaughter as a marriage partner for the son. The young woman came from the Salesian Mission School, where she had learned to dress in an occidental manner and enjoy the pleasures of the criollo world. She went about all the time with her sister, a year younger, whom she had to leave alone to attend to her young husband. The boy, scarcely out of childhood, had been raised in the most traditional Piaroan manner.

The marriage was consummated and shortly afterward the young woman became pregnant. When her first child was born, she learned that her younger sister had just died. The family had found her hanged in her parents' house; it was believed she died because of a malign spirit's influence that was suspected to have been sent by the old shaman, the father-in-law of the elder daughter.

Fifteen days later the young woman married to the old shaman's son was also found hanged. The *meyeruwa's* family reclaimed her, took her lifeless body, and buried her near their community. The family of the

yuwawaruwa (soplador) kept the son of the dead woman. At this time rumors that the feared old *yuwawaruwa* had assassinated the two sisters were widespread throughout Piaroa lands. The old *meyeruwa* organized a vengeance ritual that had no effect. On the contrary, he had a stroke; and a year later, a second stroke killed him. The battle was lost.

Fear of apparent manifest shamanic power, as we have seen, can be a decisive factor in choosing a spouse.

Nostalgia: Sentiment and Political Decisions

Don Fulgencio was an extraordinary *meyeruwa*. He was the central figure in an extensive and influential family network in the largest of the Piaroan communities along the Orinoco River. This network included an important domestic group whose lands were along the Urudei River. Don Fulgencio was originally from the Marieta, a neighboring river, but from a very young age he had established himself along the Autana; he had married the daughter of an old leader who had business dealings along both rivers. Because of established relationships, Don Fulgencio lived along the Autana but traveled often to the Marieta to visit his relatives and, more important, to maintain his commercial ties.

When his father-in-law died, Don Fulgencio left the headwaters of the Autana to go to the Orinoco, and his relations with people along the Marieta became more distant. Meanwhile, his children grew up and became marriageable while he grew old. While living along the Orinoco, Don Fulgencio converted to Evangelism and traveled to church meetings. On one of these trips, he became reacquainted with his relatives along the Marieta.

One member of the family network, PG, decided to move to Marieta, where he died. Don Fulgencio did not go there because he had consolidated a position of leadership in the large Orinoco village for which he was responsible, but he convinced two of his adolescent sons to marry in Marieta, which they did.

Why would a leader like Don Fulgencio decide to return to his original home instead of strengthening his relations in the large village where he lived? In our judgment, it was nostalgia that played a fundamental role. Don Fulgencio always remembered that time of his life along the Marieta. He had gone to live by another river to find his wife, whose father was a well-connected businessman. In addition to the ties he formed through his in-laws, in competition with his brothers-in-law, he became the leader

of his faction and assumed those responsibilities. Yet when he knew his life was coming to an end, he chose to return to his memories. He decided to reactivate the kinship and affinal ties of his childhood. These sentiments shaped his political decisions.

Discussion

When we realize the random nature of individual responses to particular circumstances, which all occurred within the framework of the same society, we understand the importance of the three analytical levels of kinship developed by Needham (Parkin 2004; Godelier et al. 1998) or the simpler scheme developed by Bourdieu (1980) of "official kinship" versus "practical kinship," also characterized as "hot kinship" versus "cold kinship." In all of these approaches there is an effort to differentiate analytically between the systems of marriage and kinship as they ought to be and as they are. The structure alludes to synchronicity, consistency, and abstraction, while the actual processes are diachronic, leading to the dysfunctional and the concrete. An analysis of kinship systems can only be fully realized using a concrete and diachronic approximation that recognizes incoherencies as an active part of the processes and not as anomalous events.

The individual histories reveal that marriage decisions in any given circumstance are not only, and not even principally, a matter of the internal logic of kinship terminology. Neither are they a purely individual choice. Rather, what happens is that the individual, and his or her personal history, are surrounded by determinations made by structures, norms, politics, networks, and personal feelings, to name just the more important factors that make it possible to understand the decisionmaking process. The Piaroa are today, and were yesterday, free to choose among alternative options offered to them by their system. Like our Paris, an individual can rebel against the arbitrary power exercised by a shaman, assume the risk of defying him, and escape with the woman he loves or, on the other hand, accept the decision of the shaman, give up the woman, and find another wife. Although the latter option appears to have been the more economically sound in this case study, it was not chosen. Our couple was free to opt among the different scenarios their system offered them. In this we can see the weight that sentiments contribute to the analysis, as Needham has already postulated (1977, 48–49).

The same applies to the incestuous couple. The couple decided to marry and, in time, abandoned the place where their transgression was well known to settle elsewhere, where they could recreate their kinship relationships to conform to the appropriate norms.

To have an incestuous relationship is not necessarily a tragedy, nor does it have to threaten the integrity of the system, because the system is sufficiently flexible to replace itself with a different focus: a man can be redefined as a "son-in-law" instead of a "father." Yesterday as today, the flexibility of the system permits playing with its rules depending on the correlation of forces, in conjuncture. A man can marry an orphan girl to avoid conflicts with norms requiring uxori-local residence after marriage. If the bride's in-laws are dead, with which family does the groom stay? The obvious response is to live with his father's family. In this case the reasons for demands against the system come from a father who, for political reasons, persuaded his favorite son to marry an orphan so as to stay in his father's village.

Relationships that are appropriately defined in the terminology can be countered by the whims of a powerful person. In our field notes there are frequent accounts of old shamans demanding young women for themselves, in spite of the fact that they were inappropriately related to the women. It is also common that these demands are denied. Piaroa sensibility usually triumphs over desire, but sometimes it loses. These decisions are more related to power than to the rules.

Seen in a broad emic perspective, the norms that promote matrimonial networks seem to aim for an impossible equilibrium, the ideal equilibrium of structure that is translated into the language of norms but cannot be translated into the language of sentiment. Don Fulgencio's nostalgia leads him to marry his two sons to descendants of old allies from his youth. Curiosity and ambition lead Juanita to look for a mate among those who can satisfy her ambition to be near the criollo world, without having to renounce her family of origin. MJ founded a village where Hiwis and Piaroas can be allies; where there is inter-ethnic marriage, in a society that prizes endogamous intra-ethnic marriage as the norm. Fear motivates the most prestigious chant-owner of a river to arrange an inadvisable marriage with the aim of protecting himself—in the end unsuccessfully—from an apparently dangerous adversary. Rafa's ambition leads him to break the circuit of reciprocity in marriage exchanges so that his

eldest son will not abandon him. Agapito's passion leads him to break the commitment made by his family and look for a woman to whom he is attracted, in spite of knowing the scandal this would cause when the union was discovered. Finally, "love," understood as the unstoppable desire to be with another person, leads Paris, his wife, and family to flee the threats of an old shaman. In all these cases there were transgressions against the norms or an intent to transgress against them; in all the cases, the norms still apply even though violated, and the kinship network reconfigures itself from the new ego-centered nucleus that reordered it.

The kinship norms are not a yoke; they are a language that orders and makes comprehensible and viable the relations between couples, including those who break the rules. The cases can be multiplied. Each individual case can be interpreted in terms of sentiment.

Bourdieu (1980, 282), studying Arab kinship, said: "It is practical kinship which makes marriages; it is official kinship which celebrates them." In this system the terminology and norms are languages that allow individuals to orient, interpret, and reinterpret the processes but that are always more or less distinguishable from the results of that same process.

What is really fundamental to our task is not to quantify the number of marriages that demonstrably require a readjustment of genealogies but to see how many marriages are openly recognized as transgressions and how many manipulate kinship norms to impose correct solutions over incorrect ones, without open moral or practical sanctions. If, in practice, most abnormal marriages reconfigure the network and can act as if they were correct, the system is efficient. We must remember that we are describing living societies that, in order to reproduce themselves, have to mitigate the restrictions making this difficult.

At this point it is important to consider and to justify the role of the anthropologist as analyst. When we describe and discuss kinship and matrimonial systems, we do not do it as members of indigenous cultures, nor simply to reproduce and repeat what they tell us. In fact, if that were the case we would not need anthropologists; indigenous people can do that for themselves. Our task is to take what our informants tell us and reflect on it, using and developing the theoretical tools anthropology provides us. To develop and create theory and interpret social data, based upon a comparative perspective, are how we repay, in part, our debt to the world's remaining rich human experience. We welcome, therefore, the decisions

individuals make, based on their sentiments and interpretations, and in the understanding that they also form part of the theory.

In order to analyze a kinship system, we have to include a study of its relationship to other social domains that it influences, while at the same time we study how these other social influences affect kinship. We are examining a kinship system in which decisions have influence on and are influenced by politics, demographic distribution, access to resources and services (including those of religion), old and new sources of wealth, and the profile of the individual who makes choices within this framework. The interpretations of those involved in these social processes do not necessarily explain them, but they certainly are part of the explanation. The same is true of their sentiments.

And so we arrive at a complex approximation of kinship that we use to understand it. It is a system of kinship plagued with contradictions and influences, with the heaviest coming from the dynamics of demography, potential technological developments, politics, and most recently the processes of the intercultural domains fostered by industrial society. Such a system has needed to mix old and young, generation and generation, in order to maintain the system and open up possibilities of alliances that could be closed by the rigors of the system. Today, furthermore, the actors must interpret outside influences and adjust accordingly.

Notes

1. See Mansutti Rodríguez and Briceño Fustec 1993 for a detailed discussion.
2. We prefer non-affinal to consanguineous because, as Dumont has expressed clearly in his seminal work of 1954 (Dumont 2004), the category "consanguineous" includes its opposite sense "affinal" but not, we add, that to which the category actually refers. In practice, "affinal" and "non-affinal" are in many cases considered consanguineous in the sense that both may descend from common ancestors.
3. Data on family genealogies and marriages were processed by M. Marion Selz, a computer researcher at EHESS in Paris, to discover marriages that demonstrated some degree of consanguinity, as they were repetitive marriage alliances over the generations. We are grateful to her for her assistance.
4. Among the Piaroa, people who died are not evoked by name. This omission results in a rapid loss of genealogical memory as people only remember those whose names are known personally to them. At most, our informants can name their grandparents, and even then, only if they knew them. This situation is further aggravated for those who were orphaned, and who frequently do not even know the names of their parents. Our

genealogies are therefore full of holes; there are individuals who we know existed but who cannot be named.

5. A genealogical generation is that group of individuals who share among themselves membership in the same terminological generation (G-n). In practice, they constitute all the descendants of the anterior genealogical generation. Thus, for example, in the Piaroan system all the following are of ego's genealogical generation: father's and mother's sons and daughters; mother's brother's sons and daughters; mother's sister's sons and daughters; father's brother's sons and daughters; father's sister's sons and daughters; and mother's and father's cousins' sons and daughters. All ego's father's genealogical generation are members of the father's genealogical generation, and so on. In effect, the age differences among members of the same generation signify that there may be no coincidence between a demographic cohort and a genealogical generation.

6. Neighborhoods, called *itso'pha* by Kaplan (Overing 1975).

7. My doctoral thesis (Mansutti Rodríguez 2002) demonstrates the existence of a hierarchy of settlement patterns, which relates to the employment in the most important communities of a whole range of public servants—religious, political, civil, sanitary, and educational. This incursion into these communities, which I call commercial centers, has transformed their capacity to acquire Western goods and maintain large populations.

8. At the time we conducted our investigations, the Evangelical religious networks were extensive. Today their influence has been weakening and is substituted by the practice and ideology of the revolutionary political party, the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). We write in the ethnographic present.

9. *Meyeruwa* are owners of magical prayers and resources in opposition to *yuwawaruwa mari*, who are the owners of whispers (*yuwa*) and sorcery (*maripa*) (Mansutti Rodríguez 2006). The *meyeruwa* controls creative shamanism and the *yuwawaruwa* controls sorcery, the destructive. The *maripa* is very dangerous and is the speciality of *yuwawaruwa mari* or *soplador* but also can be used by *meyeruwa* or *rezador*. *Yuwawaruwa* are always more dangerous than *meyeruwa*.

10. Warime is a complex ritual of masks and sacred flutes that serves to consolidate the relation between shamans and the owners of natural resources. It is a modality of *yurupari* (Mansutti Rodríguez 2006; 2011a; 2011b). The man who inherited the right and instruments to direct the Warime is called *warimeruwa* or "owner of Warime."

11. If Yawika had not married the orphaned girl, he would probably have had to leave his father's house to go and live with his wife and her parents and would have had to stay there for several years.

"Foremost scholars of indigenous Amazonia explore the vast and interesting gap between rules and practice, demonstrating how sociocultural systems endure and even prosper due to the flexibility, creativity, and resilience of the people within them."—**JEREMY M. CAMPBELL**, author of *Conjuring Property: Speculation and Environmental Futures in the Brazilian Amazon*

"A landmark volume and a major contribution to the study of kinship and marriage in Amazonian societies, an area of the world that has been pivotal to our understanding of the biocultural dimensions of cousin marriage and polygamy."—**NANCY E. LEVINE**, author of *The Dynamics of Polyandry: Kinship, Domesticity, and Population on the Tibetan Border*



THIS VOLUME REVEALS that individuals in Amazonian cultures often disregard or reinterpret the marriage rules of their societies—rules that anthropologists previously thought reflected practice. It is the first book to consider not just *what* the rules are but *how* people in these societies negotiate, manipulate, and break them in choosing whom to marry.

Using ethnographic case studies that draw on previously unpublished material from well-known indigenous cultures, *The Anthropology of Marriage in Lowland South America* defies the tendency to focus only on the social structure of kinship and marriage that is so common in kinship studies. Instead, the contributors to this volume examine the people that conform to or deviate from that structure and their reasons for doing so. They look not only at deviations in kinship behavior motivated by gender, economics, politics, history, ecology, and sentimentality but also at how globalization and modernization are changing the ancestral norms and values themselves. This is a richly diverse portrayal of agency and individual choice alongside normative kinship and marriage systems in a region that has long been central to anthropological studies of indigenous life.

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Front: A young Canela family; both the husband and wife share childcare responsibilities. Photograph by Bill Crocker.

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