

## Anthropological Dialectics: Yukuna Ritual as Defensive Strategy

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One of the interests of cultural contacts is that they reveal the hidden machinery of social systems, mechanisms which most often elude the actors of the systems themselves. In this regard, current anthropology is taking a turn from traditional anthropology. Instead of aiming at the construction of an abstract picture of "a people", which could stand by itself in the Sudanese desert or on a remote Indian Ocean island, recent studies are trying to take into account the historical, cultural contacts which were usually either ignored or taken for granted (e.g. Wolf 1969, 1982; Taussig 1980; Sahlins 1981, 1985; Valeri 1985; Comaroff 1985). I am thinking not simply of contacts between traditional and industrial societies, but about any cultural contacts, be they Precolombian wars between Carib and Arawak Indians, trade between the Incaic state and the Piedmont people, or exchange between interfluvial and riverine Amazonian Indians, etc. For as much as we cannot limit ourselves to the first "contacts" with "primitive" populations, we must examine, as far as possible, the continuous interactions in which cultures feed and need each other – even in a hostile way.

This point of view, nevertheless, does not allow anthropologists to avoid the fundamental question of their discipline, i.e., how can we account for cultural diversity, a question which inevitably raises the traditional dilemma of empiricism vs. rationalism (Leach 1980: 11). Empiricists tend to take as true what they observe, as if they had direct access to reality, while rationalists tend to take as universal what they intuit and think about, as if their reasonings and their representations, because they are abstract, were inclusive and global. Empiricists usually mistrust general theories, while the rationalists resent factual criticism. The symmetry, however, of such a classification barely conceals my own inclination toward rationalist theories. In reality, there are not only many different kinds of empiricism and rationalism, but as Quine and Popper argue convincingly from a philosophical point of view, pure empiricist or rationalist positions are untenable (Quine 1963: 20-46; Popper 1963: 3-30). Quine shows that "truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic facts," (Quine 1963: 36); and therefore in any statement it is impossible to separate clearly what is due to factual observation from what is stemming from logical reasoning. As for Popper, he suggests that "the sources from which our knowledge derives [cannot] be superhuman." It cannot be that "truth is above human authority," and if "true knowledge" must depend

on some "authoritative source", [it] leaves open the character of that authority." (Popper 1963: 29, emphasis Popper).

Yet the opposition between empiricism and rationalism is still very prevalent in the social sciences and anthropology. It results essentially from the difference of approaches between the British tradition (via Bacon and Hume) and the Continental tradition (via Descartes and Kant). The problem of empiricists, then, is to make sense of contradictory phenomena. In order to do so, empiricists *must eventually* resort to abstractions – even if their interpretation might sometimes contradict what the informants say. For instance ethnoecologists generally start by cutting off the environment from the social system and then, not surprisingly, meet the difficulty of binding them together again. When ecologists finally reach the level of symbolic representations, i.e., myth and ritual, their only course often consists in rationalizing them. As for the rationalists, their task is no easier. Their problem is to explain the apparently infinite variety of behaviors and cultures. In order to do so they have to give reasons not only for the phenomena inscribed in their theories, but also for those which conspicuously do not fit in them. For example, it has often been pointed out that structuralists cast their data in order to adapt them to their views. They then find themselves in trouble when they have to consider unexpected facts.

It is to avoid the trap of such a dilemma that anthropologists have once again returned to history. But rather than using history to reduce cultural diversity, as the evolutionists or diffusionists had previously done, anthropologists now use history to face better the basic problems just mentioned. By putting their concepts into a temporal perspective, they introduce a historical perspective into the subject matter. This is particularly relevant in the case of classless societies which appear to be stricken by amnesia, not only because they do not keep written records, but also because these societies are constantly in the process of rebuilding their past – be it genealogical, political, etc. – in order to justify their present (Jacopin 1981, 1985). Far from turning their back on theory, "historical anthropologists" are actually criticizing and developing the synchronic/diachronic conceptions of their predecessors, while even more vigorously rejecting empiricism.<sup>1</sup> For example, Sahlins does not hesitate to

<sup>1</sup> Diachrony ought to be distinguished from history. Diachrony refers to the working of a synchrony, i.e. to evo-

introduce the problem of the relations between structure and praxis; a problem which remains in the background of the Continental philosophy and the social sciences at least since Marx, and which most anthropologists are still reluctant to face (see "structure vs. *praxis* in historic time", Sahlins 1981).

In fact, one cannot understand and compare cultural settings without introducing a social determinism, that is, an abstract causal principle that orients the views, supports the hypotheses, and governs the explanations. Although it is rarely acknowledged, this strong determinism is the strength – as well as the weakness – of structuralism and functionalism. What is looked for are causal relations or correlations, which sometimes may be contrived. For example, if the determinism of a social system is believed to be based upon kinship, emphasis will be put on marriage, kinship terminology, filiation, residence patterns, and social behavior. In the case of economic matters, one looks for production and consumption units, for spheres of exchange, for circulation networks, labor equivalence, etc. In this regard the most convincing lesson of functionalism and structuralism is that form is inherent and inseparable from meaning. The notions of social structure and social organization were introduced precisely to account for the relative autonomy of indigenous social systems. For not only are these systems often geographically and physically marginal (Amazon, Kalahari desert), but above all, they are different in *nature*. They are not in line with Western industrial society. In themselves similarities, or for that matter discrepancies, between institutions, rites, symbols, or mere facts do not really mean anything unless one can show how they are related to their respective social systems.

Yet both the empiricist and the rationalist approaches apparently aim at an objective representation of the reality. They strive towards a description which does not depend on the observer. Recently anthropologists critical of this position and unhappy with the artificiality of such an image have tried to reintroduce history from another point of view: they put themselves in the picture, but not so much as historical participants as the center of a subjective experience (Rosaldo 1980, see also Rose 1982, Tedlock 1982, 1983: 285-301). In itself such

self-reference is not new. Indeed it is as old as modern fieldwork (e.g. see Malinowski 1967, Lévi-Strauss 1964, Maybury-Lewis 1965, Bohannan 1966, Crapanzano 1973, Basso 1979). What is new is to make this "self-consciousness" (Rabinow 1977) a theoretical postulate of anthropology (e.g. Tedlock 1983, Fernandez 1985, Rabinow 1985).

Such an urge would be welcomed if it were more than a simple reaction against "positivism" or scientific "objectivity" (e.g. J. P. Dumont 1978: 44-48, Tedlock 1983: 321-338); that is, if it were inducing a more concrete and effective relationship with the observed – be they actors, actions or objects. But as Rabinow remarks, this critique has not been really followed by a new ethnography. The writing of monographs, the monographic rhetoric, has not changed much (Rabinow 1985: 2, 12; cf. also Crapanzano 1977).<sup>2</sup> Although the question of cultural diversity seems to have faded out, it is still pending. Reintroducing history by refocusing on the participant observation and the actual presence of the observer can only bring about a renewed empiricism. And indeed, why should history in itself, or for that matter any approach, *a priori* be a siren less deceptive than the sirens of structure and function?<sup>3</sup> In brief the humanist and anti-positivistic criticism is too superficial to create the conditions of a real alternative and to give place to a new ethnology. One of the reasons is probably that most of these critics, instead of attacking the foundations of scientific methodology, content themselves with the distinction between social and natural sciences, and lean on the ethereal philosophy of Ricoeur, Derrida, or even Heidegger (Ricoeur 1981, Derrida 1976, Heidegger 1975).<sup>4</sup>

In this paper I am taking a middle course. Although I bear in mind the anti-positivistic criticism, I am mainly concerned with the social organization of the Yukuna Indians. In so doing, it seems to me I am taking a way similar to Rosaldo's remarkable account of the Ilongots (Rosaldo 1980). My approach consists of using the disturbances produced by my anthropological presence to understand the Yukuna ritual system. So I still see the Yukuna social system as a self-contained entity, but from a concrete, historical, and existential standpoint rather than from an abstract and ideal point of view. For if I believe in the virtues of contact and culture shock

lative and theoretically predictable changes defined by the synchronic order. Both synchrony and diachrony are abstractions extrapolated from a model of reality. By contrast history includes not only diachronic changes but *hazards* as well, which by definition are excluded from diachrony. As Leach (Leach 1966: 54-104), Sahlins (Sahlins 1981, 1985), and even Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 277-323), show, the two approaches are not really antithetic but complementary. Facts are both phenomena and events (Jacopin 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless there always have been anthropologists who made a point of writing in the first person, either because they thought that their accounts could not be abstracted from their own experience (e.g. Huxley 1957), or because their observations were entangled in personal relationships (e.g. Métraux [1937]). The formal use of "We" (for I), still often required in academic publications as a rhetorical form, is in fact, a blurring

device, which can be adventitious and inconvenient as well.

<sup>3</sup> Because social systems are not mechanical, the same circumstances do not automatically produce the same consequences, and factual history cannot really explain social change. Why would an isolated similarity between two cultures hundreds of miles apart, such as fishing rights (Hill 1984: 531), be due to history? Why not? Such an approach is not very different from the empiricism of traditional "diffusionism". The same criticism can be applied to ethnoecology (whether "processual and structural" or not (Hill 1984: 539)).

<sup>4</sup> This is particularly evident with "hermeneutics" and the philosophy of the "text". The fact that any behaviour, object, or even environment has to be interpreted, does not necessarily make them "texts" – although in the way that Ricoeur and Derrida use the concept, virtually everything can be the "text". As Fernandez remarks, the notion

for ethnography, I must contend with cultural autonomy. In other words, it is by means of events that we first elaborate structure, and then history (Sahlins 1981). This very ambiguity – experience as well as experiment – is in fact inherent to participant observation: the observer's participation implies that she or he is subject and object at one and the same time. This ambivalence is the fundamental postulate for any anthropology. Unable to find a comparative system of reference truly free of ethnocentrism, and yet not ready to abandon the resources of comparison, anthropologists give up the attempt to solve the question theoretically: they resolve it practically crossing cultural barriers, that is, through fieldwork and participant observation. Whatever the definitions of history, culture and society anthropologists opt for, their activity is by nature dialectical. For that very reason it is illusory or rather presumptuous to think that common agreement can be found about the basic concepts of anthropology. Not only are their uses and meanings dependent on the purposes of students and observers, but "true universals" would have to be so general that they would be of no use. Any abstract idea is doomed to contain contradictions, though it need not be controversial. Paradoxically this is also the reason why anthropology remains a scientific activity, for at that point, the philosophical dilemma of rationalism vs. empiricism vanishes, and is replaced by the concrete predicament of adequation among observation, discovery, understanding, expression, and representation.

### The Yukuna Indians

The Yukuna Indians are a population of the Colombian Amazon. Presently they live in the Miritiparana river basin, the last affluent of the Caqueta river, before it flows into Brazil. Geographically, the Yukuna mark the transition between the Tukano culture and the Witoto culture, although culturally they have more in common with the Tukano. They garden in clearings, fish, hunt, and live in malocas (common longhouses). They observe the sexual division of labor, follow the matrimonial rule of bilateral cross-cousin marriage, and celebrate the secret male initiation rite of Yurupari. Traditionally how-

ever, they see themselves as "people from the interior," that is, those who settle away from the big rivers (Gross 1975). For that reason and by comparison with their Western Tukano neighbors, who are "people of the rivers," they have been, and still are, much better hunters than fishermen (Ch. Hugh-Jones 1979, Arhem 1981). Nevertheless, today the Yukuna, in order to ease their relationships with the Whites, are established either on the banks of the Miritiparana, the Guacaya, and the Caqueta rivers.

The residence is patrilocal. The malocas of allied exogamic groups are equally dispersed in the forest, in such a way that two allied malocas are neighboring and in privileged relationships with respect to rituals, economics, as well as other matters. Residence descent-ordered groups tend to form local groups of two malocas (Arhem 1981: 262). There are four exogamic groups. As the Whites designate them: the Yukuna proper, the Matapi, the Tanimuka and Letuama. Originally they all spoke a different idiom, but since the Peruano-Colombian war (1934) the Matapi speak Yukuna.

This linguistic distribution is entirely consistent with their mythology. Each of the four groups has its own mythology, that is, considered proper to the group more because of the language in which it is expressed than because of the variations in content. (Though the Matapi tell their myths in the Yukuna language, they see them as proper to themselves and different from the Yukuna myths because they use their own kinship terminology, their own designation of the mythical heroes, and their own idiomatic expressions.) These mythologies are consistent with the rituals which, though similar and parallel, are also viewed as distinct because of the languages in which they are performed.

The Yukuna themselves do not recall the arrival of the Whites with any historical accuracy. According to recent studies, the first contacts took place centuries ago, much earlier than the present Yukuna imagine (Llanos Vargas and Pineda Camacho 1982). More important than the fact that they might have been in contact with Western people for centuries, is the nature of that contact, i.e. the particular conditions of trade, exploitation, oppression, etc., and the eventual importance of the impact of this contact on their way of life, above all on their independence. The Yukuna have certainly been involved in rubber gathering since the beginning of the century. In the twenties, a Colombian "cauchero" (rubber gatherer) bought the concession of the "Miriti" from an English corporation and established a permanent camp on the upper Miritiparana river. In order to have enough workers, he forced the Tanimuka and the Letuama from the upper Apaporis region, in the north, to migrate to his camp. This camp was abandoned some time after the end of the Casa Arana and the Peruano-Colombian war. Since then, the Yukuna have not ceased to work and trade with the Whites; even so they remained hostile to the Whites until the late forties. Basically they have traded furs, gathered rubber, and, more recently, produced cocaine. They now have established their own camps, where they gather the "seringua" (rubber, chewing gum) alone with some kin friends. They bring their produce to the banks of the Miritiparana river, where it is picked up

of "text" and "writing" could and should also be criticized or "deconstructed" (Fernandez 1985). The real question is a problem of language and formalization. What anti-positivists criticize is the objectivist nature of experimentation and formalism in natural sciences (J. P. Dumont 1978: 44 ss.). From that point of view, to think that the natural sciences are "analogic" and, by opposition, that anthropology, or for that matter ethnography, should be "dialogic" is abstract and simplistic (Tedlock 1983: 321-338). (Besides, when Bakhtin invented the concept of the "dialogic" to describe the process of composition of literary works, he was not naive enough to refer to the actual "dialogue" between the author, as individual, and his/her writing or his/her audience.) To put the emphasis essentially on the description and the notation of the fieldwork situation, without taking into account the consistency (or the ideology) inherent in any writing, leads to an ingenuous renewal of empiricism. Again, this is the pursuit of the true representation of reality.

by the rubber gatherer or by traders. Until the seventies, the trade system was based on a form of barter which put the Indians into debt – typical for the upper Amazon. In order to escape their “bosses”, the Indians would hide at the edge of their clearing until the rubber gatherer left in his motorboat. In the last fifteen years, the Whites have preferred to bring in money and trade directly in cash in order to have a faster return on their investments.

### The Yukuna ritual system

The Yukuna have many rituals. Although the correspondence between myths and rituals is not one to one, rituals allude to myths, and, reciprocally, there are constant mentions of rituals in myths. Furthermore, myths and rituals are organized into systems in such a way that during a ritual one allusion alone to a myth is enough to connect this ritual with its corresponding myth. Such allusions always occur in “hard speech”, i.e. during the formal greetings between ceremonial partners (Huxley 1957: 61). As expressions of worldview, myths and rituals are related to the social system. Following Durkheim, I would even say that myths and rituals are what bind classless societies together (Durkheim 1947). They constitute the symbolic means of integration for the whole society. This is why the ritual system reflects the essential features of the social structure. Thus the Yukuna classify their rituals according to the characteristics of their social organization. There are two categories of ritual: the rituals between exogamic groups, and the rituals internal to each exogamic group.

A. The rituals between exogamic groups are furthermore classified by the Yukuna themselves by order of importance, i.e., according to the importance of the magic forces at work:

- 1) The major festivals are the only ones where (sacred) feather adornments are used. The most important are *wéra* and *pupurá*.<sup>5</sup> Less important is the festival of *diao* at the opening of a new longhouse. No special beer is served at this occasion, for that festival can be held at any time during the year.
- 2) Then there are nine fruit festivals, in which the participants drink large amounts of beer or “chicha”:
  - a. Two festivals of “chicle” or “huansoco” (*Achras sapota*): *jutchapán* and *mirañala*
  - b. Five festivals of pineapple (*Ananas sativus* so.): *lumala’a*, *múkapa*, *bejo’ola*, *i’iwa*, *punama*
  - c. One festival of “milpeso” (*Jessenia batua* or *polycarpa*) or/and “asai” (*Euterpe* sp.): *pupe*, also called *iaúje’e* or *ka’amí*
  - d. The popular festival of “chontaduro” (*Guglielma* or *bactris gasipae*): *witchakaláhe* with transvestite masquerade.

B. The ritual celebrated inside the exogamic group is the secret ritual of Yurupari. The first part

of the ritual lasts seven days during which men play the famous trumpets of Yurupari (*wakapéri*), and whose sight and contact is strictly forbidden to women. The playing time is followed by a men’s fast of three to eight weeks. The fast period ends with a *wéra* festival during which chicha of “humari” (*Poraqueiba sericea*), or chicha of “canangucho” (*Mauritia flexuosa*) is served among the Yukuna-Matapi and the Tanimuka-Letuama respectively.

All the inter exogamic group festivals follow the same pattern. They all must take place in a traditional maloca, that is, in malocas built in accordance with the rules which Kahipu-Lakeno, the four mythical heroes of the Yukuna creation myth, “taught” them (four poles supporting the roof, no metallic pieces, etc.). A few weeks before the festival, the host sends a messenger with an invitation to the guest of his choice. He generally will be the headman of the neighboring maloca from the other exogamic group. He is in charge of inviting the other guests among his clansmen, and of organizing the preparations for the ceremony. On his side, the host invites his own clansmen. They form the audience. In exchange for food, smoked meat and manioc bread, the guests will dance for a night, a day, and another night. If there is not enough food, the guests are entitled to leave the ceremony earlier.

A few days before the festival and during the festival, men of the host maloca “sound the maguare,” the pair of ritual drums (*kumú*), to announce which particular festival will take place. On the day of the festival, the guests meet at the edge of the clearing near the maloca of the hosts, to get ready. They put on their make up and their adornments. The hosts have already moved all their belongings into the Western half of the maloca; the other half will welcome the guests and their families. The headman of the guests enters the maloca and sits on the visitors’ bench. He is received by the headman of the host maloca who carries the ritual house’s “makana” (club, *wakapá*) on his right shoulder; he offers some puffs from the ritual cigar (*litichipa*), and some coca powder (*ipatú*) to his guest. The ritual starts with the exchange of ceremonial greetings (hard speech). Only then can the other hosts enter the maloca. Then other formulas are exchanged, which allude to the tradition, to ancestors and to particular myth(s); the coca powder is exchanged, and the food is distributed to every guest household. Then the dancing and the singing begin. At first only the male guests dance. They move in lines or in circles according to the dances and songs. While eating, people have to turn their backs to the dancing area, and during the whole festival men are not allowed to sleep or even to sit in their hammocks. Later that night the male hosts start joining the dances. The dancing breaks off the next morning: for a few hours people go for a swim, eat, and joke. The dancing starts again later in the day and in the evening the women gradually join in, dancing side by side with their husbands. The dancing finally ends at dawn.

All the festivals refer to some aspect of the order of the world. The fruit festivals, however, allude more clearly to the relationship between exogamic groups. These festivals are usually followed with

<sup>5</sup> I use italics and the conventions of the international phonetic alphabet to represent native Matapi expressions.

the next few weeks by a similar festival at the guest's maloca. The roles are reversed: the former guests become the hosts, and the former hosts dance and sing for their hosts. According to the Yukuna themselves, the festivals of chontaduro and pineapple are less important, although they are certainly the most popular, above all among the young participants. The festival of chontaduro is the most picturesque. The first night, the dancers are dressed up with long fiber skirts dyed with black vegetal (*po'íntche*), bark cloth shirts (*ñamakanaje*), and vegetal tar masks (*mápa*) which are decorated with yellow ochre and white vegetal paint. They are the animals' spirits who are ceaselessly persecuted and killed by hunters. They are invited to drink the beer of chontaduro (*pipiri*) and in so doing, to renew the alliance with the people. Every animal is recognizable by his song and his step. The animals who live nearby enter first and the ones who come from far away arrive last. The dances representing very populous animals (e.g. schools of fishes) last often for hours. Finally the next morning the dancers take off their masks and the first part of the festival ends in a triumphant parade of all the dancers. The next day and the second night follow the same general pattern – but the dancers are no less lively, in spite of the fatigue. Although the dances are less picturesque, according to the Yukuna, the last night is the most significant. In fact it is considered the real festival.

The festivals revive all the relations that the Yukuna maintain with their social and natural environment. They renew their personal and their collective relationships as well: between individuals, between malocas (e.g. this is the time where children and cross-cousins first meet), between groups whether or not exogamic, who sometimes live far from one another, and last but not least, between people and natural elements – animals, plants, mythical beings, there are even a symbolic couple of fishermen. The general goal is to rebalance the whole social system, that is, all the people and their near environment. In the same way the festivals are also balanced in time and are punctually spaced throughout the year: they occur precisely at the time of the harvesting of the fruits whose chicha is drunk during the rituals. (If for any reason the ritual cannot be held at the right time, the Yukuna have ways to preserve the fruits: they keep them in river-water, or rasp and bury them in the ground in a bed of banana leaves.)

The festivals take place in a specific mode according to the particular view of the Yukuna world. The most important are held at the end of mourning periods or more generally when disturbing events have happened concerning the very existence of the whole community. In the pineapple festivals the participants get completely drunk. Even if the headman of the host maloca personally warns against fighting to the participants and in the ritual greetings against fighting, they often use the excuse of being drunk to release their feelings and to insult and provoke each other violently. Although the anger is supposed to clear away with the drunkenness, the resentment does not dissipate completely. The quarrel might even blaze up. But after a while people can be reconciled, in such a way that the Yukuna even refer to the

fact that they can drink together to claim good relationships.

The rite of Yurupari corresponds to the same rite as the one among the Tukano (S. Hugh-Jones 1979). Young men, from the age of seven upwards, are gathered in one maloca. After waiting for a few hours or sometimes even a day, they hear trumpets in the distance. Children and women take refuge inside the house. The trumpets arrive and surround the maloca for a while, even conversing with its inhabitants. This is repeated twice. The third day women and children are pushed outside the maloca and the trumpets enter. The would-be initiates are frightened. Their heads are covered with a blanket until they finally see the trumpets. The next day the men and the initiates go into the forest where, for seven days in succession, the youngsters learn how to play the trumpets and memorize the creation myth. They also begin a complete fast, which will last for weeks. They must protect themselves from the sun, and they sleep and live in a secluded area of the maloca into which women cannot even peek. The fear is not that it will hurt the women, but on the contrary, that they will alter the initiation process and eventually put the life of the initiates at risk. After four to six weeks, each initiate catches, boils and eats his first animal food: a triton or a salamander. After about another two weeks the headman of the maloca sets up the closing festival, in which the participants drink the beer of humari (*Poraqueiba sericea*). During the first night, the initiates are scourged by their "godfather" and initiator (generally the mother's brother). They then rejoin the other dancers, male and female, in an extraordinary single file dance called "Dance of the snakes", and so return to the community.

As one can see, the ritual system of the Yukuna is highly structured. It is therefore possible to assess how the contact with the Whites has affected the Yukuna ceremonial system. One difficulty is unavoidable: we will never have access to the system as it worked in the past, even the recent past. In the absence of written records, it is not possible to reconstitute the changes which have affected "the content" of the rituals. Nevertheless, we can reasonably postulate that people keep doing what is necessary for their continued existence. In other words, they have their own rhyme and reason and societies do not change and lose their patterns at random. Although the Yukuna are still able to perform all the rituals I have mentioned above, they have now forgotten the meaning of the ceremonial songs. They simply recognize one word here and there. However they have not lost track of the meaning of the formulas (greeting, address and magic spells), which are necessary to identify the beginning, the middle stages, and the end of the ceremonies.

When I arrived among the Yukuna, they seemed interested in celebrating only the most "minor" festivals of chontaduro and pineapple. Nobody remembered when they held the last *pupurá* and *wéra*, and I met a young man of seventeen who still had not had a chance to see the Yurupari. The chontaduro festivals were by far the most popular, to the point that when people for any reason could not set up the festival, they would postpone it and gather, process, and store the bulk of their chonta

duro. Even the rubber gatherers who employed the Yukuna had to submit to the festival's calendar. They would tell me that they abide by the season of chontaduro and pineapple because during that time "the workers" would be more busy preparing and celebrating the festivals than collecting rubber. As they put it: "The workers are taking holidays!". In fact the two activities, laboring for the Whites and celebrating the festivals, seemed to me very much in competition. Some Tanimuka would even hold the ritual in their rubber camp. In any case it appeared that the Yukuna had given up celebrating their major rituals, maintaining only the less essential ones. It looked as if the system was slowly going to ruin. Yet this perception raised another question: Why did the Yukuna keep celebrating their "minor" rituals instead of the "major" ones? After all, the latter were not really more expensive or more complex to organize than the former. Was it because the Yukuna had forgotten the hard speech formulas? Or was it because, as it seemed to me at first, the minor festivals were more fun?

In reality they had not really forgotten the important ones. During my second stay in the field, the headman of a maloca that I did not know well decided to hold a *pupurá*, and invited the people of the maloca in which I was living. Following the tradition, I was invited along with the people of the maloca in which I was living – I gave to our host a box of partridges to help him in amassing the necessary meat for the festival. At the time of the food distribution, much to my surprise, our host singled me out. Addressing me with the usual ritual formulas (which unfortunately I could not answer), he called me by the Indian name of *Parípatchimi*. He then gave me some food as if I had been a household by myself. This was extremely unusual, since unmarried men are not really recognized in the society. The name *Parípatchimi* was a kind of joke, but I have kept it since then. This is the name of a wild animal that can only be found far away in the forest, where even wild animals do not fear people. They live so far away that scarcely any human had ever seen one of them, and it was not clear (to me) whether they are real or mythical. Moreover the Yukuna told me that the *parípatchimi* is tall and strong (as I am taller than most of the Indians), but it is also clumsy, simple and a little moody! At that moment, I understood that my presence was affecting the Yukuna – though not as much as they were affecting me.

How should we interpret these facts? I show elsewhere that the Yukuna understand the Whites by means of their own exogamic differentiation (Jacopin 1984). So from the mythical point of view the Whites have been reduced to an extraordinary exogamic group. In order to introduce these new intruders into their system, they had to explain the creation of speech, for it is the most obvious exogamic difference (Jackson 1974). In other words before the appearance of the Whites exogamy was taken for granted, and the exogamic groups were a given. In order to account for the White's existence, the Yukuna had to rework the starting point of their "world", i.e., they had to revise the very beginnings of the mythology. For example they had to explain why animals did not speak. This showed that in spite of all the individual transactions that

the Whites have with the Indians, the Yukuna persist in considering the Whites as a group: for them they are more an odd *category* of people than a collectivity of separate *individuals* (traders, bosses, missionaries, etc.). Hence the popularity of the chontaduro festival. First, it re-enacts the set of social relations between malocas and exogamic groups, but then it also re-enacts the social relations indirectly involved in the mode of subsistence, at least the male aspect of it: hunting, fishing, monitoring a forest territory, etc. This ritual expresses and strengthens precisely those aspects of the way of life and the worldview that the Whites are threatening. In performing this festival the Yukuna are reaffirming and reinforcing their identity. In other words, from the empiricist point of view of White history, the Yukuna social system seems simply in the process of disintegration. However, from the point of view of Indian history, the Yukuna are responding in their own way to the Whites' threat. This misunderstanding is typical. The Whites, including anthropologists, are used to understanding small-scale societies in terms of what they are *not* (stateless, classless, illiterate, with "cold" history or even without history, or judgment, or logic, etc.). They tend to focus on what they see as native deficiencies. On the other hand, the Yukuna tend to see the Whites through the categories of their social system, i.e. through exogamic and household relationships. The Indians are equally fated to misunderstand the basic features of the White social system, in particular those related to the division of labor. Indeed, as one can infer from the Yukuna myth I just mentioned, their mythological system is literally unable to account for the differences between traders, policemen, missionaries, anthropologists, etc. For example some Yukuna asked me why the policemen (in charge of the Miriparana region) were so unfriendly and would visit the malocas "only to threaten the Indians", in contrast with the behaviour of the traders and missionaries. When one of the policeman took an Indian lover, her kin people – beside being angry – were "sorry for her".

This explains also why the Yukuna have a preference for the pineapple festival. I cannot remember a single argument during the pineapple festival which did not refer, or was not due, directly or indirectly to the presence of the Whites. For instance "a boss" paid unequally two "workers" (and brothers-in-law) who had worked in the same camp. Since the workers share almost everything (they help each other build the camp, clear their respective gathering paths, treat the "seringua", hunt, fish, cook, etc.), the worker who – for whatever reason – was paid less feels that the wage difference was unfair. (When the workers are still young and unmarried, the Yukuna actually avoid this kind of problem by having an older man (father, uncle) who can also hunt, fish, and supervise the daily life, staying at the camp site.) Another quarrel occurred when the Yukuna were obliged to choose some "communal workers" to work on the improvement of a "trocha" (trail) designed by the "corregidor" (agent of the Government). A major split happened another time after the missionary organized a ballot election to find a new "Capitán" (Indian community representative). Some Indians refused to vote be



cause they saw the elections as a missionary's interference in tribal matters. They did not see a difference between voting and electing a candidate: for them voting was already electing the missionary's favorite candidate. But they were very disappointed when the missionary's candidate was elected. At the same time the missionary who seriously thought he had been "as fair as possible" could not understand their anger either. The elected Capitán adopted a circumspect and passive attitude with the Indians, and a submissive bearing with the missionary. The missionary ended up feeling resentful towards the whole community. This example of reciprocal misunderstanding is characteristic. It explains why the chances of fights among Yukuna are constant and latent. Any disagreement can awaken old personal or family grudges. In fact conflicts arise regularly when the Whites' division of labor conflicts with the traditional Indian division of labor. The Yukuna are well-aware of it, and do not stop repeating: "The Whites are dividing us". Thus the pineapple festivals can be seen as an attempt to rely on the community to sort out personal problems – even though they may appear again at the first excuse.

In the same way we can interpret the festival of *pupurá* in which I was given my Indian name. As an anthropologist I was not really creating the same disturbance as the other Whites, but I was still causing trouble. Although most of them did not attend mass, the old men used to meet after mass Sunday morning near the mission house to discuss current community matters. For example they would clear up rumors or try to resolve quarrels, recruit people for reciprocal cooperative duties ("mingas"), test opinions on marriage issues, choose the workers (paid by the missionary) to repair the roof of the mission's dispensary, or decide who would accompany the anthropologist in his next trip to a remote maloca. So without my suspecting it, as I learned later, for weeks every Sunday the Yukuna discussed and guessed what anthropology was about. If I was not a trader, a rubber gatherer, a policeman, a priest, or an agent of the Government, what could I be? My appearance and my language did not sound even "Colombian" – Yukuna oppose "Indians" to "Columbians". I seemed really interested in knowing Indian food and habits, and in learning the language. I was drawing and writing down all that I could learn and observe. I even insisted on living in a maloca. Nor was I demanding anything, on the contrary, I was giving away gifts. Moreover, I was saying that I wanted to stay, live, and come back again. It was precisely because I was not full of contempt for the Indian way of life and because I was not directly affecting the traditional activities that I was more confusing than the other Whites. In short, I was not only disturbing the relationships between persons and groups, but I was a problem for the community as a whole. Given these conditions, the Sunday's discussions were insufficient, and holding a major festival, involving not only the relations between people and exogamic groups but also the more remote forces of the cosmography, was a sensible decision. Mawi, the Matapi Indian who took the initiative, was the son of a traditional leader; he should have been the Capitán, if the previous priest had not chosen

somebody who better suited his missionary purposes. In dealing with the disquieting risk of my participation in one of the major festivals, he was regaining some of his traditional authority. The organization of *pupurá* was a political act. It showed that, in spite of the Whites, Mawi was still a leader. In giving me a name he was demonstrating individualistic enterprise: he was taking it upon himself to change the egalitarian tradition, but without really breaking the rules.<sup>6</sup> For Yukuna names are a clan matter: every clan owns a stock of personal names which are genealogically transmitted. *Parípatchimi* was obviously an exception which sounded like a joke. It was a way to integrate me, the anthropologist, into the community, but as a foreigner (*inauké* = foreigner, enemy). Mawi invited the whole local community. The festival itself was a success, and I became less of a problem for the Yukuna.

The ritual of Yurupari is a different story. For more than two years, the Yukuna denied that such a rite ever existed. Yet I had discovered the existence of the eagle of Yurupari (*wakapéri*) in the mythology. At the end of the creation myth, it brings a deadly fire to the Yukuna people. The four creator heroes Kahipu-Lakeno, who, after having created the world for the Yukuna, are resting in heaven, come back to rescue the Indians. Kahipu-Lakeno learn from Yurupari itself that this one can be destroyed only by means of its own fire. So Kahipu-Lakeno get Yurupari's fire from his sister's vulva, and burn it. After more than two years of fieldwork I had completely lost hope of seeing the genuine Yurupari. And yet one day, during my last stay, I was stealthily given notice that the rite would be held again. At the date, without telling anybody, I went to the designated house. Although the preparation of the ritual was not conspicuous, it was quietly going on. Like the other boys who had already been there for a day, I dyed my entire body with genipa dye. At sunset, for the first time, we heard the sound of the trumpets, at first barely discernible from the usual forest noises. Then the trumpets came closer, and we were locked up in the maloca. We could hear the trumpets going around the maloca; we could even speak to them – by means of a piston one of the trumpet mimics the intonation of human voice. This ploy was repeated the next two nights, until eventually we could watch the trumpets and go through the whole ceremony and its aftermath: every morning the ritual apprenticeship in the forest, and coming back the gathering of food

<sup>6</sup> Individualistic recalls here Louis Dumont's theory of individualism vs. holism (L. Dumont 1983), and adds a new dimension to it. For this anecdote suggests that individualist initiatives emerge when holist rules become useless. From this point of view the development of Western individualism can be seen as a response to the breaking down of traditions due to the rapid development of industrial economy. So what Dumont calls "individualist ideology" should not be examined for itself only, but should be considered anthropologically in its social context. For example German authors like Herder and Fichte (L. Dumont: 115-131) appear as mere ideologists of the most active part of the German ruling class. Their "ideology" is more a reaction against what they perceive as the dangers brought by social change, than a set of "values and ideas shared by a society"; in this view the later or "second" German Romanticism is even more contradictory.

for the women (humari fruits, *Poraqueiba sericea*), the long fast, and finally the festival and the happy return to the community.

For weeks I wondered why the Yukuna had wanted me to undergo the Yurupari ceremonies. Why did they hold it just a few weeks before my departure? Such a choice could not have come from an individual alone; it required a large agreement. Actually the ritual should be performed every year, but at that time it had not been observed for years. In my "class" of initiates there was a boy of seven and a young man of eighteen. An old Matapi who knew well the traditions, had even told me: "Now because of the Whites the rite of Yurupari is over. It is not worth anything anymore!" When I asked my "godfather" why they had decided to show me the Yurupari, he just said: "You have been *with us* a long time, now you will be *like us*!"

At the time I did not pay much attention to this statement; I took it more as an ingenuous empiricist than as a seasoned anthropologist. I heard it as it sounded to me, with personal pride and as if it were an indication of my integration into the Yukuna community, and an indirect compliment on my successful fieldwork. Had I not gone through most of the apprenticeship? Had they not made sure I had "learned" the myths correctly? Didn't I "know" (*nuepika*)? Wasn't I ready for the Yurupari? Besides, everybody knew I was leaving and so by *initiating* me, in the true sense of the term, I imagined that the Yukuna were hoping that I would stay loyal to them *forever*. In spite of the distance and in spite of the fact that I would be "back with my people", I would protect and defend them – no matter what that meant or where I was going. For years, month after month I had watched them, and they had observed me. They had told me about their ancestors, their mythical heroes, their ritual symbols, and their magical spells.<sup>7</sup> Although I felt that they knew more about me than I knew about them, now my leaving was even more of a problem than my presence. It was no longer a concern for material resources, group affiliation, or personal interests as in the fruits festivals, nor was it a problem of "world" order and universal balance as in the festivals of *pupurá* and *wéra*. It was a question of life and death, a question about the very existence of the Yukuna themselves. But since Indian history is no longer merely mythical, even the best shaman cannot be sure he has the answer to the question of the continuation of the Yukuna society.

<sup>7</sup> Actually my inquiry looked more often like an *exchange* of information. As the Yukuna told me about their society, I had to speak about mine: about my ancestors, our "Fathers", our wars and violence, our politics, economics and religion. I had to explain "The Voice of America" or "Radio Havana Cuba" every time they picked them up on their radio.

<sup>8</sup> In the particular case of Yukuna Yurupari it is not very difficult to see that the generic relationship is between fire, death, life. However it is more difficult to see what the fourth term is (fire:death::life:?), for it can be water, (vegetal) salt, or even fat in shamanistic instances, or moon, "natural women", animals and plants, in others, etc. To say that they are transformations of some canonic relation (i.e. a code) does not help much to interpret them, for in reality their meaning depends on their practi-

cal context (Turner, n.d.). Actually Yukuna cosmic fire can also be considered as the wildest universal life, i.e. a life which is so untamed and a-social that it consumes itself almost instantaneously. Things in the universe last longer depending on their social form (some fish species live in schools, wild pigs live in herds (peccary, *Tayassu albirostris*), ants in ant-hills or in trees, etc.; in the view of the Yukuna even some winds are sexed). So fire is the immediate union of death and life, as symbolized by the hot vagina of Yurupari's sister. The Yurupari siblings are just the opposite of a society. The Yukuna oppose sociability to the Yurupari fire, i.e. kinship and rituals (incest prohibition, ritual exchanges, cosmical balance, etc.), but also the tamed fires of cooking and baking pottery. Animals are endowed with other forms of sociability, therefore their various forms, behaviors and ways of life.

But fieldwork goes on much longer after one has returned, and the Yurupari and its secret continued to puzzle me. My method of myth analysis (Jacopin 1981) confirmed what we already knew well about the symbolism of the ritual (S. Hugh-Jones 1979, C. Hugh-Jones 1979, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971, Jackson 1983). Yurupari's fire is equivalent to death – or rather to the irreversible passage from life to death. Yet because women give birth, they are able to reverse the irreversible. Similarly, by means of the Yurupari, men (in particular shamans) are able to make boys men born again. So the Yurupari is a ritual of inversion of the daily life; this is why, for example, Kahipu-Lakeno get their lethal fire from Yurupari's sister, a woman who gives birth to fire. At that point I could easily have slipped into a structural analysis of the Yukuna Yurupari and have come out with the usual batch of symbolic equivalences. Structuralist analysis, although very useful to identify the symbols at play (the categories of "concrete thought", Lévi-Strauss 1966), cannot really tell us how they work practically and concretely in particular instances: in myth, ritual, even in daily life – and consequently why they appear the way they appear.<sup>8</sup> It is as if one was given only the lexicon of an idiom, and would have to figure out alone how to understand or to speak it. Even though a lexicon is *absolutely* required, it is nevertheless insufficient. Instead of ascending even to a higher level of abstraction, from which I might see the Yurupari of neighboring societies, and build some sort of ontology, I chose to find out what was its role in the Yukuna social system.

Then the question of the Yurupari secrecy comes inevitably to mind. Nothing in its ideology dictates secrecy, and actually Yukuna women are well-informed about it. After I had seen and played the trumpets, the women did not stop teasing me about it, embarrassing me with all kinds of allusions – I was supposed to be absolutely silent about it. Like most secrets, the intent of initiation secrecy is to be disclosed, but in such a manner that it will have a social impact (Bellman 1984). As it has been often pointed out, the aim of Yurupari secrecy is to transform sex difference into social discrimination to make gender the fundamental feature of the social system. So Yukuna women are threatened with death if they come into contact with the trumpets, or if they simply peek at them – this is also the case of the ritual crowns' feathers when they are not worn by the men. They will die of vaginal bleeding.



Such "exclusion" however does not mean that women are absent from the ritual, as empiricists might conclude. On one hand they are constantly around, either in the maloca when the trumpets play around it, or outside when the trumpets "dance" in it. For women are physically needed to enforce the interdict they are victim of. And on the other hand, for all they are proscribed from the Yurupari ceremonial, women are its main subject matter. If one defines ritual as a symbolic manipulation, the most crucial elements are not so much the symbols with which ritual operates (i.e. trumpets, beeswax smoke, etc., S. Hugh-Jones 1979), but indeed the very "reality" which is manipulated.<sup>9</sup> In this case gender. The sense of ritual does not lie in itself, as one might perceive it, but actually in its relationship with the reality to which it refers.

At that point I saw the naïveté of my pride. By undergoing the Yurupari, I had become a party to the men's secret. To the extent that I was integrated into the Yukuna society, I was on their side. Even more as *anthropologist* than as man, by trying to stay neutral I had inevitably and unwittingly followed the male rules.<sup>10</sup> By carefully observing the precepts, customs, and ceremonials, I had lived within the frame of their dominantly male worldview. For example, a foreigner, I had stopped myself from courting Indian women, and consequently, almost all my relationships with the women were through their husbands, fathers or brothers. I had also taken away men from their household obligations, when they were helping me to transcribe myths or to guide me through the forest. It was understandable therefore that I would eventually participate in the male initiation. But then what had been the basis for the men's reluctance to let me in on their secret?

In the myth, the secret of Yurupari is that Kahipu-Lakeno get the lethal fire from Yurupari's sister. That is, Yurupari is betrayed by his own sister. This mythical situation is characterized, on the one hand by the presence of the (cosmic) fire, and on the other hand by the use of the kinship term "sister", which obviously recalls the kinship system. The episode expresses two essential elements of the Yukuna worldview. Actually it is an excellent example of how the Yukuna "ideology", and *myth in general* work. The myth does not describe, it only alludes. Nor does it explain anything. It contents itself with bringing together a set of various elements, which from *that* fact, become symbolic. In this case: women, fire, vagina, being a sister. By putting these symbols together and organizing them in "story" which tends toward something, the mythical speech introduces a causality, or bet-

ter, a teleological order. Here the purpose of gathering all the elements I just mentioned, is to cause death. In this case, because the myth of Kahipu-Lakeno is the Creation myth, that is, *the first* (in "the mythic times", *i'imaká*) of the Yukuna mythological cycle, this death is also the first death ever. Therefore, it represents the very possibility of death, or more precisely, the beginning of the Yukuna existence of death. For the Yukuna, this *explains* the actual reality of death. So myth just *justifies* the existence of "reality", that is the reality which has been given by the mythical heroes to the Indians.

In the case of the myth of Kahipu-Lakeno, the presence of the fire evokes the potential danger that women present for Yukuna society – i.e. for men. There is always the possibility that the woman's vagina will become hot. In other words, women's sexual drive is seen as wild and "natural", particularly, according to the Yukuna, the sexual drive of older women.<sup>11</sup> Their sexual drive does not really take into consideration life in society. This is why women are *not* quite responsible for incest, yet why they more or less unwillingly call it forth. This justifies men having to take responsibility for the society and especially, for women. At the same time, married women also constitute a threat for society because they must maintain two contradictory allegiances: on one side, to their husband, children and in-laws, and on the other side, to their father, brothers, and consanguinal relatives, with whom women retain ties even though they live in their husband's (father's) house. So, because of their "pivotal position" (Jackson 1983: 146), women are seen as a cause of split in the community (Goldman 1979: 143-150; Århem 1981: 205-206; Jackson 1983: 145-146, 185, 233). Both of these aspects deny the reproductive power of women, which is consistent with the Yukuna theory of procreation: the real procreators are the men; the role of women consists only in nurturing the foetus in their womb. This whole view legitimizes women subordination.

However, in order to understand its dynamic, we should put this worldview back in its social context, for it marks the very contradiction of the Yukuna mode of subsistence. In a society without a complex division of labor, the foundation of the social structure lies in the exchange of domestic goods in the household. Men's work (hunting, fishing, basketry, etc.) is clearly separated from women's work (cultivation, cooking, pottery, etc.); their tasks are as differentiated as gender is clearly defined (Sahlins 1972, Godelier 1982). In other words, husband and wife are autonomous with regard to one another.

<sup>9</sup> Ritual is by nature paradoxical. Apparently it is made of symbols which are more or less arbitrary, and at the same time ritual is by definition rooted in the physical or metaphysical "reality" that it is supposed to affect. Such "reality" does not even have to be material, true or real. Suffice it that the believers agree among themselves about it – this is why the "reality" is cultural.

<sup>10</sup> I say anthropologist, because in small-scale societies, the anthropological inquiry is more likely to call on the men than the women. From this point of view the beginnings of fieldwork in a patriarchal society might even be more difficult for a single woman than the situa-

tion I described earlier. The possibility of an alternative feminist anthropology does not depend only on the anthropologist's will.

<sup>11</sup> My expression "according to the Yukuna" seems to indicate that I confuse men's with women's world views in the matter of female sexual drive. Although I am completely convinced that the male and female understandings of women's sexuality differ, I also must accept the fact that women often make theirs the male expression of Yukuna worldview. In other words, I am suggesting that the *meaning* rather than the expression of myths and worldviews is different for men and women.

er. For example, women's gardens are considered their private domain from which men are banned, e.g. these are places where they invite their lovers. When they cross the clearings, men must follow the paths. Yet men must not only deal with intradomestic exchanges. They are also involved in extradomestic transactions, that is, precisely, in activities to which the fruits and cosmic festivals, involving other exogamic groups, refer. Men have to take into consideration these two independent social dimensions.<sup>12</sup> They are *pivotal*, but in a different sense than women: they have to articulate the "private" sphere of the household with the "public" domain of the relationships between malocas. Then, men's supremacy is a consequence of the structure of the mode of production, for when these two kinds of order are in conflict, men tend to blame their wives, i.e. "women".<sup>13</sup> Thus the very autonomy of women is in contradiction with men's supremacy. Men are under the impression that they have to trust the untrustworthy women. This explains precisely why the Yukuna (men) were so reluctant to make me a party to their secret. Just as a shaman fasts so that the curing process which takes place in his body will not be upset, the Yukuna were trying to prevent my presence from affecting their society. They decided at last that it was preferable to assimilate me. The initiation's purpose was to integrate me at the most fundamental level of their social organization.

Besides revealing the synchronized mechanisms of the Yukuna social structure, my role in the ritual system had also changed it forever. In the last months of my stay they made five pairs of ritual drums ("maguare", *kumú*), which had not been made for more than twenty years. They also made other ritual clubs ("makana", *wakapána*) and other ritual rattle spears ("lansa", *kahíla*). They decided to build new traditional malocas, and I heard that they continue to hold a Yuruparí ritual every year. In other words, my *historical* presence introduced a new dimension to the dialectical interactions of the Yukuna social system. It transformed community interactions between exogamic groups, cosmic interactions with the environment as a whole (as described in the mythic cosmography), and finally domestic interactions in the households. In the

experimental setting of my fieldwork, I had focused on myth and ritual and the instrument of my participant observation had revealed those three kinds of 'total' social phenomena ("faits sociaux totaux", Mauss [1923]: 76, emphasis Mauss) – yet the possibility remains open that a different observer or interpreter might understand something else. Although the three sorts of Yukuna rituals were all symbolic manipulations, they had to be differentiated; they addressed different aspects of the social organization. At the same time, the very fact that this "experiment" constitutes also my *personal* experience literally changed my mind: my observation of Yukuna myth and ritual brought me to a new understanding of the social function of ritual. The realization that the Yukuna use their rituals to reinforce their social system as a whole suggests that symbolic manifestations are more than mere "superstructures". At least to continue to separate the study of kinship and social organization from the study of myth and ritual is not advisable. In fact even in our complex and modern industrial societies, ritual plays a role in social change (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). It is even deliberately developed or reactivated, as indicated by the saga and the weddings of the British royal family (Cannadine 1986, Pearson 1986). But these questions already reflect other preoccupations, i.e. the dialectics of comparison. For although I have returned to my own society and much time has passed, may I say, dear Reader, that I still feel I am a Yukuna "foreigner" (*inauké*).

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<sup>12</sup> Shamans and the headmen of malocas tend to form still another category of people. They have to deal not only with the "private" and "public" dimensions of social life, but also with the relationship that people have with the "supernatural" sphere, and with the other levels of the cosmography.

<sup>13</sup> The expression «women» refers both to women from the same exogamic group, and from allied exogamic groups. For if it seems that women from other exogamic groups bring trouble, Yukuna men are well aware that marriage and exogamy are the real problem. From this point of view all women are worrisome.

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