

# **SITUATING GENDER IN EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGIES**

**Edited by**

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*Front Cover Illustration*

Gold foil from Rogaland in western Norway showing a man and a woman,  
often interpreted as the Nordic Vanir god Freyr and his wife Gerd  
from the family of Giants. 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

(Photo: Svein Skare. © Bergen Museum, University of Bergen, Norway.)

*Back Cover Illustration*

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# Gender, Individualization, and Affine/Consanguineal Relationships in “Egalitarian Societies”: The Awá-Guajá Case

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Seeing other cultures through the conceptual structures of our own is a basic problem encountered when dealing with gender issues in societies temporally or spatially remote from ours. Even though the issues involved in equating the concept of gender with its particular incarnation in a given social and historical context have not gone unnoticed by many scholars, gender is nevertheless regarded as “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (SCOTT 1986, 1067). The theoretical definition of the concept of “gender” is not problematic when a study refers to societies characterized by task specialization or power institutions. In these cases, gender always implies another kind of power relationship which crosscuts all the rest. But its precise meaning is much more problematic when it refers to so-called “egalitarian societies” (FRIED 1967).

Two positions characterise research in hunter-gatherer societies: some scholars defend the existence of “truly egalitarian” societies (e.g. BEGLER 1978; FLANAGAN 1989; KENT 1993; LEACOCK 1992; LEE 1982; RIVAL 2005, 2007; ZENT 2006). Others, however (ORTNER 1996; ROGERS 1975; SANDAY 1981), consider that men have *always* had a “greater prestige and/or status, whether or not they exert dominance over women and whether or not women have a great deal of official or unofficial power” (ORTNER 1996, 141). According to this last position, it is necessary to differentiate *prestige* from *power*: “one must always look at *both* the cultural ideology of ‘prestige’ and the on-the-ground practices of ‘power’” to understand gender relations in groups under study (ORTNER 1996, 172).

In another work (HERNANDO *et al.* forthcoming), my team<sup>1</sup> and I have analyzed the relationship that defines men and women of the Awá (also known as Guajá) group, living in the Amazonian forest of Maranhão, Brazil. We carried out an anthropological and ethno-archaeological project between December 2005

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<sup>1</sup> The permanent research team was composed of Gustavo Politis, Alfredo González Ruibal, and Elizabeth Beserra Coelho. In addition, a Brazilian linguist, Antonio Silva Santana, and a Brazilian biologist, Maximiliano Lincoln Soares Siqueira, contributed in very significant ways to the project.

and May 2009 in Juriti, one of the four indigenous outposts where Awá-Guajá people live under the protection of the FUNAI (*Fundação Nacional do Índio*) government agency. Only 40 Awá-Guajá people lived in Juriti in 2007–2008. Two researchers were in the outpost simultaneously, in campaigns of four weeks to cover the dry and the wet seasons. One researcher registered the activities and dynamics occurring inside the outpost and the second one accompanied the Awá in their hunting and “logistic trips” – in Lewis BINFORD’S (1980) terminology.

Although in everyday life no domination of men over women can be detected, there is some sort of power differential on the symbolic plane, that is, of *prestige*. Pursuing that line of enquiry, I explore one very specific issue for understanding relationships between Awá-Guajá men and women, the association of men with affinal relations and women with consanguineal ones, which has recently been defended as the primary cause of the differentiation between men and women in “egalitarian societies” (DESCOLA 2001; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001).

To gain a better comprehension of the final argument, I will focus first on the issue of *power* and its relation to *individualization* in the process of the construction of personhood and identity (including gender identity). I analyze the recent trend which associates men with affinal relationships and women with consanguineal ones. The conclusion summarises the “steps” of the article to make a final comment on the implications of uncritically accepting such an association as a “natural” one.

### Individualization and the concept of gender

Any approach to gender entails dealing with men’s and women’s different modes of self-perception, their different outlook on the world, and men’s and women’s different degrees of individualization.

According to Norbert ELIAS (1991, 52) what we call “power” is “... a somewhat rigid and undifferentiated expression ... for an [individual’s] especially large social opportunity to influence the self-regulation and the fate of other people”. Exerting power involves having clear objectives as well as the psychic ability to place one’s own wishes and desires above those of others. Awareness of one’s particular goals and objectives requires in turn a degree of individualization. Subordinating other people’s wishes to our own likewise involves a certain sense of our own individuality, as it entails objectifying others, “reifying” them, regarding them as objects rather than subjects. In other words: power is inextricably linked to individuality (LYKES 1985), emotional

detachment, and the rationalization and objectification of the world. Therefore, the capacity of sustaining power is only attainable by those who have developed a certain degree of individualization.

Although some scholars regard individuality as a universal feature of all human beings (COHEN 1994; EWING 1990; KNAPP – MESKELL 1997; KNAPP – VAN DOMMELEN 2008; MACHIN 2009; MOORE 2000; SAMPSON 1988; SÖKEFELD 1999), we agree with those (e.g. ELIAS 1991; 2000; GIDDENS 1991; MORRIS 1987; THOMAS 2004) who believe it is a form of personal identity resulting from the gradual historical development of socio-economic conditions of functional division and work specialization (HERNANDO 2002; 2008).

The subject's detachment from the surrounding world is a key factor in the process of individualization. In so-called "egalitarian societies" people feel themselves enmeshed in a complex network of "human" relationships comprising human beings as well as animals, plants, and any other significant section of reality (BIRD-DAVID 1999; DESCOLA 2001, 108; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 1996, 2001). It is a true "symbolic ecology" (DESCOLA 1999, 82), in which people endow every living object they depend upon with a human spirit and human behaviour. This is what we call myth: an experience of the world as a network of human-like inter-relationships where humans themselves have no priority, given the lack of abstract or scientific models capable of accounting for natural phenomena. With the development of specialised technology, phenomena gradually become explainable in terms of recurring, mechanical patterns, and they cease to be perceived as human-like; they become predictable and therefore amenable to human control. It follows that growing knowledge about the mechanical dynamics of the world and power over reality brings about huge changes in terms of personal identity. When people can account for the mechanical causes and dynamics of natural phenomena, they no longer see nature as human-like, and thereby their personal connection with it is lost. Increasing power means increasing emotional isolation, which contributes to the individualization of the self. As ELIAS (1991, 138–139) pointed out, "control of nature, social control, and self-control form a kind of 'chain ring'".

Historically, as social positions became increasingly differentiated, the men (for they were mostly males) occupying them began to feel more and more different from one another – indeed their different functions diversified their everyday lives and established the bases for quite different power positions – and started to experience that process of growing emotional detachment of the world. Besides, in an increasingly complex society (in socio-economic, not cultural

terms), men in specialised positions were forced into dealings with people they had no emotional connection with, and in the process they unconsciously learned to modulate their emotional self-expression to avoid social conflict (ELIAS 1987; 1991; 2000). As (male) human identity became more and more defined by this dynamic, the emotions whose outward flow had been restrained became increasingly perceived as the inner core constituting the “self” in a process that culminated in the 17th century, when “person” became equated with “individual” (ELIAS 1991, 161; MORRIS 1987), understood as “a bounded, unique, distinctive being, contrastive both against other beings and against a social and natural background” (GEERTZ 1984, 126).

Male and female selves, however, did not develop in the same fashion. In Western societies specialised positions were usually occupied by men and, as a consequence, the process of personal self-differentiation was almost exclusively a male affair. By contrast, most women’s selves remained relational; that is, women’s perception of their own selves was not autonomously defined but rather based on a network of interpersonal relationships (being someone’s mother, daughter, wife, etc.). In other contexts this form of selfhood has been termed “dividual identity” by some scholars (BIRD-DAVID 1999; FOWLER 2005; LIPUMA 2000; STRATHERN 1988; TAYLOR 2001, 49; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001, 33). *Gender*, therefore, is a concept intrinsically linked to differences in the degree of individualization and therefore to a different capacity of power among men and women.

The important point is that in societies without functional divisions or work specialisation, that is, in so-called “egalitarian” hunter-gatherer societies, *both* male and female selves are basically relational: *both* men and women perceive their selves in terms of kinship and group relationships, as part of a broader interpersonal set where their real identity truly lies. The feeling of “belonging” – of being only a small part of the group – prevents anyone from feeling “individualized” or isolated as an existing being. Then, if we associate *power* with *individualization*, does this mean that there are not any power implications in the relationship between men and women of these societies? And if so, should we still speak of different *genders* in these cases?

There is no lack of gender studies on hunter-gatherer or hunter-horticulturalist societies from a variety of locations (BEGLER 1978; FLANAGAN 1989; HAWKES 2000; KENT 1993; LEACOCK 1992; LEE 1982), although the South American Lowlands (according to BELLIER 1993 and DESCOLA 2001, 92) remain relatively under-researched in this respect. Until recent times the applicability of the category

of gender to social analysis in this field remained unquestioned (BELLIER 1993; FORLINE 1995; MACCALLUM 1990; RIVAL 2005, 2007; SEYMOUR-SMITH 1991; SILVA 2001), with discussions revolving around the egalitarian or hierarchical nature of gender relationships. In fact, this is the latest version of a rather old debate in which scholars such as Marshall SAHLINS (1958) and Morton FRIED (1967) viewed gender as universally implicated in power relationships, while others (BEGLER 1978; FLANAGAN 1989; KENT 1993; LEACOCK 1992; LEE 1982; ZENT 2006) believed there were instances of “truly egalitarian” situations. Most researchers interested in these societies agree that “complementarity” defines the relationship between men and women (RIVAL 2007; SANDAY 1981; TURNER 1979), without this fact meaning necessarily female subordination to men. Hence some of them rather use such terms as “sexual symmetry” and “asymmetry” (SANDAY 1981, 135) to refer to these societies. In our view, the common perception of hunter-gatherer societies as “egalitarian” is generally borne out by their socioeconomic organization but not by their symbolic or cognitive structures, where careful analysis usually reveals prominence accorded to the masculine (ORTNER 1996). Recent research on Amazonian hunter-gatherers/horticulturalists has opened new lines of inquiry that might help us describe this phenomenon more properly.

### Affinity and consanguinity: inside and outside

In the last twenty years, a number of researchers working with different groups in the South American Lowlands have highlighted the fact that relationships established by women tend to be consanguineal and those established by males affinal (FAUSTO – VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 1993; GOW 1989; MACCALLUM 1990; SEYMOUR-SMITH 1991; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 1986, 190–191). In other words, men in those groups seem much more inclined to interact with the “others”, the different, the alien, while women tend to stick to well-known things and people. This gendering of consanguine/affine relationships was initially hypothesised for groups of hunter-horticulturalists (DESCOLA 2001; SEYMOUR-SMITH 1991; SILVA 2001; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 1986), but in recent years its further applicability to hunter-gatherer societies (FAUSTO 1999; RIVAL 2005; VILAÇA 2002) has been tested.

In both types of societies a distinction is usually made between men and women in emotional terms: men – like the Achuar hunter-horticulturalists – are “naturally prone to anger” (DESCOLA 2001, 99; see also MACCALLUM 1990 on the Cashinahua) or even to “fits of rage” – like the Huaorani hunter-gatherers

studied by Laura RIVAL (2005, 295). Rage, *pīi*, may even lead Huaorani men to kill their own kin, unless restrained by friends and family until the fit subsides and they are able to return to a more sociable state. This never happens to women, who have access to most social activities “except the exercise of violence in warfare” among the Achuar (DESCOLA 2001, 100) or “shamanism and warfare” among the Araweté (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 1986, 190). In general, women are barred from “life-taking” activities in these societies (DESCOLA 2001; RIVAL 2005, 304; 2007; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 1986). This difference is ostensibly clear even in contexts in which gender relations have been defined as “truly egalitarian” (such as among the Huaorani studied by RIVAL 2007). It seems then that expressions of anger and aggression are much more tolerated in males than in females, which might partly account for the fact that it is men who are in charge of dealing with the “outside”: the realm of otherness, conflict, and life-taking, while women are in charge of the “inside”: the world of harmony, accord, and life-giving (MACCALLUM 1990, 417; RIVAL 2005, 304). Cecilia MACCALLUM (1990, 417) summarizes the difference by explaining that among the Cashinahua “women are linked to the ‘inside’, the world of kinship and human sociality”, reproducing consanguinity relations, while “men are linked to the ‘outside’ and the world of purely fictive affinity and potential enmity, the antithesis of human sociality. Theirs are powers of destruction, separation, transferral”.

Although some dissenting voices claim that “the time is ripe for anthropologists to go beyond their emphasis on affinity as the schema of articulation between outside and inside or as the idiom of mediation between the sphere of kinship and wider levels of sociality” (FAUSTO 1999, 937), some of the most famous representatives of French and Brazilian Structuralism (DESCOLA 2001; TAYLOR 2001; VILAÇA 2002; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001), insist on the priority of kinship, within which gender would be subsumed as a minor category (see COLLIER – YANAGISAKO 1987 on gender/kinship). This might explain, in turn, the paucity of gender studies on Amazonian societies according to Philippe DESCOLA (2001, 93–94), who believes that gender distinctions are not relevant in the Amazon region because “sex roles acquire their full justification and meaning in relation to the type of behaviour proceeding from the preferential assignment of each sex to a specific kinship category” (DESCOLA 2001, 101). In Descola’s view, hunting and warfare are male activities not because men are stronger or braver than women but because such activities engage metaphorical affines and would therefore be seen as tasks to be assigned precisely to those in charge of handling relationships with affines in general. DESCOLA (2001, 101) believes that “gender contrasts are



subsumed under this elementary opposition in such a way that women are first and foremost defined as signifiers and operators of consanguine links, while men are perceived as signifiers and operators of affinal links”.

Affinity, which by definition involves confrontation with alterity, necessarily entails awareness of a subjective “I/Not I” delimitation which is obviously not at play in consanguinity, where the bonds with others subsume and constitute the self. If the correlation between masculinity and affinity on the one hand, and consanguinity and femininity on the other, does indeed prevail among Amazonian societies, we might then conclude that, even before the development of functional divisions and work specialization allows for the full unfolding of such features, male selves are more structurally consistent with power and individuality than female selves.

As we have already seen, the individualization of the self is the cognitive counterpart of a process of increasing technological mastery over nature (ELIAS 1991, 138–139); it is the form of self-perception resulting from the emotional detachment that accompanies the subject’s separation from the non-human, which can no longer be seen in terms of personal bonds. By contrast, wherever technological control is absent or minimal, people live in a universe where “[no] marked ontological distinctions between humans on the one hand and most species of plants and animals on the other” are made (DESCOLA 2001, 108), and consequently they establish personal bonds with every significant object and living thing around them.

In contexts characterised by lack of technological control over their environment, humans need the feeling of belonging, protection, and strength that only group bonds can afford in the face of overpowering, unexplainable natural forces. Individualization is unthinkable in such groups; on the contrary, identification with the group and perception of the self as inextricably constituted by the group are in fact essential mechanisms for survival (HERNANDO 2002). However, if the hypothesis of the gendered correlation affinity/masculinity vs. consanguinity/femininity is confirmed, then we might state that in male selves, identity is nevertheless constructed in ways that favour the eventual development of individualization to a much greater extent than in female ones.

Before going any further into all these issues, we shall now turn to the Awá to see whether these gender distinctions related to affinity and consanguinity are present in their society.

## Affinity/consanguinity among the Awá-Guajá (Maranhão, Brasil)

The Awá are a small indigenous group of around 300 individuals living in the rainforests of the state of Maranhão (Brazil). Before being contacted in 1973, they were pure hunter-gatherers. They moved about the forest in small bands comprising two or three nuclear families. From the mid-1970s onwards, however, they have suffered the encroachment of mainstream Brazilian society into their ancestral lands (TREECE 1987). Brazil's National Indian Agency (FUNAI) decided to relocate them to permanent villages inside reservations to save them from extermination and introduced important changes in their lifestyle; the most dramatic were agricultural practices (COELHO *et al.* 2009; GÓMES – MEIRELLES 2002, 1; O'DWYER 2002).

The reasons why this process has had a huge impact in terms of gender relations include, first of all, that FUNAI employees are all male, with a rather basic level of education and no specialized training or knowledge of anthropology. As pointed out elsewhere, inter-ethnic contact has generally resulted in women losing influence within their own groups (BEGLER 1978, 576–577; BROWN 1970; BUENAVENTURA-POSSO – BROWN 1980; ETIENNE – LEACOCK 1980; FLANAGAN 1989, 259; FORLINE 1995, 61–62; LEACOCK – LEE 1982; SEYMOUR-SMITH 1991, 639, 644). Representatives of the modern/Western world (reservation guards, priests, ethnologists, linguists, etc.) tend to be mostly males who only regard other males as valid interlocutors, thereby establishing or intensifying differences between men and women which did not exist previously or at least not to that degree. Replicating this type of dynamic, the FUNAI employees at Juriti Post have established a paternalistic and rather unequal relationship with the Awá (see also FORLINE 1997, 195). They always choose males as representatives for the whole group, ignoring certain women who are held in high esteem within the group. All this means that an increasingly visible patriarchal bias in current relationships, nonexistent before first contact, must now be factored into the analysis of Awá society.

Secondly – although this was not meant to happen – the Awá have lost mobility, for two reasons: first, loggers are illegally invading their territory. Secondly, the FUNAI employees urge the Awá to live as near the post as possible, in order to protect them more easily. The transformation of their traditional mobility patterns has had important effects on their traditional activities as well as on the economic and social positions of men and women within the group.

Curiously enough, however, the reduction of mobility has had a higher impact on the disappearance of traditional female tasks than on male tasks such as hunting. The reasons for this are again twofold. First, hunting is the activity around which traditional life unfolds. Losing hunting would mean a huge upheaval in the most profound basis of their culture. Male activities resist transformation while female activities vanish, and this in turn reinforces men's role in the new, changing conditions. Secondly, traditional female activities revolved mainly around collecting vegetables employed not only as food but also as materials for manufacturing hammocks, skirts, and strips for carrying babies. The need for such activities was eliminated when FUNAI employees started providing the Awá with industrially produced clothes and fabrics, and Awá men were persuaded to cultivate manioc and rice in place of their traditional source of carbohydrates, the *babassu* palm fruits (*Orbignya/Attalea speciosa*); since then, Awá women have lost almost all their economic functions inside the group, except for the raising of children.

Thus, contact with the modern/Western world reinforces gender differences among the Awá, although it seems that a gender hierarchy in the symbolic realm always existed (HERNANDO *et al.* forthcoming). Nevertheless, this "hierarchy" does not have any consequence for daily life, in which relationships still seem egalitarian. The range of variation is quite wide in both sexes, and it is striking how much each person's particularity is respected by others. Each helps the group according to her or his capabilities – see also RIVAL (2002, 102) on the Huaorani from Ecuador. If they want to avoid responsibilities, they may, but they will then have to carry out the heaviest and dullest tasks – which they will do without a single complaint. No particular abilities or personal characteristics give anyone power over others because all know that belonging to the group – and the bond with others – is key to everyone's survival (HERNANDO 2002).

However, as we have related, the Awá-Guajá seem to demonstrate a pre-eminence of the "masculine" sphere on the symbolic level. And this pre-eminence affects the point tackled in this text, since there seems to exist the same associative scheme as in other groups from the Amazon region mentioned above. All dealings with the "outside world", where "potential affines" – in Eduardo VIVEIROS DE CASTRO'S (1993) term – dwell, belong to the masculine sphere, while the female realm encompasses the "inside world" of supporting bonds and familiar, domestic, unremarkable, well-known beings and things. Loretta CORMIER (2003a, 70–74) has already dealt with this issue in relation to the Awá-Guajá kinship system. Let us pay specific attention now to those

behaviours exemplifying the nexus between affinity/consanguinity and gender categories:

1. It is Awá men who act as interlocutors with the modern/Western world on behalf of the whole group. A certain confluence of masculinities clouding the whole issue may be at play since FUNAI representatives, owing to their own patriarchal mentality, always address Awá men rather than women. But for the Awá it seems “natural” that a man, not a woman, should represent the whole group at decision-making gatherings affecting all of the Awá villages, which FUNAI usually stage in locations outside the posts.

2. Awá men confront the loggers invading their lands every year in the dry season (GONZÁLEZ RUIBAL – HERNANDO 2010).

3. Women and children may sometimes accompany the men in hunting sorties. Women may exceptionally hunt in groups with the help of dogs, but only men go hunting solo, usually for the most dangerous animals.

4. Only men can interact with the spirit world (*iwa*). Through the *karawára* ritual – from which women are prohibited – Awá men contact their dead ancestors. Women “are said to be, by their nature, unable to reach the *iwa* or their inhabitants through ritual”; in order to contact their own ancestors, women must ask their husbands or relatives to transmit their messages and act as emissaries (CORMIER 2003b, 136). Interactions with alterity are always the responsibility of males, to a greater extent the more removed the “potential affine” may be.

5. According to CORMIER (2003b, 136), men’s dreams are interpreted as part of their *hatikwayta*’s flight to the *iwa* spirit-world, while women’s dreams are dismissed as passive experiences. The *hatikwayta* may be seen as “a manifestation of both the spiritual self and the remembered images of others” (CORMIER 2003b, 128); it is a multiplicity formed by the subject’s relational memories of himself and other members of the group. That is why *hatikwayta* do not exist outside memory and have no fixed objective form, but each person “sees” different images of the same (CORMIER 2003b). While men’s dreams are thought to show what occurs during the *hatikwayta*’s flight to *iwa*, as seen in the men’s own experience, women’s dreams by contrast are believed to result from possession by a deity or to show what they see through the eyes of one of their *iwa hatikwayta* alter egos (CORMIER 2003b, 136). Women are not deemed capable of dealing directly with alterity by themselves.

6. Although intra-group violence is extremely rare, we heard reports about some exceptional cases of gender violence in the four outposts where the Awá-Guajá live, always involving a man who beat or even killed his wife. As in other

societies in the Amazon region, a fit of rage may turn men into murderers of their own family. In all such cases, the man is ostracised by the group and thought to be insane. At Jurití Post, for example, the manager reported to us the case of Takanĩhĩ Xa'a, who apparently beat his pregnant wife into miscarriage because the baby was by another man. Moreover, the mistreater also threatened FUNAI officials at Awá Post with a knife and was considered antisocial by everyone (CORMIER 2003a, 69). Although Louis Carlos FORLINE (*pers.com.* 19 March 2009) attributes these cases to the cultural stress of interethnic contact in a reservation, these forms of aggression and intra-group violence are generally conceivable in men but not in women.

7. Contact with the modern nation-state has resulted in Awá women gradually losing their economic functions. Agriculture – which is simultaneously a cause and an effect of the reduction of mobility – is replacing gathering, a traditional female activity. By teaching agricultural techniques only to men, FUNAI employees are further reinforcing inequality between men's and women's workload and economic contributions, which are becoming completely unbalanced. Men deal with the new, imported techniques, which are quite alien to the Awá's traditional modes of interaction with the animals and plants in their environment. In sharp contrast with the excitement involved in hunting sorties (well documented by POLITIS 2007 for the Nukak, RIVAL 2002 for the Huaorani, and ZENT 2006 for the Hotĩ), for the Awá agriculture is “work”: a set of chores to be carried out against one's will and with great effort. Excluded from the dynamics of the new, Awá women are relegated to a domestic, “inside” context void of surprises and change. This shows physically in a less dynamic or active disposition, with less mobility and a routine filled by child-caring, alone or in the company of other women.

8. Perhaps as a compensation for the disappearance of the gathering activities to which they formerly contributed and also as a way of contributing “productively” to the group in a situation of depopulation, women's maternal role is reinforced through the adoption of pets, especially monkeys – to the point that CORMIER (2003a) gave the title *Kinship with monkeys* to her study on the Awá-Guajá. As DESCOLA (2001, 111) points out, “while game animals are affinal others ... pets are consanguinealized when they are brought into the domestic sphere”. CORMIER (2003c, 92) agrees and adds that “the pet-keeper/wild pet relationship is linked more closely to the mother/child relationship than to the father/adopted child relationship” since “women are believed to have a special, natural relationship with pets, which men lack”. In fact, for the Awá-Guajá, animals “‘desire’ women while they ‘fear’ men” (CORMIER 2003c, 92).

Motherhood and childcare play a central role in the lives of Awá women. They seldom separate from their infant children – whom they breastfeed until the age of two or three. They hold and carry the children around all the time, propped against their hips and wrapped in the vegetable-fabric band called *chirú*, even when they have to walk long distances to accompany men in their hunting trips. Furthermore, the Awá also have a very close relationship with the offspring of many of the animal species they hunt – which are “adopted” and treated with great care by the whole group. As is common among many other groups (FAUSTO 1999; KOZÁK *et al.* 1979, 423; ZENT 2006, 13–14), the Awá adopt many different animals as pets, including agouti (*Dasyprocta sp.*), squirrels (*Sciurus aestuans*), and coati (*Nasua nasua*). But they mostly prefer monkeys, from species such as *Alouatta belzebul* (howler monkey), *Saimiri sciureus* (squirrel monkey), or some of the types of capuchin monkey (*Cebus apella*, *Cebus kaapori*, or *Cebus olivaceus*), although any of the species of monkeys identified in the area can also be adopted (CORMIER 2006). Breastfeeding women will feed baby monkeys as their own children. If the women are too old or simply not breastfeeding, then they chew food into small pieces and feed it to the baby monkeys from their own mouths. They do all this not only with baby monkeys but also with squirrels and coatis, and even feed birds from their own mouths.

9. Endogamy among Awá groups is increasing to a worrying degree. Although the Awá are distributed in four indigenous posts, interactions between them are scarce. Only Awá Post and Tiracambú Post, separated by 14 km (as the crow flies), are really connected. The latter was in fact set up in 1994 to relieve demographic pressure at the former, established in 1983 and now harbouring more than a hundred people. Guajá Post and Jurití Post, however, are virtually disconnected from each other and the other posts, not only because of their distance from Awá Post (39.2 km from Jurití Post; 71.3 km from Guajá), but because indigenous lands, which in theory should be interconnected, have been deforested by invading loggers and farmers, rendering unimpeded transit and contact through hunting grounds impossible.

Jurití was established in 1989 to resettle two family groups known to roam the area. Another small group of four people was contacted at Arroyo Seco in 1998: Kamará, with his wife and two children (GÓMES – MIREILLES 2002). Three families live now at Jurití, which numbers 40 people in total, and isolation is forcing them into inter-marriage.

This means that consanguinity is increasing where real affinal relationships should in principle have prevailed. Under the circumstances, women’s social and

perceptive sphere is literally being defined by consanguinity: without gathering tasks to carry out – except for the occasions when they accompany the men in their hunting sorties or go looking for honey – the women remain mostly inactive, in their hammocks, chatting the time away with their relatives or looking after the children. Their interactions are less and less defined by contact with affines or alterity. Just as the alien, the different, and the unknown become increasingly integrated into male experience, women's horizon of interactions is absorbed by sameness, the familiar, and the world of well-known things.

10. As is the case among other groups from the Amazon region (see TAYLOR 2001, 50 on the Jívaro, for instance), Awá women use consanguineal terms to refer to affines: they call their husbands *chipa'i*, from *chipa* the word they (girls and boys) use for “father”. *Chipa'i* uses a diminutive suffix (*'i*), meaning something akin to “little daddy” (CORMIER 2003a, 79).

To summarize, in the Awá-Guajá group, men are effectively associated with affinal relationships while women are associated with consanguineal ones. The significant implication of this is that consanguinity is coherent with a kind of “relational” identity in which the persons do not feel themselves to be “others” in the pairs of relationships they sustain. On the contrary, affinity is intrinsically coherent with more individualized features since it establishes a clear delimitation between the person and the “others”. Consequently, those who specialize in affinal relationships (the men) will also be better prepared and more oriented to sustain power, which requires this kind of delimitation. In groups without division of tasks or specialization of work, individualization would not characterize any person, since all (men and women) need to feel bonded to the group to feel safe enough in the middle of a universe which they do not master. Besides, in these societies, neither specialised tasks nor division of functions exist, and therefore no one perceives herself or himself as different from the rest of the group.

We stated that in these conditions, where *individualization* does not define personal identity of anyone, we cannot expect *power* relations. In fact, it is so among the Awá. They really sustain “truly egalitarian” relationships in daily and material life. However, it seems that male specialization in affinal relationships could endow men with a sort of autonomy related to the capacity of power, which is not yet material nor economic but only symbolic. We would not yet call “patriarchy” the underlying ideology since it does not involve power relations between sexes, although we should refer to two different “genders”, as those differences in the symbolic realm already imply differences in the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of both sexes.

## Final discussion

Accounting for the primeval reasons for differences in the symbolic level between men and women would mean accounting for the origin and causes of patriarchy. This is a daunting task that falls beyond the scope of this work. On a more modest scale, the aim here has been to analyze the relation between men's affinal relationships and women's consanguineal relationships among the Awá in order to reflect on the differences in the construction of gender in "egalitarian societies". As far as I know, when differences of "gender" can be detected, differences associated with the "power" realm always exist. This does not necessarily mean, however, a difference in power of men and women (or of men over women) in the daily or material life that would permit us to define those societies as "patriarchal". Instead, it only means a difference in self-perception as more capable of sustaining relationships with the "outside", the "other," or the unknown in men, which points to a potential for a more individualized self in them than in women. Thinking in historical terms, it is possible that, had the conditions been the same, this "potential for power" could have been developed and could have *acted* when division of tasks and work specialization began – when patriarchal society could be said to start.

All this means that affinity and consanguinity can be useful categories for thinking about gender differences in "egalitarian" societies. Nevertheless, this paper would not be complete without referring to a last (and crucial) issue related to the priority which should be given either to kinship or to gender in the analysis of men's and women's positions in these societies.

Some accounts of Amazonian societies play down the category of gender, as these societies are regarded as rather more "cosmocentric" than "sociocentric"; that is, as societies "where the essential contrast is between human and nonhuman rather than between human (males) and human (females)" (DESCOLA 2001, 108). The category of gender is conceptualised, in fact, as deriving from kinship, since "it is not impossible that the transcription of the consanguine/affine dichotomy in exogamous descent groups, that is, the reification of a dualist principle of social organization, may have fostered a parallel institutionalization of the gender dichotomy in myth and ritual" (DESCOLA 2001, 104). Sexual dichotomies, as we saw above, are furthermore believed "to be subordinated to, and instrumentalized by, more encompassing social patterns and relationships" (DESCOLA 2001, 101), namely, affinal and consanguineal relationships, which would encompass the masculine and the feminine, respectively.



VIVEIROS DE CASTRO (2001), on his part, takes all these arguments even further, focusing on the structural connection between affinity and consanguinity. In his view, rather than both being symmetrical categories – as Louis DUMONT’S (1983) study of Dravidian kinship postulated – “affinity is hierarchically superior to consanguinity” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001, 26) to such a degree that it constitutes “the given dimension of the cosmic relational matrix, while consanguinity falls within the scope of human action and intention” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001, 19). Viveiros believes affinity is the idiom of all supra-local relationships in the Amazon region: “guests and friends, as much as foreigners and enemies, political allies or clients as much as trade partners or ritual associates, animals as much as spirits”. It may be stated that “affinity becomes the overall mode of sociality” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001, 24). Consanguinity can only be constructed on the basis of affinity; it is “purposefully carved out ... as an ‘inventional’ (i.e., intentional) differentiation from universally given difference” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001, 26). Although Viveiros does not focus on gender, he nevertheless remarks that “pure consanguinity seems only to be attainable by and among women, just as pure affinity is a male condition” among the Achuar (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001, 34) – an argument in agreement with other scholars’ views (DESCOLA 2001; TAYLOR 2001; VILAÇA 2002).

It is not our aim here to cast doubts on the alleged asymmetry between consanguinity and affinity or their correlation with the feminine and the masculine, which our research on the Awá confirms. *But the seemingly “natural” or “axiomatic” character of this gender correlation seems suspect to us and worthy of further analysis and debate.* None of the above-cited scholars and researchers explains why dealing with affinity is “a man’s business” (DESCOLA 2001, 102) and dealing with consanguinity a woman’s one, thereby running the risk of naturalizing a hierarchy of values which *just so happens* to encompass gender. It might be hypothesised that the key lies in women’s reproductive capabilities, but Anne-Christine TAYLOR (2001, 51) argues to the contrary, claiming that consanguinity is what remains once a person’s “difference” is established; for a father, for instance, it would be “the fraction of his son’s ego that is not affinal”, being therefore “identical to his own position as father; likewise, for a mother, [it would be] that part of her daughter that is not ‘other’” and “is a clone of herself”. But if this is indeed the case, why the subsumption of the feminine in consanguinity and the masculine in affinity?

Put in these terms, the whole conceptual scheme inadvertently (and seemingly innocuously) tends to identify the masculine with presence, the referential core

of sociality, the active and dynamic part, while the feminine is demoted to the non-social and equated with absence, lack, and passivity: “consanguinity is *non-affinity* before being anything else” (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2001, 27). This conceptual manoeuvre naturalises (and exempts from further clarification) an order obviously created by the human mind, an order whereby men are universally afforded, through some mechanism or other, the status of the *given* and women that of *heteronomy* (VALCÁRCEL 1991, 105), that is, that which requires allusion to the masculine in order to be named. An example of the hidden implications of naturalising gender hierarchies can be seen in RIVAL’S (2005; 2007) otherwise brilliant study of the Huaorani from Ecuador, where she claims that “a female person is said to be dissimilar to a male person during her child-bearing years, and like a male person when not involved in a conjugal relationship. Sterile women, or women who do not wish to engage in sex are all said to be ‘similar to men’” (RIVAL 2005, 289; 2007). In other words, man is the “given”, neutral, not-construed fact: woman only exists insofar as she is distinguished from what man represents. In fact, “while a man cannot transform himself into a woman, a woman is considered to be physically equivalent to a man prior to, and past, her child-bearing phase” (RIVAL 2005, 302). RIVAL (2005, 289) points out that “no stigma whatsoever is attached to their condition”, but she seems unaware of how radically that condition itself, beyond the appearance of outward behaviour, resides in the innermost core of the deepest structures. As Celia AMORÓS (2000, 76) wrote, based on Simone de Beauvoir’s ideas, “the masculine appears as the neutral term, to which the feminine condition is opposed not as a generic construction, but rather as the idiosyncratic is opposed to the neutral”.

We agree with Descola and other scholars that the attribution of complementary and socially differentiated responsibilities to men and women does not derive from their physical characteristics. This is borne out by comparative studies of the same types of work in different human groups (MURDOCK 1967), which seem to indicate that there are no purely male or female activities<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, we believe further reflection is required regarding all those arguments which defend that men and women are attributed different activities depending on their affinal or consanguineal character. The underlying causes must be cultural ones – not *natural* or *implicit*. By the same logic of the currently hegemonic arguments, it might be argued *a sensu contrario*, that if men deal with affinity and women

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<sup>2</sup> Except for extremely hazardous activities such as whale-hunting and work in metal foundries, which have been systematically carried out by men.

with consanguinity, it is perhaps because of slight (initially barely perceptible) differences between the structures of the male and the female self, having to do with love, hostile desires, and detachment from the world. In other words, the type of kinship corresponding to the activities assigned to men and women would be determined by gender and not the other way round.

At any rate, if the connection and the mutual reinforcement – or subsumption – between the categories of gender and kinship are confirmed, their underlying causes remain to be explained. That undertaking is, however, beyond the scope of this work, whose focus was limited to check the applicability of the structural correlation between the categories of gender on the one hand, and affinity/consanguinity on the other in the case of the Awá from Maranhão, Brazil.

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