

# Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

---

Volume 10  
Issue 1 *Issues 1 & 2*

Article 5

---

2012

## Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia

James Andrew Whitaker  
*Tulane University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>

 Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Whitaker, James Andrew (2012). "Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia," *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 5, 71-73.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol10/iss1/5>

This Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:jcostanz@trinity.edu).

***Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia.* Carlos Fausto. Translated by David Rodgers. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2012.**

xv + 347 pp., maps, illustrations, footnotes, bibliography, annex, index.  
USD \$99.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-107-02006-1

James Andrew Whitaker  
Tulane University

In his recently translated volume, Carlos Fausto explores the roles of warfare and shamanism among the Parakanã societies of eastern Brazil. This is volume 96 in the Cambridge Latin American Studies series by Cambridge University Press, edited by Herbert S. Klein. The text has been translated—and truncated in some sections—from Fausto’s 2001 work, *Inimigos Fielis*, by David Rodgers. The English-language translation makes this innovative work in Amazonian anthropology accessible to a wider readership. Fausto’s dissertation fieldwork, which was undertaken between 1988 and 1995 under the supervision of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, provides much of the research data on which the present volume is based. The research for this volume, which involves two ethnographic projects and an ethnohistory, is centered on the distinct, yet related, eastern and western Parakanã societies.

The text abounds with theoretical insights and conceptual innovations that are articulated to produce luculent ethnographic, ethnological, and ethnohistorical narratives. The staggering scope of the data, as well as the density and depth of the theoretical analyses, reflect the magnitude of Fausto’s research. Ethnographic arguments are supported with ample ethnological and ethnohistorical data. Comparisons are made between the Parakanã societies and a number of related and regional Amazonian societies, such as the Araweté and the Asurini of the Tocantins. Fausto demonstrates his knowledge of the Parakanã language, which is part of the Tupi-Guarani language family, through nuanced discussions of semantics and morphology. For example, in a subsection of the volume with a heading “On War” that evokes a famed theorist of warfare, Carl von Clausewitz, Fausto analyses the lexical and morphological units that signify “war” in the Parakanã language, whilst explaining that there is “no exact equivalent” (pp. 4-7). Such analyses of linguistic data are used to support various ethnographic and ethnological arguments.

There are a wide range of topics and concerns that are covered in this volume. The emphasis shifts through the chapters from history, to political economy and subsistence, to sociology and cosmology. The structure of the text is dialectical and moves from historical particularity to cosmological generality. The volume begins with an historical narrative—constructed through the use of both archival documents and oral history—that provides an overview of the region between the Tocantins and Xingu rivers up to the “pacification” of the eastern and western Parakanã societies, which had only recently occurred when Fausto began his research. The genealogical and demographic data is very detailed and has a considerable historical depth. Fausto explores how the Parakanã bifurcated into separate eastern and western societies in the late nineteenth century and how various social and political-economic differences—such as the development of moieties within the eastern Parakanã society (pp. 99-101)—emerged historically between these ex-kin.

The complex intersections of sociological and political-economic structures with historical events are given much attention in the early chapters. Fausto intervenes in the debates concerning the causes of agricultural loss (or abandonment) and increased mobility among some Amazonian societies. With reference to Laura Rival (1998), he theorizes mobility within a political-economic framing and interprets “agricultural regression”—a concept that has received considerable attention from William Balée (1994)—as the result of exogenous forces interacting “...with internal processes and decision-making mechanisms” (pp. 87-88). These discussions of history, sociology, and political economy provide contexts for the cosmological structures that emerge in the subsequent chapters. In the last chapter, the interaction between history and cosmology is foregrounded as Fausto explores the socio-cosmological framing of historical interactions between the Parakanã societies and the whites, who are referred to as the *Toria*. Fausto shows how structure changes through history, whilst it affects history through indigenous understandings and practices. Structure, agency, and history are combined, balanced, and interrelated with innovative force throughout the text.

Warfare and shamanism are explored, within the context of the Parakanã societies, from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. In theorizing these topics, there is an eschewal of both ecological and historical determinism. Neither is there an embrace of voluntarism. Fausto successfully navigates through the interstitial theoretical spaces that are found between the positions of historicists, culturalists, and materialists. He interrelates these positions and posits a novel theoretical understanding of Amazonian socio-cosmological life with his conceptual model of “familiarizing predation” (pp. 248-250), which encompasses both warfare and shamanism. This model associates the external predation of enemies with the emergence of internal allies, i.e. with familiarized dream entities. It implies an economic logic in tandem with an historically dynamic symbolic framework—the “cannibal symbolic” (p. 4)—through which the Parakanã frame much of their interaction with the outside world.

Fausto shows how bellic predation and shamanic familiarization, which he views outside of the classical frameworks of exchange and reciprocity, are linked—through ritual—with symbolic, social, and physical reproduction. A process is delineated in which the destruction of enemy bodies, through warfare, provides the means for the warrior to dream. The entities that are subsequently encountered in dreams are familiarized, through oneiric shamanism, as “pets” and provide symbolic desiderata, such as names and the songs that are ritually killed as enemies to ensure group continuity (pp. 255-256). This ritually-enabled continuity, which produces a relationship of dependency between the interior and exterior domains of the society, ensures both physical and social reproduction. That which is needed for the continuation of the group is brought to the interior from the exterior through a process that involves predation, familiarization, and ritual incorporation.

The reader will be able to ascertain the influence of Amerindian perspectivism throughout the volume. The influence of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is quite visible and can be seen in both the theoretical discussions and in the extensive usage of ethnographic data from the Araweté (1992). Fausto adds to Viveiros de Castro’s “symbolic economy of predation” a complementary analysis of familiarization (pp. 229-230). This complementation serves to demonstrate how consumption and production are articulated as “productive consumption” in Parakanã socio-cosmological practices (pp. 176-177). Fausto presents comparative ethnological data to suggest that this conceptualized form of production may have a wide currency in Amazonian systems of thought.

The ethnographic representation that Fausto produces of Parakanã cosmology does not appear to include a concept commensurable with the notion of the “soul” in western cosmologies. Although there are concepts in Parakanã cosmology that somewhat resemble such a notion, such as the “specter” that emerges after death and the somewhat mysterious entities that cause impregnation (pp. 211-213), the immaterial world of the Parakanã appears in the text as an esoteric domain and it seems that they do not generally ascribe to beliefs regarding a pantheon of spiritual beings. Nevertheless, Fausto demonstrates, through ethnological comparisons, that the contour and structure of their cosmology resembles the cosmologies of other Amazonian societies that do hold such beliefs.

The influence of the alliance theory of the French school can also be ascertained. Fausto depicts the impact of the differences in the matrimonial systems of the eastern and

western Parakanã societies. In contrast to their eastern ex-kin, the western Parakanã captured women through warfare. Although Fausto prioritizes the influence of cosmology, he claims that matrimonial capture was a motivation, at least at certain times, for bellic behavior and practice among the western society (p. 156). However, despite only one Parakanã society resorting to such capture, there was a shortage of marriageable women in both societies. Fausto considers how the eastern Parakanã were able to “...defuse the time bomb in their alliance system” (p. 116). He relates this “defusing” to the development of social asymmetries that center around age, gender, and other axes of difference (p. 117). Differential matrimonial systems are linked to broader divergences in sociological and political-economic organization between the two Parakanã societies.

In his larger ethnological project, Fausto elucidates the similarities and features that the Parakanã societies share with other regional and Tupi societies. This comparative project, which relies heavily on ethnographic data from the Araweté and the Tupinamba, is centered on shared elements of Parakanã cosmology. Myths are given special attention in this regard and are emphasized. Fausto presents several mythic analyses and comparisons of mythic series, which rely on structural analysis. A structuralist style is readily observable throughout the volume. Structure is emphasized in relation to both sociological and cosmological aspects of Parakanã life. There is a methodological favoring of conceptual opposition in the text. However, Fausto disrupts, reconfigures, and intervenes in the oppositions that he posits.

The interventions that are covered in this book include many topics and themes of anthropological concern and will be of interest to a wide range of readers. The primary opposition that is treated concerns the dialectical relationship between the interior and exterior of society. Fausto shows how this relationship is made productive in symbolic and practical Parakanã life. The tensions between oppositions as varied as nature/culture, predation/familiarization, blood/tobacco, public/domestic, determination/choice, and structure/action are also considered and treated in the text. Fausto intervenes in each of these oppositions and shows how structural tensions are related to historical, sociological, political-economic, and cosmological contexts. He consistently foregrounds the dialectical relationship between structure and action.

At the end of the volume, the reader is made to confront the contemporary contexts of national and political-economic impingements and encroachments on the Parakanã societies. The vertiginous acceleration of history is palpably expressed within the ethnographic context. However, it is clear from Fausto’s text that history and structure have always been interrelated. Although he briefly discusses the changing relationships between the Parakanã societies and material objects, it is still too early to clearly ascertain what will come of their increased exposure to the national Brazilian society. Fausto discusses this changing situation in terms of a “sarcastic predominance of matter” (pp. 307-309). A society with external relations centered on predation and familiarization is now coming into closer and more intimate interaction with one that is built around exchange and the circulation of currency and goods.

Throughout the volume, Fausto adheres to the goals—both theoretical and methodological—that he sets out in the forward and introduction. He succeeds in these goals and has produced a text that is quite impressive in its scope and depth. Throughout the volume, ethnography, ethnology, and ethnohistory come together in novel and innovative syntheses. Overall, this volume is a great work that will surely make its way into the hands, minds, and bookshelves of anthropology’s most discerning readers. It will find a suitably elevated place in the canon of literature on contemporary Amazonian societies.

## REFERENCES

- Balée, William 1994 *Footprints of the Forest: Ka'apor Ethnobotany*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rival, Laura 1998 “Domestication as a Historical and Symbolic Process: Wild Gardens and Cultivated Forests in the Ecuadorian Amazon.” *Advances in Historical Ecology*, William Balée, editor, pp. 232-250. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo 1992 *From the Enemy’s Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.