

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

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

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Volume 15 | Issue 2

Article 6

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12-15-2017

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### Cover Page Footnote:

I would like to thank Fapesp (São Paulo Research Foundation) for funding my post-doctorate, which enabled the research I present here. I would also like to thank everyone from the village Casa Nova for their consistent patience, affection and care. Finally, thank you to the friends and colleagues who have helped me with their feedback, especially Marta Amoroso, Laura Rival and Tania Stolze Lima.

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### Recommended Citation

Maizza, Fabiana (2017). "Persuasive Kinship: Human–Plant Relations in Southwest Amazonia," *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 15: Iss. 2, Article 6, 206-220.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol15/iss2/6>

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# Persuasive Kinship: Human–Plant Relations in Southwestern Amazonia

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## Introduction

This essay is inspired by a story that Wero, a Jarawara friend of mine, heard in a shaman's song.<sup>1</sup> It was about Wero's cousin's death—specifically the moment in which the *abono* (souls) of plants from the deceased man's garden took him to the *neme* (upper layer, or the land of the dead).<sup>2</sup> Wero insisted that the souls that carried his cousin away were the sons and daughters of latter, and thus his *bitimi* (nephews and nieces). When I spoke about this story with another Jarawara friend, Bibiri, who helped me translate it, she reiterated what I had been told by different people since my first stay at Casa Nova, one of the biggest Jarawara villages. She stated that the plants, and more precisely the *abono*, are people's *okatao yokana* (real children).

My interest in these ideas began with Wero's story, but my understanding of them remained nebulous for some time. Then one day, while sitting on Narabi's veranda surrounded by women talking about children and plants, I noticed that much of what happened with the *abono* and with dead people in the upper layer paralleled what happened in the village. How people related to each other, looked after others, married, and raised their children occurred in the *neme* as well. It occurred to me that the Jarawara concepts of *nayana* (raising) and *nofa* (liking/seduction) crosscut the domains of kinship, garden, and afterlife that I had been treating as distinct.

The fact that garden plants appear as the “children” of humans is not unique to the Jarawara. This relation had been previously observed in other Amerindian societies (Taylor 2000; Descola 1986). What strikes me as different among the Jarawara is that the connections between plants, dead people, and offspring are necessary to grasp the meaning of parenthood. The Jarawara concept of parenting points to something already suggested in studies of Amerindian kinship—that there is no consanguinity, only degrees of affinity (Viveiros de Castro 2002:422, 432). Although consanguineous relations, especially the mother–child tie, are seen as “natural” in the West, the Jarawara do not see them as such and consciously undertake daily social activities to create and maintain them. Similar ideas have been discussed at length in studies of lowland South America in terms of the *construction of the Amazonian person* (Overing 1993). Several researchers have revealed that for many Amerindian peoples “being kin” is a process composed of daily actions in which care and nourishment play a fundamental role; relations cannot be viewed a priori, only known by their effects (e.g., Coelho de Souza 2004:44).

Along with the idea that care and nurture create kinship bonds, the concepts of *nofa* and *nayana* are also central to Jarawara notions of sociality. These concepts are not limited to connections between humans; they apply to relations between practically all other beings in the cosmos, particularly plants. Specifically, the acts of seducing and raising different beings (especially plants and children) and the possibility of being seduced by and marrying other type of beings (especially those who steal and keep human souls in order to marry them) reveals the multiplicity of Jarawara kinship. In turn, this multiplicity provides us with a guide for considering alternative models of parenthood that do not assume the Western conception of family and the heterosexual couple (cf. Collier and Yanagisako 1987:32). Consequently, this article's description of Jarawara kinship opens questions about the very organization of female and male domains. I will examine how Jarawara parenting challenges the Western way of conceiving of certain types of relations as social and others as natural, including relations of paternity and maternity and the part played by men and women in their formation.

The paper is divided into three parts. Beginning with considerations raised by the feminist critique of kinship, the first part discusses the concept of *nayana* as central to the comprehension of Jarawara kinship, especially in relation to the nuclear family. The second part describes how *nayana* is important in understanding interspecific kinship between humans and plants because Jarawara garden plants are seen as children that are raised by the parents' siblings. Human–plant relations are associated with the neme where Jarawara “plant-children” live and where the Jarawara go when they die. In the third section I will argue that understanding persuasion and seduction as central to kinship is essential to comprehending Jarawara sociality, especially ties between human and nonhuman (mostly plant) beings.

## Multiparenting

The division of the social sphere into public and domestic domains is one of the most important issues from the Marxist-feminist debates of the 1970s that continues to this day. It has been argued that motherhood and the bonds between mothers and children formed the domestic side of society in which one finds the “minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children” (Rosaldo 1974:23). Concurrently, the public sphere has been described as containing institutions that grouped or subsumed the mother–child groups (*ibid.*). Because of their roles as mothers, women were always absorbed in domestic activities (*ibid.*:24). Therefore, women were subordinated to men because the latter organized the public life of society (Ortner 1974:72). However, in the following decades it has been argued that the public/domestic division is not reflected in all societies and only appears to be convincing as a universal social organizing principle because of our (Western) own social arrangements (Strathern 1988:88).

Family, home, and “the domestic” merge into a single unit in Western society, defined in juxtaposition to “the public” spheres of work, business, and politics (Moore 1988:23; Rapp 1979:510). Commercial relations, which involve competition, negotiation, and contracts, are separated from and viewed in opposition to the relations of intimacy, nurturing, and care associated with family and the home (Rapp *op. cit.*). Adulthood in Western culture demands autonomy from the domestic sphere. The public sphere, the workplace, must be distanced from the infantilizing home (Strathern 1988:89). Western women run the risk of appearing less than full social persons, either because their creativity is understood as natural rather than cultural (given by their ability to bear children) or because they belong to the limited world of the domestic rather than the broader social world of public affairs (*ibid.*).

According to (Yanagisako 1979 *apud* Moore 1988:24), in the first part of the twentieth century, Malinowski equated the domestic group with the nuclear family, which is composed of a father, mother, and their children. The universal domestic group was later reduced to the mother–child unit, and it was argued that this bond underlay the nuclear family group in human society (Goodenough 1970 *apud* Moore 1988:24). In this formulation, the very notion of the domestic entails the concepts of “mother” and “mothering” (Moore 1988:25). The category of *woman* is associated with motherhood attributes such as fertility, naturalness, maternal love, nurturance, life giving, and reproduction (*ibid.*). In Western society the categories *woman* and *mother* overlap. This results in the meaning of woman being inseparable from the concept of *mother* and includes the activities and associations of motherhood (*ibid.*). The Western assumption that maternity is natural, paternity is cultural, and that mothers make babies naturally and biologically (Strathern 1988:315) follows from this. Fatherhood is seen as extremely variable in different cultures, whereas motherhood is seen as more natural, more universal, and more constant (Moore 1988:24).

Collier and Yanagisako (1987:15), inspired by the work of Schneider, argue that our Western folk conceptions regarding the biological facts of sexual reproduction have defined our study of gender and kinship. According to these authors, we take for granted that the family is a social unit that anthropologists would discover everywhere as long as they confounded genealogically defined relationships with certain kinds of culturally meaningful, social relationships (Collier and Yanagisako 1987:25–26). Schneider (1984:97) argues that sexual reproduction is assumed when we study kinship in other societies. If it is true that we anthropologists have no choice but to begin investigations with our own concepts in mind, our efforts can only unpack the cultural assumptions embodied within those concepts (Collier and Yanagisako 1987:34). In a similar vein, questions that emerged from my tireless attempt

over the years to map the Jarawara “family tree” led me to realize that there existed a child-rearing system distinct from but linked to relations of genealogy. As I shall explain below, Jarawara parenting involves a multiplicity of relations that transcended those among humans.

The Jarawara system of relationship terms is a variant of the Dravidian system. The preferential/prescriptive marriage described by the Jarawara as *amosake* (beautiful/right) is contracted with a person of the opposite sex in one’s own generation. A man would marry a woman he calls *nakiri* (sister-in-law), and a woman would marry a man she calls *wabo* (brother-in-law). Potential spouses include, but are not limited to, cross-cousins, MBD or FZD for a man and MBS or FZS for a woman. Although I do not have time to discuss it in detail here, it is interesting to note that when a couple does not conform to the right or beautiful form of marriage they change the way they refer to their spouse’s relatives. Thus they patch up (*remenda* in Portuguese) or *namosa* (fix) these relations so that they become *amosake* (right/beautiful). But *namosa* is not a simple reclassification in a prescriptive system as described by Lévi-Strauss (1949). It reflects the actions people take to achieve a desired effect, such as marrying the person they *nofa* (desire/like/have the will to marry), and then “tidying up” relations so that they become consistent with their wishes. *Namosa* (tidying up or fixing) according to the *nofa* (will) may also be found in other areas of Jarawara society.

While *amosake* marriage is an important issue for the Jarawara, parenting is just as crucial. I have never met a Jarawara couple who has not raised or who is not raising at least one child together. Some couples have many children. In this case, the Jarawara say that it is the father who “works” to make the child in the mother’s belly. Afterwards, when the child is born, the father and the mother work together to raise it. Couples who find themselves unable to conceive, for whatever reason, raise other people’s children. But there is also the possibility that a man and a woman who are not a couple raise the same child.

Raising of another person’s child is referred to as *nayana* in the Jarawara language and *nayana* may be contrasted with the modifier *yokana* (real). For example, *Manira owa nanayana* (Manira raised me) may be contrasted with *Narabi okomi yokana* (Narabi is my real mother). Children use the same terms, *abi* (father) and *ami* (mother), for their “raising” and “real” parents. When they are very young they do not know they are not being raised by their biological parents, but as time goes by they begin to understand. When they are a little older and begin to address people around them according to their vocative terms, they refer to the relations of their *yokana* parents rather than their *nayana* parents.

When people speak about their raising parents (*pais de criação* in Portuguese),<sup>3</sup> they usually refer to one of the parents’ siblings who is caring for the child in place of the *yokana* parent. The preferred caring parent is a sibling of the same sex, a FB or MZ. From what I have observed, more than half of raising parents fit this description. Another less frequently practiced but common possibility is when a sibling of the opposite sex, a FZ or MB, cares for a child. Maternal grandparents can also become raising parents, as can a new spouse of the real parent if the children are small at the time of the new union. In addition, a mother can raise her child, and the child can choose a raising father who has no direct relation with the mother. I have also observed a brother and sister—that is, not a couple—raising the child of another brother or sister together. In fact, all the adults I know, not just the married ones, have raised or are currently raising a child.<sup>4</sup> To the people of Casa Nova, it seems unimaginable that someone would not have parental ties with a child at some point in their lives. It is almost as if having or raising a child is essential to becoming a person.

When entering a marriage, a person will consider his or her *yokana* parents’ ties rather than those of the raising parents. For cases in which the child has been raised by their MZ or FB, relationships for both sets of parents are the same. When this is not the case, marriage is not prohibited; for example, a boy raised by his maternal uncle (MB) and this uncle’s daughter, who is his cross-cousin and is in a right/beautiful relationship for marriage, can wed. Raising parents, consequently, are able to become the in-laws of the child they care for. This being the case, we could ask, for instance, in the situation described above, “Is the man who raised the boy who married his daughter his father or father-in-law?” The answer would be something along the lines of: “If you raise a child, you are his father, but if he marries your daughter, you are his father-in-law.” It is as if the present relation or newest relation is the only one that counts. This relationship is deemed to be “more beautiful” since the new is considered in every way better than outmoded relationships.

When two sisters are married to the same man in a polygamous union and one of them cannot have children, she will commonly raise one (or more) of her sister's children together with the shared husband. Given village endogamy among the Jarawara, marriages usually take place between people living in the same village, and a child raised by a cross-uncle or cross-aunt will in most cases be a co-resident with his/her real parents. When a child is raised by their maternal grandparents, normally his/her mother is a single mother who lives in her parents' home. Therefore, most children are raised by people who live in the same village as their parents and sometimes in the same house as them. The proximity of the child's raising and real parents is inherent to *nayana*.<sup>5</sup> This distinguishes it from Western concepts of fostering or adoption, where the common assumption is that children are separated from their parents and raised by people with whom they had no previous connection. Among the Jarawara, the child's upbringing depends mainly on proximity of kinship ties and living space of the real and raising parents.

*Nayana* (raising) refers to a set of actions that include bathing, feeding, dressing, and educating a child, putting them in the hammock to sleep, and buying clothes in the city. Parents also teach gendered activities to their children. Girls learn from their mothers how to cook, wash, and make artefacts; boys learn from their fathers how to fish, hunt, make arrows, build houses, and clear areas for gardens. Learning takes place through observation and participation. Parents take their young children when they go about their daily tasks so that they gradually learn how to do things. Once they have acquired the requisite knowledge and competence, children help their parents. I have been told that the process of raising a child ends around the age of thirteen, an age when the child is "grown up" or "brought up." This does not signify the end of parental affection and attention but only that the child needs less parental care.

The *nayana* of a child reveals a lot about *narifa* (care), almost as if one signifies the other. Whoever is raising a child is also caring, and vice versa. And whoever is raising and caring is also looking. *Kakatoma* (looking) is another way of speaking about care, raising, closeness, and attention. When describing the connections between parents and children, be they "real" or "raising" parents—and also the connections between spouses, between siblings, and between in-laws who live together—these ideas become intertwined. In everyday life, people must avoid *hamaká* (being angry or with rage) and maintain as much as possible a state of *nofa* (liking, being liked, seducing). This movement towards liking happens in the *ati boti* (heart/liver/thought). People need to be vigilant regarding their own anger towards those they live with or would like to live with, anger being associated with the idea of not being kin.

Contrary to what might be imagined, *nayana* is not related to neglect but to *narifa* (care) and *nofa* (seduction). It is not the mother who renounces the child, hoping that another person will take care of her/him. Rather, the child allows himself/herself to be seduced by someone else, who through their actions proves that they would take good care of him/her. It is the child itself who chooses its "raising parents" through a process of rapprochement and habit. When the child is still small, just a few months old, the raising parents draw near and do everything to make the child like them. They buy milk, invite him/her to sleep in their hammock, and spend a lot of time close to the baby watching and being attentive to every cry. In the end, the child no longer wants to stay with its *yokana* (real) parents and chooses its new caretakers—in a move that shows that she/he has begun to *nofa* (like) the "raising parents" more than the "real ones." The real mother often does everything she can to prevent this process of seduction and will always deny a request to give her child to another mother. However, sometimes it is too late, for the seduction of the child has already occurred. Because their real parents still care for them, even if they do not physically look after them on a day-to-day basis, "raised" children receive double the attention compared to peers raised only by real parents.

The seduction of children so that they might choose of their own volition to live with raising parents produces a phenomenon that can be understood as *multiparenting*, something close to what has been observed and described in many Amazonian societies (e.g., Beckerman and Valentine 2002). There are many ethnographic examples in Amazonia in which a single sexual relation is deemed insufficient to make a child and procreation requires multiple sexual couplings. Life is formed in a woman's womb through continuous procreative "work," and if she maintains sexual relations with more than one man during gestation, then each will be recognized as one of the child's fathers. Among the Jarawara, multipaternity is a fairly common

phenomenon, but it is a subject that women avoid discussing. Disputes over parenting can provoke *hamaká* (anger/jealousy) and consequently lead to fighting. Jarawara multipaternity is analogous to what happens with crops growing in swidden gardens. As explained to me, “the white yam was mixed with the red yam, and so it became black yam.” The term *dyoro tokanaro* (mixed) could be translated as “come out from/emerge from, more than one.” This discourse refers to plants—which, as we shall see, are central to think about Jarawara parenting—and again, to closeness. The conceptualization of multipaternity among the Jarawara posits that the relations of proximity male sexual partners maintain with a mother serve to link them with one another as well.<sup>6</sup> Multipaternity is also associated with *nayana* (raising) children.

The feminine counterpart to multipaternity can be called *multimaternity*<sup>7</sup> and occurs through the seduction of children by someone other than its real parents, as previously described. When children choose other parents, their real parents maintain their position as such due to their proximity to the child and, above all, the care and concern that they have shown toward that child, and that tends to last for the duration of their lives. These intentions are what make them parents. Some parents raise children only for a short time—they “help to raise” them. When the child grows up, she/he may say something like, “She helped to raise me, she is a little bit my mother.” Thus, some children end up having more than one mother or more than one father; that is, they potentially have a number of raising parents in addition to their real parents.

Up to this point our description of parenthood seems to rely on the distinction between biological and social parenting, which would lead us back to a reliance on the nature/culture distinction as the basic conceptual framework. However, Jarawara creativity also suggests that there is no given natural or biological relation, since even “real” parenthood is the result of intentional seduction and of the constant persuasion required to convince someone else to stay close by. This is to say that for the Jarawara, all parenting is a form of seduction.

Thus it can be argued that Jarawara parenting is not directly linked to sexual reproduction. In this respect we can contrast Jarawara understanding with that of Euro-American kinship. Strathern (1995:307, 311) points out that in the latter, fatherhood is defined by sexual relations with the mother, and this means that paternity depends on connections that need to be declared and proven. For the Jarawara, in contrast, father and mother are defined by the relation they maintain with the child. In some cases, the biological father does not raise the child. Instead, someone close to him, like a brother, helps the mother, but without marrying or having a sexual relationship with her. A child can be raised by a woman who has not given birth, a raising mother, who did not have to become pregnant (or have intercourse) to become a mother. We thus have a type of parenthood that does not seem to be linked to sexuality but is instead developed through seduction, convincing, persuasion, and the maintenance of closeness.<sup>8</sup> In this version of Amazonian kinship, nothing is given in advance; relationships are known by the effects that people have on each other (Coelho de Souza 2004:44). In the Jarawara case, the relevant effects include seduction, liking, being liked, desire, and convincing and persuading other people to have desire.<sup>9</sup>

Jarawara ethnography shows that fertility itself is not problematic for the generation of kinship relations. It is possible to be sexually inactive and have children, just as it is possible to not become pregnant and have children. It is also possible to be unmarried and have children. And one can partner with a sibling or another relative with whom one does not have intercourse to raise children. Consequently, I argue that Jarawara femininity is not directly associated with fertility or the uterus and that the organization of a family is not based on a heterosexual couple that maintains sexual relations.<sup>10</sup> Above all, the Jarawara mother and father are people who convince and persuade those close to them on a daily basis that they like them and by these means create ties of kinship. Seduction does not occur only between the opposite sexes but also between members of the same sex. It may occur between a mother and daughter, for example. Jarawara kinship reveals a social order in which desire and will are the main mechanisms for creating relations. In this order the mother–father–child triad is not the invariant familial basis of kinship.

### The Plant-Children

My reflections so far have framed kinship as an exclusively human domain, set apart from other spheres of life. In this section I turn to what are known as the *plant-children*. For the

Jarawara, the souls of plants leave their material bodies to live socially in different parts of the cosmos, especially the neme (the upper layer). I use the word “soul” to translate the Jarawara term *abono*. As we shall see, what the Jarawara call a soul is not quite the same as Western understandings of this word. For them, the soul is closer to what has become known in anthropological literature as the *potential subject* (Lima 1999; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Plant souls are therefore something like potential-subject-plants. In reference to the idea that such beings, from their own point of view, have a human essence and appearance, I will sometimes refer to them as plant-people. The abono of the plants that people cultivate in their swidden gardens live in the neme in beautiful villages that are very similar to the town of Labrea in Amazonas that the Jarawara often visit. In these villages there are motorbikes, cars, buildings, lights, brick houses, and lots of people. The souls of cultivated plants are called *yamakorona abono* (soul of a planted thing), but they can also be called *yamata abono* (food soul), since people mostly grow crops they like to eat. I was led to understand that only fast-growing plants are cultivated by the Jarawara because it would not make sense to plant something that cannot be eaten or used or that the person will not see grow.

The *fatará*, or swidden garden, is a space that women, men, couples, and siblings visit together. In this they are unlike many other Amazonian societies, such as the Achuar, for example, for whom the garden is typically a female space (Descola 1986:266). People regularly visit their gardens to check the growth of their seeds, to harvest, observe, take care of their plants, and talk to them. Talking to plants is essential, as one must explain to them that they must bear great fruits. The plants’ souls listen and respond by providing the fruit. Perhaps even more important than talking to plants, is watching them. People often go to their gardens to *kakatoma* (look), especially when the plants are small and have just started to grow. Often people will sow plants, such as the peach palm (*pupunha*), next to their houses and take them to their gardens only when they have grown a little. This method of cultivating certain plants seems to be a way of intensely caring and looking after them so they “grow well.”

Like relations with children, watching over cultivated plants goes hand in hand with caring, raising, and enhancing them. Caring for the garden is expressed as *namosa* (to enhance). It is said, “*fatará onamosa*” (I clean, take care of, tidy, look at, and make my garden beautiful for the plants to grow). This concern for plants and the garden is in line with caring for children and relatives in general, as previously described. It is an intentional action whose effects are measured a posteriori. A peach palm, for example, will only grow if it has been correctly planted, and if the person who planted it cared for it and did everything he/she should have done.

There seems to be an important distinction between the plants cultivated by the Jarawara and the noncultivated, wild ones raised by other beings.<sup>11</sup> These noncultivated plants are mainly found in the floodplain (*várzea* in Portuguese). I have been told that these plants are planted and cared for by the *yama* and the *yama maka*, potential-subjects who live in the depths of rivers and lakes and kidnap the souls of humans who unwittingly find themselves alone in their territories. Trees in the forest are usually called *ava bote* (old wood) and are linked to *inamati bote* (old predatory souls), people-eaters who live in holes in the ground.

The plants and their abono (souls) are distinguished in accordance with their “forces.” These are directly related to their bodies and their physical and physiological characteristics. The size of their trunks, their height, and their medicinal and therapeutic properties all are relevant qualities in the determination of a tree’s force, for example. Therefore, *yati* (young trees) are *kita* (strongest), as are poisonous plants and those that contain a phytochemical or a chemical that can be activated. Examples are *kona* (*Mascagnia glabrata* St. Hill., *tingui* or *timbó*)<sup>12</sup>, *sina* (tobacco, used to make snuff), *yamita* (peach palm), and *fowa* (wild cassava), the last of which cannot be eaten raw. Edible plants and their *yamata abono* (food souls) are generally *keitare* (weak). Rationales for inclusion in this category differ. Examples include *kana* (cane) and *sami* (pineapple) because they contain sugar, *fowakabe* (cassava) and *bihá* (yam) because they can be consumed without much preparation, and several others, such as avocado, mango, and açai palm, which are not known for warrior-like properties. The world of the plant-people is, above all, defined by war, enemies, and constant disputes between the abono of *yamakorona* (cultivated) and *ava* (wild) plants. Shamans often witness such fights and report their occurrence to the people of the village through chants called *ayaka*.

According to the Jarawara, the process that separates plant-souls from their bodies resembles a birth (or death). A schematized account of this process is roughly as follows: a

person plants seeds in his/her garden; the plant eventually leaves the soil and begins to grow above it; when it reaches a certain height, but is still small, the plant's soul leaves its body and lingers beside it, crying. According to the shamans, a plant's soul resembles a human baby and is the child of the plant from which it emerged. A yawita abono is the peach palm's child, for example. The existing ethnological literature on Amazonia offers at least three interpretations of this process. The first is that the soul is the body's "clone" and that there is a relation of "full consanguinity" between the plant's soul and body (cf. Taylor 2000:320).<sup>13</sup> A second interpretation, based on the concept of *owner-master*, supposes that all banana plants, for example, are linked to the same "reproductive matrix" comprised of the mother/owner/master of all plants of the same species (cf. Fausto 2008:330).<sup>14</sup> Both of these interpretations stress the identification and similarity between a plant's body and soul. However, I believe that Lima's (1999) concept of *doubles* is the most useful for the Jarawara case.

Here we must recognize the double relationship entailed in the production of plant souls. The children who cry when leaving their plant-bodies are not only the plants' children but also children of the people who sowed them. As in this article's opening anecdote, a friend said, in reference to a plant-child, "*okatao yokana* is my real son—he calls me *okobi* [my daddy]." After leaving its plant-body, the plant-child cries. Upon hearing its cries, plant-souls descend from the neme, where they live, and carry it "up there." It is then named and raised by a plant-people couple (or two or more plant-persons who do not form a married couple). The plant-people who raise the plant-child become its parents. Thus, souls of the plants in the upper layer become the raising parents of the plant-souls of the terrestrial gardens, while their "real parents" are the Jarawara who cultivated them. These plant-children are raised in the neme and, when they are small, do not know they are being cared for by raising parents. When they become old enough to understand, they are told the identity of their *yokana* (true) parents. As explained by different Jarawara friends, what happens in the upper layer is very similar to what happens in the Jarawara village. We can understand the repetition of the same terms used to describe the raising of human children and raising of plant-children in this light. The true parents of plant-children are people who live in the same village as the shaman who is regularly received in the neme. In the neme, the shaman interacts with plant-souls. On the terrestrial level, Jarawara, in turn, ask the shaman for news about their relatives in the neme, wanting to know if they are well and healthy.

Up to this point we have described the relationship of the real and raising parents to the plant-child. However, we still must describe the relationship between the different sets of parents. This relationship rests on the general calculus of Jarawara kinship. Kinship delineates ties between humans and their different spiritual and material components, and between humans and other sorts of beings. In the neme a plant-child is usually raised by its human parents' plant-siblings, that is, the plant-children of their human parents' parents. Thus, people who have many children must have big gardens with many plants since their plants' souls will fetch the souls of the plants belonging to their human children. The plant-children will be raised in the neme by their parents' same-sex plant-siblings, their MZ or FB, or by their parents' cross-sex plant-siblings, their MB or FZ. However, raising parents in the neme may also be souls without genealogical ties of kinship. They may be the souls of deceased humans, children of the shaman, or other people in the village. However, the act of raising a child may itself infer a genealogical tie in the absence of certainty about what happens in the neme: "He/she raised my child, so he/she is my brother/sister." An additional possibility is that a plant-child may also be raised by an older sibling-plant, that is, the soul of another plant cultivated by the same person. As on the terrestrial layer, in the upper layer *nayana* refers to care, attention, education, affection, persuasion, and seduction. Down on the terrestrial layer, people continue to take care of their gardens, looking at and talking to the plants. Perhaps, then, we can think of caring for the garden as a way of also caring for the plant-children being raised by other parents in the neme—just as, from a distance, real parents care about and look after their children while they are being raised by others.

When people die, they also go to the neme. Or rather, one of the three or four souls that leave the body of the deceased will go "up there." While a plant-child is taken up to the neme, a dead person's soul/double leaves the grave after the burial and waits to be taken to the neme as well. The main difference is that, despite having human appearance, this soul is not a child. The souls of the plants that the person cultivated in life bring this soul up to the neme. That



is, the human soul's own plant-children who were taken to the neme when they were small descend to Earth to fetch it. When it arrives in the neme, the soul rests, rejuvenates/strengthens itself (*namosa*), and goes to another village for a celebration very similar to the *marina*, a girl's initiation ritual. The soul then marries and goes to live with its plant-relatives. This is the destiny of most souls, except those who died as children, who will be raised by the plant-people.

The village where the dead person's soul will settle down is usually the one where its father or mother, siblings and their spouses, or its "classificatory in-laws" live. Jarawara do not differentiate between dead people and plant-souls. It is not important to know whether the father, father-in-law, sister, or brother-in-law are people who have passed away or plant-souls from a garden. Instead of the terrestrial form of the being welcoming the dead upon reaching the upper layer, kinship ties and the type of relative (father/father-in-law/sister) are emphasized.

It is said that the newcomer (the deceased) should have an amosake (beautiful/right) marriage with a cross-cousin, that is, with his/her father's brother-in-law's or his/her mother's sister-in-law's son/daughter, or with any affine—in the version of the Dravidian system mentioned previously. Classification in the neme is based on classification on Earth. As in the neme, the great majority of beings are plant-people, and, once rejuvenated, the dead usually marry them because they are young and beautiful and easy to marry. Everyone is beautiful, and marriage is easy in the upper layer. But procreation is never mentioned, and little is known about it. When describing what happens "up there," people often talk about their plant-children or their children who died young and are being raised by their siblings (plants or deceased people). All of this leads me to believe that people in the neme marry but do not have children. This seems to indicate that the neme, the ideal world of the plant-people and of the Jarawara themselves, is a world of child-rearing but without conception. In this world hunters are always successful, gardens are big, and everyone travels by motorbike and plane.

The relations the Jarawara maintain with cultivated plants may thus be described as kinship relations. When I would pass a garden in Jarawara company, they would often refer to it as "my son," "Narabi's son," or "Narabi's *biji* [little one]." There is no evidence that this kinship is metaphorical: plants are not "like offspring," they *are* offspring. At the same time, we are describing relations that only become effective after death. It is almost as if the cultivation of plants permits an "counter-natural alliance" in the afterlife between heterogeneous beings with no possible filiation between them (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2007a:118). In the upper layer the only possible filiation is based on child-rearing. Death is the condition for this alliance. Kinship with plant-people is a possibility that can only be actualized at the moment the person dies and thus ceases to be related to people on Earth. In a sense, this practice refers to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming as explored in Viveiros de Castro's 2007 writings; it is as if the Jarawara are or have a plant-becoming.

When people speak about gardens and of plant-people, there is an emphasis on infinite quantity—a multitude of plants, so to speak. Growing lots of plants in life implies having lots of plant-children. But in this respect, quantity appears to be the most important feature. A multitude of children, siblings, brothers- and sisters-in-law, and, ultimately, a multitude of plant-relatives are created. Plant people comprise a multitude. Viveiros de Castro (2007b:15) argues that what we define or translate as soul or spirit in Amerindian worlds is an "intensive virtual multiplicity." Using this perspective to describe the Jarawara, where being-plant implies multiplicity, then being-plant would also signify "being-spirit" or being a ghost. In other words, being a plant is equivalent to being a soul. This creates an intense dialogue between humanity and vegetality, contrasts with existing ethnology of Amazonian that has focused, above all, on human–animal relations.

An essential point remains to be clarified, although I will not be able to elaborate here. Reproductive alliance exists neither in plant–human relations (as evidenced by the Jarawara afterlife) nor in human relations. In the afterlife, there is marriage but no procreation. And as I described in the first part of this article, people do not need to be married or be part of a couple to have children. Furthermore, recognition of married status does not depend on procreation, and couples do not need to procreate to have children. Therefore, for Jarawara relations, marriages are not synonymous with sexual reproduction, and a marriage alliance does not necessarily have a reproductive counterpart. This finding casts a critical light on our understanding of sexual binarism, as our division of sexual beings into either male or female

is a product of the Western conception of procreation (cf. Strathern 1995:330). Breaking with this Western assumption suggests the possibility of thinking about procreation and alliance separately. Viveiros de Castro (2007a:126) called the situation where marriage alliance and procreation do not coincide *potential alliance*, a way of Other-becoming specific to kinship. We have seen among the Jarawara that the man/woman distinction is not correlated with heterosexuality as the standard relational mode. There are cases where women do not make babies, but men do, for example. And men do not have to marry to raise children. Will and persuasion, rather than the facts of reproduction, define marital bonds (see next section). And men and women alike must have plant-children. Sexual intercourse, therefore, does not serve to define either the male/female opposition or relations of filiation. Thus, alliance may be defined separately from filiation (Viveiros de Castro 2007a:126). In today's Western societies, the autonomy of alliance and filiation is also suggestively delineated by the concept of contrasexuality (Preciado 2015:22, 27).

### Persuasion and Seduction

What I call seduction comes from the Jarawara verb *nofa*. *Nofa* appears in various forms, in phrases such as *tiva onofa oke*, which means something like, "I like you;" "You can stay close to me;" "You have to take care of me;" or "I take care of you." These phrases reveal the way affection intertwines with care. The verb *nofa* can also be used in phrases such as *bati hinofe*, which translates to something like "His father likes him, wants to raise him." But *nofa* also refers to "having a will/desire," as in *yama onofa okere* ("I'm feeling lazy and not willing to work"). When someone falls in love with an individual named Soki, for example, it may be explained *Soki nofa ke* ("She fell in love/was seduced/wants to take care of and be with Soki").

"Having a will" is related to a more embracing and encompassing dimension of *nofa*, which I translate as *seduction*. It suggests that most of the relations in the Jarawara world are based on will. This encompasses the will of a person and the will of his/her alter, since making another person like oneself and wanting to be close and to care for them as well are both essential. In this sense, relations of seduction are also persuasive relations in which people persuade others to stay close to them. Marriage, for example, is seen as a way to "hold" people close to you. "If you want to get married, you have to hold," I was told. Conjugality is like "holding" (*tamana*) and never "letting go" (*sobana*). The right thing to do, what humans do, is "to hold" others through *nofa* (desire, will, liking, and seducing).

*Nofa* (seduction/will) manifests itself in marriage, in parenthood, and in planting, that is, in various forms of raising and caring. Raising parents should first show that they will take care of the child they want to raise. They gradually approach the child and accustom him/her to them so that she/he chooses them as parents. The younger the child, the less accentuated this process will be. Conversely, real parents should look after their children, otherwise they might let themselves be seduced by other potential parents. People need to have the will to work in the garden and to make it clean/beautiful, so that plants and their souls can grow. The plant-souls taken to the neme are children and the process of being raised by other parents is straightforward. By contrast, when dead people's souls leave their bodies and are taken to the neme, it takes a lot of concentration and attention on the part of their relations. The soul's first impulse will be to return to its village, because it does not know that it is dead. In such cases, its return causes death and suffering. Therefore, his/her plant-children, who have been warned about the death by the shaman, must descend to convince him/her to go with them to the neme. The soul comes out of the body feeling *hamaká* (angry and belligerent) and wanting to fight. As Wero told me about his cousin:

"Be careful! When your grandfather's soul arrives, it will kill you," the shaman said (to the plant-souls).

"No, our grandfather's soul will not kill us, we'll *kakatoma* (take care of) it," they said.

Here, the plant-souls' intimation of seduction is a notice of future care and a way of showing the potential to care. In marriage such an intention should be communicated to potential in-laws, since it is usually mothers who make the final decision in relation

to their children's desire to marry. If the mother does approve, the union is unlikely to happen. Marrying amosake (in the right way) involves asking the intended partner's mother or father for permission. Parents will accept if the aspirant is the "right" sort of relative and if they consider that he/she knows how to work/has strength/has the will to work. Their approval depends on their sense that the person has the potential to care for the child they cared for and will also take care of him/her, now and in the future. This seduction is analogous but symmetrically inverse to that engaged in by aspiring raising parents. In the case of marriage, the future son- or daughter-in-law must seduce their in-laws, whereas in the latter case, the future parents seduce the child. The new spouse should spend a lot of time in their in-laws' company in the early years of marriage and help them with day-to-day tasks, just as children help their parents.

If a man marries a woman without asking her parents and, consequently, without seducing or working for them, it is treated as *boti*, or theft. Such an act entails *weye* or *tinana* (carrying) someone or "carrying someone and tying them up," in the manner of nonhumans. Such a marriage resembles the "tricks" used by nonhumans to seduce humans. The most common story of this kind is about Siraba, a young woman who met a soul that looked like her boyfriend. She allowed herself to be seduced by him, and they had intercourse in the forest. The next morning the young woman died because her lover was in fact a plant-soul who took her to the neme to marry her. Women, as I shall explore below, seem to be more subject to this type of action than men, perhaps due to a certain "takeable" female agency (Maizza 2017).

*Inamati* (plant-souls) or plant-people are the beings most insistent in their attempts to marry the living. Such beings are referred to generically, without specification of any precise species of plant. They prowl the villages at dusk and wait in the forest for someone to come so that they can seduce them. For this purpose they assume the appearance of someone familiar to the victim. When they are successful, they steal a person's soul, take them to the neme, and marry them. These plant-people are normally the souls of wild plants or of plants from an unknown garden. However, it is possible for village garden plant-souls to try and seduce potential spouses and lead them to the neme, which causes them to die.

Besides plant-souls, there are beings called *yama* who also want to marry people and steal their souls. These beings prey upon people who find themselves alone in the floodplains or forest. Initially, the *yama* appears as prey. If a person believes in and is seduced by this appearance and makes a move to hunt it, then the relation reverts and the *yama* kidnaps the human's soul. The *yama* may also have the appearance of a person's loved one. In all cases, the *yama* tricks the person for the encounter to take place, then takes his/her soul to where it lives. The soul kept tied up for a few days, at which point the person's body becomes ill and dies. After this the *yama* marries the soul. The *yama* might also eat the person. Here, seduction is used to mislead and, as in the case of the hunted that turns into a hunter, transforms the *yama* into the aggressor.

The shaman is the only one who is able to see the souls of plants and dead people under their human appearance without any problems (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1998). Soul abduction is the greatest danger in the Jarawara world. It is a constant problem in peoples' lives, whether on their journeys to the port, the forest, or the garden. When someone has their soul taken by an *inamati* or a *yama*, the shaman notices that the person is unwell, and he can smell the wrongdoers. He knows that the person's body is in front of him, but his/her soul is tied up elsewhere. The shaman calls the plant-souls from his garden, his plant-children, because it is they who will find the imprisoned soul, fight its captors, and bring it back. But not just any plant-children will do. The shaman calls upon those that possess a lot of *kita* (strength), such as the souls of *tingui*, peach palm, and tobacco, as mentioned earlier. For this reason, a good shaman is, above all, a good cultivator.<sup>15</sup> His success depends on his plant-children and on having multiple gardens.

The shaman also needs his plant-children to transport him to other places where he meets with the plant-children of the humans of his own village on Earth. To this end he inhales tobacco snuff and calls his plant-children. The latter descend to Earth, put him on their backs, and carry him to the neme in a manner that seems to be analogous to the way plant-children and the dead are also conducted to the upper layer. However, I believe that the conduction of the shaman to the upper layer relies upon female agency. While I cannot discuss this subject

in depth here (for more, see Maizza 2017), it may be emphasized that Jarawara women have *tonakama* (a certain takeability) or *weyena* (carriability). This quality is seen in girls immediately after their first menstruation, when they remain in reclusion in cabins especially made for them (the *wawasa*). The generation of this capacity is the desired effect of the *marina* emergence festival, an event that we could qualify as a female initiation ritual. During these festivals, sleeping and dreaming are forms of learning and recognizing the capacities of body and soul. What is revealed to the girls is that they are “takeable,” an agency that causes them to be able to be conducted by different types of beings such as men, white people, or souls. This takeability is akin to that of shamans, who are also takeable beings, a commonality of female and shamanistic agency that has previously been pointed out in Amazonia (Colpron 2005). In a nutshell, women’s agency confers the capacity to be taken or to be persuaded more easily than other beings. This agency is not an expression of feminine passivity. It derives from a greater capacity to allow oneself to be seduced and therefore to create relations.

## Conclusion

In Jarawara kinship, seduction and child-rearing can be seen actions that reveal an alternative understanding of our definition of kinship as biological relations and raise questions about some of our dichotomies, including that of man versus woman. For example, in Jarawara society the link between femininity and care and masculinity and seduction are not absolute.<sup>16</sup> Of great importance is the fact that seduction is not solely a human strategy for forming relations. All the world’s beings have access to this strategy and may exercise it for their own ends. It is precisely seduction that creates the social relations that make it possible for the Jarawara to marry, raise children, and live together. However, this same sociality allows them to be seduced by other beings, be persuaded to marry, and raise other children. Seductive, persuasive kinship implies that the very concept of kinship expands and multiplies beyond human boundaries. The central point of my argument is that kinship relations are intentional relations. It is people’s desire/will that compels them to create relations, even though, as in the case of soul-abduction by nonhumans, the will to deceive may successfully create relations as well.

When thinking about the domains of gender and kinship independently of sexual reproduction and the model heterosexual couple, we find among the Jarawara parents who do not form couples, parents who do not have biological children, and parents of plants. There are multiple kinds of ties<sup>17</sup> unrelated to sexual reproduction that nevertheless entail alliances between different types of beings. Such alliances are made possible through seduction and do not inevitably end in procreation. Such arrangements disclose a form of creativity in societies where, as has been argued, only difference exists—that is, degrees of difference—while affinity is the prior relation and consanguinity is calculated against the backdrop of affinity (Viveiros de Castro 2002:422).

I will conclude by pointing out something that feminist critiques have been suggesting for at least thirty years (Strathern 1988:66–97). Perhaps our domestic/public dichotomy that places kinship as biological reproduction in opposition to social alliances misleads when describing people who do not describe themselves in this way. This observation regarding how Western assumptions have relegated kinship to the periphery in opposition to the public sphere can be used to reflect on the way that Western anthropologists have been misguided with respect to the public sphere as well. Many Amazonianists have adopted Clastres’s (2011:176) understanding of chiefly influence within the public sphere as comprised primarily by persuasion. Yet I have shown here the role that persuasion plays in the creation of relations of marriage and filiation among humans and between humans and other sorts of beings. If we take these insights from the Jarawara into account, we can perhaps better understand that the political domain where persuasion is the main tool of chiefly influence need not counterpoised to the domestic sphere. The Amerindian chief might be first and foremost a “great” relative, a person who seduces more, convinces more, who can persuade others to accept his will. The chief, in some way, just hypes a command that everyone will follow in order to live together. Through seduction he convinces others that living close together with people who engage in mutual caring is what is most desirable in life. Perhaps in this way we can think of chiefs as having a capability or quality akin to Jarawara women, something that allows them to create relations more easily.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Approximately 250 people define themselves as Jarawara; the group is part of a constellation of related communities who speak idioms derived from the Arawa linguistic family and live near the middle course of the Purus River in the state of Amazonas, Brazil. Those who call themselves Jarawara, and speak the Jarawara language, are divided among three main villages called Saubinha, Casa Nova, and Água Branca. I have been working with the Jarawara, especially those who live in Casa Nova, since 2004 (first for my doctoral thesis (Maizza 2012) and then for other dialogues and researches). In the fourteen years that I've known the Jarawara, I have spent around fourteen months in the field. Those stays were not distributed, as one might think, in one month per year, but were rather irregular, more concentrated and longer at the beginning, when we first met. In the last six years, I've tried to visit my Jarawara friends at least once a year, or once every two years. I would like to thank FAPESP (São Paulo Research Foundation) for the postdoctoral funding that enabled my recent stays in Casa Nova. I would also like to thank everyone from the Casa Nova village for their patience, affection and care—especially Manira, Hinabori, Makeni, and Narabi. Finally, thank you to the friends and colleagues who have helped me through their feedback to this paper, especially Marta Amoroso, Laura Rival, and Tânia Stolze Lima. A warm thank you to the Tipiti reviewers and to Julia Sauma, who translated my text from Portuguese to English.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Jarawara, there's a division between the earth and “something above the earth”—an “upper layer” that is called neme. For more details on Jarawara social organization, and other information, please see Maizza (2012).

<sup>3</sup> I prefer to use the term “raising parents” instead of “adoptive” or “foster” parents, because those last two terms are charged with Western meanings and assumptions.

<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that raising parents are not mostly composed of cross-sex couples, but quite the opposite: people who did not marry, especially brothers and sisters of one of the biological parents, are important “potential raising parents,” as, most of the time, they are close to the child from the day she/he is born.

<sup>5</sup> Nayana and the expression naya naho (“I am creating/raising”, “my creation”) can also be used to refer to animals, but often nawata is preferable in these cases. Nawata is similar to “raising,” but it indicates holding and tying, and thus translates to something like, “raise while holding.”

<sup>6</sup> This connects with Sahlins' definition of kinship (2011a, 2011b) as “mutuality of being.” Mutuality is understood by the Jarawara as proximity, too.

<sup>7</sup> Pollock (2002:54), in the cited Beckerman and Valentine volume on multiparenting, mentions multiple-maternity among the Kulina. He argues that, due to uxorilocality, all the mother's sisters are the mothers of a Kulina child. Those women who breastfeed the child, as well as its “real” mother, are considered mothers of the child. Again, as the feminist critique of kinship notes, motherhood is associated with something biological—the production of milk.

<sup>8</sup> The Jarawara practices can be related to the debate over virgin-birth in British anthropology, which was summarized critically by Strathern (1995:317–321).

<sup>9</sup> I will not have enough space to discuss here what we could call the “public life” of the Jarawara—for a detailed description and reflection of what we could be called the “initiation rituals,” please see Maizza (2017).

<sup>10</sup> As aptly pointed out by Colpron (2005:96), authors such as Overing (1986), Gow (1989), and Hugh-Jones (1979) dissolved the possibility of thinking about gender relations in Lowland South America through simple oppositions such as the domestic woman vs. the public man or the reproductive woman vs. the productive man. However, as the Colpron (2005:97) notes, the discarded oppositions were transferred to a new opposition: the biological procreative woman vs. the procreative man on a social and cosmic plane—which leads the discussion back to where it started.

<sup>11</sup> It seems to me that the plants born by what we would call “vegetative reproduction” are not considered “children” of the person who planted the first plant. The Jarawara only consider as their child those plants they have put an effort into making grow—mainly by putting the seed on the ground and then “taking care” and “watching it.”

<sup>12</sup> Of the Malpighiaceae family, the tingui plant root exudes a white substance when mashed or beaten. This substance is thrown in the water to asphyxiate fish (especially small ones), which then become sluggish and are more easily caught.

<sup>13</sup> Rival (2001:76) shows that the very idea of cloning must be reconsidered when we talk about Amazonian societies.

<sup>14</sup> For a more recent and complete discussion on owners in Amazonia, see Costa (2017).

<sup>15</sup> Unlike many other Amazonian societies, where the shaman's qualities resemble those of a good hunter.

<sup>16</sup> As, for example, suggested by Descola (2001:98) in reference to the Achuar.

<sup>17</sup> It has been pointed out to me that the multiplicity of Jarawara kinship is not limited to multiple paternity and multiple maternity but can also be thought of through the idea of multifiliation. I have not developed this idea here, but it does seem very coherent to me. It made me also think about Kopenawa's description of his xapiri spirits, which are always so large in number (Albert and Kopenawa 2013).

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