

Of fear and friendship: Amazonian sociality beyond kinship and affinity

FERNANDO SANTOS-GRANERO *Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute*

The article explores the nature of sociality and alterity in indigenous Amazonia. If native Amazonian sociality is all about predatory affinity or, alternatively, convivial consanguinity, why do native Amazonians constantly strive to establish social relationships with people with whom they are related neither as kin nor as affines? The comparative analysis of intertribal trading partnerships, shamanic networks, and mystical associations allows the author to examine the mechanisms by which hostile or potentially hostile relations between strangers – non-relatives – are transformed into relations of amicability. Special emphasis is placed on the role played by ‘trust’ and ‘spaces of trust’ in the creation of non-kin-based social networks. In brief the article analyses the little-studied issue of ‘friendship’, viewing it as an alternative to kinship and affinity in the construction of Amerindian societies and multi-ethnic polities.

In the matters of lending, assistance in work, and sociability, friendship plays at least as large a functional part as does mere kinship, which, when it stands alone, implies for the most part, as among ourselves, rights and duties frequently less vital than those of friendship.

Gillin 1975 [1936]: 99

This article is concerned with how sociality in its broadest sense – that is, as a domain that includes relations with alien and even spirit beings – is understood and constructed by Amazonian indigenous peoples.¹ I will analyse trading partnerships, shamanic alliances, and mystical associations with other-worldly beings, as instances of the creation of spaces of sociality with ambiguous others. The focus, therefore, is on the little-studied issue of friendship, which I view as an alternative mode of relationship in the forging of native Amazonian sociality. In so doing, I seek to problematize prevailing views of Amerindian social life, which place emphasis either on consanguinity, conviviality, and identity, or on affinity, predation, and alterity (see Overing & Passes 2000; Viveiros de Castro 1996a). Labelled respectively the ‘moral economy of intimacy’ and the ‘symbolic economy of alterity’, these two approaches, which Viveiros de Castro (1996a) viewed as distinct but not exclusive analytical styles, have subsequently been represented by Taylor (1996) as opposed and disparate theoretical positions and schools of thought. This was an unfortunate turn, for it transformed what was originally a ternary view of Amazonian studies – Viveiros de Castro’s

original formulation included a third approach labelled the 'political economy of control' – into a dualistic, 'either/or' type of formula. Furthermore, it transformed what originally were conceived of as different theoretical emphases into inflexible models of native Amazonian sociality.

If, as it is argued, Amazonian sociality is only about kinship or affinity, conviviality or predation, how are we to interpret the many relationships between non-kin that are phrased in the idiom of friendship? The need to examine this type of relationships, somewhat obscured today by the over-emphasis on consanguinity and affinity, was pointed out some time ago, without it leading, however, to more detailed research. Viveiros de Castro (1993: 178) has drawn attention to a wide variety of social relationships that fall neither into the sphere of convivial kinship, nor into that of predatory affinity, articulating the need for a Lowland South American theory of non-kin relationships. On the basis of C.S. Peirce's notion of 'thirdness', he and Rivière have stressed the importance of those social relationships that in the highly dualistic Amazonian indigenous societies mediate 'between the same and the other, the inside and outside, friend and enemy, living and dead' (Rivière 1993: 512). As an interstitial institution (Suttles 1970: 97; Wolf 1977: 168), friendship offers new avenues through which to explore the nature of sociality in native Amazonia. This article is meant as an initial step in this direction.

In native Amazonia, at least three spheres exist in which relations of amicability can be established with 'others'. The first sphere is that of familial others, or the 'others who are not', that is, people with whom ego is already related through links of consanguinity and affinity of varying degrees of closeness. Examples of friendship in this sphere are Gê ceremonial formal friendships, but also some instances of Jivaro *amigri* relationships (Da Matta 1982: 87-93; Harner 1973: 125). The second sphere is that of neighbouring others, or the 'others within', those who belong to ego's ethnic group but are separated from ego by either social or geographical distance. Instances of friendship in this domain are the Araweté *apihi-pihã* sexual friends (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 167-78) and the Piro *compadres* (Gow 1991: 174-8). Finally, there is the sphere of foreign others, or the 'others without', that is, persons who do not belong to ego's ethnic group and are generally considered as enemies.

This article focuses on the formalized personal friendships that are established with enemy peoples and which clearly differ from the 'formal friendships' described in the literature on native Amazonian peoples (e.g. Da Matta 1982: 87-93; Seeger 1981: 144-5). In this latter context, this term designates certain ceremonial relationships found mostly among Gê peoples. Individuals related in this way are like friends in that they are not relatives. But they have little freedom to choose their friends and these are often prescribed or chosen for them in accordance with moiety divisions.

For the purposes of this work, I will define friendship very broadly as a type of interpersonal relationship in which the individuals involved – who may or may not be related by other kinds of ties – seek out each other's company, exhibit mutually helping behaviour, and are joined by links of mutual generosity and trust that go beyond those expected between kin or affines. The relationships of friendship analysed below are either recognized as such by Amerindian people through the use of specific terms, or have been characterized as friendships by the anthropologists describing them. In either case, they are distinguished from, and opposed to, other types of interpersonal relations, namely those derived from consanguineal or affinal ties.

Three questions are of interest to me here. Firstly, why do native Amazonians seek to establish relations with people who do not belong to their own ethnic group; people who are neither 'safe' consanguines nor 'necessary' affines, and who are generally considered to be dangerous or potentially dangerous? Secondly, what are the social, rather than the ideological, mechanisms through which native Amazonians transform these ambiguous others into friends? Thirdly, can native Amazonian formalized personal friendships be characterized as friendships as the latter are understood in Western societies; and if so, what is the relationship between kinship and friendship? I focus on relations of friendship not only between human beings – namely trading partnerships and shamanic alliances – but also between humans and non-humans – to wit, mystical associations with spirit beings. Examples drawn from a wide variety of ethnographic sources and focused on seven Amerindian societies will provide the groundwork for discussion. Although these examples should not be taken to represent the totality of Amazonian indigenous societies, they do represent a wide range of cultural areas (Andean piedmont, Gran Sabana, Central Brazil) and language families (Arawak, Jivaro, Carib, Tupí-Guaraní, Gê), indicating that formalized personal friendships are a widespread social practice.

Trading partnerships

It has long been accepted that trade in Lowland South America does not always arise from ecological variations, and that product specialization is often artificially generated and self-imposed (Basso 1973: 55-6; Chagnon 1968: 100; Kelekna 1991: 266). It has also been shown that not even after the entry of industrial goods into indigenous networks did Amerindian trade adopt the principle of profit-making basic to Western economic rationality (Bodley 1973: 595; Gregor 1977: 306). Similarly, although some authors have argued that the aims of native Amazonian trade are political rather than economic, it is clear that intertribal trade seldom culminates in the kind of marriage exchanges and political alliances anticipated in the ideal model of how this institution works (Chagnon 1968: 99-100; Lévi-Strauss 1943; 1969).

If intertribal trade cannot be fully explained by the constraints imposed by ecological differentiation, the dictates of economic self-interest, or the imperatives of political alliances, what, then, motivates it? The answer to this question, I would suggest, is to be found by analysing the micro-dynamics of Amerindian trade. There are three aspects of this trade that have generally been overlooked. Firstly, most trading takes place not between groups but between individuals. Even in intervillage trading ceremonies, transactions are always between individual partners (Basso 1973: 147-53). Secondly, with a few notable exceptions, traders are seldom village leaders acting as mediators between exchanging collectivities (Harner 1973: 126; Rivière 1984: 82; Schäfer 1991: 61; Thomas 1982: 126). Lastly, the importance of trade does not always reside in the value of the products exchanged, but rather in that of the social relationships they embody.

Keeping these considerations in mind, we should ask ourselves not why do groups trade but, rather, why do individuals trade. Harner's (1973: 126) answer to this question – namely that individuals trade 'to acquire friends' – provides us, I believe, with the key to the paradox of native Amazonian trade.² In effect, one of the most conspicuous features of Amerindian trade is that it is carried out through highly institutionalized dyadic trading partnerships or friendships. These partnerships have four important characteristics: they are generally established between unrelated men who are socially and geographically distant; they are highly formalized, particularly in their initial

stages; they are always phrased in the idiom of friendship; and, finally, they create bonds of trust, co-operation, and intimacy that may be stronger than those existing between close kin and actual affines.

Among the Jivaro, trading partnerships are frequently established between men from different settlements belonging to the same, or to neighbouring, preferably Jivaro-speaking, ethnic groups: that is, between enemy groups who raided each other in the past in order to take head trophies (Descola 1996a: 154; Harner 1973: 125). Trading partners are usually unrelated men. They call one another *amigri* or *amikri*, terms probably derived from the Spanish 'amigo' or friend.³ Jivaro partnerships begin with a series of informal visits in which prospective friends exchange small gifts. They end with a formal ritual in which the partners and their respective wives exchange numerous valuable presents (Descola 1996a: 153-4; Harner 1973: 128-9).

Jivaro trading partnerships 'constitute the strongest male units within the same generation' (Harner 1973: 125). The *amigri* bond is a contractual relationship through which partners assume mutual obligations exceeding those existing between consanguines. In fact, in exceptional circumstances, pairs of brothers, or of fathers and sons, might choose to become trading friends 'to formalize their sense of mutual obligation to one another' (Harner 1973: 125). In such cases, however, the relationship of amicability supersedes that of consanguinity. Thus, when two brothers formalize their relationship as trading partners they address each other as 'friends', rather than as 'brothers' (Harner 1973: 131). Jivaro people explicitly recognize that one does not choose one's relatives, and is therefore under no obligation to like them. In contrast, one does choose one's friends, and because one likes them, one is bound to honour obligations due to them.

Ashaninka, Asheninka, and Yanesha trading partnerships are also established both at the intra- and intertribal level (Bodley 1973: 590; Schäfer 1991: 53). People involved in such relations address each other as *ayompari* or *iyompari*, terms that can be rendered both as 'trade partner' and as 'friend' (Kindberg 1980: 18; Payne 1980: 150). Trading friendships are generally established between unrelated, potentially dangerous, men belonging to different ethnic groups. The key to this system, according to Bodley, is to provide 'strangers a legitimate non-kin, non-enemy identity' (1973: 595). At a certain level, *ayompari* relationships are very formal. Visits are highly ritualized and involve ceremonial dialogues between trading friends. At another level, however, the relation between trade partners is one of warm affection (Schäfer 1991: 54). Men compose songs expressing their fondness for their *ayompari* friends. These songs resemble the love songs that Ashaninka men and women compose for each other; they are consistent with the way in which *ayompari* relationships are conceived (Schäfer 1991: 55). In the first stage of the relationship, prospective friends address each other as *namathani*, a term that translates as 'fiancés'. As their relationship deepens, they become, it is said, 'as if brothers'. However, among the Ashaninka, Asheninka, and Yanesha, when two men decide to establish a trading friendship, they stop addressing each other by the corresponding kinship or affinal term – if they are related in such a way – replacing it with the term *ayompari* or friend.

Among the Pemon, trade friends call each other *pawana*, a term that Thomas translates as 'in a trading relationship' (1982: 124), but that also has the meaning of 'preferential friend' (*ami préférentiel*) (Grenand 1996). The *pawana* friendship is 'a one-to-one relationship of exclusivity'. It can be instituted between two unrelated men belonging to different Pemon settlements, or between Pemon men and men from neighbouring, potentially hostile, ethnic groups. *Pawana* friendships can sometimes be instituted between two young men sponsored by a pair of older partners. They can also

be passed from father to son or from father-in-law to son-in-law. But, in both cases, the *pawana* relationship is transmitted only if the new partners feel mutual sympathy and are willing to become friends (Thomas 1982: 124, 129). *Pawana* partnerships are also characterized by sharing, closeness, and intimacy. Although trading friendships can be devolved, they are in no way simply inherited, for they entail a kind of mutual trust that can only spring from repeated personal contact.

To summarize, if native Amazonians risk their lives to trade with the enemy it is not simply in order to obtain desired goods. It is because the goods they obtain through such trade embody the special relations that they entertain with the enemy. Trading with enemies often entails a certain amount of risk, competition, and strife, particularly when the latter are non-indigenous (Henley 1982: 177). Trade goods acquired from beyond the boundaries of one's ethnic group might have little intrinsic use or exchange value. But sometimes they are believed to be endowed with dangerous powers and, by being tokens or emblems of the courage and charisma of the trader in his dealings with the enemy, they assume the form of symbolic capital; a capital that translates into greater social prestige and power for the man who possesses it. This, however, is only one aspect of intertribal trading friendships. More importantly, as I shall argue below, intertribal trading offers friends-*cum*-traders other personal and affective rewards that are of equal, if not greater, value in their own eyes.

Shamanic alliances

In Lowland South America shamanism is extremely competitive. Native Amazonian shamans are engaged among themselves in a constant struggle for greater prestige and an ever larger clientele; they also battle to counteract each other's purported bewitching activities. However, Amerindian shamans are not isolated monads in permanent battle with each other. On the contrary, they are at the centre of a network of interpersonal mystical power relations, which are generally rated according to the principles of social and geographic distance (Santos-Granero 1991: 266-7). Local shamans to whom one is related through ties of kinship or affinity are considered to be good. Socially distant but geographically close shamans are thought to be responsible for most witchcraft activities. In contrast, geographically distant, unrelated shamans are neither good nor bad. They are potential enemies, but they can also be potential friends.

Shamanic friendships usually originate when a man, or less commonly a woman (but see Henry 1964; Perruchon 2003; Wagley 1977), seeks to be trained by an established shaman. Former apprentices often maintain 'close affectionate ties' with their masters after finishing their training (Kloos 1971: 213). Master shamans often train several novices at the same time, and when this happens, fellow shamanic students also maintain friendly relations with each other after their training period is over (Gillin 1975 [1936]: 171). An analysis of Jivaro – Shuar, Achuar, and Aguaruna – and Yanesha data shows how these shamanic alliances are frequently described as relations of friendship.

Would-be shamans often receive their first magical darts (*tsentsak*) from their fathers (Mader 1999: 84). However, since Jivaro people believe that the most powerful shamans belong to ethnic groups living in close contact with white or *mestizo* society, namely the Canelos Quichua, Cocama, and Chayahuita, later on they venture as much as they dare into the territories of these enemy peoples in order to obtain their much valued *tsentsak*. They achieve this by establishing *amigri* relationships, or relationships of friendship, with different, unrelated master shamans (Harner 1973: 118). This holds true even if the parties that enter into such relationship are of opposite sex (Perruchon

2003: 225). This type of relationship is predicated upon the same terms as those existing between Jivaro trade friends.

Having a large number of shamanic friends allows Jivaro shamans to acquire a large number of magical darts to treat different illnesses, diversify the sources of their magical darts so as not to be overly dependent on any particular individual, and enhance their network of alliances to better fend off the attacks of enemy shamans. As a result, the oldest and more powerful Jivaro shamans end up having a large number of shamanic friends (Descola 1996a: 341, 347; Mader 1999: 84). Shuar shamans engaged in a master-pupil relationship call each other 'friend' (Rubenstein 2002: 146, 156). Under exceptional circumstances, however, shamanic friendships can also be established with kin, or with actual or potential affines. In such cases, however, the individuals involved stop addressing themselves as kin or affines, and address each other as 'friends' (Rubenstein 2002: 152, 154, 162).

Yanesha shamanic practitioners – tobacco healers (*pa'llerr*), ayahuasqueros (specialists in the *Banisteriopsis* hallucinogen), and herbalists (*apartañ*) – are in constant contact with a large number of peers with whom they have relations of friendship and alliance, or rivalry and enmity (Santos-Granero 1991: 264-74). Yanesha shamanic specialists attempt to make as many shamanic friends as possible, to ensure both their personal safety and the success of their curing activities. Yanesha people believe that most illnesses are caused by witchcraft, whether by lay people or by specialists. A shaman's power is measured according to the number of animal spirits he possesses or has managed to befriend. When a shaman has to cure an illness caused by a more powerful rival, his only chance of curing it is to resort to one or more of his shaman friends, to join forces with in order to defeat the sorcerer.

Shamanic friendships often develop among pupils of the same master shaman, generally young men who have come from different settlements, and even from different ethnic groups (Santos-Granero 1991: 273-4). They also arise between socially and geographically distant shamans who come to know and trust each other during their curing expeditions. Friendships between Yanesha and Ashaninka, or Asheninka, shamanic practitioners are common (Santos-Granero 1991: 271). Shamanic allies call each other *noyem*, 'my friend'. They consult each other in actual visits or during dreams. In such encounters, characterized by great camaraderie, they share healing knowledge and techniques. Relationships between shamanic friends entail a great deal of trust (*yemteñets*), for in the process of curing jointly a patient they are dependent on each other, and their mutual vulnerabilities are more exposed than ever. They also entail a kind of personal intimacy, emanating from the sharing of shamanic experiences and their constant struggle against common enemies and death, which achieves a level of intensity rarely seen in other kin and non-kin relationships.

Briefly, then, in the context of shamanic alliances, the link of friendship either fills in the void existing between two unrelated shamans, creating a relationship where there was none, or it supersedes pre-existing kin or affinal ties, transforming them into a new type of bond. In either instance, the new relationship creates a higher order tie, entailing a kind of camaraderie, affection, and a host of rights and duties that are absent among unrelated persons, or among people related only as kin or affines.

Mystical associations

Shamans do not seek to make friends only among their masters and peers. As Descola (1996b) and Viveiros de Castro (1996b) have argued, from the point of view of native

Amazonians the realm of the social involves not only human beings, but also animals, plants, objects, and a host of invisible beings, who, although not exactly the same as humans, are nevertheless considered to be human in essence. Native Amazonian shamans often engage these dangerous, primordial humans dialogically. Thus, relations with these extraordinary beings can be scrutinized under the same light as human social relations. In the following paragraphs, I explore the ties of friendship that Tapirapé, Matsigenka, and Kaingáng shamans establish with a host of alien and potentially dangerous spirit beings for a variety of shamanic purposes. It should be noted, however, that not all relations between shamans and spirit beings are 'friendly'. Indeed, the anthropological literature on native Amazonian shamanism is full of examples of relationships between shamans and other-worldly beings that would fall within what Descola has labelled the 'predatory mode of relationship' (1996b: 94).

Tapirapé men and women seeking to become shamans embark on a dream quest whose main objective is to establish friendly relations with as many *anchunga* spirits as possible (Wagley 1977: 199). These may be aquatic and terrestrial animal spirits, sky and forest spirits, or the spirits of the dead. All these spirit beings are potentially dangerous. While visiting the invisible worlds in dreams, shamanic apprentices are sometimes invited to visit the homes of the spirits they meet along the way. These invitations are often traps in which malevolent *anchunga* spirits seek to sodomize and eat unaware novices (Wagley 1977: 182-3). In such cases, apprentices are forced to struggle against the evil spirits to save their lives. It is said, however, that frequently, instead of combating the *anchunga*, the apprentice enlists them 'as "his friends" and eventual aids' (Wagley 1977: 183).

The parties involved in such mystical associations call each other *tuhawa* or 'friend', although sometimes shamans can address their spirit helpers as 'sons' (Wagley 1977: 182, 184). Established shamans visit their spirit friends transformed as birds or in their dream canoes. Their spirit hosts invite them with 'real' food and drink. Shamans who have been able to acquire many spirit friends are said to 'know how to walk with [the] spirits' (Wagley 1977: 199). They hunt together and decorate each other. More importantly, Tapirapé shamans can convoke their spirit friends through song to help them cure their patients (Wagley 1977: 184). In brief, we are told, of a Tapirapé shaman, that 'ghosts were his friends, and the power of a shaman grew in proportion as he fraternized with, or defeated in combat, the demonic spirits of the forest' (Wagley 1977: 181).

Matsigenka shamans (*seripi'gari*) are believed to be able to cure thanks only to the establishment of relations of friendship with good spirits known as *saankarite*, the 'pure ones', or the 'unseen ones' (Johnson 2003: 212). The pure ones are mostly beneficent beings incapable of doing evil, but they can sometimes be dangerous (Johnson 2003: 218; Rosengren 2004: 42). When a Matsigenka shamanic apprentice establishes a personal relationship with one of these spirits, the latter becomes the shaman's *ine'tsane*, 'visiting spirit', who acts as his guide and protector. The larger the shaman's network of spirit friends, the greater is his power as a healer. Under the influence of ayahuasca and other psychotropic plants, Matsigenka shamans fly regularly to the celestial dwelling of the pure ones, where they visit their spirit friends. There, their *ine'tsane* friends entertain them, inviting them to eat and drink, and making them gifts (Baer 1994: 125; Rosengren 2002: 20). These gifts may take the form of magical stones embodying jaguar spirits (*isere'pito*), facial designs, beautiful painted cotton tunics, or mystical knowledge (Baer 1994: 122, 124-5). In exchange, shamans give their spirit friends tobacco and magical plants (among them *Cyperus sp.*), which are their main food (Rosengren 2004: 41).

Although it is reported that sometimes Matsigenka shamans call these spirits by kin or affinal terms – e.g. son, brother, brother-in-law, aunt – they are treated, above all, as ‘companions’ or ‘friends’ (Baer 1979: 118; Johnson 2003: 215; Rosengren 2002: 19–20; 2004: 47). The relationship, we are told, is one of ‘comradship between equals’, characterized by familiarity, intimacy, and mutual trust (Baer 1979: 126; Rosengren 2004: 44). Shamans publicly express the intimate ties they have with their spirit friends in the songs that they chant during their curing sessions (Baer 1994: 128).

To become a shaman, Kaingáng men and women must establish a relationship of friendship with one or more of the many spirits of the natural world (Henry 1964: 71–8). These spirits, known as *nggÿyúdn*, may appear in their natural form or in the shape of human beings. Encounters with the ambiguous *nggÿyúdn* are, however, very dangerous. If the person who comes across any of these spirits rejects their invitation to visit them, refuses to accept their gifts, or tells others about the encounter, the spirits become angry and make the person ill or do not allow themselves to be seen again. But if the person accepts the spirit’s invitation, the latter grows to be his or her friend. As such, they often bestow on their human friends healing powers, magical medicines, hunting knowledge, ability to discover bee hives, or immunity against illness.

One of the ways in which Kaingáng people can establish a permanent friendship with *nggÿyúdn* spirits is by adopting one of their children. If the shaman in question is female, these spirit children are placed directly in her womb, and if male, they are placed in the womb of his wife, and raised as their own. Such an act, we are told, turns a given spirit into a ‘close friend and companion’ (Henry 1964: 76). Relationships with spirit friends are sometimes equated to ‘hunting companionships’ (Henry 1964: 73). Although mystical associates do not intermarry or share wives – as Kaingáng hunting companions do on the human level – they regularly share food. Relationships with spirit friends are described as ‘warm’, ‘close’, and ‘intense’. Like human friendships, they are based on ‘superlatively developed emotional rapport and strong identification’ (Henry 1964: 78). In fact, it is affirmed that ‘[a] highly affective relationship with the supernatural is the only kind of friendly relationship that is intelligible to the Kaingáng’ (Henry 1964: 73).

Although in only one of the above societies auxiliary spirits are referred to by a term that can be translated as ‘friend’ (Tapirapé), the manner in which Kaingáng and Matsigenka shamans describe their relationships with these spirit beings has led anthropologists to characterize or represent them as relations of friendship (Henry 1964: 76; Rosengren 2004: 47). According to these authors, relations with these mystical associates entail a kind of intimacy and trust that can only be achieved with time, after repeated acts of mutual generosity. Thus, Henry’s assertion in relation to the Kaingáng – that ‘[e]verything a shaman had from the supernatural he had by virtue of a strong and enduring emotional relationship with some supernatural being’ (1964: 78) – can be said to be valid for all the above examples.

Kinship and friendship

Such emotional connection is considered to be a crucial component of friendship by Montaigne (1972 [1603]), arguably the most important exponent of the idealistic view on friendship in modern Western thought. In his essay ‘Of Friendship’ we find all the traits that have come to be expected from ‘real’ friendships in Euro-American societies. According to Montaigne, friendships are voluntary relationships based on choice and free will; they are personal rather than social affairs; unlike other relations, friendships

are totally unselfish; they entail a kind of intimacy and informality seldom found in any other type of relationship; and they flourish among equal, though not necessarily identical, persons. Measured against these parameters, the relationships discussed above would be found somewhat wanting. Native Amazonian intertribal friendships are voluntary, but sometimes they can be passed on; they are personal affairs, but they do have a social dimension insofar as they are often the only civil connections between enemy groups; they are characterized by intimacy and affectivity, but they usually entail a certain degree of ritual formality; they are unselfish insofar as both parties are expected to be unrestrictedly generous, but they have an instrumental aspect to them expressed in the expectation of regular exchanges of food, valuable gifts, prized knowledge, and assurances of mutual protection.

Montaigne's view, which disengages friendship from social, political, and economic motivations, corresponds, however, to a very particular model of friendship, a model enshrined by nineteenth-century romantics, which has persisted to a large extent in industrial and post-industrial societies (Cucó Giner 1995: 19). In contrast to this view, anthropologists insist that whereas relations of friendship can be found in almost all human societies, models of friendship vary substantially, making it difficult to offer a single, all-encompassing definition of Friendship with a capital F (Bell & Coleman 1999: 4; Guichard, Heady & Tadesse 2003: 10).

Each of the five aspects that Montaigne singled out as central to amicability has thus been attacked by anthropologists on the basis of cross-cultural analyses. Cohen (1961) questions the notion that friendships are voluntary rather than ascribed or prescribed, showing that in many societies they are socially arranged and cannot be terminated without serious social and/or ritual sanctions. In his *Essai sur le don*, Mauss argued that although, in theory, in primitive and archaic societies the gift – central to relations of friendship – is generously offered, 'the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest' (1970 [1925]: 1). He further contended that formalized personal friendships such as trading partnerships should be seen as social rather than personal relations insofar as their aim is to connect social groups, not individuals. Bell and Coleman (1999: 4) warn that Western expectations of intimacy, privacy, and affectivity cannot be assumed to be universal traits of friendship. Finally, Cohen (1961: 353), Wolf (1977: 173), and Deutsch (1994: 20) contend that friendships can also be established between people of unequal social, economic, or ethnic backgrounds, provided they are characterized by balanced exchange and exclude any kind of dominance of one party over the other.

This tension between the voluntary and the ascribed, the personal and the social, the altruistic and the selfish, the affective and the formal, the like and the unlike, is present, I would contend, in all models of friendship, with some models being closer to the first term of the equations and others to the second. Native Amazonian models of intertribal friendships can be said to be midway between these two poles. In some respects they resemble what Cohen (1961: 352) calls 'inalienable' friendships; in others what Wolf (1977: 172) describes as 'instrumental' friendships. Like inalienable friendships they are generally entered into ritually or ceremonially. They are eminently moral relations, often governed by supernatural sanctions. And the rights and duties, privileges and liabilities accorded to, or expected from, intertribal friends are, we are told, 'as binding as those of consanguineal kinsmen' (Cohen 1961: 352). In turn, like instrumental friendships, native Amazonian formalized personal friendships are not totally altruistic but fulfil important pragmatic objectives: acquisition of exotic goods, allies, prized knowledge, and, above all, security. They are not constrained to the two members of the

dyad but constitute a link between the social groups to which each of them belongs. Despite their instrumental character, however, affectivity continues to be an important ingredient in the relation, so much so, we are told, that if this emotion is absent it must be feigned lest the relationship disintegrates.

The difficulty in identifying relations of friendship in tribal societies is partly due to the assumption that this type of relationship is socially relevant only in complex societies. Often seen as a product of modernity (Deutsch 1994; Guichard *et al.* 2003; Suttles 1970), friendship in Euro-American societies has been the object of important historical and sociological works (Allan 1989; 1996; Gurdin 1996; McGuire 1988). In contrast, there is a paucity of major studies on the subject of friendship in tribal societies, where kinship is made to encompass the entire field of sociality, and friendship appears as a subsidiary relation.

Some authors argue that friendship has little chance of flourishing in societies where kinship structures remain strong (Bell & Coleman 1999: 6). Following Montaigne (1972 [1603]), these authors contend that friendship and kinship constitute different forms of social interaction. They warn, however, against drawing too rigid a distinction between kinship and friendship, insofar as in many societies these are partially overlapping rather than opposing types of relationship. Guichard *et al.* (2003: 10) adhere to this stance, arguing further that relations of friendship should not be studied as a separate topic but analysed together with kinship as complementary forms of social integration. Despite these attempts at viewing kinship and friendship as distinct, though connected, fields of social interaction, the notion that kinship encompasses friendship persists in assertions such as those of Bell and Coleman, to wit: 'The power of kinship as an idiom through which to express the power of all social relations considered to have binding qualities cannot be denied' (1999: 6-7). Here, the main issue seems to be that intertribal friends are often referred to by kin or affinal terms. As we shall see below, this is not a sufficient argument to regard amicability as being subordinate to kinship.

The identification of particular forms of friendship with particular social structures à la Cohen (1961), or the assertion that friendship does not flourish where kinship structures are strong (Bell & Coleman 1999: 6), is highly problematic. As we have seen, native Amazonian models of friendship share traits of what Cohen and Wolf have defined as inalienable and instrumental friendships. But these two authors differ radically between themselves as to the social contexts in which these types of friendship prosper. Inalienable friendships, according to Cohen (1961: 354, 314), tend to emerge in closed societies, generally corporate lineal groups, where highly integrated kin groups, physical proximity, and sedentary life generate feelings of intense social proximity. In contrast, according to Wolf (1977: 174), instrumental friendships thrive in open communities, where people can mobilize ties of both kinship and friendship to widen their spheres of social relations. With some exceptions, native Amazonian societies cannot be described either as closed or as open societies. Although intertribal friendships in this geographical area share traits of both inalienable and instrumental friendships, they cannot be ascribed to either type of social structure.

Despite the existence of numerous friendship models or patterns, friendship does not seem to be a dependent variable of social structure. But friendships emerge in particular circumstances or social situations. Interestingly enough, with a few exceptions, most authors do not seem to be concerned with what Suttles terms the 'situational elements of friendship' (1970: 100). Both the more philosophical (e.g. Bloom

1993; Rouner 1994) and the more sociological (e.g. Allan 1989; Bell & Coleman 1999) studies take relations of friendship as a given. They discuss the nature of friendship *vis-à-vis* other social relationships, they describe the dynamics of different types of friendship in different societies, and even hint at the possible emotional or utilitarian needs that friendships fulfil, but they seldom explore the social situations in which particular forms of friendship develop. I suggest that native Amazonian friendships, established beyond the boundaries of one's own ethnic group and even beyond the boundaries of visible human sociality, emerge in contexts of great fear of (potentially) dangerous others. It is this fear that endows native Amazonian intertribal friendships with their peculiar character and explains the great importance attributed to trust in such relationships.

Amicability and trust

In situations of intertribal warfare, shamanic competition, and supernatural dangers, trading partnerships, shamanic alliances, and mystical associations provide a means for creating spaces of trust and sociality between people and beings not linked, or weakly linked, by ties of kinship and affinity. Bonds between trading partners, shamanic allies, and mystical associates are frequently stronger than ties of close kinship and affinity. As has been shown above, in those exceptional instances where amicable relationships involve people already related as kin or affines, it is the bond of friendship that takes pre-eminence over the previous ones. When native Amazonians related as consanguines or affines choose to enter into formalized personal friendships they are not looking for more of the same, but rather for something different. The strength of intertribal ties of friendship resides in two factors. Firstly, they are freely chosen and consensual.⁴ Secondly, they can be maintained only through repeated demonstrations of trustworthiness.

Jivaro trade friends, we are told, are extremely generous. They are expected to respond positively to requests for military aid, offer refuge in times of war, and, above all, guarantee the safety of their partners while they are visiting (Descola 1996a; Harner 1973). Trade friends acting as hosts must provide safe conduct, act as bodyguards, and accompany visiting partners to other settlements. By addressing trade partners in public as 'friends', they let potential local enemies know that they are under their protection. Jivaro trading friends are appreciated for their courage and audacity, but they come to be really esteemed only when they prove to be dependable (Kelekna 1991: 273).

The relationship between Ashaninka trading friends is also based on mutual, long-term acquaintance and trust. To show their mutual trust, host partners allow their guests to inspect their houses and possessions, something that would be unthinkable even between the closest of consanguines (Schäfer 1991: 60). Host partners are expected to protect their visiting 'friends', and to accompany them to other settlements, where they have neither relatives nor trade associates. In this way, we are told, the *ayompari* system generates 'chains of trustworthiness' that traverse and interconnect the territories of different Ashaninka subgroups and their non-Ashaninka neighbours (Schäfer 1991: 52).

Trust – already singled out by Overing (1999) as a crucial feature of Amerindian everyday community life – is crucial to the proper functioning of the system because, in most cases, indigenous trade is based on generalized reciprocity and deferred exchange. In a context characterized by suspicion, feuding, and betrayal, keeping one's word becomes an important personal capital. The more you prove to be trustworthy,

the larger the number of people who will trust you and be willing to trade with you. By having numerous trading friends, trustworthy Jivaro traders acquire an above average degree of social security in a society where security is a scarce resource (Harner 1973: 126). The same holds true for Pemon traders (Thomas 1982: 128-9).

Security is also an important component of shamanic alliances. By establishing amicable relations with a large number of peers, an active shaman creates a safety net that serves him as a reservoir of shamanic knowledge that he can tap when trying to cure gravely ill patients, or as a medical council to which he can resort when he himself becomes the subject of a sorcery attack. Given the deep rivalries that pit shamans against each other, these networks are indispensable for personal survival. Trust is basic to the persistence of these friendships. It is not, however, a foregone condition. Trust can be gained, maintained, and enhanced through time only by means of numerous small acts of unrestricted generosity and generalized reciprocity.

Like any other amicable relation, shamanic alliances are open to duplicity and betrayal. Jivaro shamans, for instance, are always mindful of the need to maintain their shamanic friendships by a constant exchange of gifts. This is not to say that shamanic friends are always loyal and dependable. A Jivaro master shaman can sometimes betray one of his friends by withdrawing from them the *tsentsak* spirits he has bestowed on them (Harner 1973: 121). To minimize the harmful effects of such duplicity, Jivaro shamans strive to establish more, rather than fewer, shamanic friendships.

Personal security is also a central motivation for entering into friendly relations with other-worldly beings. Most native Amazonian shamans have to travel to the normally invisible spirit worlds in order to obtain the knowledge and powers necessary to cure or bewitch. Invisible worlds are extremely dangerous. Without the aid and guidance of their spirit friends shamans would be unable to overcome the risks, mystical traps, and temptations they have to face while visiting these worlds. Spirit friends warn shamans of upcoming attacks from their rivals, or from evil spirits, talking to them in dreams, or warning them through a variety of mystical signs (Rubenstein 2002: 158). They also provide them with an array of mystical objects – stones, darts, crystals, and cloaks – that they can turn into spirit forces to be used when confronting dangers in both the visible and invisible worlds.

Like other relations of friendship, mystical associations become deeper and stronger with time. Shamans do not ‘acquire’ spirit-helpers once and for all. They befriend them by initial offers of gifts, and maintain their friendship through a subsequent stream of offerings, which in due time spirit friends reciprocate. Spirits test novice shamans to see whether they deserve their friendship. In turn, novice shamans test their spirit friends to ensure that they are not evil spirits in disguise, intent on killing them. Familiarity and intimacy are essential to the relationship between Matsigenka shamans and spirit auxiliaries. But above all, we are told, the most important pillar of mystical friendships is trust (Rosengren 2004: 44).

This trust is all the more essential since it is placed on people or beings whom native Amazonians have no reason to trust or, worse still, have all the reason to distrust. Trust in the context of relationships with predatory others is hard to win and hard to keep. Once achieved and converted into friendship, it acquires a high value and becomes an essential asset in a person’s social life.

Is personal security, then, the only reason for establishing relations of friendship with potentially dangerous others? The answer is yes and no. Successful traders and shamans certainly have a larger social network upon which to rely, as well as greater

freedom of (safe) movement than ordinary people do. This translates into greater social prestige. Safety, connections, and a good reputation are extremely important social factors in native Amazonia, but there is also a less functionalist and more personal reason for men (and sometimes women) to try to acquire trading partners, shamanic allies, or spirit-helpers, namely the desire to make friends and attain what native Amazonians would call the 'good life'. Friends are fun. We know it and native Amazonians know it. Having a good time is certainly a central aspect of the type of relationships we have examined (Bodley 1973: 595; Descola 1996a: 149; Harner 1973: 129; Thomas 1982: 130). In each of these instances friendship is based on mutual trust, reciprocal care, sharing openly, and laughing often. Because they are dependent upon personal affinities, relations of friendship frequently transcend the divisions imposed by such collective mechanisms of inclusion and identity as kinship ties, settlement membership, or ethnic affiliation.

Conclusions: kinship, affinity, and friendship

Because native Amazonians sometimes use images and metaphors derived from the idiom of kinship and affinity to describe formalized personal friendships with alien, ambiguous others, some authors have concluded that these relations are not different in essence from kin or affinal ties, or that they can be equated to either type of relationship. Among the Trio, *ipawana* trade friends should ideally call each other *pito*, a term that can designate cross-cousins, or actual or potential brothers-in-law (Rivière 1969: 79). Jivaro shamans and their alien partners of similar age refer to each other as brothers-in-law (Rubenstein 2002: 152). At the beginning of their relationship, Ashaninka partners refer to one another as 'fiancés' but they look forward to having a relationship 'as if brothers' (Schäfer 1991: 55). And it is said that Tapirapé shamans sometimes treat their spirit friends as 'sons' (Wagley 1977: 184).

Similarly, Descola (1996a: 156-7) argues that the bond of trading friendship among Jivaro people is comparable to affinity by marriage in that it requires a certain distance between the partners, similar to that between wife-givers and wife-receivers. On the other hand, he says, 'it draws its affective inspiration from the deep mutual confidence that characterizes the relations between brothers by blood' (Descola 1996a: 157). A similar ambivalence characterizes mystical friendships between Matsigenka shamans and their spirit friends, who are sometimes referred to as brothers and sometimes as brothers-in-law (Rosengren 2004: 47).

This partial overlap between kinship and friendship has prompted Viveiros de Castro to categorize native Amazonian formalized personal friendships as para-kinship relationships that 'make an intense use of conceptual and practical symbols of affinity' (1995: 14). According to this view, potential affinity with the enemy – which is never actualized in real marriages – would be the real affinity insofar as it is not tainted, like actual affinity, by consanguinity. Potential affinity extends a bridge between kinship and its exterior. 'The real affine – we are told – is that with whom one does not exchange women but other things: dead people and rituals, names and goods, souls and heads' (Viveiros de Castro 1993: 179). The sign of the relationship with dangerous potential affines is symbolic predation. Ritual relations with potential affines constitute specific actualizations of the relationship (Viveiros de Castro 1993: 182). In this view, kinship would be a structured structure, shaped by the structuring structure of potential affinity (Viveiros de Castro 1993: 179). In other words, kinship is encompassed by, and subordinated to, potential – that is, real – affinity.

This theoretical model, suggestive as it is, does not seem, however, to be substantiated by the ethnographic information. If formalized intertribal friendships are indeed an actualization of potential affinity, one would expect either that they are phrased exclusively in the language of affinity, or that they, at least, lead to some kind of symbolic affinal exchange. Instead, what we observe is that these relationships are equated to affinal or consanguineal relationships interchangeably, and that they seldom culminate in symbolic exchanges.

A detailed review of the literature reveals that whereas formalized personal friendships can sometimes be talked about in terms of kinship or affinity, they are fundamentally different from these two types of relationships. Although Jivaro people may associate ties of formalized personal friendship with the affinal relationship, such ties, we are told, remain 'marvellously unencumbered by the obligations you acquire for all time towards the people who supply you with women' (Descola 1996a: 157). And although the duties between Jivaro trade partners are always thought of in terms of the prescribed behaviour between siblings, ritual friendship between brothers, it is asserted, constitutes 'something of a perversion of the system' (Descola 1996a: 157).

Arguing along the same lines, Rivière observes that although Trio trading friends call each other *pito*, a term that refers to actual or potential brothers-in-law, '[t]he *pito* relationship stands in a position between the relationship obtaining between brothers and that obtaining between unrelated affines' (1969: 227). *Pito*, he adds, is a term that is used to address 'socially distant men'. In fact, in later times it was used to refer to those who were potential captives for sale to European slavers. Although it is a relationship term, *pito* is not a kinship term since it is not genealogically defined, and may be applied to the brothers of unknown and unrelated women. Moreover, Rivière asserts, '[t]he behaviour between unrelated brothers-in-law (when the woman is also unrelated) is very different from that when both parties are related' (1969: 79-81). Thus, Trio trading friendships may be talked about in the idiom of affinity, but they differ substantially from either actual or terminological affinal relations. They also differ from kin relations. Close relatives do not establish trading friendships since among them, we are told, 'there already exists a series of duties and obligations which render [such a relationship] superfluous' (Rivière 1969: 79).

Ayompari trading partnerships among the Ashaninka confirm the notion that formalized personal friendships – even when involving men or women belonging to the same ethnic group – are established beyond the spheres of kinship and affinity. Rather than being fused with these latter types of relationship, friendships are kept as a distinct form of sociality. Thus, Bodley asserts that networks of kin and affines are 'quite independent of the trade network' (1984: 52).

Intertribal friendships are a means of creating relations with unrelated potentially dangerous others. Rather than transforming friends into kin or affines, however, what native Amazonians seem to do on special occasions is to turn particularly esteemed kin and affines into formalized personal friends. In such instances, the tie of friendship takes pre-eminence over existing links of affinity or consanguinity, signalling that the relationship has entered into a higher plane of trust and intimacy. In this sense, it could be affirmed that, at least in certain native Amazonian societies, it is friendship rather than potential affinity that structures and encompasses kinship. In these societies people expect their closest kin and affines to behave as friends, rather than expect their friends to behave as close kin and affines. In the outer limits of native Amazonian sociality, generosity and trust are the forces that turn fear and predation into friendship.

It is precisely because potential affines are both unrelated and unmarriageable that friendship is the only civil alternative to predation and mutual destruction.

Trading partnerships, shamanic alliances, and mystical associations belong to a category of relations that not only differ, but can even be said to be an alternative, or an 'antidote' as Viveiros de Castro (1992: 169-70) and Descola (1996a: 156) have argued, to kinship and affinal relations. Intertribal friendships are characterized neither by the hostile, hierarchical, and predatory overtones of affinity, nor by the competitiveness, compulsivity, and factionalism of consanguinity. Although they imply certain obligations, namely the obligations of the gift – generous giving, reciprocity, and mutual protection – they do not entail the burdensome services, avoidance taboos, and respect that sons-in-law owe to their parents-in-law; or the tensions and latent hostility that underlie joking relations between actual and classificatory brothers-in-law (see Overing Kaplan 1975: 85; Turner 1979: 189). Similarly, they do not require the respect and compliance that men owe their parents and consanguines of their parents' generation, or the rivalry and sometimes outright antagonism that characterize relations between biological and classificatory brothers (see Basso 1985: 47; Santos-Granero 1991: 183). Formalized personal friendships offer an escape from the burdens of kinship and affinity, particularly in situations when these become oppressive, as is sometimes the case when men are doing their bride service uxorilocally, or when sets of brothers are vying for the position of leadership vacated by an ageing or recently deceased father.

But formalized personal friendship is also an antidote to symbolic predation. Because they emerge in the periphery of kinship and affinity, in the realm of unrelated, unmarriageable dangerous others, formalized personal friendships are an important component of the native Amazonian symbolic economy of alterity. Intertribal friendships serve the purpose of creating social relations where none exist. They may serve utilitarian economic, political, or mystical ends, but, above all, formalized personal friendships enlarge an individual's sphere of safe relations. In so doing, they also enhance the sphere of safe relations of the whole group. In fact, intertribal formalized friendships may have played a key role in the establishment of ancient Amerindian macropolities.

For this reason, formalized personal friendships could also be considered as a projection of the native Amazonian moral economy of intimacy onto the sphere of intertribal relations. This is not, however, totally correct. Amazonian friendships present many of the characteristics of convivial relationships as they develop among close relatives in local settlements (see Kidd 2000; Overing 2000; Passes 2000). But whereas in intratribal contexts potential affines are first incorporated as actual affines, and then consanguinized and turned into quasi-kin, in intertribal situations formalized personal friendships create a radically new type of relationship. Moreover, the establishment of intertribal friendships does not change the sign of the relationship with ambiguous others, which on the whole continues to be characterized by distrust and hostility. Intertribal friendships are, however, islands of peace in a sea of actual or potential predation. Thus, they must be understood as exceptional attempts at sociality and civility where no such sociality or civility is expected.

Intertribal friendships may share some features with kin and affinal relations, but native Amazonians explicitly distinguish them from either of these ascribed relations. So much so, that friendship networks, we are told, do not overlap in space with networks of kin and affines. Formalized personal friendships could be seen, in this sense, as an escape from kinship and affinity. They are not ascribed, but are freely chosen and consensual. They are based on personal affinities and nourished through

intense, though temporary, conviviality. As such, they are not given and fixed for ever, but are processual. As is often the case in relations of conviviality between cognates, formalized personal friendships change through time, sometimes deepening, sometimes breaking off bitterly, and sometimes gradually eroding to the point of disappearing (Santos-Granero 2000). They can be passed on from parents to children, but they can never be inherited. They can entail important rights and duties, but these are not ascribed; they are willingly embraced. Based on trust, congenial sharing, mutual caring, laughter, and fun, friendships provide a highly formalized but, paradoxically, relaxed setting for social interaction; a setting that contrasts strongly with the prescriptions, proscriptions, and non-voluntary burdens of kinship and affinity.

NOTES

¹ I use the terms 'native Amazonian peoples' or 'native Amazonians' to stress their common historical and cultural heritage, rather than to imply any kind of sociocultural uniformity.

² This is not to say that native Amazonians only trade things that they do not need or that Amerindian trade does not have a material base. Often trade items include utilitarian objects, prestige goods, and ritual paraphernalia believed to be endowed with dangerous powers that the trader can redirect in favour of his collectivity.

³ According to both Harner (1973: 125, 128) and Descola (1996a: 154-5), although the term has a foreign origin, the meaning of the relationship is clearly native.

⁴ Although Amazonian kinship systems are processual and social actors can sometimes manipulate the system to treat each other as kin or affines even when they are not related in such a way, this is only possible among unrelated people or people distantly related.

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La crainte et l'amitié : la socialité amazonienne, entre parenté et affinité

Résumé

L'auteur explore la nature de la socialité et de l'altérité chez les peuples indigènes d'Amazonie. Si la socialité des natifs amazoniens n'est vraiment qu'une affaire d'affinité prédatrice ou de consanguinité conviviale, pourquoi cherchent-ils sans relâche à nouer des relations sociales avec des gens auxquels ils ne sont apparentés ni par le sang ni par alliance ? L'analyse comparative des partenariats d'échanges intertribaux, des réseaux chamaniques et des associations mystiques permet à l'auteur d'examiner les mécanismes par lesquels les relations hostiles ou potentiellement hostiles entre étrangers (non apparentés) sont transformées en relations amicales. Une attention particulière est portée au rôle joué par la « confiance » et les « espaces de confiance » dans la création de réseaux sociaux non basés sur la parenté. En résumé, l'article analyse la question peu étudiée de « l'amitié », considérée comme une alternative à la parenté dans la construction des sociétés et des entités politiques multiethniques amérindiennes.

Fernando Santos-Granero has a Ph.D. degree in Social Anthropology from the London School of Economics. He has done fieldwork among the Yanesha and Ashaninka of Central Peru, and has written several books and numerous articles on the social organization, cultural practices, and history of the indigenous peoples of Upper Amazonia.

Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Box 0843-03092, Balboa, Ancon, Republic of Panama. santosf@si.edu